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Cover Photo: Fortuné Louis Méaulle, "Jean Valjean porte Marius dans l'intestin du Léviathan" (1879-82),
Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables, Paris, Eugène Hugues, 1879-1882, 5 volumes* (Wikimedia Commons)

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Winter 2018 Issue of the *Vanderbilt Historical Review*! Our team has worked tirelessly to present to you nine articles of outstanding scholarship, spanning an eclectic variety of subfields and historiographies. From the development of shock work in South Asia, to the rhetoric of the American government after 9/11, to the complex role of sanitation as a tool of racial segregation in early 20th century South Africa, there is something in this journal for everyone.

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to our staff of seventeen editors for the intellectual rigor they brought to cultivating every article in this issue. Further thanks must be given to our Board of Advisors for their limitless encouragement and counsel as our journal traverses the waters between our founding period and a more stable future. Finally, Vanderbilt Student Communications has provided us a gracious base of operations, and we are thankful for their support. The endeavor of publishing a history journal can seem weighty and thankless at times. However, the role history has played in public debates over the last few years has convinced me that endeavors like ours are all the more necessary.

I would be remiss, in touting the quality of our newest issue, if I did not at least touch on these broader challenges of writing history today. Of late, our national discourse has been punctuated by cries of “fake news” and “alternative facts” among Americans more and more likely to discard information at odds with their own opinions. Perhaps this is to be expected. As the flow of information has fallen prey to the same stream of polarization feeding political tribalism, perhaps this is only a natural response by Americans falling further and further back into media bubbles that reinforce their own worldviews. The role of historians and those who study history must also adapt with this polarization. The line between serious historical scholarship and “fact-checking” is a meaningful one, but there is no reason why historians should not strive to write for the public as well as for the historiographical record. This is why our own standard at the *VHR* has always been to publish articles that speak to both the academic and the citizen together. Discourse is always heightened on the field of learning.

These are divisive times for our country, and as Americans grapple with the tedious work of realizing the American Creed, the importance of history should not be discounted. History should never be partisan, but perhaps it is time for those in the discipline to take a more active role in combating the rise of false history-telling and misleading half-truths. This begins with rigorous scholarship in journals like the *Vanderbilt Historical Review*. Perhaps it might be wise to heed the words of William Sloane, writing in the first issue of the *American Historical Review* of the mission of historical criticism, that it must be “fearless to denounce a bad or superficial book which solicits public favor, equally courageous to sustain one which presents unpopular truth, and sufficiently learned to give reasons of its opinions.”¹

Best,

Justin DeMello
Editor in Chief



Vanderbilt Historical Review

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[1] William M. Sloane, “History and Democracy,” *American Historical Review* 1, no. 1 (1895): 21-2.

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VALJEAN'S ESCAPE

Photographs of Haussmann's Underground Paris

Abstract: While traditional accounts of the Haussmann reconstruction of Paris allege that the reconstruction was completed for military reasons, namely to ensure government control of the city, this paper proposes a second cause: sanitation. By examining the prints of photographer Felix Nadar, it becomes obvious that sanitation played a key role in the Haussmann reconstruction. This paper begins by addressing classic arguments for the reconstruction and proceeds to analyze several of Nadar's most important works. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of Nadar's contemporaries and addresses competing hypotheses.

By Declan Riley Kunkel
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At the end of Victor Hugo's 1862 novel, *Les Misérables*, the protagonist, Jean Valjean, is stranded behind in a barricade in the middle of Paris.¹ The French army slowly advances towards him. Thinking quickly, Valjean picks up a wounded friend, lifts him over his shoulder, and disappears into the sewers for safety. As he runs through the small tunnels, he stoops over so that he can fit in the narrow pipes, knowing that the slender gutters are his only opportunity for escape. The sewers allow him to outrun the advancing armies, and he escapes a free man.

Unlike Valjean, scholars have not always recognized the importance of Parisian sewers. Historians Roger V. Gould and Michel Carmona hold that Valjean's barricades—those erected during the 1832 Lemarque revolution—prompted major urban renovation.² Gould and Carmona both assert that Emperor Napoleon III collaborated with Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, an administrator, to bulldoze and rebuild Paris with wide streets so that barricades could never again be constructed, and thus citizens could not take the city.³ While compelling, this view fails to consider the larger history of the reconstruction. Valjean's escape highlights another part of the story—the sewers of Paris.

In trying to understand the city's reconstruction, most historians have focused on street-level renovations that benefitted military strategy, but contemporary documents and photographs reveal the importance of something else entirely: sanitation. In examining urban photographs from the period, we can see that not only did sanitation play a large role in the Haussmann reconstruction of Paris, but it was part of a larger effort that highlighted the scientific advancement and theatricality of Paris. This paper will argue that Haussmann-commissioned photography by French photojournalist Félix Nadar and his contemporaries show that sewers were an integral part of Haussmann's renovation and his vision for modernization. To accomplish this, this article will examine the pre-Haussmann sewer failures—



Portrait of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1860)
Source: Pierre Petit, *Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, FOL-NA-303*
([Wikimedia Commons](#))

namely the backing up and overflowing of old systems, and the water contamination that resulted. These flaws, contrasted with modern sewers in with Nadar's photographs and methods of capturing images, sewer design, and urban planning, show that the sewers of Paris were renovated purposely, and with great attention from the outside world.

Valjean's Escape



The Piercing of the Avenue de l'Opera (1856)

Source: *Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris*. in Shelly Rice, *Parisian Views* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997)

PAST SCHOLARSHIP

Academics and historians have tended to focus on the reconstruction's role in the fall of the commune as a political process. In June 1871, Karl Marx noted in his pamphlet, *The Civil War in France*, that the 1851 reconstruction was "designed to disarm" the people of Paris.⁴ Marx reasoned that the reconstruction caused the defeat of the commune, and the dismantling of the spirit of the French people. In 1995, Roger V. Gould, a professor at Yale University, argued along similar lines. He asserted that the Haussmann reconstruction caused a "disruption...for the city's population" by preventing the "crystalliz[ation] of militant forms" of popular uprising.⁵ In 2002, Michel Carmona, a professor of geography and history at Paris-Sorbonne University, found that "some continue to regard 'haussmannization' as the criminal work of a modern Nero bent on vandalizing...Paris" through the creation of situations resembling "the apocalypse of the Paris Commune."⁶ The traditional post-commune account holds that the government "tried to gloss over its authoritarianism (the reconstruction) with a theatrical show of creative initiative (rebuilding theaters and operas)."⁷

Part of the reason for this focus may be the dramatic suppression of the Paris Commune itself, an event that highlighted the immediate importance of street-level changes to Paris. In March of 1871, after the Haussmann reconstruction that dramatically reshaped the sewers of Paris, as well as the boulevards that ran above them, the citizens of Paris attempted to barricade the streets and declared Paris to be a sovereign commune; a city outside of the purview of the Versailles-based government. This occupation ended when the government sent armies to brutally crush the city in the so-called "bloody-week" of 21 to 28 May, 1871. Though the defenders fought bravely, the army was able to use the wide boulevards created during the Haussmann reconstruction to maneuver and overcome the barricades.

THE REBUILDING OF SEWERS

The rebuilding of sewers, however, was motivated by necessity, not authoritarian desire. Paris was in desperate need of sanitation reform, and long reeked of "horrific smells."⁸ For centuries before 1850, the city had only small amounts

of narrow piping, which caused blockages that spewed sewage into the open streets.⁹ Storm runoff would often sit and pool in gutters and in alleyways, creating a significant health hazard for the rich and poor alike.¹⁰ Haussmann detested the resulting stench of Paris, and recognized there was an urgent need for improved sanitation. He ordered the construction of new sewers, and commissioned Félix Nadar, a photojournalist, to document the construction. Haussmann sought to turn Paris into “an institutional space as necessary to the happiness of great people as the insights of a wise government.”¹¹ Nadar’s photographs captured Haussmann’s vision and were a way to show others that the renovation would improve life.

The style of Nadar’s photographs suggests that these images were for public display rather than structural documentation. Because of this desire for attention, Nadar became one of the first photographers to experiment with electric lighting in photography. In his *View of a Gallery*, Nadar set up flashbulbs and magnesium strips so that the entirety of a sewer chamber could be illuminated.¹² This combination allowed complete and total exposure to the underground world of the Parisian sewers. In the image, the viewer is looking down a long brick tunnel deep underground, and can see sewage running along deep sluices in the floor to a collecting bin.¹³ Such an image was almost entirely new to both photography and to the general public. This practice, which was decried by photography experts, was done at Haussmann’s personal instruction.¹⁴ He wanted the world to see what Paris had become.

To Nadar, the legacy of the reconstruction was sanitation, not demolition—precisely what Haussmann wanted. By preventing disease, modern sewers would save Nadar, and France, from the “nothingness of the human condition,” meaning it would prevent early death.¹⁵ In his own words, the photographer said that the reconstruction was important because it would open up “an infinite field of operations” that would improve the quality of life for all Parisians.¹⁶ Nadar thought that the reconstruction was sparked, at least in part, by concern over raw sewage leaking into food products. Nadar asserts in his own biography that the sewage was “poison[ing] fish,” and that such waste would greatly harm the citizens of the Paris.¹⁷ In his first photographs of the reconstruction, Nadar depicts the changes in sewer technology beneath a Parisian market. In the photograph, large sewer pipes crisscross the walls, separating waste from various houses so that there is no spillover.¹⁸ The fish market, from Nadar’s perspective, was safe. Interestingly, Nadar took this first photograph under the same marketplace where illustrator Edmond Morin had done one of the earliest drawings of sewers.¹⁹ The difference in sanitation quality between the two depictions could not be more shocking—Morin depicted an open sluice system where waste could flood the streets, and Nadar showed waste pipes cleanly and efficiently carrying filth away. The fact that Nadar used his photograph to capture the changes over time

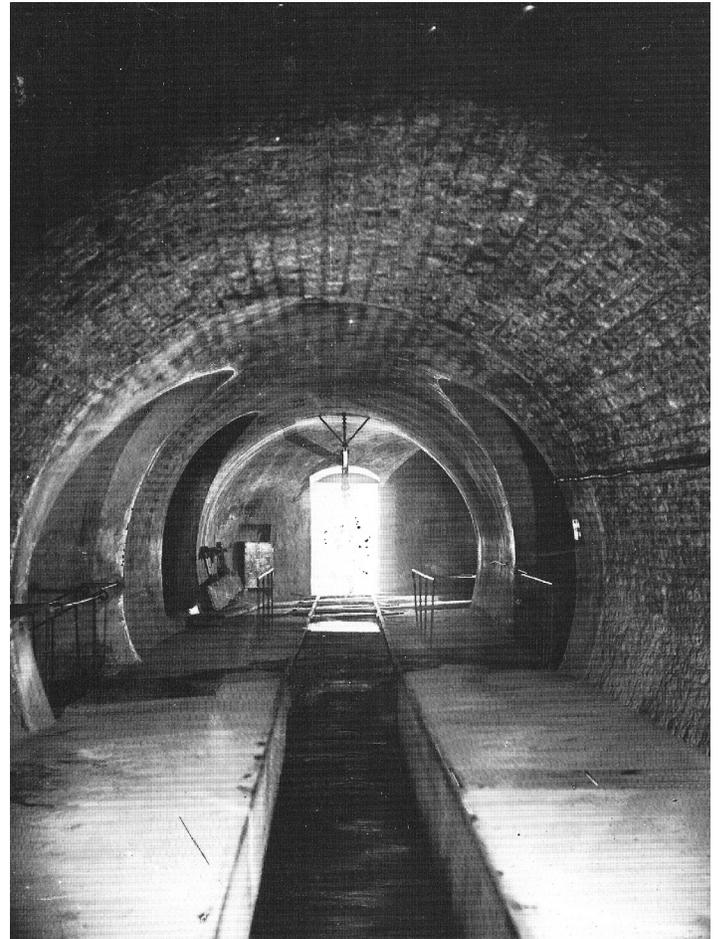


Photo of Paris Sewers (1861)

Source: Gaspard-Félix Nadar (Wikimedia Commons)

caused by the reconstruction of a known site sets the tone for the evolutionary scheme of his documentation. He wanted to show changes because he knew the sewers were important.

Nadar’s photography highlights another benefit of new sanitation—agricultural growth. Parisian farms needed water so that their crops would grow. Prior to the reconstruction, farmers used water that came from any source, including sewage runoff.²⁰ His pictures demonstrate that the sewers installed were designed to “separate ‘clean’ storm water [runoff] from ‘dirty’ human waste” so that the water could be re-used to irrigate crops and thus feed Paris’s growing population.²¹ In short, the renovation of the sewer had benefits that exceeded simply reducing diseases. Nadar’s photograph entitled *The Sewers (sluice system)* clearly demonstrates this by focusing on the reconstruction’s use of dual-lined sewer pipes.²² These pipes allowed for the Parisian sewers to control the flow of two different sources of water—storm drains and toilets—without mixing the waste. The separate piping allowed for “clean” water to be controlled, stored, and ultimately used to grow food for the rest of the city.²³ This water, combined with the “advent of inorganic fertilizers,” led to a complete urban revitalization and “the modernization of urban infrastructure”; the Haussmann reconstruction.²⁴

In addition to capturing such practical reforms, Nadar's commissioned work was staged in a way that revealed an ambition for cleanliness and publicity. Beyond simply requiring the sewers to be constructed and documented for sanitary reasons, Haussmann wanted his underground world to be remembered.²⁵ Nadar's photographs document this desire well, often relying on artifice to create a particular effect. In his *View of a Gallery of the Sewers of Paris*, Nadar poses mannequins along the lengths of exposed pipes. He highlights the cleanliness of the workers, showing well dressed men in clean clothing constructing tunnels, riveting pipes.²⁶ This depiction, however, is highly stylized and not entirely realistic. Engravings from the same period show that while workers did labor in relatively sanitary and safe conditions, they did not look or dress in the clean and modern style that Nadar depicts.²⁷ Nadar shows real workers in some of his later photographs, capturing grubby-looking men in dark clothing working in dangerous conditions.²⁸ So why might

Haussmann also commissioned Nadar's photographs to highlight the dramatic architectural reforms that were enacted to create the sewers. Architectural and engineering reforms were not limited to the street level—the photographs ask the viewer to marvel at the unseen workings of the city. In his photograph entitled *Sewers: Chambre du pont*, Nadar captures a magnificent underground chamber nearly fifty feet in height that connected the newly-built sanitation infrastructure with the historic catacombs of Paris.³² Nadar depicted these “constructions” as not simply as marvels of engineering, but also as revolutions in sanitation technologies. In his photograph titled *The Sewers*, Nadar demonstrated that small-gauge rail cars could travel up and down some of the wider tunnels of the city. In his own autobiography, Nadar mentions sitting in the “little wagon[s]” that led home passed the “enormous iron pipe[s]...that contained poisons.”³³ Impressed, Nadar took pictures and testified that the remarkable structures within the sewers “testified to [Haussmann's] glory.”³⁴

“Beyond simply requiring the sewers to be constructed and documented for sanitary reasons, Haussmann wanted his underground world to be remembered.”

have Nadar added mannequins? They sought to increase public opinion through the promised of a better reality. Paris was completing a reconstruction at breakneck pace, and by publishing photographs, Haussmann hoped to show the world that the reconstruction was accomplished by common men and demonstrated the industrial might of France.

Even outside of Haussmann's immediate jurisdiction, independent photographers chronicled the same themes. One of Nadar's contemporaries, photographer Charles Marvilles, documented the sanitary improvements despite lacking an official commission. His photograph entitled *The Piercing of the Avenue de l'Opera* shows the viewer that massive sewer and fresh water pipes were laid underground. Marvilles notes in his comments that four blocks of slums were cleared to make way for sewer lines.²⁹ Though the title of Marvilles's work suggests critique, the avenue was built on land excavated for the main Parisian sewage channel, and could not be avoided.³⁰ Auguste Collard, a second urban photographer, documented similar destruction. His image *Pont Louis-Philippe* documented the massive laying of pipes in what had formerly been a residential neighborhood.³¹ Though he did not leave comments, his photograph noted the same phenomena depicted: a demolition of the city to allow for clean water and the disposal of waste. The sewers were built to improve urban life, even if a considerable number of people were displaced.

GREATER EFFECTS OF THE SEWERS

Haussmann's intention of generating interest worked—other sanitary engineers and artists either directly reprinted Nadar's work, or drew their own schematics of the Parisian sewers. One artistic rendering, circulated in the *Illustrated Magazine of Art*, depicts massive quarries excavated underground to provide “clean water while carrying off dirty water.”³⁵ This engraving showed that buildings were demolished in part to better public sanitation. Beyond buildings, streets were demolished and rebuilt at least in part for sanitary purposes. Pictures from the time show that the large *Rue d'Arcole* was created to allow for massive pipe positions so the sewers could flow better.³⁶ Even more, the historic *Rue de Rennes* had to be completely destroyed to allow for the replacement of the “large[ly] mutilated” public health infrastructure.³⁷

Haussmann's unique combination of documentation and advertising influenced people beyond the borders of France. At the same time that Haussmann was designing and advertising the sewers, other cities in other countries began to model their own sanitation systems off of Haussmann's newly built Paris. Philadelphia similarly improved public health by renovating its sewer systems in the 1850s, relying on Nadar's photographs and site tours in France as models. The municipal government was inspired by Haussmann's desire of “controlling subterranean waste,” and recognized the importance of sanitation in disease prevention.³⁸



Well-dressed Workers in Paris Sewers (1861)
Source: *Gaspard-Félix Nadar* (Wikimedia Commons)

Some historians, however, may contend that Haussmann simply included sanitation as an afterthought, preferring to raze the city for tactical purposes and then including a sewage system after-the-fact. This conclusion, however, overlooks historical precedent. During Haussmann's period, urban designers began to recognize the importance of cleanliness and sewage management. Following the Enlightenment, urban planners worked hand-in-hand with architects to develop cities that functioned "like bodies," allowing "a circulation of waste, air and water from house to house."⁴² Haussmann sought to copy this in his reconstruction, arguing that the "organs of the metropolis function like those of the human body, without ever seeing the light of day."⁴³ Sanitation was certainly one of Haussmann's central concerns. Even more than simply wanting to design a city that allowed "pure and fresh water, along with light and heat [to] circulate like the divers fluids whose movement and replenishment sustain life itself," Haussmann wanted Paris to be a beacon of scientific advancement, and the sewers were a necessary part of fulfilling that vision.⁴⁴ Haussmann's renovation did not cause a revolution of urban design, but rather was a continuation of evolving sanitary thought.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Haussmann did not rebuild Paris simply to allow for a "blunt, efficient, [and] authoritarian," end to rebellion, but rather wanted to create a city that Jordan himself notes heralded "cleanliness, [and] an urban life [with] quality."⁴⁵ So why, then, do historians remember his reconstruction as an authoritarian act designed to crush rebellion? This is at least in part due to a lens historians use to evaluate the war-torn reign of Napoleon III. Many assert that he detested the "long-continued intrigues of treason," that Paris harbored, and wanted it gone.⁴⁶ Revolution makes for interesting scholarship. Sewers are simply less compelling.

**“Revolution makes for interesting scholarship.
Sewers are simply less compelling.”**

City leaders feared "miasmas," which was loosely defined as anything that gave off a foul odor—from corpses, slaughterhouses, or fermentation—and found Haussmann's renovations to be the solution.³⁹ Just as Haussmann had removed all slaughterhouses from the center of the Paris and placed them in "distant neighborhoods" where they could not "infect" any members of the public, Philadelphia transferred meatpacking to the suburbs.⁴⁰ Soon after, Philadelphia banished all meat-packing industries and slaughterhouses from the city entirely.⁴¹

But even though interest may not lie in sanitation sciences, as photographers like Nadar, Marvilles, and Collard show, such work was an important part of the Haussmann reconstruction, and made Paris infinitely more livable. Improved sanitation systems, the result of a push by well-meaning city planners, yielded actual results. By the 1870s, Paris—and other cities that followed its example—looked different. People were not dying as often from easily preventable disease, and plumbing worked. Had he run through the sewers in 1871, Jean Valjean would not have had to stoop. 🏛️

Endnotes

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- [9] Ibid.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] Nicholas Papayanis, *Planning Paris Before Haussmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 49.
- [12] Ibid., 84.
- [13] Félix Nadar, *Vue d'une galerie des égouts de Paris* [View of a gallery in the sewers of Paris], modern digital reproduction from collodion-on-glass negative, 27 cm × 21 cm, 1864–65. Ministère de la Culture – Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Imaginechina. in Shao-Chein Tseng, "Nadar's Photography of Subterranean Paris: Mapping the Urban Body." *History of Photography* 38, no. 3 (2014): 241. doi 10.1080/03087298.2014.881150.
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- [17] Ibid., 92.
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- [21] Ibid., 30
- [22] Félix Nadar, *Les égouts*, modern digital reproduction from collodion-on-glass negative, 27 cm × 21 cm, 1864–65. Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques et des Sites, Paris. in Gandy, "The Paris Sewers and the Rationalization of Urban Space," 28.
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] Gandy, "The Paris Sewers and the Rationalization of Urban Space," 31.
- [25] Haussmann was particularly fond of his sewers and "wanted everyone around him" to understand what he did for the city. He was often "pleased to boast" about his accomplishments in the sewers. See J.M. Chapman and Brian Chapman, *The Life and Times of Baron Haussmann* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957), 127.
- [26] Félix Nadar, *Vue d'une galerie des égouts de Paris*. *Machinerie, reconstitution avec un mannequin* [View of a gallery of the sewers of Paris. Machinery, reconstruction with a mannequin], modern digital reproduction from collodion-on-glass negative, 27 cm × 21 cm, 1864–65. Ministère de la Culture—Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/ Imaginechina. in Shao-Chein Tseng, "Nadar's Photography of Subterranean Paris," 251.
- [27] Unknown engraver, *Place des Blancs-Manteaux et de Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs*, wood engraving, 1853. From Edmond Texier, 'Les cimetières et les catacombes', in *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 2, Paris: Paulin et le Chevalier 1853, 146. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, in Shao-Chein Tseng, "Nadar's Photography of Subterranean Paris," 251.
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- [33] Nadar, *When I was a Photographer*, 90-91.
- [34] Ibid.
- [35] "Paris Underground." *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, Vol. 1, no. 5 (1853), pp. 253-254. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20537963>.
- [36] Bisson Frères, *View from top of Tour-Saint-Jacques*, albumen print from collodion-on-glass negative, 27 cm × 21 cm, 1867. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. in Leonard Pitt, *Walks through Lost Paris* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), 61.

- [37] Seeberger, *Cour du Dragon in Demolition*, albumen print from collodion-on-glass negative, 27 cm × 21 cm, circa 1850. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. in Leonard Pitt, *Walks through Lost Paris*, 19. and Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations*, 10.
- [38] Ibid.
- [39] Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.
- [40] Stephanie Kirkland, *Paris Reborn: Napoléon III, Baron Haussmann, and the Quest to Build a Modern City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 171.
- [41] Ibid.
- [42] Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), 255–65 and 324–34.
- [43] Baron Haussmann: 'Les galeries souterraines, organs de la grande cité, fonctionneraient comme ceux du corps humain, sans se montrer au jour; l'eau pur et fraîche, la lumière et la chaleur y circuleraient comme des fluids divers dont le mouvement et l'entretien servent à la vie.' in Alfred Mayer, *La Canalisation Souterraine de Paris* (Paris: La Découverte, 1983), 298.
- [44] Ibid.
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TAPPING PRODUCTIVITY

Shock Work, Stakhanovism, and Working Class Identity in Central Asia

Abstract: While Central Asia was seen as a wasteland of “backwardness” in the 1910s, it had become a collection of politically significant nations within the USSR only a few decades later. This paper argues that the productivity campaigns of the Soviet Union were essential in expanding opportunities for the indigenous in Central Asia. The shock work campaign of the late 1920s offered objective criteria of productivity and enabled the formation of an indigenous working class. In the mid-1930s, some Central Asians even distinguished themselves as “Stakhanovites,” or hyper-productive workers who were recognized as national heroes.

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In the creation of the “*homo sovieticus*” race, the Soviet state formulated criteria for an ideal citizen and defined means by which this status could be attained. One such means was productivity, which was trumpeted as an opportunity for poor, obscure, but hard-working citizens to ascend the social ladder and achieve national acclaim. During the shock work movement of the late 1920s, as well as later in the Stakhanovite campaign of 1935-6, the enthusiastic and hyper-productive worker came to be equated with a national hero. The qualities that defined a worker-hero, moreover, were not exclusive on the basis of nationality, ethnic origin, or previous way of life; at least in theory, this ideal was equally attainable to natives of Central Asia as it was to ethnic Russians.

Were these qualifications for success, in reality, accessible to ethnic minorities? Did the universal language used by the state reflect an aim to resolve ethnic inequalities? And if so, to what extent did new, productivity-based criteria for the ideal citizen open opportunities for marginalized ethnicities?

One approach to these questions is to examine the increased opportunities induced by productivity campaigns in Central Asia, the region often regarded as the most “backwards” in the Soviet Union. Although Central Asians were labelled, as a group, as “unproductive” workers in the early years of the Soviet Union, the shock work campaign offered natives the opportunity to distinguish themselves individually for remarkable efforts in the workplace. Stakhanovism further expanded the recognition available to Central Asians; those who managed to set new productivity records in industry or agriculture were celebrated as worker-heroes.

Thus far, there has been little historical investigation into Stakhanovism in Central Asia. Stakhanovism, a predominantly industrial movement, may seem irrelevant to Central Asia, where industry remained sparse in the mid-1930s. Stakhanovism, however, also comprised an



“Lenin Calling For Hard Work”, Tashkent (1933)

Source: Mardjani Foundation, State Central Museum for the Contemporary History of Russia (Wikimedia Commons)

agricultural component; rural Stakhanovism flourished in the Soviet Union, including the underdeveloped areas of Central Asia.¹ The “socialist competition” that characterized the agricultural branch of Stakhanovism, furthermore, was comparable in intensity and ubiquity to that of the coal mines in Ukraine and western Russia.

Paralleling the increase in opportunities for indigenous laborers was the rise of a working class in Central Asia. In the early years of the Soviet Union, there was little, if any, class consciousness, or specifically worker identity, among the Kazakh nomads and Turkmen peasants. Historian Matthew Payne argues in his book *Stalin's Railroad* that shock work created a cohesive working class among the native population, both transforming the identity of indigenous workers and encouraging society's acceptance of native workers as valuable members of the proletariat.² Stakhanovism continued this trend, rewarding zealous indigenous workers with comfortable living conditions, honorific titles, and even acclaim on a national level. In the interest of realizing a Marxist social order, the state, by distributing the rewards of Stakhanovism, sponsored the emergence of an indigenous working class. As a consequence, Central Asians could participate in the Soviet class structure and further their prospects of becoming celebrated workers.

While it seems that the Soviet central government did intend to level the opportunities available to various ethnicities, and to integrate the Central Asian nations as near-equal entities in the USSR, there were practical barriers to this fulfillment. Both ethnic Russians and indigenous Central Asians resisted attempts at indigenization of the workforce. Furthermore, deficient supplies, as well as unfamiliarity with technology and production methods to which ethnic

employment. The Kazakhstan party Krai Committee, for instance, lobbied and secured commitments for at least 50% of workers on the Turksib Railroad, the largest industrial project in Central Asia, to be from the native population.³ The vast majority of natives, at the outset, however, were not qualified for industrial labor, and officials often resorted to hiring those with little experience or promise. Forced affirmative action quotas aroused much resentment among Russian workers, who felt undervalued and sacrificed, despite their higher competence, by systematic preference for natives.⁴ The natives, for their part, often felt threatened by the overwhelming rush to integrate them into the Soviet Union, which they feared might estrange them from their cultural roots.⁵

Rampant illiteracy and lack of experience with skilled work impeded much of the progress expected from *korenizatsiia*. Official resolutions to hire Central Asians proved largely unsuccessful; natives, although employed, continued to occupy the "lowest rung of productive usefulness"⁶ and were subject to ever-present racism fueled by Russian workers' perception of Central Asians as "superfluous and unproductive."⁷ In some cases, the natives were abused or punished for their failure to meet productivity standards; food, for instance, was withheld from the indigenous on the pretext of underproduction.⁸

“In the interest of realizing a Marxist social order, the state, by distributing the rewards of Stakhanovism, sponsored the emergence of an indigenous working class.”

Russians were accustomed, disadvantaged Central Asians in productivity competitions. The indigenous population of the Soviet Union, clearly, faced a greater number of obstacles, whether intentionally contrived by Russian co-workers or as an indeliberate consequence of the region's distance from the central government. Arguably, however, even if Central Asians never achieved precise *equality* of opportunity with ethnic Russians, Stakhanovism and its precursor, shock work, provided the indigenous with revolutionary prospects for improvement.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Central Asia, characterized by low productive output and the absence of a working class, seemed to be mired in "backwardness" at the advent of the USSR. To remedy this underdevelopment, Soviet leaders launched modernization drives in Central Asia in the early 1920s. One of these efforts was an affirmative action program, *korenizatsiia*, that intended to tap the latent productive potential of indigenous peoples by granting them greater preference in

Other historians have defended the intentions of the Soviet Union to uphold the socialist doctrine of universal equality for all its citizens.⁹ The state did not sanction discrimination, and even treated ethnic violence as treason; it dismissed, incarcerated, and made "counterrevolutionary" charges against racist managers and leaders of pogroms.¹⁰ Although there were no institutional systems of discrimination, the "indigenous communities did not enjoy the same career opportunities as their European counterparts."¹¹ In spite of benign intentions on the part of the state, the stark underdevelopment in Central Asia inhibited the formation of a respectable working class.

As the Soviet Union was eager to pursue the communally-oriented ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution, work was emphatically collective in the 1920s. Productivity was measured on a group level, and hiring native workers, whose unfamiliarity with industrial work would likely hurt the net efficacy of the team, was often seen as antagonistic to the goals of a given workforce. With the emergence of

Tapping Productivity

individual-oriented measures of productivity, first in shock work and later in Stakhanovism, however, the Central Asian worker could be judged by his own productive merit, an objective and improvable measure, rather than confounded as a suboptimal peg in the machinery of a group.

PRELUDE TO STAKHANOVISM: SHOCK WORK

“Shock work,” concomitant with the First Five-Year Plan, emerged in the workplace as a means by which individual workers could distinguish themselves for their outstanding productivity. Historian Lewis Siegelbaum defines shock work as “particularly arduous or urgent tasks”¹² rewarded by the state in order to encourage “socialist competition” among workers. Shock work was the first step in recognition of the worker as an individual, albeit within the greater socialist collective; outstanding feats of shock work could be traced back to a single worker, who could be praised and celebrated. Shock work, in addition, established a more objective measure by which workers could be evaluated; biographical details, including ethnic origin, were subordinated to quantitative levels of output, by which historically disadvantaged workers could distinguish themselves.

This paper will propose that shock work was the first link in the chain of opportunity gradually extended to Central Asian workers. It will draw on the research of Matthew Payne, a key historian of Central Asia, who, through his studies of Kazakh workers on the Turksib Railroad, concludes that shock work was vital to the creation of a native working class and the integration of Central Asians into the Soviet system.

Payne first establishes the dismal conditions confronting Kazakh workers before the spread of shock work. Native Kazakhs were not accepted as legitimate workers by their Russian counterparts, blamed for any discipline problems on their teams, and labeled as hopeless employees who were impossible to teach, despite proving themselves to be, in reality, just as productive as others in their positions.¹³ Against this historical context, Payne declares shock work to be a resounding success: it ended the social alienation of the Kazakhs, contributed to their cultural awareness, and ultimately facilitated their integration in the USSR.¹⁴ Moreover, shock work encouraged the development of working class identities, even among the indigenous population. Kazakhs were able to partake in an edifying proletarian identity, once workers became classified as “ordinary” versus “shock,” as opposed to the old categories of cadre, peasant, and Kazakh.¹⁵ Payne describes instances of Russian shock workers taking on Kazakhs as personal protégés, teaching them Russian and mentoring them in the operations of the workplace.¹⁶ As their once-disadvantageous ethnic backgrounds were normalized by the objective standards of shock work, indigenous workers could increasingly view themselves as part of a proletariat, and thus, as part of Soviet society.

Historian Niccolo Pianciola cautions against an overly optimistic view of shock work; if productive work was a welcome refuge for discouraged nomads, it was only because the state had destroyed their economic base and lifestyle, and left them no other option for survival.¹⁷ The Soviet campaigns of collectivization and sedentarization in the 1910s led to rampant disappearance of livestock in Central Asia, epidemics and starvation, and violence against the natives.¹⁸ While Pianciola concedes at the end of his article that most Kazakhs had been integrated in the Soviet state apparatus through employment, education, and administration by the late 1920s, he concludes with a firm reminder of the injustices and assaults against the natives’ economy.¹⁹ Was the development of a native working class worth the devastation of thousands of Central Asians’ livelihoods?

By no means does Payne assert that shock work *justified* the earlier forced settlement and collectivization of Central Asia, or that it was a panacea for the plight of every Kazakh, but he still considers it an important first step in the process of obtaining greater equality. Payne indeed acknowledges the state’s failure, in several cases, to suppress violence toward Kazakh workers, in addition to the high indigenous turnover rate that persisted, especially due to language-based discrimination.²⁰ Numerically, the shock work campaign fell short of approaching equality for native workers; for instance, only seven of forty-seven attendees of Turksib’s First Shock Worker Conference were Kazakh, a disproportionate amount compared to the 50% quota for natives on the Turksib workforce. While this low representation from the indigenous population is disappointing, and reveals an incompleteness of ethnic equality, it is simultaneously sanguine, proving both that Central Asians were capable of achieving the status of shock worker and that the state was willing to accept them as such. It now remained, in order to achieve a more complete equality, only to expand the degree to which the indigenous were represented in the class of worker-heroes.

Despite the continued obstacles faced by Central Asians, and the memory of devastation induced by the state, Payne’s verdict remains: shock work was a monumental step towards greater opportunity for native workers. Before their consolidation into a working class, the indigenous were dismissed as useless and backwards. Even if shock work may not have warranted the state’s coercion of the previous decades, it still encouraged Russians’ acceptance and regard of Central Asians as legitimate, productive members of society, an equality that may not otherwise have arisen towards the indigenous nomads. The positive outcomes of shock work, moreover, are not annulled by the tragic policies that preceded them. The formation of a native working class, instead, allowed the former nomads access to the Soviet system, in which they began to use the rhetoric of class struggle to edify themselves, as well as to aggrandize their communities and nations.



Alexei Stakhanov (centre) explaining his system to a fellow miner in the USSR (cir. 1935-1943)
Source: Unknown, Library of Congress LC-USW33-024256-C (Wikimedia Commons)

STAKHANOVISM AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN PROLETARIAT

If shock work created the native Central Asian working class, then Stakhanovism cemented it. Workers who had gained experience in the shock work movement of the late 1920s were increasingly absorbed into the greater Soviet proletariat, and some were even able to distinguish themselves by their productivity. As it was often left to individuals to decide their class identity, natives were, at least in theory, free to identify with the working class.²¹ Soviet historian Sheila Fitzpatrick admits that certain attributes, such as occupation, restricted the options in choosing one's class, but nationality was a neutral factor, neither barring nor imposing a class identity.²² Socioeconomic criteria, including workers' backgrounds, ceased to be requisites for admission into the "elite" working class of the USSR,²³ which became increasingly within reach of the indigenous.

Stakhanovism introduced further objective criteria for success, which were not restricted by ethnic origin, geographic location, or former occupation; it also lionized

workers for their individual achievements, rather than the overall productivity of a workforce.²⁴ This pivot in orientation from collective to individual standards of productivity was incited by the sweep of "recordmania" through the Soviet Union in the years 1935 and 1936. The campaign of record-breaking that characterized Stakhanovism is considered by some historians to be both a planned exhibition of model workers "from above," and a spontaneous manifestation of workers' desire to distinguish themselves. In order to promote ambition in the workplace and attachment to the regime, it seemed more efficient to attribute a record to the efforts of a single, relatable individual, rather than to a faceless workforce. In this way, the Soviet Union offered specific, living embodiments of personal loyalty to the state. The shift to individual measures of productivity did not, however, necessarily contradict the socialist ideology of the Soviet Union; the two ostensibly diverging trends were reconciled, as the state construed each record as an advancement that would benefit the collective, and insisted that the support of the community was, in essence, responsible for any individual's accomplishments.

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As the standards of productivity, and those of an ideal Soviet citizen, were revised to depend on the skill and eagerness of an individual, members of historically disadvantaged groups could increasingly attain distinction. Stakhanovism enabled indigenous workers, for instance, to prove themselves objectively, supported by the quantitative records of their production. These new opportunities for recognition provide a refreshing contrast to the 1920s, in which natives attempted in vain to convince a prejudiced team of their value in contribution to the net output of a group. Stakhanovism, furthermore, became an “indicator of loyalty”²⁵ to the state; one could prove his commitment to the Soviet Union through a willingness to work and improve his skills and prospects. Many Central Asians capitalized on this opportunity to exhibit their allegiance and competence. As a result, citizens across the USSR began to recognize the working class in Central Asia as a valuable force capable of contributing to the well-being of the nation.

There were, however, existing prejudices and conditions that rendered productive standards more elusive for indigenous workers, and Stakhanovism cannot be said to have opened opportunities in Central Asia to quite the same degree as it did in Russia proper. We will first explore several trends that encumbered Central Asian productivity and which may explain the low representation of Central Asians in the Stakhanovite “class,” before looking at the successes attained by indigenous Stakhanovite workers.

Stakhanovism, first of all, coincided with the campaign of *kulturnost*, or “culturedness,” which became a principal criterion of the New Soviet Man or Woman.²⁶ Workers, and especially Stakhanovites, were expected to adhere to a certain degree of “culturedness,” which pertained to dress, manners, hygiene, and participation in “cultural activities,” such as Soviet ballets, operas, and literature.²⁷ While “culturedness” did not explicitly reference ethnic or national origin, it contained notes of Russian superiority, since ethnic Russians were construed to be the bearers of culture, in a forest of indigenous “backwardness.” Many of these same associations of Russianness with culture were preserved in the connection between culture and Stakhanovism.

According to Stalin, Stakhanovites were “people with cultural and technical knowledge.”²⁸ This “cultural knowledge,” however, was defined to be the “antithesis of Asiatic backwardness,”²⁹ which incorporated, albeit implicitly, an accusation of native inferiority in the culture and productivity campaigns. The title “Stakhanovite” itself, and its association with a national “hero,” was also tinged with a hint of ethnic exclusion; Siegelbaum explains that the characterization of a “Stakhanovite” as *bogatyri*, literally “hero” or “Hercules,” had a “significant Russo-specific connotation,” as *bogatyry* were the heroes of Russian folk epics and defenders of Kievan Rus.³⁰

Not only did the key terms of “culture,” “modernity,” and even “Stakhanovite” connote preference for ethnic Russians, but there were also practical obstacles for an indigenous worker to become a Stakhanovite. Siegelbaum proposes that Stakhanovites were set apart not by particularly exceptional skills, but by the *opportunity* to demonstrate abilities not uncommon to the top workers in a given field.³¹ He details the case of Stakhanov himself, who was provided with ideal conditions in order to complete his famous record; Stakhanov was given a continuous supply of compressed air and wood, as well as several “proper” assistants, which forced various workers into inconvenient and abnormal shifts.³² Stakhanov was even quoted as expressing surprise at having been selected to break the record for coal hewing, since other miners had been equally qualified to perform his feat, he says, if they too had been handed optimal conditions.³³

It would have been impossible for unassisted workers to compete with the records of those who had been “set up” by an entire administration team. There were, furthermore, certain qualities that increased the likelihood of being selected as a record-breaker; Siegelbaum enumerates literacy and party membership among the traits that favored “promotion” to Stakhanovite status.³⁴ Both of these characteristics were scarce among Central Asians, who were not generally considered productive or competent workers, and did not fit, in appearance and habits, the image of the archetypal Russian proletarian projected on propaganda. Certainly, *korenizatsiia* gave preference to indigenous workers in many cases, but the Soviet government was, most likely, not secure enough to risk its Russian citizens’ disapproval if it had elevated too many natives to the highest positions of national honor. As is patent in many instances of policy-making, and especially in the delimitation of the Central Asian republics,³⁵ the Soviet Union chose the path it considered would provoke the least resistance from its citizens. In this case, it may have been “safer” for the state to celebrate a vast majority of ethnic Russian Stakhanovites, who could be admired and emulated by all Soviet citizens.

The low count of Stakhanovites from Central Asia can alternatively be explained by unpreparedness, and, finally, inability, of the natives to merit Stakhanovite status and compete with their Russian counterparts. The Kazakhs, for instance, had only recently been settled and had no prior organized work experience; they were uncomfortable with sedentary, and especially industrial, life and could not reasonably have been expected to rank consistently among the most productive workers in the entire Soviet Union.³⁶ Inadequacy of supplies, in addition, including lighting by which to study, was a widespread problem throughout the Soviet Union in the 1930s, obstructing productivity in all parts of the empire.³⁷ It is not unlikely that the outskirts would suffer an even greater neglect of supplies than would the administrative and cultural centers of the USSR, thereby disadvantaging the population in border regions.



“Urging peasants to speed up cotton production,” Tashkent (cir. 1920s)

Source: Mardjani Foundation, State Central Museum for the Contemporary History of Russia (Wikimedia Commons)

Although Central Asians may not have had the most favorable opportunities to be recognized as Stakhanovites, there are still many examples of successful native Stakhanovites in the region. Historian Mary Buckley reports on the success story of a farmer from Kyrgyzstan, Saty Tokombaev, who rose to the status of Stakhanovite and was credited with an extraordinary grain harvest for his district in 1936.³⁸ This rural Stakhanovite served as a paragon of social mobility and worker initiative, having started as a refugee in China, and having become an indispensable agrarian leader and the chair of a successful kolkhoz.³⁹

Coal mining Stakhanovite Illarion Yankin, in his diary *Notes of a Stakhanovite*, also presents an optimistic view of Central Asian Stakhanovites. Yankin is equally enthusiastic in his praise of distinguished Stakhanovites from Central Asia, such as Khaidin from Kazakhstan,⁴⁰ as with those from western Russia. He also lists Kazakhstan as one region in a list of equals that collaborated on improving Soviet productivity as a whole, at a conference in which workers shared the particular insights and methods that

had developed in each of their regions.⁴¹ In one anecdote, Yankin expresses delight at finding the Turkestan miners productive, competent, and appreciative of the intricacies of their work.⁴² He further reports on the “communal spirit” that pervaded the indigenous working community, a promising sign of modernity and progress for Central Asia.⁴³

Although Yankin speaks of overcoming Kazakh “primitiveness,”⁴⁴ he refers to the former underdevelopment of Central Asia only as a historical fact, which he implies has no bearing on the proven competence of indigenous fellow workers or the cooperation of Soviet nations. It is unthinkable to Yankin, and thus likely to other Stakhanovites inspired by Yankin’s example, to consider a past condition as a basis for superiority over native workers. Although he notes that ignorance of drill mechanisms persisted in Kyrgyzstan, Yankin only hopes that he and other workers will be able to help their fellow workers overcome this barrier and access their productive potential, from which the entire Soviet Union would benefit.⁴⁵

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Yankin was a fervent communist and supporter of the state, to which he owed his success as a Stakhanovite, and he therefore cannot be taken to represent the ideas of all, or even most, Soviet citizens. Yankin, however, also cannot be dismissed as a completely anomalous and inauthentic “brainwashed” creation of the government. Stakhanovites were a real class of people in the Soviet Union, who were inclined to adopt the rhetoric, but also the beliefs, of the ideology of productivity and its consequences, including ethnic equality. In addition to the tangible benefits of hyper-productivity, such as higher wages, bonuses, and special access to services and goods, Stakhanovism also held the promise of a better, more joyous life that was attractive to many, especially formerly poor, disadvantaged, and obscure, workers.⁴⁶ Archetypal Soviet men and women were “happy, smiling, and jubilant”⁴⁷ and many personal accounts of citizens at the time report partaking in these ideals. Just as historian Mary Buckley cautions against the interpretation that all peasants were resentful of socialist developments in the 1920s and 1930s, and instead suggests that many rural workers were beneficiaries and supporters of collectivization,⁴⁸ we must similarly acknowledge that the Stakhanovite mentality circulated, at least to some extent, in Soviet society. Historians reveal that the behavior of shock workers, for one, including both their level of productivity and their acceptance of natives, gradually became expected of all workers.⁴⁹ If Stakhanovism developed out of shock work, then the “multiplier effect” of shock work may also have diffused Stakhanovite ideals, including happiness for all citizens and the “friendship of peoples,” to the Soviet population at large.

Beyond even the ideal “friendship of peoples,” the Soviet state attempted to engineer a *homo sovieticus* “ethnicity,” which would, in theory, eliminate any reference to the old concept of nationality. In an attempt to diminish nationality-based divisions, the Soviet Union constructed a “fictive kinship”;⁵⁰ “Stalin’s tribe”⁵¹ contained citizens loyal to the integrity of their work and to the Soviet system, regardless of their former racial labels. This “Soviet ethnicity” promised a “rebirth” of its constituent members, and emphasized the “blood relationship”⁵² of Stakhanovites to leaders such as Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, the Commissar of Soviet Heavy Industry, who served as father figures to devoted Soviet workers. The ethnic “criterion” of loyalty to the state helped indigenous workers to overcome their former alienation, and also allowed them access to material success, societal acceptance, and even national recognition. Exploitation of this new “ethnicity” did not, however, necessitate abandoning one’s national heritage. In fact, racial identity remained strong in many Central Asian nations, enabling these states eventually to become independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The proposed “Soviet” ethnicity, then, did not replace national heritage, but rather served as a rewarding, parallel ethnic identity, “achieved” through work.

STAKHANOVISM AND WOMEN

Interestingly, the opportunities created by Stakhanovism for the indigenous population have a striking parallel with the prospects it opened for women. Women, similar to Central Asians, were considered “backward”⁵³ and in need of special encouragement from Zhenotdel, the Women’s Department of the Party, to tap into their dormant productive potential. Stakhanovism, finally, provided an outlet for this potential, as women encountered the opportunity to establish themselves as Stakhanovites and become celebrated worker-heroes.⁵⁴ Stakhanovism’s focus on both women and Central Asians, which were considered to be the “underdeveloped” sectors of Soviet society, illustrates the broader trend of the productivity campaigns to develop working class consciousness in various historically neglected groups.

The Soviet state perceived a dire need for Central Asian women, in particular, to develop their productive potential. The indigenous of Central Asia did not have a strong concept of class identity, so gender was here substituted for class in the Marxist rhetoric of past exploitation and future equality.⁵⁵ It thus became necessary to “liberate” the oppressed “class” of Central Asian women from the “bourgeois” patriarchy and cultivate their development as a proletariat. The first step in integrating these women into the working class was to draw them out of their traditional roles; to this end, the Soviet Union launched an unveiling campaign, called *hujum*. Historian Douglas Northrop, in his book *Veiled Empire*, concludes that unburdening Central Asian women from the veil, and its symbolic implications, was one of the highest priorities of the Soviet state in Central Asia.⁵⁶ The Party even labelled those who opposed or resisted *hujum* as “enemies of the state,” and punished them accordingly in the *proverka*, or “verification,” general purge of 1928-9.⁵⁷

Hujum was closely linked to the productivity campaigns, as unveiling was considered to be conducive, and even necessary, for increased productivity. The workplace, conversely, was often the main fount of opportunity for women’s advancement; Northrop credits factory workers with notable support of *hujum*, and suggests that the Soviet work environment promoted equality by recognizing outstanding women workers.⁵⁸ Women, especially in agriculture, came to be lauded as shock workers and Stakhanovites. In fact, the peasant “equivalent” of Alexei Stakhanov was Mariia Safronovna Demchenko, a woman who came to represent the ideal rural worker.⁵⁹

One prominent female Stakhanovite in Central Asia was Mamlakat Nakhgova, a poor peasant schoolgirl who led a cotton-picking effort among her classmates.⁶⁰ Mamlakat was honored with medals, invited to committees and conferences, and even sponsored on trips to England and America.⁶¹ Perhaps even more extolled than many ethnic Russian or male Stakhanovites, Mamlakat was celebrated as having overcome the hardships of poor Tajik village life with her enthusiasm for work alone.

THE CENTRAL ASIAN WORKING CLASS: REAL OR IMAGINED?

The consolidation of Central Asians into an alleged “working class” seems to have facilitated their integration into the Soviet Union. Payne, however, introduces the complication that the Kazakh workers who came to constitute the indigenous proletariat maintained “dual identities” as state-sponsored workers and as Kazakhs who had been estranged by the same state.⁶² If the indigenous were not sincere in assuming working class identities, can they still be considered a proletariat?

“What was Kazakhstan, for instance, known for in former times? Cattle raising, and nothing else. But at this congress I saw miners from Karaganda, which has become one of our leading coal basins, and Kazakh iron and steel nonferrous metalworkers. That is how Kazakhstan has changed.”⁶⁵

Stakhanovism and its precursor, shock work, were instrumental in elevating Central Asia to a position of respectability. These productivity movements introduced increasingly objective standards by which indigenous workers

“Central Asians, many of whom had been wandering nomads in the 1910s, were transformed... into models of productivity in the 1930s.”

Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick further compounds the uncertainty surrounding an indigenous working class. She substantiates that the Bolsheviks “found themselves obliged to invent the classes”⁶³ that Marxism supposes; the Soviet Union, in this way, was all too eager to capitalize on any evidence of an indigenous working class, even if it could not reasonably be said to have existed. Central Asian workers, on the other hand, may have been just as alacritous in declaring themselves “proletariat,” recognizing the benefits of the state sponsorship that accompanied this title. Allusions to a Central Asian working class, then, may have been nothing more than a reflection of the interests of both the state and indigenous workers in presupposing the existence of a native proletariat. Even if indigenous workers did not subscribe to the proper ideology of the Bolshevik proletariat, they still were employed in mass quantities, with the help of *korenizatsiia*, and acquired, albeit initially through coercion, work experience, knowledge of techniques to improve their productivity, and ultimately, the means for self-sufficiency. Central Asians, many of whom had been wandering nomads in the 1910s, were transformed, through shock work and Stakhanovism, into models of productivity in the 1930s. The quantity of indigenous workers employed, their productive achievements, including the completion of the Turksib Railroad, and their occasional elevation to the status of Stakhanovite, regardless of their internal convictions, is evidence enough to conclude the existence of a Central Asian working class by the end of the 1930s.

CONCLUSION

In only a few decades, Central Asia was promoted from the atavistic wasteland to which Russians “will go as masters”⁶⁴ to its place in the litany of legally equal nations of the Soviet Union. In the words of one Stakhanovite, Alexander Chutkikh,

could be evaluated and acclaimed. Central Asian workers were also able to distinguish themselves by virtue of the shift from collective to individual measures of productivity; when equipped with the proper materials, training, and conditions, Central Asians were able to prove themselves as productive as ethnic Russians. The formation of a working class among natives, furthermore, allowed the indigenous to integrate into the Soviet system and gain recognition from their Russian peers.

Shock work and Stakhanovism did not, however, afford indigenous workers with the *same* opportunities as they did ethnic Russians. Tension remained between the former colonizers and their “backwards” neighbors in Central Asia, and the region was deprived of the resources necessary to afford its workers with *equal* chances for success. But while Stakhanovism and shock work did not erase centuries of brewing inequalities, they did open a promising array of opportunities, and constituted a remarkable push towards ethnic equality. During the mid-1920s in Central Asia, “the indigenous working class was tiny”⁶⁶ compared to the vast indigenous majority in the population. In the early 1930s, the Turksib Railroad workforce included 7,000 native Kazakhs, out of 25,000 total workers, which furthermore comprised 8.2 percent of the technical staff and 8.7 percent of the white-collar workforce.⁶⁷ By the late 1930s, there were numerous examples of indigenous workers, including Khaidin of Kazakhstan, Mamlakat of Tajikistan, and Tokombaev of Kyrgyzstan, who seized upon productive work as a means to rise from their previous position as undeveloped nomads and soar to the status of national Stakhanovite heroes. Productivity, ultimately, served as an attainable standard by which Central Asian workers began to establish themselves as legitimate, valuable members of the Soviet Union. 🏠

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CUBAN SPONGES SCRUB WORLD

Sponge Fishing in Cuba's Gulf of Batabanó (1890-1940)

Abstract: Before the invention of the artificial sponge, sea sponges were an industrial and household necessity throughout the United States and Europe, where they were put to purposes ranging from surgery to automobile manufacturing and military maintenance. As industrial demand grew, sponges from the Cuba's shallow coastal waters became a crucial supplier. Most of the Cuban industry centered around the town of Surgidero de Batabanó, a small southern fishing village that became the hub for the marine industry. New York sponge merchants became dependent on Batabanó's sponges to meet U.S. demand. In turn, conditions of life and labor in Batabanó became inextricably tied to the fluctuations of U.S. industrial markets. While sea sponges were Cuba's largest marine export for decades, the once-enormous industry has not yet attracted the attention of Cuban or foreign historians. This article fills this gap by tracing the local, national, and transnational histories of Cuban sea sponge fishing, regulation, and trade.

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Until the mid-19th century, residents of the Cuban town of Surgidero de Batabanó thought little of the millions of sea sponges that dotted the waters of the vast, shallow gulf with which the town shared a name. Food fish were plentiful, and no one had much use for more than a few sponges at a time. But around the 1860s, sponges shifted from being one ecological element of the many that made up the Gulf's shallow benthic ecosystems to become a massive export commodity whose commercial value was exceeded only by Cuba's most dominant cash crops. Commercial sponge fishing transformed the economy and ecology of the region. By the early 20th century, Surgidero de Batabanó—known to most simply as Batabanó—had become a global hub for sponge fishing and export. Demand from the United States and Europe for Cuban sponges increased steadily from 1890 through the middle of the 20th century, when the introduction of the artificial sponge would abruptly end Batabanó's near-century of wealth and cultural importance.

Sponge fishing created a human-ecological relationship predicated on a uniquely abundant marine resource and intimate human knowledge of the geography and ecology of the surrounding Gulf. Working in pairs, fishers would dip a glass-bottomed bucket in the sea to scan for the best specimens. With the help of a long rake, they would rip the sponges off of the sea floor, moving systematically across each bed. Decks piled high with sponges, the sponging boats would return to the docks of Batabanó and unload their harvest. These sponges were dark-colored, slimy, potent-smelling specimens, and the air would fill with the smell of the living sponges—the simple animals occupying the soft, valuable spongin skeletons—rotting on the docks. After drying for several days, the sponges would be trimmed, processed, strung-up and sold, auction-style, to the sponge merchant offering the highest price.

These merchants—some longtime residents, others recent Greek and Mallorcan immigrants—served as the brokers between the Gulf of Batabanó's heterogeneous, locally-situated ecological resource and the demand for a standardized product that emanated from the manufacturers and sponge dealers of France, Great Britain, and especially the United States. To many contemporary observers, both Cuban and American, Batabanó's sponging economy appeared as a quaint, localized curiosity, a peculiar feature of Cuba's southern coast. This perception of quaintness stemmed partially from the low-capital, decentralized character of the industry throughout its duration, and partially from foreigners' preexisting expectations of Cuban economic and cultural activity. The Cuban sponging industry exemplifies what sociologist Mimi Sheller argues are the dual "modes of consumption" of the Caribbean, a framework of consumption that encompasses "not only flows of material things [...] but also of symbolic representations, knowledge and images."¹ The constructed quaintness of Batabanó sponging allowed American audiences to culturally consume sponges as part of a "politics of the picturesque," wherein travel writers and journalists used sponging to construct an image of an abundant, undeveloped, and "othered" Cuba.²

But the hyper-local, capital-light aspects of the sponging industry and the resulting projected quaintness masked the inextricable ties between the rise in Cuban sponging and the growth in U.S. industrialization and manufacturing. In the 19th century, sea sponges were used primarily for cleaning, contraception, bathing, and art. But in the 20th century, the paint, explosives, and automobile industries—not domestic needs—drove the increased demand for sponges.³ These unique demands of a modernizing United States pushed the Cuban industry towards overproduction and ecological precarity. Unlike the mass agricultural monocultures

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(bananas, sugar, tobacco, etc.) that have usually attracted the attention of historians studying U.S. economic influence in Latin America, the Batabanó sponge fishery could not be expanded beyond the capacity of the uniquely abundant sponge beds endemic to the Gulf.⁴ Despite—or perhaps because of—this local specificity and these natural limits, Batabanó sponging formed a crucial node in the regional supply chains that fueled U.S. industrialization and manufacturing. Through studying the economic ties between Cuba and the U.S. created by the shipments of Batabanó's best, as well as examining the cultural ties formed via sponges between Cuba and the increasingly internationalist “Western” nations, this essay aims to broaden understandings of U.S. economic imperialism as well as Cuban environmental history.

In recounting the history of the Batabanó sponge fishery, this paper seeks to make three broader historiographical contributions, commenting on: marine environments, U.S. economic imperialism in Latin America, and Cuban economic and environmental history. First, the focus on marine industry in the Caribbean helps broaden the geographic scope of current marine environmental history. It also expands the smaller collection of work on the history of sponging by providing the first historiographical study of the Cuban case. Second, this case study of an extractive industry that remained unindustrialized and locally-managed even as it exported massive quantities of resources pushes historians who study the effects of U.S. resource demand on Latin American environments to see these smaller, locally-constrained sites of production as key nodes in the historical supply chains of U.S. economic imperialism. Third and finally, a history of Cuban fishing in a specific coastal region diversifies the focus on national politics and agricultural commodities that guide much of the foreign scholarship on pre-Revolutionary Cuba. Though Batabanó's sponge fishery appeared to be a marginal local economy, the industry served as a major supplier for U.S. consumers and manufacturers, resulting in a precarious, dynamic relationship between southern Cuba's local ecology and the United States' demand for and consumption of the sea sponge.

MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AND BATABANÓ'S SPONGE FISHERY

The earliest examples of marine environmental history were situated within the field of economic history and focused primarily on European fisheries and maritime technologies.⁵ In 1986, Arthur McEvoy's *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and the Law in California Fisheries, 1850–1980*, highlighted new directions for the field, and in the 1990s, several fisheries histories followed McEvoy's work.⁶ This period also saw the launch of the History of Marine Animal Populations project (HMAP), still one of the field's most ambitious initiatives. HMAP was intended to draw “history and ecology into collaborative study,” with an eye towards quantitative assessments of the historical abundance and distribution of

marine life.⁷ Through HMAP, marine environmental history turned to population reconstructions and cross-disciplinary studies between scientists and historians. These historical-ecological studies focused primarily on marine life in the waters around Europe, the U.S., and the South Pacific, though some studies of the Caribbean emerged.⁸ Today, marine environmental history remains a nascent subfield within the discipline of environmental history. However, perhaps due to its development in a time of near-constant ecological crisis, marine environmental history has refused to retreat into the detached realm of pure academic inquiry. Scholars in the field explicitly connect historical patterns to present concerns, creating arguments for historicizing the ocean based on the material contemporary stakes and state of crisis.

Though the historicity of the ocean is less obvious than that of other environments, this subtlety should not be mistaken for absence. This caution is particularly relevant when applied to historical sponge fisheries, as the current dominance of artificial substitutes makes it hard for present-day audiences to grasp the industry's enormous importance to early twentieth century Caribbean fishing communities and global consumption. The absence of a booming contemporary sponge trade should not be taken to indicate the industry's historical triviality. Indeed, several historical-ecological projects have reconstructed the impact and character of the sponging industries in Tarpon Springs and Key West, Florida, most notably Loren McClenahan's “Social Conflict, Over-Fishing and Disease in the Florida Sponge Fishery, 1849-1939.”⁹ In the Mediterranean, several historians have recorded the long history of commercial sponging on various Greek islands.¹⁰ Yet, the story of Cuban sponging remains untraced. This article aims to contribute to the growing conversation on marine environmental history by filling in this crucial missing link in the story of Caribbean sponging.

CARIBBEAN SPONGING: REGIONAL CONTEXT

While today sponging is best known as a mainstay of Tarpon Springs, the Caribbean sponging industry first developed in the Bahamas, arriving in Key West only with the migration of Bahamian sponge fishers. The Bahamian sponging industry was established in the late 1830s, while Florida did not export its first sponge until 1849.¹¹ Frustrated with the low wages and exploitative labor conditions set by white merchants and ship owners, many experienced black Bahamian spongers moved to Key West in the 1840s and established the early Key West sponging industry.¹² In the second half of the 19th century, declines in key Bahamian industries like sisal and pineapple farming pushed more Bahamians toward the Florida Keys. By 1890, Bahamians made up 25% of the population of Key West, and the majority of its 2000 spongers.¹³ At the same time, rising prices for Mediterranean sponges increased demand for Florida's products, and Key West merchants began to see sponges as a proto-commodity.

A strong trade developed between the merchants of Key West and the sponge dealers of New York City in the second half of the 19th century. The New York sponge houses, already accustomed to importing Mediterranean sponges, used their established grading systems to organize, evaluate, and standardize the new Caribbean specimens. They incorporated exportation into their previously import-focused businesses.¹⁴ Further, they began to make demands on the Key West merchants: for certain sizes of sponges, for certain types—the sheepswool sponge was particularly valuable—and for ever-increasing quantities. Demand was enormous. Larger sponges were crucial for cleaning, bathing, and manufacturing, while smaller sponges and clippings were used for packaging or for stuffing mattresses and cushions.¹⁵ One merchant remarked to a Bureau of Commercial Fisheries (BCF) official that the demand for high-quality Florida sponges was ten times greater than he could supply.¹⁶ Yet, even as the sponge dealers pressed the Key West merchants for more shipments, they complained that Florida buyers had begun to “top off” bales of small sponges with more-valuable larger ones.¹⁷ This commercial fraud also concealed a larger ecological problem in the sponging industry—an increasing inability to find large sponges, one of the key signs of overfishing.

In a story common to many histories of fisheries, a perceived abundance quickly gave way to sharp, unmistakable declines in sponge populations. As McClenachan writes, spongers in

the 19th century, both in the Florida Keys and in a developing secondary sponging hub near Apalachicola, practiced a sort of “unintentional conservation”: the common methods of hand- or rake-harvesting inherently limited the intensity and depth of sponging efforts.¹⁸ Despite these limits, many of the shallowest sponge beds were depleted quickly, pushing sponge fishers into a constant—if unsystematic—search for new beds. In the 1870s, the sponge fishers hit a jackpot: a second major set of sponge beds off Florida’s Gulf coast, near the Cedar Keys. The Tarpon Springs sponging industry, which would soon dwarf Key West’s contributions, began to take shape.¹⁹ In 1887, a BCF official noted that although sponge sizes were marginally decreasing, overall yields remained relatively constant due to the consistent discovery and exploitation of new beds.²⁰ Despite these foreboding signs for the overall regional stock, the Tarpon Springs sponging boom continued through the turn of the 20th century, attracting a new wave of immigrants to the Gulf coast: the Greeks.

The arrival of the Greek sponge divers and merchants fundamentally shifted the cultural and ecological dynamics of the Florida sponging industry. According to several histories of the early industry, John M. Cocoris was the first Greek immigrant involved in Tarpon Springs’ sponging.²¹ Cocoris arrived in Tarpon Springs as an agent with the New York-based Lembesis Sponge Company, and he quickly saw the potential profit in technological modernization.



“Sponge Fishermen, Bahamas” (1885)
Source: Winslow Homer (Wikimedia Commons)

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In 1901 and 1902, he brought over three of his brothers from Greece—all with experience in their family’s sponge business on Hydra—as well as an import that would change the entire Florida sponging industry: diving gear. With diving equipment, an entire sponge bed could be harvested systematically, and depth limits increased enormously. With the “hooking” technique, harvesters could reach sponges at depths of no more than 40 feet (12 m). Trained sponge divers could harvest sponges at 90 to 120 feet (25-30 m).²² Previously inaccessible sponge beds became sources for the finest quality sponges as the shallow beds continued to decline. From 1902 to 1906, the Cocorises built a half-dozen diving boats and brought dozens of crewmembers and divers from Greece.²³ More Greek sponge divers emigrated to the region, and diving quickly threatened to become the dominant form of sponging. The older hand-raking method just could not compete. The Greek spongers began to displace other Floridians, who pushed their elected officials to defend the industry against this technological rupture.

Fears of overfishing became inextricably linked to animosity toward Greek sponge fishers, and the American sponge fishers turned to the legal system to confront these twin threats. The American sponge fishers found their most vocal champion in U.S. Congressman Stephen Sparkman. Sparkman, a Democrat, served as one of Florida’s congressmen from 1895 to 1917, the same period that saw the powerful effect of Greek migration.²⁴ In April 1906, Sparkman testified before Congress on the national need to protect the Florida sponge industry from sharp price decreases and overfishing.²⁵ Sparkman had introduced two bills on sponge conservation, and he defended both vigorously. One bill sought to ban diving methods; the other bill sought to ban all Greeks from the industry. When questioned about the necessity of both laws—surely, the committee members argued, the diving prohibition alone would be enough to protect sponge stocks—Sparkman held firm. Both bills were necessary to

both massive industries by the early 20th century. A 1908 U.S. federal report recorded annual Bahamian exports of 1,486,000 pounds of sponges in 1905, and annual Cuban exports of 591,000 pounds of sponges in 1906.²⁸ For comparison, in 1906 the combined Floridian beds produced 518,000 pounds—less, by volume, than either of the state’s neighbors.²⁹ As Sparkman was in Washington testifying to Congress about the unique regional importance of Florida’s sponge industry, the Cuban and Bahamian industries were booming. And despite the massive aggregate output of the Cuban and Bahamian sponge fisheries, neither the Bahamas nor Cuba ever saw the introduction of the sponge diving technologies that transformed the Florida industry. In both Cuba and the Bahamas, the fishing methods and labor structures surrounding sponging remained remarkably constant despite the industrialization that marked other export-oriented industries at the turn of the 20th century.³⁰

While the Cuban sponge fishery remained a predominantly locally-managed and low-capital network of Cuban fishermen and buyers, the fishery was inextricably tied to the growing demand from a rapidly-industrializing class of U.S. consumers and manufacturers. Cuba exported less than half as many sponges as the Bahamas in the early 1900s, but Cuban sponging was vital for both the Cuban export economy and for U.S. manufacturers. And unlike in the Bahamas, where sponging was spread across multiple towns and islands, Cuban sponging became increasingly centered around Batabanó. The town would become a “sponge capital of the world,” both real and imagined, up until and even beyond the industry’s eventual decline at mid-century.

THE CUBAN CASE: SPONGE FISHING, EXPORTING, AND CUBAN INTERNATIONALISM

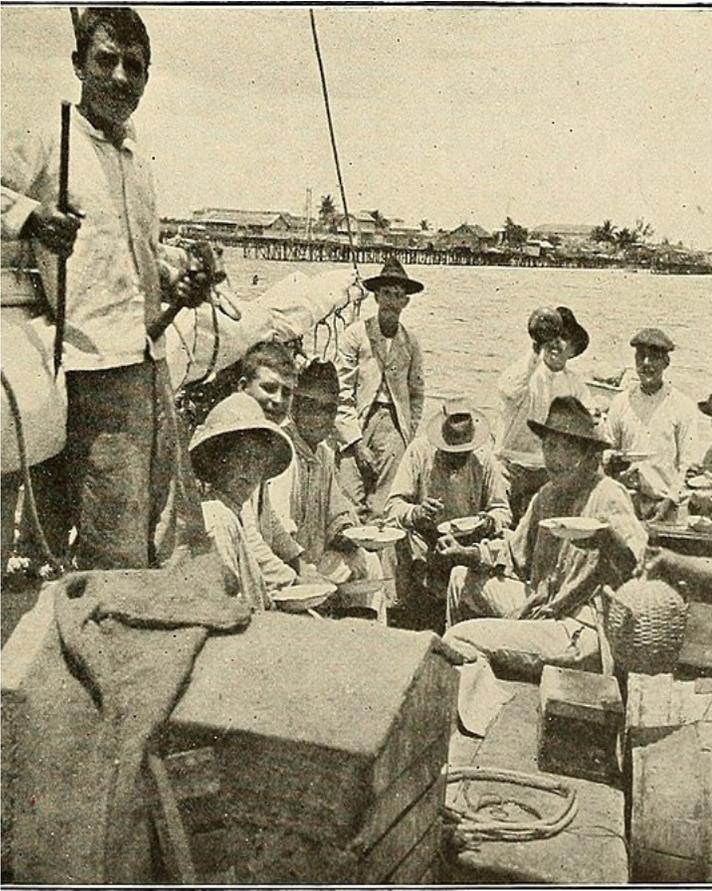
Unlike the somewhat clear origin stories of commercial sponging in the Bahamas and Florida, the early development of commercial Cuban sponging remains a murky story.

“Fears of overfishing became inextricably linked to animosity toward Greek sponge fishers...”

protect the American spongers. Overfishing concerns could not be separated from fear of the Greek spongers. Sparkman cautioned that without some form of legislation, Florida’s sponges would be “threatened with extermination.”²⁶ And if Florida’s sponges disappeared, Sparkman warned, this would be a devastating blow to global and especially Caribbean sponging.²⁷ The Florida beds had to be defended vigorously, Sparkman argued, for they were the only truly productive sponge beds in the Caribbean.

Sparkman’s assertion was personally convenient, but inaccurate. Bahamian and Cuban sponge fishing were

The northern sponge beds in the shallow waters between Cardenas and Nuevitas were exploited first, primarily by traveling Bahamian sponge fishers.³¹ The Batabanó sponging grounds, which eventually outstripped production from the northern coast, were not exploited until late in the 19th century, though the exact date is unclear. A 1911 bulletin from the Pan American Union dates the fishery’s origins to 1844.³² In sharp contrast, a U.S. government report states that the Batabanó sponge beds were discovered in 1884, when “an attempt was made to secure a concession monopolizing the exploitation of the beds.” (The attempt failed. The sponge beds would remain in the public commons throughout the



Cuban Sponge Fishers (circa 1904)
 Source: *The Cuba Review*, Munson Steamship Lines
 (Wikimedia Commons)

fishery's existence.)³³ An 1887 assessment of the sponge fisheries in Florida and the Bahamas remarked on the fraudulent practice of substituting Cuban sheep's-wool sponges for Floridian ones, but gave the Cuban fisheries no further comment. Cuban scientist Mario Sánchez Roig placed the date of Batabanó's commercialization at 1865, though he caveated that the northern beds far outstripped Batabanó's production for several decades.³⁴ In December 1884, New Orleans' *The Daily Picayune* commented that "business has been very dull at the Batabano Sponge Market" due to the holiday lull, suggesting the market had been established several years prior.³⁵

Despite these discrepancies, various sources—Cuban and foreign—agree that by the 1890s, sponging was a significant industry in Batabanó.³⁶ Meanwhile, sponge farming (*esponjicultura*) was garnering increased interest at sites along the northern coast.³⁷ Statistical information on Cuban sponging improved in the 1890s as U.S. reports and trade notices provided increasingly detailed information on Batabanó's sponge exports.³⁸ This increasing U.S. interest in the industry reflected both the growing economic value of Cuban sponging and the broader escalation of U.S. interest in Cuba in the years leading up to the Spanish American War in 1898.

The Spanish American War and the U.S. occupation of Cuba transformed the relationship between the neighboring nations. The town of Batabanó would both contribute to this transformation and experience its effects in unique ways. During the War itself, the Isle of Pines and the port of Batabanó served as key entry points for the Spanish ships and supplies that would undermine the U.S. blockade of Havana.³⁹ After the War, the U.S. military government established the regulatory framework that would govern sponge fishing in Batabanó for the next decade and influence conservation policy throughout the fishery's existence.⁴⁰ In addition, the military government also collected detailed statistics on all Cuban industries and exports, including sponge production. The U.S. War Department produced monthly reports on Cuban commerce throughout the three-year Occupation; these reports showed that exports of sponges dwarfed those of rum at the turn of the century.⁴¹ Such networks of statistical collection and dissemination strengthened the foundation for national record-keeping and regulation of the industry after U.S. forces left mainland Cuba.

Here, I specify mainland Cuba because American expatriates continued to occupy the Isle of Pines, Cuba's second largest island and the seventh largest in the Caribbean, until 1925. The Americans on the Isle of Pines never entered the sponging business, concerning themselves instead with agricultural pursuits and sport fishing. The Cuban sponge fishers predominantly lived across the gulf in Batabanó. However, the distinct communities met and mixed, both on the Isle and on the water. American residents of the Isle complained that Haitian and Jamaican sponge poachers would occasionally raid the Isle as well, using these incidents to express their frustration with Cuban authorities in Batabanó.⁴² At the same time, sponge boats docked in the Isle's Río Las Casas, and a rumor circulated that the sponge fishers might shift their base of operations to the Isle.⁴³ As Michael Neagle emphasizes in his history of "America's Forgotten Colony," the relationship between the Cubans and Americans in the region defied a simple designation of either harmonious or antagonistic.⁴⁴ The Isle of Pines provides a particularly acute example of the continued American influence on Batabanó's sponge fishery after the U.S. Occupation ended in 1902. However, the Occupation shaped the industry's early 20th-century development through several less visible legacies as well.

In the first decade of the 20th century, Batabanó's sponge merchants worked within the political frameworks established by the U.S. military and the Cuban national government to expand their businesses and, by extension, the entire Batabanó sponging industry. At the beginning of the century, sponge fishing and processing employed hundreds of Batabanó's residents—perhaps as many as 2000 men, or 25% of Batabanó's male population, by 1910.⁴⁵ From longtime residents to a small class of Greek and Mallorcan immigrants, almost everyone in the town was tied to sponging in some

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way. But not everyone participated equally. Most fishers were not exclusively devoted to sponging, nor did they own the large sailboats needed for commercial-scale harvesting.⁴⁶ Instead, fishers would be hired out for sponging trips by boat owners, who would pay them in sponges. Then both fisher and captain would head to the sponge market, organize their catch by size and count, and sell it to the highest bidder in a market-auction system described by foreign commenters as more systematic than Florida's version.⁴⁷

At this link in the sponge economy, the number of participants would again contract as all the high-quality sponges were purchased by a small cadre of sponge merchants. The trade in sponges was entirely controlled by these men, many of them with growing ties to the New York sponge houses that received most of the Cuban product. Sponge merchants like Julian Quadreny, Javier Gardet, and Jorge Nicoletto became wealthy and powerful figures in Batabanó.⁴⁸ Through their control of purchasing and processing, the Batabanó sponge merchants ensured a consistent, standardized product for export while communicating and actualizing the increased production demanded by New York dealers within Batabanó. These men served as the crucial brokers between locally-situated ecosystems of production and growing foreign demand, and their individual efforts to maximize their profits enabled sponging's overall growth.

As the sponge trade expanded, the Cuban government began to take a deeper interest in sponge conservation and regulation. In doing so, officials leaned heavily on Occupation-era policies like Military Order 102, an 1899 regulation that established official grades of sponges and

Nacional de la Pesca's arguments and the Guild of Sponge Buyers' counterarguments bounced across the pages of Havana's *La Lucha* and *El Mundo*.⁵³ These conservation clashes rendered the divergent interests of regulators, fishers, and merchants acutely visible. Batabanó couldn't afford these bans, the Guild argued, as "the town of Batabanó lives only and exclusively on fishing."⁵⁴ The regulators countered with the familiar and enduring argument that the policies were in the best interest of both the fishers and the nation. Batabanó's sponging, despite its appearance as a localized, niche economy, had become a matter of national concern.

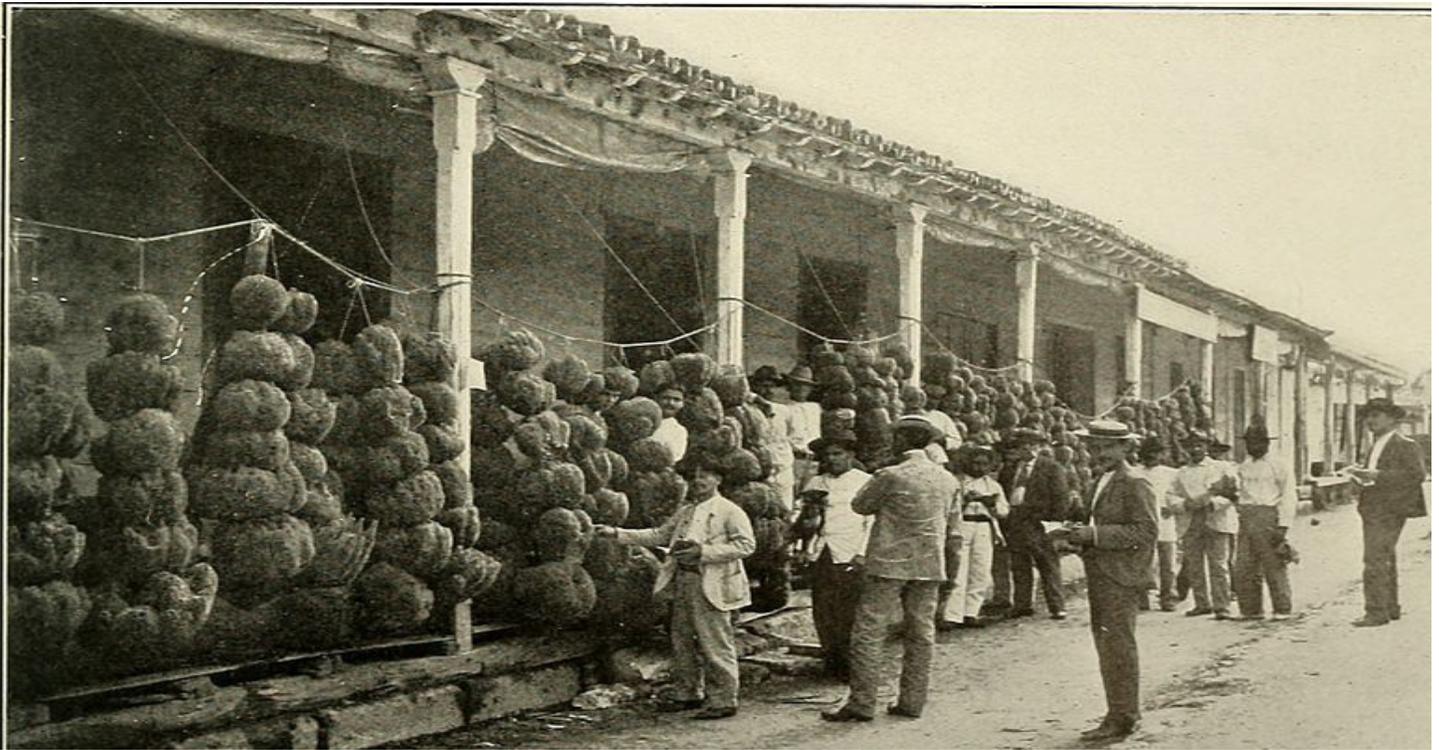
While these domestic debates unfolded, the national government began to use sponges as a tool for claiming space in the increasingly internationalist milieu of "modern" nations. Though no sponges appeared on exhibit lists for Spanish Cuba during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, by the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, sponges featured prominently in Cuba's exhibit. Batabanó merchants including Julian Quadreny and Jorge Nicoletto traveled to Buffalo to display their best sponges. (Both won honorable mentions).⁵⁵ Cuban representatives also brought sponges to the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis and the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.⁵⁶ The space given to sponges never rivaled that of sugar or tobacco, but sponges were the key marine resource featured from the island nation. In St. Louis, Cuba's education exhibit also included an ecological investigation of sponges, as Cuban officials recognized that scientific self-knowledge had become another requirement for modern nations. Events like the International Fishery Congresses in Vienna (1905) and Washington, D.C. (1908) further demonstrated the growing

“Batabano’s Sponging, despite its appearance as a localized, niche economy, had become a matter of national concern.”

created a partial-ban system in which alternating halves of the Gulf of Batabanó would be closed to sponging.⁴⁹ This policy seems to have loosely remained in place after the Occupation, despite the protests of the sponge fishers, who in 1910 traveled to the presidential Palacio in Havana to argue against the excess of the partial bans. They believed that size limits could adequately meet conservation goals.⁵⁰

However, it appears that even the alternating half-Gulf ban was not enough; by 1912, journalists and officials were sounding early alarms about overfishing in Havana's newspapers.⁵¹ In response, the national government instituted a closed season from March through May, to the enragement of sponge fishers and merchants—who, in a change of position, now argued that the alternating half-Gulf ban was the reasonable and optimal policy.⁵² The Junta

scientific internationalism of industrialized nations.⁵⁷ Cuba did not attend either conference, but Cuban officials tracked the proceedings carefully. The countries invited to participate in these conferences pleaded to places like Cuba with still-intact sponge beds to take sponge conservation more seriously than Greece had.⁵⁸ Sponge conservation was a key discussion topic at these conferences, and the increasing attention given to still-flourishing sponging areas meant Cuba and Cuban resources were discussed more seriously in the internationalist space, even as Cuban representatives were absent. At the turn of the century, Cuban representatives displayed sponges as a sign of the nation's tropical ecological heritage, while the Cuban government tracked industrialized nations' embrace of internationalism and leveraged Cuba's unique ecological resource to garner attention and respect in the international arena.



Sponge Market at Batabanó (1911)

Source: *The Cuba Review*, *Munson Steamship Lines* (Wikimedia Commons)

As Cuban sponges provided fodder for these national political projects, the sponge trade strengthened economic ties between Cuba and the United States. U.S. sponge dealers, pharmacists, manufacturers, and household consumers fueled an ever-growing demand for sponges, which led to the sponge price increases in Batabanó that incentivized overfishing.⁵⁹ Almost all U.S.-bound sponges from the Gulf of Batabanó went directly to New York, where the sponge houses collected and graded Batabanó's sponges and distributed them across the country or re-exported them across the Atlantic. In the early 19th century, these sponge houses specialized in importing Mediterranean sponges, but as the geographic loci of sponge production shifted west, so too did the dealers' specialties.⁶⁰ By 1919, many of the New York houses maintained agents in Cuba, including Juan Esfakis, a Greek immigrant who had become a key figure in the Batabanó trade.⁶¹ These sponge houses filled the demand generated by various users, including longtime sponge consumers: surgeons, artists, druggists, and the everyday bather, dishwasher, or toilet-scrubber.

But in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a new industrial class supplanted these traditional consumers: automobile and explosives manufacturers, industrial painters, upholsterers, and even railroad interests drove the increased demand for Cuban, Floridian, and Bahamian sponges in the 20th century.⁶² In 1911, the *Pan American Bulletin* noted that "sponges are known to the general public almost solely for their use in the toilet," but that this was "one of their minor applications."⁶³ By the 1930s, the automobile and paint

industries were the largest U.S. consumers of sponges.⁶⁴ Throughout this period of growth, New York dealers expressed concerns about overfishing, as well as a related desire for a system of marine monoculture cultivation that would detach sponge production from naturally-limited sponge beds.⁶⁵ But no commercially-viable method emerged, so sponge consumption remained dependent on the ecology of Tarpon Springs and Batabanó.

While the United States' primary pressure on the Gulf of Batabanó was material, an imaginative, cultural consumption of the Batabanó sponge fishery also occurred via newspapers and travel writing. As the 20th century progressed, the town of Batabanó increasingly appeared in American tourist guides as a must-see site.⁶⁶ Tourist articles and advertisements flaunted the impressive size of the industry, with headlines like "Cuban Sponges Scrub World" leading into grandiose descriptions of "the largest sponge depot" and "the greatest sponge market" in the world.⁶⁷ Photographs of piles of sponges onshore and particularly massive specimens further confirmed this abundance to U.S. readers. At the same time, travelers' accounts emphasized the town and the fishery's quaintness. One tourist party told of a little girl dancing for spare coins amongst the drying sponges, while many other writers emphasized the quiet, rustic and "picturesque" nature of Batabanó, an epitome of "untouched rural Cuba."⁶⁸ Authors took care to differentiate between Tarpon Springs' "scientific" sponging and Batabanó's, which was "pursued with all the primitiveness and leisure associated with sponge fishing since classic times."⁶⁹ Travel writers' simultaneous

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emphases on Batabanó's ecological abundance and its rural primitiveness crafted a image of natural, undeveloped Caribbean fecundity, rather than of a complex industry whose products were central to U.S. industrialization and modernization.

THE LEGACY OF BATABANÓ SPONGE FISHING: 1930 AND BEYOND

The American construction of Batabanó—and Cuba more broadly—as a quaint, abundant space of tropical production continued through the eve of the Cuban Revolution, as a 1959 advert asked U.S. readers, “Do you know the real Cuba? [...] Have you watched them bring in the sponges at Batabanó?”⁷⁰ Between the early years of Batabanó's sponge fishery and the late 1950s, enormous changes occurred in the industry. The 1926 Havana-Bermuda hurricane destroyed much of Batabanó's sponging infrastructure, but the industry rebounded quickly and continued strong production until the late 1930s. Between 1937 and 1939, a blight of unknown origin decimated sponge beds throughout the Caribbean, but the Cuban and Floridian industries recovered, and Cuban imports supplied almost all U.S. consumption when World War II disrupted supplies in Europe. Production dropped as the artificial sponge began to dominate the market, but natural sponges continued to be a key export until the U.S. embargo in May 1962.⁷¹ Throughout the 70 years of the Batabanó sponge fishery, fishermen worked the sponge beds precariously close to the Gulf of Batabanó's ecological

limits in order to meet U.S. and European demand, thus establishing and maintaining one of the many supply chains that enabled Western industrialization.

Yet since 1962, scholarly and popular attention to Batabanó's sponge fishery and Caribbean sponging has waned. As the artificial sponge pushed the natural sponge from its place as a competing product to an artisanal, specialty item, the memory of the massive, complex Caribbean sponging industries faded. In Tarpon Springs, the continued existence of a niche sponge fishery and recent scholarly recovery projects have kept the link between sponging and Tarpon Springs alive. Not so with Batabanó—the once-enormous industry now appears a historical oddity, when remembered at all. But the story of the Batabanó sponge fishery is not—nor ever was—one of just a quaint Cuban curiosity. The industry tied together the ecology of the Gulf of Batabanó, the lives of Cuban fishers and merchants, and the fluctuations of a rapacious American industrial market. The history of this ecologically-precarious marine resource showcases the diversity of relationships between the U.S. and Cuba in the 20th century and centers the ocean as a historicized site of extraction and exploitation. Studying this locally-situated industry with a eye towards larger patterns of trade and consumption enables a richer understanding of what Batabanó's sponges meant to the men who harvested them, to the Cuban officials who regulated and promoted their harvest, and to the U.S. dealers, artisans, and manufacturers who eventually consumed them. ■■■

Endnotes

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- [12] Florida Writers' Program, "Stories of Florida: Prepared for use in Public Schools: Spinging at Key West," Work Projects Administration, 1940. There was also a much smaller spinging industry developing on the northern Gulf coast of Florida near Apalachicola at this time.
- [13] McClenachan, "Social Conflict," 29.
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- [16] *Ibid*, 820.
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Cuban Sponges Scrub World

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BUCKLEY AND HIS BEDFELLOWS

Fusionism, Birchism, and the Rise of Conservative Populism

Abstract: William F. Buckley Jr's 1962 clash with Robert Welch directly and indirectly contributed to the rise of extreme grass-roots populism on the American Right. Buckley's anti-communism differed from Welch's in its attribution of incompetence rather than subversion to the cause of Sovietization, but their natures and styles were largely similar. Buckley's jettisoning of Edmund Burke's communitarianism in favor of an untenable libertarian-conservative fusion enabled a new conservative ethos characterized by inconsistent thoughts, principles, and ideas. Well-organized advocacy groups thrived off anathematizing propaganda that incited populist fears, whereas traditional conservatism would have disdained its lunacy.

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In 1962, at the height of the Cold War, America's preeminent conservatives clashed bitterly with right-wing extremists over the nature and extent of Communist inroads within the United States. Leading the former contingent was the charismatic William F. Buckley Jr., who had gained prestige for reinvigorating conservatism through his publication of *God and Man at Yale* in 1951 and his ongoing weekly magazine, *National Review*, in circulation since 1955. He had developed a reputation as a patrician gadfly crusading against the liberal forces of intellectual conformity, relativistic atheism, moral dissolution, repressive statism, and malignant communism. Beyond his charisma and intellect, Buckley's political ascendancy was a function of his audacity to challenge what amounted to almost the entire political spectrum of the 1950s. He legitimized resentment for New Deal socialism, timid Soviet containment strategy, and loosening cultural mores at a time when the right-wing establishment, the so-called Rockefeller Republicans, had mostly acquiesced to these liberal gains.

In spite of its well-defined ideological adversaries, Buckley's reimagined American conservatism lacked a clear philosophical basis itself. His movement was constructed from a discrepant fusion of libertarianism and religious traditionalism. Combining these "strange bedfellows" necessitated a degree of argumentative dissonance that enabled the participation of extremists who applied elements of his philosophy beyond their intended boundaries. The mutability of Buckley's political convictions, in concert with his aristocratic, gunslinging style, emboldened radical conservatives to extend his ideas beyond their rational limits and thereby threaten the respectability of his movement. Buckley's clash with Robert W. Welch Jr., a confectionary tycoon turned rabid anti-Communist advocate, elucidated not only the newfound power of grassroots conservatism as an implacable force of the New Right, but also Buckley's determination to protect his branch of conservatism from

that radicalism. Welch, as the influential founder and leader of the radical John Birch Society, cultivated a substantial membership dedicated to a paranoid vision of a covert Communist conspiracy that penetrated the highest levels of the United States' government. Buckley and Welch initially maintained a cordial symbiosis designed to bolster each other's influence amongst the conservative base. Eventually, Welch's allegation that President Dwight Eisenhower and other prominent leaders were engaged in treasonous sabotage became the fodder of the national media. Buckley and his allies feared association with a man that many Americans perceived to be unhinged from reality.

Collaborating with Senator Barry Goldwater and political theorist Russell Kirk, Buckley publicly advocated for Welch to be jettisoned from the conservative fold, but simultaneously offered support for the underlying mission of his organization. With the power afforded by hindsight, Buckley and most recently Senator Jeff Flake have characterized the episode as the courageous ousting of a figure emblematic of extremist "irresponsibility" by conservative purists.¹ Buckley certainly disagreed with Welch's intentions and the Bircher's cultish structure, but he could not deny the commonality of religious and anti-Communist values between the *National Review* and the John Birch Society, nor ignore the many overlapping subscribers between both organizations, without sacrificing his own reputation as an ardent conservative. In reality, Buckley's maneuver was primarily a self-serving calculation, not a principled rejection. When the opportunity to attain respectability by marginalizing the outlandish Welch appeared, Buckley seized on his competitor's vulnerability because it was politically expedient. To protect his veneer of upper crust civility, Buckley publicly condemned Welch. In a wider context, however, the conflict illustrated how Buckley's movement contributed to the rise of the extreme grassroots fundamentalism as a permissible component of the American Right.

RECONSTITUTING THE CANON

The conservatism Buckley espoused descends from Irish-born political philosopher Edmund Burke, but Buckley reengineered the principles of the transatlantic antecedent in establishing a new American conservatism for the modern era. While Buckley channeled some of his predecessor's sensibilities, he injected the canon with an anti-statist, laissez-faire, populist individualism that the renowned statesman would have disdained. In his effort to fuse two incongruous political persuasions, economic libertarianism and traditionalist conservatism, Buckley radically changed conservative ideas about political engagement. Burke's convictions, regurgitated for the modern era by Russell Kirk in his 1953 book *The Conservative Mind*, were sixfold: his school of thought espoused belief in a "divine intent" above

fanaticism" if religious doctrine were applied literally to the world of current affairs. To Burke, scripture was not a written template, but a spiritual inspiration in the formation of policy. Pragmatic, "sound doctrine" should govern religious expression; the inversion of this precept, particularly by government enforcement as during Charles I's "violent and ill-considered attempt...to establish...the Church of England in Scotland," subverted not only the "order, but...the liberty, of the whole community."⁶ Buckley, a devoted Roman Catholic, split with his predecessor in promoting the primacy of Judeo-Christian doctrine, even by state intervention if necessary, through his advocacy for mandatory school prayer and against abortion.⁷ Where he observed religious expression under assault, Buckley employed Hamiltonian constitutional rhetoric, but where he perceived the alignment of popular

“In his effort to fuse two incongruous political persuasions, economic libertarianism and traditional conservatism, Buckley radically changed conservative ideas about political engagement.”

society and conscience; appreciation for the “proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life”; support for a civilized society of “order and classes” defined by natural distinction; understanding that private property is the basis of human liberty and “economic levelling” is antithetical to “progress”; “[f]aith in prescription and distrust of ‘sophisters’” knowing that people are “governed more by emotion than by reason”; and gradualism in political reform.² Burke advocated for a spiritual communitarian society insulated from its own short-sighted impulses by a venerated government that interpreted godly will. He supported virtuous prescriptions that prioritized existing hierarchies and harmonious interests over the uncertain promises of reform. Like Burke, Buckley despised the unfettered Baconist faith in the “perfectibility of man and illimitable progress of society”³: in his 1955 *National Review* “Mission Statement,” he asserted that the “profound crisis of our era” is “the conflict between the Social Engineers, who seek to adjust mankind to conform with scientific utopias and the disciples of Truth, who defend the organic moral order.”⁴ A wealthy heir himself, Buckley's self-assured manner would appear to be an implicit endorsement of Burke's third tenet, the idea of “natural distinctions among men,”⁵ at the very least within the intellectual sphere.

Still, Buckley's philosophy conflicted with Burke's in a meaningful, though somewhat obfuscated, manner. Both Burke and Buckley emphasized the importance of religion in government and society. But while the former considered faith to be an important metaphorical guide that inculcated communitarian values, respect for tradition, and moral enrichment, he also understood the potential for “dangerous

opinion with his personal viewpoint, he willingly ditched civil rights in favor of government-backed religious enforcement aligned with his agenda.

In *God and Man at Yale*, for example, Buckley stringently defended the religious freedoms of college students supposedly suppressed by homogenizing, authoritarian administrators. Yet in a collection of cultural essays, Buckley chastised the “First Amendment rampart-watchers” who opposed government-sanctioned “religious instruction,” referring to the people who opposed school prayer.⁸ In an even greater departure from Burke, Buckley defended political candidates' use of “God's name” by reporting that over 85% of Americans believed in a divine ruler.⁹ Clearly, freedom of religious expression on the basis of utilitarian diversity and constitutional protections, statist administration of Catholic prayer justified by religious law, and the politicization of God through a majoritarian rationalization are incompatible arguments. With the potential exception of the first statement, Buckley's reasoning contradicts Burke's. Yet his divergence extends beyond comparisons to intellectual ancestors, because his rhetoric conflicts with itself. If the political end were right, Buckley employed any means necessary to justify it, a fundamentalist tendency he shared with his radical counterparts.

Buckley's deviation partly can be explained ontologically; although his work is less philosophical than Burke's, it implies fundamental disagreement on the contract between individuals and society. Whereas Burke deemed localized institutions, the “little platoon[s],” to be the ideal

foundation of society and “love of country,”¹⁰ Buckley’s patriotism stemmed from a libertarian orthodoxy in which individualism supplanted institutionalism and the pursuit of wealth possessed a societal, if not individual, morality. Burke approved of Adam Smith’s free market as an efficient means of economic organization but disapproved of capitalism as an ethical basis for personal or sociopolitical affairs. Buckley’s arguments extended beyond Burke’s to suggest laissez-faire capitalism was not only economically sound but a worthy end in determining social hierarchy. In *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley elevated “free enterprise and limited government” to normative superiority in judging “the role of man in his society.”¹¹ His views stopped short of Ayn Rand’s objectivism because he believed that a divine will governed “the role of man in the universe”¹² – whereas she categorically rejected religion and championed materialism as the foremost ethical end¹³ – but his individualism was nonetheless extreme by Burkean standards.

FLUORIDATED WATER AND POISONED CANDY

Buckley’s endorsement of capitalist self-improvement as a socioeconomic good impeded by the “growth of Big Brother government” had important implications for the role of radical populism within the conservative movement.¹⁴ It validated right-wing resentments around power, wealth, and class as a function of insidious collectivism. Buckley aroused suspicion for “satanic...communism” internationally and an expanding government domestically as the primary threat to “liberty and material progress.”¹⁵ He may not have overtly indicted national leaders as card-carrying Communists, but he emboldened Welch and his fellow conspiracists in their distrust of American institutions through his advocacy. The Bircher’s perception of a Communist “octopus” whose “tentacles reach[ed] into all of the legislative halls, ...union labor meetings, ...religious gatherings, and ...schools of the whole world”¹⁶ differed in extremity but not nature from that of the *National Review*, which regularly editorialized with a suspicious worldview.

The so-called “Siberia, U.S.A.” controversy of 1956 demonstrated this interplay between grassroots radicalism and Buckley’s *National Review*. A congressional proposal to permit Alaskan authorities to “hospitalize...mentally ill residents” incited the ire of far-right suburbanites like Gene Birkeland, who believed that the government was “establishing... Siberian slave camps,” otherwise known as Gulags. These credulous conspiracists, many of whom participated in the John Birch Society, inhabited a parallel universe with alternative information, language, and convictions—the “fake news” of yesteryear. Pamphlets, articles, letters, and petitions from the Educational News Service, Liberty Lobby, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Network of Patriotic Letter Writers promulgated “bizarre apocalyptic fantasies”¹⁷ through provocative headlines such as “Seeds of Treason,” “Government Book Control,” “Unbelievable Degeneracy [in Public Schools],” and “Communist Brainwashing: Your Child



L. Grant Bozell, and William F. Buckley, Jr. (1954)

Source: *Los Angeles Times* photographic archive, UCLA Library (Wikimedia Commons)

is Their Target.”¹⁸ With scant or no evidence, these groups disseminated propaganda that interpreted real or imagined events that threatened the white, middle-class suburbanite’s worldview as the deliberate sabotage of “Big Business,” “Big Labor,” “Big Government,” “The Power Elite,” “totalitarian Leftists,” and “the Jews” amongst others.¹⁹ This splintering of perceptions was self-perpetuating; distrust in the establishment encouraged engagement with advocacy groups that further alienated the reader. “Projective politics,” defined by scholar Richard Hofstadter as the expression of irrational, “essentially pathological” concerns in the public sphere, was the upshot of this divisive feedback loop.²⁰

The consequent division of American political engagement underlay the paranoia around the Alaskan mental health bill. Conspiracists threatened to undermine a measure that, ironically, Senator Goldwater supported for its very decentralization of federal power.²¹ In her well-known grassroots study *Mothers of Conservatism*, historian Michelle Nickerson recounted the impressions of Jane Crosby, a South Pasadena Bircher, who felt disenchanted with “social scientists who lectured about mental health” at a local educational conference, an encounter that inspired her reversal from Roosevelt Democrat to radical conservative. “The perception of being psychologically manipulated by authorities,” in Nickerson’s analysis, “invigorated the activism of conservative women.”²² Paranoid about ties between “psychiatric professionals and the welfare state,” many far-right activists linked the Alaskan bill to a broader campaign

of “mass indoctrination aimed at stifling individualism and belief in God,”²³ the two principal tenets of Buckley’s fusion. Although *National Review* published a caustic satire of the Gulag-crazed housewives, it also championed their skeptical anti-statist thinking with Kirk’s glowing book review “Those School Psychological Tests” and Dr. Thomas Szasz’s criticism of “psychiatric liberalism,” which questioned the redefining of “moral and political values” as “health values.”²⁴ Buckley chided the delusional excesses of these crusaders, but also substantiated their suspicions about an elite academic, governmental complex conspiring to strip them of their liberties. Balancing the respectable right and the radical conservatives, *National Review* often confirmed the sentiments of grassroots extremists without adopting their delusions.

The ideological fickleness that characterized Buckley’s vacillations between libertarianism and conservatism, individualism and statism, constitutionalism and majoritarianism, and reason and faith further contributed to the inroads of

of firebrand rabble-rousing; in a scathing critique, liberal commentator Dwight Macdonald labelled the *National Review*’s commentary “demagoguery,” arguing that a “true conservative...is not simply anti-something.” He “appeals to the laws or...tradition, but certainly not to the ‘hearts of men.’”²⁸ Macdonald based his claim on the *National Review*’s rebuke of the Plessy doctrine in which *Review* editors evaded the discriminatory nature of segregation by invoking public will in its favor.

Buckley gleefully substituted silver-tongued fomentation for concrete reasoning, which naturally made him popular among extremist groups like the John Birch Society. Robert Welch’s characterization of the Communist threat employed similar rhetorical means, albeit with a more extreme conclusion. Within the same 1961 letter to followers of the John Birch Society, the former candy magnate declared that “the enemy” was “now closing in...on the informed anti-Communists of this country.”²⁹ Simultaneously, though, the

“Welch, like Buckley, propagated multiple narratives about the state of affairs in order to expediently attack the liberal establishment.”

groups like the John Birch Society. Buckley imbued his conservative synthesis with a demagogic tone. To the extent that his anathematizing charisma overpowered the glaring inconsistency of his ideas, he endowed American conservatism with its indignant populism. Demagoguery was not unprecedented amongst United States’ reactionary politicians. Almost a century before Buckley founded *National Review*, Senator Stephen Douglas touted the “great principle of popular sovereignty” while also proclaiming his view that the United States government was “made by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by white men.”²⁵ Douglas stoked racial resentments while invoking localized populism in order to safeguard the preordained hierarchy he envisioned amongst people. Buckley certainly was not the first to bridge European-style conservatism with America’s democratic predisposition in pursuit of an agenda, but his anti-establishment brand went further to legitimize demagoguery with lasting consequences.

In fact, Buckley deliberately engaged in anti-elitist fearmongering, using hyperbolic labels such as “parasitic bureaucracy,” “cultural menace,” and “Fabian operators” to describe a bankrupt American political system.²⁶ Criticizing the intellectual establishment, he once opined that he would “rather be governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston telephone directory than by the faculty of Harvard.”²⁷ Indeed, prior to the Welch altercation, contemporary critics observed Buckley’s argumentative “equivocation” as an indicator

“Communists and their sympathizers...[were] frightened over” the promising campaign to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren.³⁰ Welch, like Buckley, propagated multiple narratives about the state of affairs in order to expediently attack the liberal establishment.

RIGHTING THE SHIP

Welch’s paranoid right-wing fundamentalism, recorded primarily in *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, his public manifesto chronicling the founding meeting of his organization, and “The Politician” or “Black Book,” an incendiary book-length “letter”³¹ intended for a “limited number of good friends and outstanding patriots,”³² distinguished itself from Buckley’s assessment in its attribution of subjective intentionality to objective consequence. Logically, Welch’s approach was the inverse of Hanlon’s Razor, which states that one should “never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.” *The Blue Book* described an indefatigable Communist conspiracy that had utilized “bribery, lies, bluff, brutality, the countless tentacles of treason, [and] murder on a scale never before dreamed of in the world...without the slightest concern for any moral difference.”³³ Unless “inexorable” forces could be overturned, the United States faced “Communist dominion...from the Kremlin” within a few years.³⁴

Welch’s assessment of the internal danger was that Machiavellian leaders were yielding to collectivism for career

advancement, though not necessarily through conscious sabotage. He cautioned that the “mass psychological flight towards amorality” enabled duplicitous politicians with the “appearance of excellent morals” to do “a tremendous amount of ball-carrying” for the Communist conspiracy.³⁵ In *The Blue Book*, Welch’s assertions about feckless leadership in United States were hardly more extreme than Buckley’s, who believed that Eisenhower’s “lethargy, indecision, and ignorance” had been adroitly exploited by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.³⁶ Both feared the inroads of a relativism in American culture that prevented the assertion of the “superiority of capitalism to socialism.”³⁷ Both Buckley and Welch believed in a pernicious collectivist plot facilitated in some manner by the behavior of American politicians. In public statements, the latter is only slightly more alarmist in his assessment of the Communist threat.

“The Politician,” however, cast Faustian aspersions about domestic leaders that garnered national attention, exposed the John Birch Society to extensive criticism, and eventually persuaded Buckley to condemn Welch. It directly accused Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower; C.I.A. Director Allen Dulles; and Chief Justice Earl Warren of being “knowing instruments of the Communist conspiracy.”³⁸ In 1962, at Senator Goldwater’s request, Buckley quietly compiled Welch’s most preposterous “remarks” in order to facilitate the most effective condemnation of the Birch

The outlandish claims in “The Politician” discredited Welch’s mainstream credibility when they were widely reported in 1961, but when Buckley, entrusted with the manuscript of “The Politician” in 1958, was amongst the few conservatives aware of Welch’s genuine sentiments, he avoided public conflict with Welch. Buckley, eyeing the expedient path, prioritized his own reputation in regards to the Society and its founder at every turn. Their earlier correspondence had been defined by a reluctant cordiality interspersed by pledges of written and financial aid.⁴² Reflecting on Welch’s swelling popularity amongst *National Review*’s associates and the conservative base, Buckley staved off a rupture in 1958. He expressed to Welch that they “agree[d] on essentials” and their “differences [were] a matter of emphasis,”⁴³ even after Welch had emphasized that “conscious treason” was “propelling our ship of state down its present dangerous course.”⁴⁴ In Buckley’s missing reply to Welch regarding “The Politician,” he supposedly challenged the Bircher assumption that communist expansion meant “American leaders wanted them to win,” the intentionality fallacy, which led Welch to demand the return of his manuscript. Still, in the interest of protecting his reputation as a staunch anti-Communist, Buckley upheld a public entente with the exception of one standalone critique by proxy, a piece by Eugene Lyons.⁴⁵

Evidently, Buckley was roused to action not by his reading of the controversial manuscript, but the 1961 media firestorm

“When self-preservation necessitated temporary well-wishing towards the Society, Buckley obliged.”

founder in future conversations and publications;³⁹ 30 of the 66 quotes in this document came from “The Politician.” Among these statements were accusations that Eisenhower was “a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy”; was the “most conspicuous and injurious of [the] enemies” to the American people; was “one of the most vigorous and vicious anti-anti-Communists in American public life”; had “adjusted his policies...to tie in with [the Kremlin] line”; and served under “superior and boss” Milton Eisenhower “within the Communist Party.” Furthermore, Presidents Roosevelt and Truman were “used by the Communists” and Allen Dulles was an “untouchable supporter of Communism.” Indicative of his alarmist fanaticism, Welch proclaimed that the Communist danger was “almost entirely internal, from... treason right in our government.”⁴⁰ Whether deliberate or not, his levelling of treason at the “very top social, economic, educational, and political circles”⁴¹ neatly fit the paranoid predisposition of the grassroots base described by Nickerson. Moreover, it preemptively contextualized any criticism against Welch as part of the wider Communist conspiracy, such that these attacks would further entrench many of his supporters.

surrounding its widespread circulation. *Time Magazine*’s 1961 expose, entitled “The Americanists,” lambasted the Birchers as a would-be “comic-opera joke” save for their “unsettling presence...in scores of U.S. communities.” The piece decried the John Birch Society’s structure of secretive cells harnessing “Communist-style” tactics under Welch’s “hard-boiled, dictatorial direction.” Before reporting the more salacious allegations of “The Politician,” *Time* declared the document “Welch’s *Mein Kampf*,” an allusion to Adolf Hitler’s fascist manifesto.⁴⁶ Welch responded that the document was a “private confidential letter” expressing “personal opinion” with no bearing on the Society “in any way,” and naturally blamed “Communist” machinations for the attack on his character.⁴⁷ To all but his faithful supporters, however, the “Black Book” was the sinister dogma behind the more agreeable “Blue Book.” It was “the ultimate truth held by his founder and his hard core, but...too advanced and too powerful to present, as yet, to the “masses” being led,” according to legal scholar Alan F. Westin.⁴⁸ The negative publicity around the John Birch Society naturally forced conservative leaders like Buckley onto a political tightrope:



Russell A. Kirk at his typewriter. (cir. 1950s)

Source: *The Imaginative Conservative*
(Wikimedia Commons)

they had to deflect doubts of their sanity from the left and of their anti-Communist allegiances from the right.

The extent to which widespread denunciation by the “religious, civil, and political establishment”⁴⁹ in 1961 alienated conservative ideologues, particularly the *Review’s* and Society’s shared proponents, was the subject of intense speculation by Buckley, because it determined the potential success of an effort to excommunicate Welch. Although never openly expressed, Buckley’s ultimate goal was the consolidation of the conservative movement under his control. When self-preservation necessitated temporary well-wishing towards the Society, Buckley obliged. He indicated his non-confrontational intentions to the ascendant Welch via Birch confederate Bryton Barron two weeks after the *Time* expose.⁵⁰ At the same time, Buckley drafted an unpublished editorial outlining the “personal motivation” fallacy and calling for Welch’s resignation.⁵¹ The shrewd Buckley was uncertain of the optimal course of action, and sought the advice of trusted allies. *National Review* publisher and confidante William Rusher wisely observed that Buckley’s insistence on the syllogism that Welch’s irrationality made the “John Birch Society” incurable was a disguised “impatience” with a conservative organization that was not “obediently following [National Review’s] lead.”⁵² Confirming this interpretation are a list of prominent John Birch Society sponsors and a memo outlining the dangers of alienating “our readers and contributors.”⁵³ Buckley’s determination was a question of political opportunism. He sought to ascertain the reaction of the conservative community to an assault on Welch.

Senator Goldwater, anxious about a broad-brush association with the erratic Welch, cemented the political calculus of Welch’s excommunication by offering Buckley a coalition of rational conservatives from which to launch his attack. In January 1962, Goldwater, Buckley, Kirk, and a few other prominent conservatives secretly convened at The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida, for a two-day conference that would determine their approach to the John Birch Society in advance of Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign. Goldwater had adopted a similarly nonconfrontational attitude because of the Society’s hold on the Republican constituency in his home state of Arizona. The Society and its prominent members had backed him, and like Buckley, he needed to disabuse the public of any official association while preserving relationships with his supporters. The coalition vowed to isolate Welch without alienating his followers, leading Buckley to pen his damaging editorial, “The Question of Robert Welch.”⁵⁴ The rationalization behind the maneuver was certainly Machiavellian in nature. The coalition’s self-serving intentions were demonstrated by Goldwater’s undemonstrated claims of having criticized Welch in an interview with the *New York Times*.⁵⁵ Suspicious of this assertion, Buckley expressed to Kirk his distress over Goldwater’s inactivity in denouncing Welch.⁵⁶ Rather than a brave stand, as Jeff Flake retroactively characterized it, the coalition’s mutually distrustful, delayed response was the product of savvy maneuvering for political gain.

More than any other conservative intellectual, Buckley possessed the resources, including financial wherewithal, editorial independence, and political legitimacy, to invalidate Welch’s premises on reasons of principle in 1958. Instead, he waited until convenience compelled him to do so in 1962. Whether his reaction indicated his ideological proximity to Welch, the political expediency of remaining cautious allies, or a combination of both factors, the incident demonstrated Buckley’s responsibility for, and participation in, the rise of grassroots populism within the conservative movement. If the former is true, then the commonality of a conservative tastemaker and a radical movement that advocated the levelling of the patrician political establishment through subversive means was a sign of the new anti-Burkean individualism in the right-wing ethos. If the latter is true, then as the foremost conservative intellectual of his era, Buckley’s own propensity for demagogic behavior effectively licensed the “absurd superstitions” of the nation’s “populistically oriented popular culture.”⁵⁷ By any interpretation, Buckley’s involvement in this ideological groundswell was significant. Underneath his wild allegations, Welch’s political philosophy attributed the “Communist’s overwhelming success” into a telling principal factor: “patient gradualism.”⁵⁸ In the confectioner’s mind, the quintessential basis of European conservatism, and indeed the United States Constitution, was the single greatest tool in the destruction of the American way of life. Buckley may not have endorsed that assertion himself, but his tepid, self-serving rejection of Welch illustrated the inversion of populism’s role in the conservative movement. ■

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“EVERY MAN HIS OWN HISTORIAN”

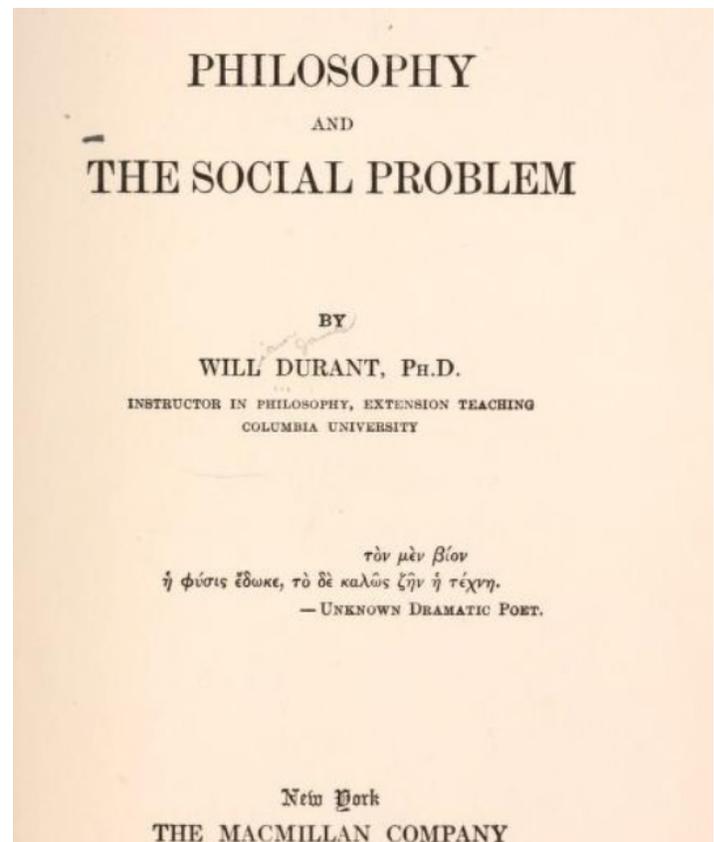
Will Durant and the Price of Popularizing History

*Abstract: In a review of Will and Ariel Durant’s 11-volume series *The Story of Civilization*, one critic remarked: “What is wrong with our educational system when more people learn “history” from one book by Will Durant than from a whole year’s output by all the professional historians in the country?” This article argues that in order to make their books accessible and interesting for ordinary people, the Durants de-emphasized important historical debates, and over-emphasized both the influence of famous individuals and the extent to which “history repeats itself.” These failings represent the “price of popularizing history.”*

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This is an essay about a philosophy teacher who wanted millions of Americans to read history and devised a story of civilization suited to that aim. Will Durant (1885-1981) found his first great success with *The Story of Philosophy*, the U.S.’s best-selling nonfiction book in 1926.¹ The book presented philosophy as a series of contributions by great thinkers, with the ideas of these thinkers placed alongside detailed biographies of their lives. In the next year, Durant and his wife, Ariel, began writing *The Story of Civilization*, the project which would consume the next forty-five years of their lives and enrapture millions of readers around the world.² The eleven-volume set totaled over ten thousand pages, sold millions of copies, and was translated into over twenty languages. It covered the whole history of Western civilization from ancient Greece to the Napoleonic Wars, with long sections on the histories of the Middle East, India, China, and Japan through World War One. The Durants won the Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction in 1968 for the set’s tenth volume, *Rousseau and Revolution*, and were awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977. Cultural historian Joan Shelley Rubin wrote in 1992, “To mention Durant to practicing scholars today is to realize that an early encounter with his prose shaped many a distinguished career.”³

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, enormous increases in literacy vastly expanded the market for books in many academic subjects, including history. At the same time, universities also expanded rapidly, creating far more professional historians whose work became increasingly fragmented and specialized. As a result, the history books written by professional historians appeared less and less interesting to the majority of readers, who wanted to read books with a broader scope. In 1935, historian Charles Andrews lamented to the Mississippi Valley Historical Association that in the last fifty years of professional historical scholarship, “we have won no major engagement outside our ranks.”⁴ In their place, so-called “popularizers”



Title Page of *Philosophy and The Social Problem* (1917)
Source: William Durant, New York : The Macmillan company. (Archive.org)

of history filled this demand by writing broad, colorful outlines—simultaneously a reaction to uneasiness about the specialization of knowledge and an opportunity for non-elite readers to feel “cultured.” As Willem Van Loon, author of *The Story of Mankind*, put it, “The world we live in has completely changed its masters...as Will [Durant] and I considered it necessary that the new masters should know certain things which until then had been the privileged possessions of



President and Mrs. Ford with Recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House (William and Ariel Durant on Right) (January 10, 1977)

Source: White House photograph B2741-08, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, NARA (Wikimedia Commons)

the few.”⁵ Even Durant’s fiercest critics, historians like M.I. Finkelstein, J.H. Plumb, and James Henry Breasted, agreed that historians ought to write for a more public audience and that, for this end, a broader scope of study was needed.

Since the “outline craze” broke out in the interwar period, the chasm between history written by professional historians for other professional historians, and history written by popularizers for the general public, has widened substantially.⁶ The popular and academic reviews of *The Story of Civilization* can help us understand this chasm. Specifically, this body of criticism can show us why the general reading public might find histories written by popularizers like Durant to be more interesting than histories written by professors whose work is held to a higher standard. Although most historians of Durant’s era wanted to reach a larger audience, historians many failed to recognize the variety of tradeoffs inherent in the project. The main thrust of the reviews of *The Story of Civilization* is relatively superficial: Durant is too careless with his facts and too dramatic with his words. These critiques are correct, but misguided. It is not the facts or word choice that matter in *The Story of Civilization*—but its underlying philosophy of

history. Every historian writing a history with a large scope inevitably addresses two problems. The first is the capacity for individual political leaders, generals, writers, and thinkers to create a new future for the rest of humanity—in short, the role of the hero in history. The second is the treatment of repetition, continuity, and inevitability in history. Events in the past, particularly in the distant past, seem inevitable, for their outcomes are irrevocable. Historians disagree over the extent to which the course of history follows an inevitable path and how one might account for contingencies, real or illusory, available at any moment in the past. Inside his solutions to these problems lie the deepest secrets to Durant’s success—and the greatest flaws with his work.

There are certain tradeoffs, inherent in the popularization project, which all together make up the price of popularizing history. First, it was inevitable that the Durants would make some mistakes, rely more on secondary sources than primary sources, and make generalizations. Second, Durant’s ignorance of contemporary scholarship both perpetuated the illusion that historical truth is fixed and lent them more time to churn out volumes. Third, Durant’s beliefs in an unchanging human nature, a usable past, and a history that repeats itself together offer readers the notions that history is practically useful in dealing with the present and that it offers predictive powers when dealing with the future. Lastly, the Durants needed to humanize their history in order to make the book more comprehensible to ordinary readers, and they naturally chose the most interesting subjects: geniuses and “great men.” The three central themes of Will Durant’s philosophy of history—historical truth as timeless and fixed; determinisms linking the past with the present and future; and the extraordinary influence of great men—cannot be true, but they must be used in any history that sustains the interests of the reading public.

PROBLEMS WITH WRITING HISTORY

Durant’s critics varied in their tolerance for three of the more obvious shortcomings of his works—high quantity of factual inaccuracies, reliance on secondary sources, and failure to keep up on contemporary scholarship—all of which are inevitable problems of a study of this scope aimed a general audience. Nearly all of Durant’s reviewers acknowledge that errors can be expected of a work of this ambition and scope. Sidney Packard wrote of *The Age of Faith*: “The misleading statements which inevitably crept into the text are neither numerous nor vital.”⁷ J.W. Swain calls *Caesar and Christ* “moderately accurate,” although “a zealous mistake-finder would criticize something on every page.”⁸ Some critics are less forgiving. J.H. Plumb wrote that errors “stud *The Age of Louis XIV* like stars in the heavens on a frosty night,” and that *The Age of Napoleon* is a work of “slipshod scholarship” full of false generalizations.⁹ Both W. Leonard Grant and John Day give a long list of errors in *Caesar and Christ* and conclude that the book falls short of worthy scholarship.¹⁰ As the historical profession grew

“Every Man His Own Historian”

more specialized and fragmented throughout the middle of the century, historians grew less and less tolerant of generalization and factual errors. As a result, it was more difficult for Durant than it was for the popularizers of the previous generation, such as Arnold Toynbee and H.G. Wells.

Another target for critics was Durant’s dependence on secondary sources. Stanley Mellon complained, “They write their histories from other people’s histories.”¹¹ For Winthrop Hudson, *The Age of Faith’s* problems did not

A PAST IN SERVICE TO THE PRESENT

Durant begins *Caesar and Christ* by paraphrasing Horace: *Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur* (“If only the names are changed, the story is about you”).¹⁵ In Durant’s view, nearly all of the elements of his recreated civilizations can be traced to life later on in Europe and in the U.S. Although at times exaggerated, the analogies are not without purpose. Michael Ginsburg, reviewing *The Life of Greece*, went so far as to write, “The only effective way to arouse the general reader’s interest in classical antiquity is to show him that the ancient world was agitated by the same problems we are facing today.”¹⁶ Popular

“Durant begins *Caesar and Christ* by paraphrasing Horace: ‘If only the names are changed, the story is about you’.”

come from relying on writers like Edward Gibbon, Henry Hart Milman, or Frederick Homes Dudden, but in the sections based on second-rate scholarly sources, where he may have been better off examining the sources for himself. Durant often responded saying that he used secondary sources for his writing on economics and politics, and primary sources for writings on the subjects more fundamental to his themes: culture, religion, philosophy, literature, and the arts. Not only did Durant take his work from secondary sources, but according to Breasted, from the wrong ones: in *Our Oriental Heritage*, “an archaeological engineer...is quoted as an authority on languages and hieroglyphics.”¹²

Many critics faulted Durant for failing to use more contemporary scholarly findings. C.A. Robinson faulted *The Life of Greece* for not keeping “abreast of recent research,” and John Day claimed that the bibliography of *Caesar and Christ* had “serious deficiencies.”¹³ Ralph Bates faulted *Caesar and Christ* for not drawing enough from Toynbee’s *A Study of History*. Durant proudly defined himself as an “amateur” historian and disagreed with the more academic, professional types throughout his career. His resentment of the “Ivory Tower” was a popular position with those outside academia, and it probably influenced his respect for contemporary scholarship. As Durant became more entrenched in his outsider position, his prejudices against the specialists and the specialist historians’ skepticism of the merit of his work fed off each other. In addition, if Durant were to use contemporary scholarship and show that the interpretations are constantly changing, the basis of his work would be weaker. Peter Novick would agree: if a work of history is to hold the interest of the reading public, knowledge of the past must appear objective and its truths must seem timeless. Durant hinted at such when he said that from teaching philosophy to working-class Americans after college, he learned that presenting complex material to working class people “demands complete clarity.”¹⁴

critic Edmund Richards agreed: “Not one of our current problems...cannot be duplicated somewhere in the history or literature of these many-sided and abounding people.”¹⁷ Many historians attacked the volumes for their “vulgarization” of the past, or their attribution of more base elements of the present to a past that many thought ought to be studied for its own sake. M.I. Finkelstein summarized this theme as “an essential sameness of institutions and problems throughout the ages,” which he is only able to prove by “twisting ancient institutions until they fit a modern frame.”¹⁸ Historian Carl Becker, in an address to the American Historical Association given in 1931, laid out an approach to history that could practically interest a normal person, whom he called “Mr. Everyman.” To infiltrate Mr. Everyman’s “little world of endeavor,” history must not be “a pure antiquarian image to be enjoyed for its own sake.”¹⁹ Instead, it must be “associated with a picture of things to be said and done in the future.”²⁰ For Mr. Everyman, the significance of any past event depends on how “well or ill it fits into his little world of interests and aspirations and emotional comforts.”²¹

If he believes that there are many links between the past and the present, then Mr. Everyman might find history informative and useful. Thus, the constant parallels and analogies are attractive for a reader who wants to understand the present. These links are strengthened by Durant’s emphasis on an unchanging human nature, continuity, and the idea that “history repeats itself” according to universal causal laws. Will Durant defined the goal of his project as the discovery of this universal, unchanging human nature, of which every individual in history is an example. On continuity, he wrote in *The Life of Greece*, “History, like nature, knows only continuity amid change: *historia non facit saltum* – history makes no leaps.”²² The Durants’ volumes are full of formulas and laws of history. In reading *The Story of Civilization*, the reader senses that if one knew enough about the past, then the future would be completely predictable. Not only can the past help us understand the present, as the two are so similar, but it can also help us predict the future.

These connections between knowing the past and knowing the future—an unchanging human nature, inescapable continuity, and repetition—lead to serious metaphysical problems. The same history that is governed so rigidly by cause and effect, as well as by Durant's formulas like "When x happens, and y happens, then z follows" is also supposed to include human beings with the freedom to make their own decisions and therefore influence the future. If Will Durant and his obedient reader can know what a society will do merely by reading enough history, then their omniscience threatens the society's freedom to do otherwise. Durant became a thoroughgoing determinist after reading Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*; determinism had a "certain majesty and courage" to him.²³ Although in his *The Mansions of Philosophy*, Durant refers the picture of a "totally predictable world" as "ridiculously incongruous with life," the aggregate of his generalizations hardly reads as a hymn to human freedom.²⁴ If history moves according to laws, patterns, and cycles, then we are trapped. The more Durant's determinisms are true, the more "man is born in chains," and the less freedom we can claim.²⁵

LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN

The scope, style, and determinisms of *The Story of Civilization* all attracted everyday readers, yet each came with its own set of problems. Through the subject matter of their history, we see once again: the brighter the sunlight, the darker the shadows. The chapters of his latest volumes, which discuss eras we know relatively more about, are flush with flattering stories about the lives of famous subjects. In Durant's work, the unit of historical study is the great man. He alone—through his power to lead armies, to penetrate others' minds with new ways of thinking, and to create written and physical art for the rest of us to worship—can genuinely influence history. If we can learn to appreciate geniuses, then we can stand on the shoulders of giants and more fully see the richness of life. We worship heroes for good reason; their gift to mankind is nothing less than civilization itself. Some of his non-academic critics shared these views. For instance, Michael Ginsburg wrote that Durant's idealization of Alexander the Great "does not do justice to the genius of the great Macedonian."²⁶ Regardless of whether he sincerely believed all this, Durant's emphasis on geniuses certainly intrigued the millions who bought his books. He was right to realize how uninterested most of us are in the lives of those without ability, brains, beauty, money, and power. Even the titles of his last four books (*The Age of Louis XIV*, *The Age of Voltaire*, *The Age of Rousseau*, and *The Age of Napoleon*) must have piqued the interests of a class of readers whose equivalent today remember world history classes as anthologies of kings and queens, cherish biographies of the presidents, and are fascinated by those on the cover of *People Magazine*.

It is a paradox: ordinary people were only interested in a history that dismissed the importance and meaning of the lives of ordinary people. In a twisted sense, thanks to the

efforts of historians like Durant, the poets, philosophers, and politicians of, say, ancient Greece, will continue to be revived and are actually made less mortal than the Mr. Everyman of their time. If Lord Acton is right, and "great men are usually bad men," we have further cause to doubt the ridiculous hero-worship that dominates the later volumes of *The Story of Civilization*. This emphasis on the efficacy of great men intensified over the course of *The Story's* publication timeline, contrary to the opposite movement in the historical profession, which, by the social turn of the 1960s, had dismissed the value and importance of such individuals (another "absolutism dethroned").

Durant wrote in his article "The Shameless Worship of Heroes":

The real history of man is not in prices and wages, nor in elections and battles, nor in the even tenor of the common man; it is in the lasting contributions made by geniuses ... The history of France is not...the history of the French people; the history of those nameless men and women who tilled the soil, cobbled the shoes, cut the cloth, and peddled the goods (for these things have been done everywhere and always) -- the history of France is the record of her exceptional men and women, her inventors, scientists, statesmen, poets, artists, musicians, philosophers and saints, and of the additions which they made to the technology and wisdom, the artistry and decency, of their people and mankind.²⁷

A critic might have countered: Always and everywhere poets have invoked a higher power, borrowed from their predecessors, written about life in their time, and have been read by literate elites and university students. Always and everywhere politicians have waged war, made alliances, and written laws. One could continue down the list, if only by using the "timeless" determinisms in his books. Here the reader might find a contradiction. What is so "great" about a class of individuals who have always, in every time and place, performed these same roles? Great men cannot create the future, if the future is predetermined by continuity with the past and an inevitable adherence to universal laws. Nor should we praise the ideas and achievements of heroes if they had no agency in their doing. Hero-worship and determinism, the two central themes of Durant's philosophy of history, are incompatible.

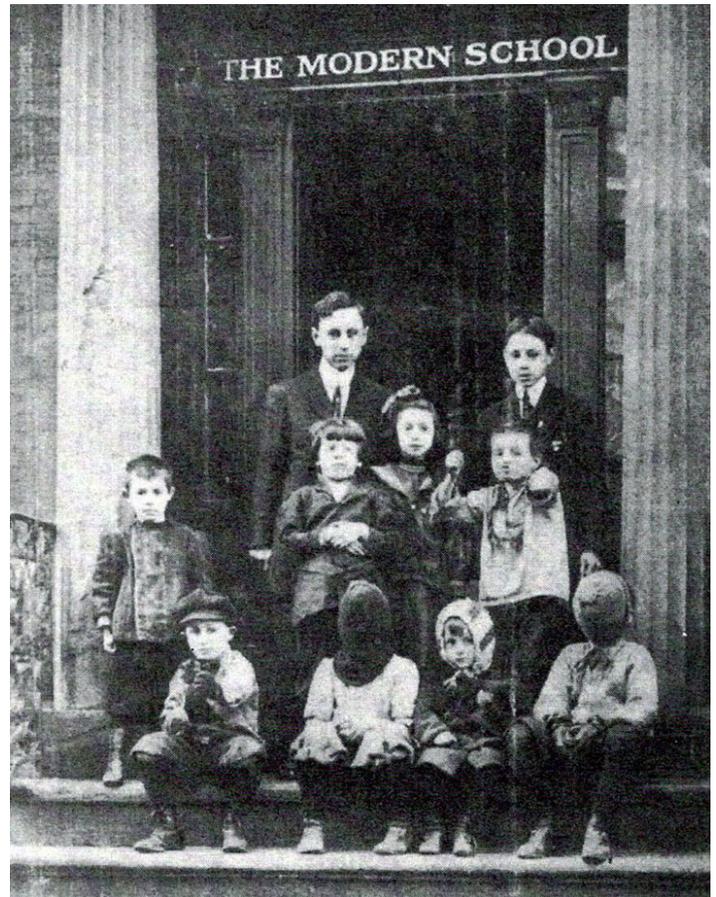
The conflict between these two aspects of his philosophy of history can be resolved by assuming a belief that we can find among the ancients and (perhaps) even in ourselves: that heroes are *outside of history* and therefore not subject to the same determined laws as everyone else. Durant claims in *The Life of Greece* that for centuries after the death of Alexander the Great, many people thought that he had transformed into a comet and become a god. When a comet flew over Rome in July of 44 B.C., Octavian claimed it was the god of Julius Caesar, metamorphosed. It is not much of a leap from the

“Every Man His Own Historian”

idea that the two most glorified political leaders of antiquity became comets to the idea that they were made of different stuff and lived outside of history. Durant does not entertain the possibility that talented people might, for some reason, not realize their “fate,” because such a possibility does not align with the determinist notion: that which did not happen, could not have happened. In Plato’s *Republic*, after generations of indoctrination, the people are tricked into believing that the souls of the rulers are made of gold, the souls of the warriors, of silver, and the souls of the slaves, of bronze. Not for nothing is this myth called the noble “lie”; the idea that heroes are made of different stuff than the rest of us...cannot be true. The celebrities of history may have more talent, more means, less scruples, and more effective ideas, but these are differences of degree, not of kind. If ordinary people are inside of history, then so are the “chosen ones.” And if they are inside history, then the conflict between determinism and the creativity of so-called “great men” cannot be resolved.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the three themes underlying Will Durant’s philosophy of history—historical truth as timeless and fixed, the extraordinary influence of great men, and determinisms linking the past, present, and future—cannot be true, but they must be used in any history that sustains the interests of the reading public. Historian M.I. Finkelstein ended an otherwise highly negative review of *The Life of Greece* with a rhetorical question: “What is wrong with our educational system when more people learn ‘history’ from one book by Will Durant than from a whole year’s output by all the professional historians in the country?”²⁸ Will Durant saw his project as part of an unprecedented democratization of knowledge. “Let us not be ashamed...of educating the people,” he boasted.²⁹ Of course, far fewer Americans read the books of Will and Ariel Durant today than they did fifty years ago. Yet, the challenge they posed to the study of history remains. If the reading public ought to know more history, then how might one write a history that could interest and educate the “general reader”? These aims—to pique the interest of the general reader and to educate that same reader—are often in conflict. To write a history that pleases Mr. Everyman is to make peace with certain tradeoffs, to sacrifice scholarship for popularization, to change the truth in order to share it. 🏛️



Will Durant stands with his pupils in front of the Modern School (1911-1912)

Source: *The Stelton Modern School* (Wikimedia Commons)

Endnotes

- [1] Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middle Brow Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 234.
- [2] Will Durant is listed as the sole author of the set's first six volumes. Beginning with *The Age of Reason Begins*, Ariel Durant is listed as a co-author.
- [3] Rubin, p. 244.
- [4] Novick, p. 194.
- [5] Rubin, p. 217.
- [6] Rubin, p. 214.
- [7] Frey, p. 92; Sidney R. Packard, "Striding the Centuries. Review of *The Age of Faith*", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, vol. 33, (December 9, 1950), pp. 19-20.
- [8] J.W. Swain, "Review of *Caesar and Christ*", *American Historical Review*, vol. 50, no. 3, (April 1945), p. 517 and p. 516.
- [9] J.H. Plumb, "A Ragbag of History Continued: The Age of Napoleon", *The New York Times Book Review*, (October 26, 1975), p. 2; J.H. Plumb, "Review of *The Age of Louis XIV*", *The New York Times Book Review*, (September 15, 1963), p. 3.
- [10] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 362.
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- [12] Breasted, p. 3.
- [13] C.A. Robinson, "Review of *The Life of Greece*", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, vol. 21, (October 28, 1939), p. 5; John Day, "History—and Mr. Durant—March On: Review of *Caesar and Christ*", *The New York Times Book Review*, (December 10, 1944), p. 4.
- [14] G.H. Guyot, "Review of *Caesar and Christ*", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1, (January 1946), p. 105.
- [15] Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, p. 2.
- [16] Michael Ginsburg, "Review of *The Life of Greece*", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 45, no. 4, (July 1940), pp. 945.
- [17] Edmund C. Richards, "The Glory That Was Greece: Review of *The Life of Greece*", *The New York Times Book Review*, (October 26, 1939), p. 2.
- [18] Finkelstein, 127.
- [19] Becker, pp. 3-4.
- [20] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- [21] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- [22] Will Durant, *The Life of Greece* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935), p. 557.
- [23] Frey, 12.
- [24] Frey, 69.
- [25] Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, p. 29.
- [26] Michael Ginsburg, "Review of *The Life of Greece*", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 45, no. 4, (July 1940), p. 946.
- [27] Will Durant, *The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Time* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), pp. 6-7.
- [28] Finkelstein, p. 129.
- [29] Frey, p. 131.

PETE SEEGER AND THE COLD WAR BLACKLIST

Authentic Leadership Through Music in the Face of Un-Americanism

Abstract: This article examines Pete Seeger's leadership through use of his music and platform from the early 1930s. Helping to bring about a folk revival throughout the 1930s-50s, Seeger developed an authentic leadership style and gained a grassroots following supporting liberal causes throughout the period. His subsequent 17 year media blacklist following summons to the House un-American Affairs Committee brought about the use of cultural guerilla warfare, though non-violent in nature, to the United States. Diaries, interviews, newspaper transcriptions from Duke University and The New York Times, and congressional testimony were used for this research.

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Editors Note: This article was edited extensively by Patrick Mills

From 1941, when his *Almanac Singers* published their first folk album, *Songs for John Doe*,¹ until 2012, when he performed at President Obama's inauguration with Bruce Springsteen, Pete Seeger captivated American and world audiences. Seeger's hits, "Guantanamera," (1966) "Turn Turn Turn," (1962) and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" (1955) all made *Billboard's* top 10 charts when they were released.² His ability to stay relevant within the popular music scene indicates why he continued to produce and perform music.

Seeger focused exclusively on creating music that not only acted as social commentary, but also served as a call to action for those Seeger viewed as marginalized by the American elite. In addition to his music, Seeger used his network and platform to disseminate his criticisms of the American economic system, the U.S. wars throughout the era, and the institutional racism and discrimination towards African Americans in the Jim Crow South. Seeger's body of work became essentially inseparable from the man himself, and an American government afraid of Soviet influence throughout the Cold War viewed him as dangerous. Due to the efforts of the House un-American Activities Committee, Seeger was blacklisted from the two mediums that most effectively reached audiences of the time, radio and TV.

Though he faced institutional adversity for expressing his beliefs, whether through his platform or otherwise, Pete Seeger used the folk revival he helped bring about in the 1930s-50s to rally political activism throughout the Cold War and the House un-American Activities Committee, the Vietnam War, and the American civil rights movement. Although he was not allowed to sing on radio or TV, Seeger's uncompromising tactics within his platform separated and shielded him from the cycles and tribulations of popular media and culture. These tactics included creating a paradigm of "cultural guerilla

warfare" that kept him and his message relevant throughout his time on the blacklist. In challenging the idea that American political activism couldn't leave a set spectrum of ideas, Seeger furthered the causes of these social movements to their ultimate successes. His relevance was thereby solidified for American generations from the 1940s to today.

AUTHENTICITY OF LEADERSHIP; SEEGER'S RISE IN ACCRUING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Born to a Berkeley musicologist and a concert violinist in 1919, Seeger was raised in the intellectual elite rather than the typical "folksy" American family; he was soon sent to a boarding school in Connecticut before attending Harvard.³ Although his musical education allowed him to perform, he did not have the skills nor the cult of personality necessary for reaching out and connecting to audiences like the premier folk artist of the time, Woody Guthrie.⁴

In discussing the problems with acquiring an authenticity factor in leadership, American historian James MacGregor Burns subscribes to the "circulation of the elite"⁵ theory: while talent or expertise may be found in the upper echelons of society, as was the case of the young Seeger, an intellectual gap still remains. Young ideologues need to connect with the masses, and often, the differences between northeastern and southern American lifestyles could not be breached. This gap causes what Burns defines to be an "absence of doctrine of leadership."⁶

Seeger used Guthrie to bridge that gap. Alan Lomax, one of Seeger's friends and compilers of American folk music, spoke thoughtfully about meeting Guthrie. He said, "You can date the renaissance of American folk song from that night. Pete knew it [Guthrie's] was his kind of music, and he began working to make it everybody's kind of music."⁷ Seeger and Guthrie soon departed on a year-long trip across the country, performing for local saloons and bars to earn money for their

food and gas. Seeger learned two critical skills from Guthrie: the first was the ability to write and adapt verses from the folk songs they learned in each place they went, from Virginia to Oklahoma to Missouri.⁸ The second was more innate: “[I learned the] ability to identify with the ordinary man and woman, speak their own language.”⁹ Seeger melded his New England intellectual background with Guthrie’s down-to-earth Oklahoma background. With music as the medium, Pete allowed himself to be influenced by both Guthrie and the larger folk-constituency in the United States. In doing so, Seeger accumulated the cultural capital necessary to engage with audiences across the country, whether they were urban coastal residents or rural Americans in the middle of the country.

The audience was taken aback; this was the first time that a performer had sang to them directly about the cause they were fighting for.¹⁵ Like the shanties and work songs of times past, Seeger’s song dotes on current labor problems of the time, but more directly as a focal point calling for a social movement. The songs speak of the formation of the union and incorporate the specific goals that labor workers all around the country vied for: shorter hours and better working conditions. His lyrics also add a dimension of what to hope for, an ultimate humane goal that the workers could get behind, something not seen previously in Seeger’s time. In doing so, Seeger adapted to the wants and needs of his following, as Burns indicates as happening in the formation of an authentic leader. Even though Seeger notes in an interview

“Seeger melded his New England intellectual background with Guthrie’s down-to-earth Oklahoma background.”

Seeger’s new position was a unique one; in the 1940s United States, the type of music that one listened to depended on where one lived, often a function of the distribution of record labels. It was common practice at the time for record companies to record two versions of the same song, one pop and one country. A geographic rift came about because these companies would distribute the two releases in different areas.¹⁰ But where one lived did not necessarily indicate what music one connected with. According to census data, between 1910 and 1950, roughly 20% of Americans had moved from rural parts of the country to urban cities,¹¹ but they carried with them the traditions and heritage of their yeoman past. By not only understanding the music of the American people, but also understanding the basis by which their music was created, Seeger was able to add his own political messages and social commentary into his folk music and still reach his audience.

Identifying the pivotal moment of becoming an authentic leader, Northwestern Professor of American History Gary Wills sees a final test taking place before such a leader emerges in his book *Certain Trumpets*: “The orator’s final test is his ability to create heroism in himself to match what he has been preaching.”¹² Such a moment took place in May 1941 when Seeger and the Almanac Singers took the stage at Madison Square Garden in front of 20,000 striking transit workers, after a failed performance one year prior.¹³ Seeger differentiated himself during this performance by *directly* singing about unions and the plight of the worker:

“Now, if you want higher wages let me tell you what to do. You got to talk to the workers in the shop with you. You got to build you a union, got to make it strong, But if you all stick together, boys, it won’t be long. You get shorter hours, better working conditions, Vacations with pay. Take your kids to the seashore.”¹⁴

in 2006 that after meeting Guthrie, in order to truly impact people with his music, “I was *eager* to change.”¹⁶

INSTITUTION BUILDING AS A PRECURSOR TO THE HUAC

Consistent with his belief that people should sing to his music rather than simply listen to it, Seeger understood the role that other forms of media could play in interacting with music as an art form. After returning from his World War II service, Seeger helped found a *People’s Music Bulletin*, which, after financial changes, would eventually become the more known publication *Sing Out!*¹⁷ He wrote, “The printed page is a handy device, and there is value in being able to count on a certain number of pages appearing regularly with up-to-date information on a certain subject.”¹⁸ The *New York Times* lauded *Sing Out!* as “a musical stethoscope on the heartbeat of the nation, translating current events into notes and lyrics.”¹⁹ *Sing Out!* served as a music bulletin providing the scores, arrangements, and lyrics for new songs pertaining to subjects of labor movements, union strikes, and pacifism as well as providing a medium for writers to produce opinion pieces. In his management practices of the publication, Seeger became what Keohane defines as a “public leader,”²⁰ someone who, through the development of institutions, whether they be mass-media (like *Bulletin* and *Sing Out!*) or non-profits, gains a large audience and provides his or her own mechanism for reaching them.

Though *Bulletin* and *Sing Out!* provided him with an audience, Seeger’s experienced his biggest failings while managing these groups. Seeger’s biggest failings were during his time as manager of groups such as *Bulletin* and *Sing Out!* Because he did not have the experience to make managerial decisions with a focus on his bottom line, Seeger’s decision-making, although equity-focused, proved ineffective and disastrous. For example, the first *Bulletin* amassed over \$8,000

Pete Seeger and the Cold War Blacklist

in debt.²¹ Seeger made similar decisions in other publications and projects, financially failing because he brought a public leadership community mindset into the singular decision-making that befalls the executive of a profit-driven mass media publication.²² Nevertheless, after both the popularity of his songs on the national stage, including several appearances of his records on *Billboard's* Top 10²³, and the mechanisms of dissemination of his and other pro-labor workers, Seeger had a national platform.

Although *Sing Out!* and *Bulletin* focused on music and music as it related to social engagement, several of Seeger's associates were already under the scrutiny of Chairman Francis E. Walter's House Un-American Activities Committee.²⁴ Seeger himself was not a communist, but played venues in the national spotlight and was involved with communists under investigation by Chairman Walter's committee. The interaction between the different arms of the media drove a sensationalist and fear-mongering American communist conspiracy network narrative because of their profit-motive, namely the work of *Red Channels' Counterattack*.

Counterattack was a right-wing journal bent on challenging the American loyalties of people that worked in entertainment media throughout the Cold War frenzy. Their methods were particularly effective because they understood the profit-driven motive behind the everyday operations of media companies. Understanding that sponsors had a big say in the decision-making of media companies, they employed a strategy of harassing the companies that were sponsors of shows. *Counterattack* would first call a company to tell them they had heard a specific actor with potential un-American ties was employed on a show they sponsored. They would then ransom companies demanding the equivalent of \$9000²⁵ to "investigate" the actor. If the company refused, the editors would run a story in the publication that the actor was a "fellow traveler," (someone who was not a card carrying member of the communist party but nevertheless a sympathizer) avoiding the legal troubles of slander or libel in the process.²⁶ In June of 1950, *Counterattack* published the booklet *Red Channels*, which named among the likes of Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, Pete Seeger.²⁷ Being named 13 times,²⁸ Seeger was cited foremost for being the chairman of *People's Songs*, then for being the entertainer and singer affiliated with the daily worker.²⁹ Among the accusations was "led singing at dinner."³⁰ Even though Seeger's primary occupation and platform was his musician status, to the publishers and McCarthyists, he was the leader of a powerful civil society institution that was mobilizing political power. As a result, Seeger was summoned to Congress with a subpoena by the House un-American activities committee.

CULTURAL GUERRILLA WARFARE AND THE HUAC

In preparing to testify before HUAC, Seeger had before him three possible answers to lines of questioning. He could either 1) choose to not answer any of the questions on the

grounds of self-incrimination in the Fifth amendment and be branded a "fifth-amendment Communist," 2) choose to answer the questions of being a communist or leftist for himself but not answer for any of his associates, or 3) refuse to answer the questions using a first-amendment defense as to the right of free expression³¹ and to "petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Musicians before and after him brought before the board used the fifth-amendment defense; Seeger recognized the problems of answering their questions because his father was fired from his job for taking this approach and not revealing any of the people he associated himself with. However, the last time the First Amendment defense was taken, the infamous Hollywood Ten in the film industry were sentenced to a year of jail for being in contempt of Congress and eventually blacklisted.³² While Seeger understood the consequences of each decision, he ultimately chose the First Amendment rebuttal because it was the reasoning he felt he could most get behind³³; being a proponent of free speech was evident throughout his life, both within and surrounding the singing of his songs. Seeger confused the committee for the first portion of the hearing by challenging whether any of the lines of questioning were "proper."³⁴ Furthermore, even as Seeger recognized the consequences of his actions on his work disseminating music to the masses through media (the blacklist), he had transformed the methods by which he could reach a large American audience through a "cultural guerilla warfare" paradigm.³⁵ Seeger's appearance before HUAC and his continued use of his platform to express his views on civil and social society challenged what it meant to be an American.

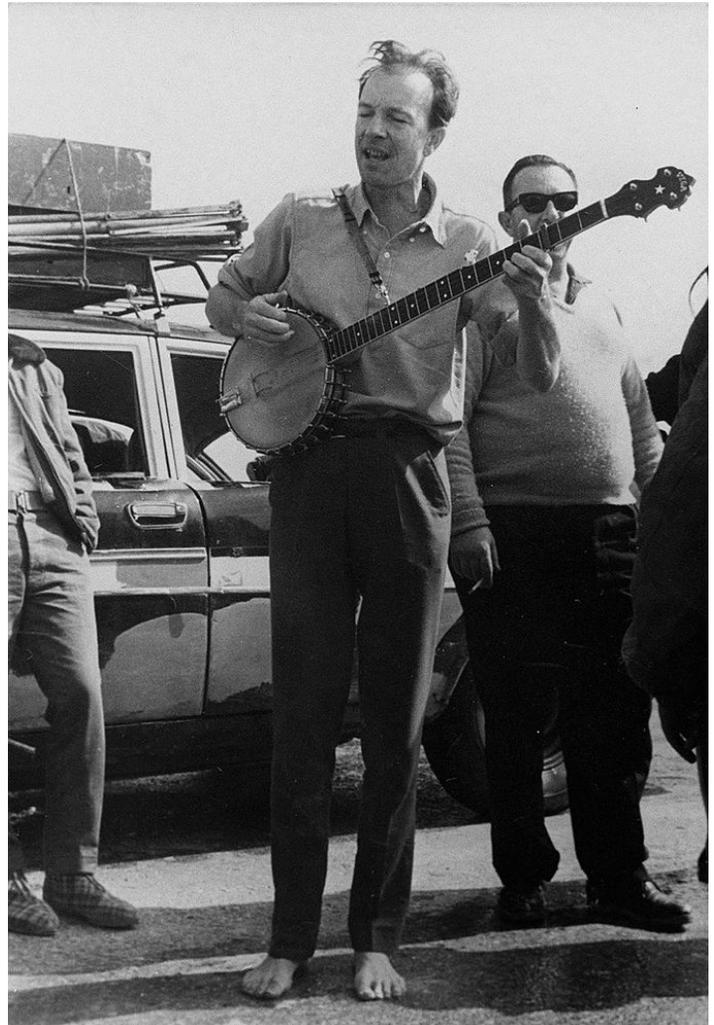
Do certain American civil and governmental institutions enjoy a higher sense of legitimacy than others? In today's society, for example, those serving in the military are seen as the truest patriots in the eyes of the American public. Not only does polling show that support for the military has increased significantly between now and Seeger's appearance before HUAC³⁶, but we see the left and right both ideologically shift in the same direction during that time period to more pro-military and even more anti-Soviet resentment. While the right in Congress, HUAC, and America generally did not approve of Pete Seeger, the left's disenchantment with the armed forces did not allow for a patriotic argument to arise. The argument, present from the Lincoln era, follows from his Gettysburg Address as the "cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion."³⁷ Seeger and the left in general had idealistic failings during the era, because no military argument was made on behalf of Seeger, by himself or his associates.

From his unorthodox answering style before HUAC to reaching audiences across the country, Seeger designed his tactics to provide an element of surprise. Before arriving in a new area, he would contact local TV and radio stations to inhibit groups like the American Legion from mobilizing their forces against him. During the TV or radio broadcast,

he would advertise a performance he would be giving at a local high school or college the same evening.³⁸ Colleges made perfect audiences; they were pivotal institutions for Seeger to interact with because they were responsible for the education of the intellectually malleable young, who were hungry for a variety of ideas. Liberal arts colleges including Oberlin, Stanford, Smith, and Duke were immune to outside, anti-communist intervention; for example, Seeger was slated to perform at the Ohio State Fair, but the governor of Ohio did not permit him to perform.³⁹ The same can be said for the hundreds of summer camps that Seeger would play for, albeit to a lesser extent. HUAC's cultural directives were ineffective for the groups in society most susceptible to the ideas presented due to free speech and expression.

Leaders within the art and performance industries were not only cognizant of the role that money plays in advancing the interests of musical expression, but aware of music's role as a social tool in the era. The most widely regarded orchestras, ballets, and other high arts were sponsored by corporations and large banks.⁴⁰ While Seeger aspired to attach as little commercial value to his music as possible, he understood the critical role additional money could serve in his advocacy efforts. Part of the cultural guerilla warfare included playing for business management in nightclubs and private venue bookings for investment bankers and consultants.⁴¹ He structured his responses to questions about his bookings in a way that supported his transformational paradigm: whenever asked about these matters, his response was always that he would play for anyone, whether in answering to the media or before the HUAC.⁴²

While Seeger worked for years to establish a cult of authenticity within his music presence and platform, the legitimization had to come *externally*, due to Seeger's own advocacy efforts. Externally, he had only previously received pushback and hyper-criticism from media, business, and government. Seeger needed a source of legitimization, one that would resonate with the ever-challenging idea that he was as American as a pro-war anti-Communist Congressman. To accomplish this, Seeger used the institution of American power that most directly looks for breaches in the Constitution, the judicial system. Because all of the tactics within his "cultural guerilla warfare" paradigm were legal, he would take up any threats to it in court; most common were challenges from school boards in allowing him to use auditoriums as performance spaces. Challenging these decisions in court culminated in the New York State Supreme Court decision in *East Meadow Concert Association vs. Board of Education*, where the use of the W.T. Clarke High School on Long Island, New York was in contention. The court's decision affirmed the narrative that Seeger used in his HUAC defense: "The expression of controversial and unpopular views... is precisely what is protected by both the Federal and State Constitutions."⁴³ Thus, while one branch of the government served to ostracize him, another affirmed his beliefs and actions.



Singer Pete Seeger, A Member Of The "Weavers", Performing For Idf Soldiers (1964)

Source: Motke Avivi, *Israel National Photo Collection* (Wikimedia Commons)

THE US CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: A DUKE UNIVERSITY VIGIL CASE STUDY

As the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s started to take shape, Seeger was active from the start, both from a participatory role as a pro-integration activist as well as a leadership role as a folk singer. Seeger made his entry as a singer after adapting the lyrics of Zilphia Horton's popularized protest song, "We Will Overcome" to "We Shall Overcome,"⁴⁴ and as an activist by marching alongside Dr. King in the Selma protests.⁴⁵ However, his methods were not as successful with the black constituency and organizers as he had anticipated. Apart from "We Shall Overcome," Seeger's music, which was aimed toward a white labor constituency, would not resonate with the African-American audiences he was targeting. A failed October 1962 performance in a black church in Albany, Georgia⁴⁶ proved to Seeger the existence of an unbreachable gap between the culture and style of some of his music to certain audiences. Grassroots institutions agreed.

Pete Seeger and the Cold War Blacklist

Seeger's dilemma followed the larger narrative of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the group that Seeger would organize with the most. From the mid-1960s, their leader, John Lewis, began a policy directive of a SNCC "more Black dominated and Black led."⁴⁷ Seeger did not find a place in an organization that would publish position papers against his integrated, American identity over racial identity beliefs:

"If we are to proceed toward true liberation, we must cut ourselves off from white people. We must form our own institutions, credit unions, co-ops, political parties, write our own histories."⁴⁸

As his doctrine was tied to his performances, his income, Seeger had to adapt his audience without changing his picture of what an American could do with free expression. When an opportunity arose for an audience that he could capture, he would take it.

On April 4, 1968, when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Seeger received a call from the poet John Beecher:

"Pete, you've got to come down here. I've never seen anything like it on any southern campus. After King's assassination about two hundred white students decided they must do something, not just talk. They went to the million-dollar home of the president, demanded he resign from his white-only country club, that he bargain collectively with the Negro employees' union, and several other things. He refused to talk further to them. They refused to leave...and moved their vigil to the quadrangle. Will you come down and sing for them?"⁴⁹

After Seeger sang, the *Duke Chronicle* reported that his protest songs, anthems, and folk music were "keyed to the occasion."⁵⁰ Using his standard repertoire for cultural guerilla warfare, Seeger successfully kept the students going and continued the students' vigil. He identified a means to achieve his goal of using music to bring Americans together that was practical- he understood that the young, malleable white students knew the folk music that he had imparted on their parents a generation before. The Duke students' anger was not made violent (even though news stations in Durham had told students that they would only cover the vigil if it had turned "violent"⁵¹), and was also driven forward using non-violent protest, with the prose, poetry, and music of Pete Seeger and John Beecher acting as guides.

"WAIST DEEP IN THE BIG MUDDY" AND LEADERSHIP THROUGH SONG: A CASE STUDY OF THE ANTI-VIETNAM WAR MOVEMENT

In March of 1963, Seeger and his family arrived in Vietnam and saw the place he had started to champion for years prior. He noted in interviews that the omnipresent reminders of American bombings made the entire trip disturbing.⁵² Seeger opposed the war morally and practically long before the rest of America did. Gallup polling shows 61% of Americans believed

U.S. military involvement was not a mistake in 1965; that number dwindled to 28% in 1971.⁵³ Seeger's disillusionment with Vietnam is found within the song, "Where have all the flowers gone,"⁵⁴ which peaked in the Billboard's 25 when released.⁵⁵ As Seeger evolved and formed his opinion, he would galvanize his listener base in the process.

Seeger's most effective actionary measure through song was found in "Waist deep in the big muddy." In it, he portrays a regiment of American trainees doing maneuvers in Louisiana and being ordered to cross a river too deep to cross by foot:

It was back in nineteen forty-two,
I was a member of a good platoon.
We were on maneuvers in-a Louisiana,
One night by the light of the moon.
The captain told us to ford a river,
That's how it all begun.
We were -- knee deep in the Big Muddy,
But the big fool said to push on.

All at once, the moon clouded over,
We heard a gurgling cry.
A few seconds later, the captain's helmet
Was all that floated by.
The Sergeant said, "Turn around men!
I'm in charge from now on."
And we just made it out of the Big Muddy
With the captain dead and gone.

Waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on.
Waist deep in the Big Muddy
And the big fool says to push on.
Waist deep! Neck deep! Soon even a
Tall man'll be over his head, we're
Waist deep in the Big Muddy!
And the big fool says to push on!⁵⁶

The lyrics were particularly effective when set to Seeger's melody. He makes no mention of Vietnam within the song; rather the narrative of the World War II trainee serves as a poignant reminder to the "fool" mentality of the current period. Rhetorically, the choice of Louisiana as the setting reminds the audience that wanton killing in Vietnam is the same as it is back home. Critics and commentators also saw the death of the captain as an allusion to President Lyndon B. Johnson who continues the narrative of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, pressing the American people to "push on."⁵⁷

Media coverage tactics were the final component of the cultural guerilla warfare. Even though a blacklisted entertainer was not allowed a personal platform, he or she could appear on news media if they happened to make the news. There were limits of course, at the discretion of the artists. Seeger would never allow violence to activate the



Pete Seeger, noted folk singer entertaining at the opening of the Washington labor canteen (1944)
 Source: Joseph Horne, *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. (Wikimedia Commons)*

news media; the Duke vigil serves as a clear example. Finally benefiting from the reporting of the news media, Seeger was eventually allowed to perform “Waist deep in the big muddy” on the CBS broadcast.

**FAILINGS IN JUDGMENT:
 SEEGER AND OTHER WORLD LEADERS**

Observing individual leadership presents its difficulties for those who relied on personality more than policy for Seeger; there is a failing in how Seeger’s viewed other leaders precisely because the organizational skills and mobilizational qualities that he drew on hid the truth behind leaders he steadfastly remained behind. Seeger’s failings came to negatively affect the tactics that he had successfully used in disseminating his ideas and beliefs. He repeatedly publicly stood behind the communist line in the early tenure of Joseph Stalin’s reign as Party Chairman⁵⁸, as well as calling Ho Chi Minh one of his “all-time heroes.”⁵⁹ The mechanism behind his failure in leadership was the media.

Alongside his respect for these anti-American leaders, through rhetoric, Seeger allowed the news media to alter one of the cornerstones of Seeger’s argument throughout the blacklist: that he was first and foremost an American, and his expressed beliefs and actions were meant to “preserve its institutions,” as he so openly rebutted the HUAC with.⁶⁰ He would openly visit

Russia and Vietnam and fall prey to narratives created by the press such as, “SEEGER SONG IN MOSCOW IS ANTI-US.”⁶¹ The tool narrative-drivers understood that Pete Seeger did not was the importance of striking first; whoever *sets* the narrative directs it.

CONCLUSION

While many of Seeger’s personal writings, whether private or published as editorials in *Sing Out!* addressed the power and severe necessity on differing mediums in presenting music, they also were in a time where the very nature of music media was changing. TV was in its infancy, and Seeger wanted to experiment with these new forms of media. True transformational leadership involves taking newer practices, norms, and technologies, and using them to move and uplift the country. Irrespective of understanding of different technologies, Seeger had a scope of authenticity determined to change outlooks and beliefs of environmental, political, and social issues at any micro or macro level. His specific “brand” of authentic leadership spanned through multiple civil and social movements on race, war, and the environment. The same tactics worked regardless of issue. This was the great underlying framework of his cultural guerilla tactics: the critical use of media. **III**

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SETTLERS, SAVAGES, AND LESAGE

Relations of Reciprocity in New France

*Abstract: Historians have been less inclined than literary critics to use French utopian writing as sources for studying colonialism. Thus, this paper historicizes Alain-René Lesage's (1668 – 1747) *Beauchêne* (1732) in its settler colonial context. *Beauchêne* shows how French settlers and Native Americans formed, negotiated, and contested reciprocal relationships in New France. Relationships depended on intermediaries who adopted differing cultural elements or formed kinship ties. While the work neglects the conflicts that broke out between settlers and natives, *Beauchêne* masterfully synthesizes colonial developments with contemporary literary traditions. Future studies can examine how similar novels reflect the blurred lines between settlers and “savages.”*

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In 1732, Alain-René Lesage published *Les Aventures de Monsieur Robert Chevalier, dit de Beauchêne, capitaine de flibustiers dans la Nouvelle-France* (“The Adventures of Robert Chevalier, call’d de Beauchene, Captain of a Privateer in New France” in the 1745 English translation). This novel, combining picaresque, romantic, and utopian themes, concerns the lives of three characters: Beauchêne, Monneville, and Mlle Duclos in both France and in the French settler colonies. While purportedly based on the memoirs of the real Beauchêne, Lesage’s work comprises tales invented by the novelist.¹ Literary critics and scholars have contributed much to our understanding of how the novel is a representative piece of French writing from the eighteenth century. However, the text not only synthesizes different literary trends in Europe, but also those political, social, and economic developments far away from the metropole. The latter necessitates a more historicist approach to the text and a reading of the volume as a whole.

With the above concerns in mind, this article seeks to demonstrate how Lesage’s *Beauchêne* provides a remarkably accurate insight into how New France was not only a site for the exploitation of native peoples by imperial powers, or for the displacement of these indigenes by settlers from the Western world. Rather, the novel demonstrates that New France was a space for the formation, negotiation, and contestation of reciprocal relationships between French (and English) settlers and the Iroquois, Algonquin, and Huron Indians of Northeast America. The most basic of these relationships depended on intermediaries, either European or Native, who were willing to accept, to varying extents, aspects of cultural identity that were not their own. Stronger relationships, however, depended on the formation of kinship ties established through marriage or adoption into the community, either as children or as leaders. These relationships brought happiness and fulfillment to the

individuals who engaged in them, as well as peace and material prosperity to the societies that were involved.

SETTLER COLONIALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In the context of the time in New France, reciprocal relationships emerged in circumstances that were often unfavorable to any form of cooperation between the European settlers and native peoples. The “middle ground,” as Richard White has termed it, was one where any negotiations were highly vulnerable.² The stakes were high, given that the survival of both Canadian and Native people was at risk.³ Lesage, given his access to the works of such explorers as Lahontan, Hennepin, Lafitau, and Labat, would have known of such difficulties and chosen to play them down.⁴

It is hard to imagine how the Natives would have felt comfortable approaching the French if their lives had been badly disrupted by the Europeans’ presence. Lesage tells us of Monneville’s penchant of taking captives from the Amerindian tribes. In one attack, Monneville captures several Iroquois women and a great number of children to enslave them.⁵ In another instance, Monneville discovers a large habitation of Iroquois in the woodlands. He launches a surprise attack on the “great Number of old Men and Children” there, and leaves with a booty prize of nearly two hundred children and women.⁶ In reality, the French went beyond taking captives; some of the actions of the French can only be described as genocidal. To demonstrate the power of the French, Governor-General Beauharnois vowed to decimate the Fox people, ordering his subordinates to “kill them without thinking of making a single prisoner, so as not to leave one of the race alive in the upper country.”⁷ With lives lost and displaced in the face of overwhelming French military superiority, certain Native peoples never had the option of fostering close relations with the French, or were disinclined to do so.

Settlers, Savages, and Lesage

At the same time, many settlers were hesitant to approach the Amerindian peoples. The term “les sauvages” at the time may have had more to do with the idea of wild forest people than with their supposed attributes of ferocity or cruelty.⁸ However, it was still common to view Native peoples as subhuman and unworthy of any partnership. French settlers were frightened by the attacks that Native peoples made on their communities. Lesage describes how the people of Chambly and Montreal dreaded the Iroquois and their “terrible mortal” chief, Black-Kettle, who was so frightful that there were public prayers where “the People begg’d of God to deliver them” from his attacks.⁹ Most notably, Lesage reports on the real-life incident of Madeleine de Verchères, who fended off a troop of Iroquois who had made an incursion upon her fort, which was located some distance from Montreal.¹⁰ Likewise, Lesage writes of the unfavorable impressions that the missions of New France had of the Huron:

[T]hey have endeavoured to represent [the Hurons] as an inconstant Nation, perfidious and barbarous, only for having conducted themselves according to those Customs of their Nation, received from their Ancestors. The Hurons, say they, have killed, have eat [sic] the Prisoners ... They are therefore the most barbarous Savages, they are Anthropophages, they are Monsters.¹¹

With these attacks and atrocities, Lesage provides some reason why French settlers may have been reluctant to approach Native peoples, let alone to develop deep relationships with them.

The picture that Lesage provides us accords with reality. Indeed, in their private correspondence, French officials and priests vented their frustrations at, and even contempt for, Native peoples.¹² One Canadian governor described the Iroquois as not only untrustworthy, but also highly dangerous:

They are everywhere. They will stay hidden behind a stump for ten days, existing on nothing but a handful of corn, waiting to kill a man, or a woman ... They are not content to burn the houses, they also burn the prisoners they take, and give them death only after torturing them continually in the most cruel manner they can devise.¹³

Hence, war was one of the main forms of interaction between settlers and natives. It is telling that Beauchêne’s first interactions with the natives come about when the Iroquois travel up to the gates of Montreal, pillaging and setting fire to villages and scalping those they had killed.¹⁴ Lesage’s description of such events mirrors actual events in North America. For example, in 1689, the Iroquois destroyed the westernmost settlement of the French, La Chine, destroying fifty out of seventy-seven houses, killing and taking prisoners, and reportedly feasting on the flesh of five captive children.¹⁵ It is difficult to fathom how harmonious relations could develop if the settlers felt threatened by the Natives.



Alain-René Lesage engraving, 18th century
Source: Anonymous, *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris*
(Wikimedia Commons)

Yet, the reality was that the most negative and the most positive attitudes towards the natives could coexist in New France. Attitudes varied from person to person, depending on whether they had benefits to gain from interacting with the other side. Those who did were more willing to be open-minded about a different culture and to initiate a reciprocal relationship on more or less equal terms. Among the French, these included anyone from traders who were hungry for pelts, to officials who wanted to forge military or political alliances, to captives who were fearful for their lives. On the Indian side, these were tribesmen who wanted iron goods, chiefs who wanted protection from rivals, and even women who wanted husbands who might treat them better than the men in their tribe. This does mean that patronizing attitudes were completely absent. Of the chieftains who accompany Mlle Duclos, Monneville remarks that their long robes of beaver skins “add[ed] a new Ridicule to their strange and grotesque figures” and goes on to comment that “We should have sooner have imagined them to be old Baboons, than Kings.”¹⁶ Natives, conversely, giped at any white newcomers who failed to demonstrate sufficiently their strength or resilience in running or wrestling competitions.¹⁷ Thus, settlers and natives might have found each other strange or even amusing, but in many instances there was not enough ill-will between them to eliminate all possibility of cooperation.

BEYOND CULTURAL TRANSVESTISM

One of the most basic ways that settlers and natives acknowledged each other's common humanity was by adopting each other's clothes, as Lesage describes throughout the novel, blurring the lines between separate cultures. Nathan Brown argues in "Curious Savages" that *Beauchêne* depicts New France as a privileged space for the problematizing of the ancien régime's traditional hierarchies – either gender or ethnically based.¹⁸ New France, according to Brown, was a place where identities could be constructed, transgressed, disputed, and negotiated, a site of cultural transvestism, cross-dressing, and sartorial transgressions.¹⁹ But the characters of *Beauchêne*, like the real-life counterparts, were never interested in vestimentary choices for their own sake. The decisions to wear Native clothing or partake in other Native folkways occurred within institutions – marriage, family, and tribal leadership – that made these necessary.

At the very least, even if they did not wear each other's clothes, settlers and Natives were willing to accept a degree of cultural difference. Not all French settlers had as unfavorable a view of the natives as some of the missionaries and government officials had. Even as Monneville finds distasteful the dish of dog meat presented at the feast he attends, he still finds "very much to [his] taste" the sagamite

Slightly stronger relations could be formed when both parties extended their tolerance of other cultures to attempts at assimilation. The French fur traders were experts at this.²⁴ They wore Indian dress, travelled like Indians, ate the same foods, spoke Indian languages, made war as the Indians did, lived off the land, and endured privation with the same fortitude as the Natives.²⁵ In so doing, they became closely integrated into the native tribes they lived with. Natives, too, were sometimes willing to adapt to the cultural practices of the French settlers, as illustrated by Mlle Duclos's account of her tribe:

I even remark continually, that they contrive every thing that may give me Pleasure; and to conform themselves to my Manner of Behaviour, throw off their own. It was, for Example, a Custom established amongst them, to go into each other's Huts, and sit down in the first Place they come to, without saying a word, or using the least Civility; now, they salute one another by bowing the Head a little, and smiling.²⁶

In making these and other efforts to make their guest feel welcome, the fictional Huron tribe earned an ardent supporter of their cause. Lesage has Mlle Duclos deliver a poignant monologue, where she asks Monneville to consider what it would be like to be a Frenchman whose land is colonized

“In this way, the acceptance of some Native practices provided the basis for the most superficial of reciprocal relations between French and Amerindian people.”

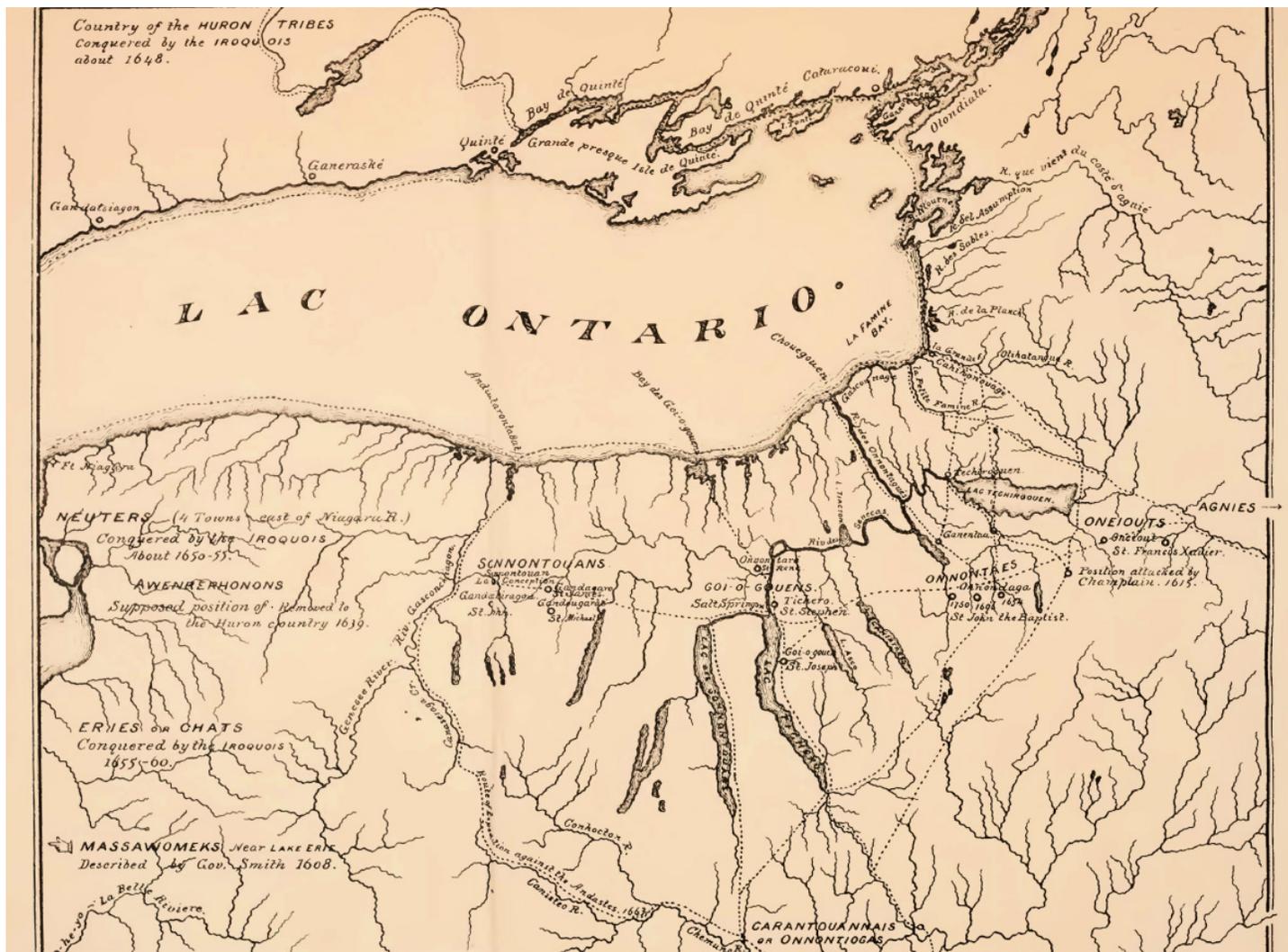
that the Hurons serve him.²⁰ After spending some time with the Hurons, he concludes that they are a "humane people," even if he still considers their customs strange.²¹ Outside the world of Lesage's fictional Huron village, the French missionaries and colonial authorities, to be sure, tolerated some native practices. But unlike Monneville, they did not do so because they enjoyed native practices or their interactions with the Indians. Rather, they did so when it was a matter of expediency and of not sullyng the relations they had with compliant Native peoples. In the case of the mission Indians, missionaries were willing to tolerate native customs and rituals that did not contradict Catholic worship.²² Officials also turned a blind eye to instances where a mission Indian accidentally killed a Frenchman while drunk. Instead of arresting and putting to trial the Native person responsible, the French would permit the native ceremony of "covering the grave," where the Indians would deliver presents to the relatives of the deceased to settle the murder.²³ In this way, the acceptance of some Native practices allowed provided the basis for the most superficial of reciprocal relations between French and Amerindian people.

by the Huron and whose religion is deemed by the invaders to be illegitimate.²⁷ Empathy, or so Lesage suggests, may develop if there were sufficient opportunities for members of each group to assimilate into one another's culture.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION

As such, it is not surprising that relationships of reciprocity were often established when Frenchmen were taken prisoner. Captives--if they were not tortured and killed--were given full recognition as a member of a clan, since the Huron, Iroquois, and other tribes viewed this as a means of gaining additional kindred after lives had been lost in war, a way of renewing their human and spiritual potential through the ritual process of integration.²⁸ White children who had been captured young quickly became indianized, and often struggled later to abandon what had become their native lifestyle and language.²⁹ Lesage evinces these processes in the episode where the Iroquois capture the child *Beauchêne* during a raid on Montreal. *Beauchêne* is adopted by a woman who had lost her husband in the conflict, and who subsequently married another.³⁰ Soon, *Beauchêne* learns how to hunt and fight like the Iroquois, and comes to see his adoptive family

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Map of Iroquois Five Nations and Mission Sites 1656-1684 (1879)

Source: John S. Clark, *Early Chapters of Cayuga History: Jesuit Missions In Goi-O-Gouen, 1656-1684* (Wikimedia Commons)

as equal to his birth relations, for he comments that “I could not think I had lost any thing, since I saw that I had still a Father, a Mother, Brothers, and Companions.”³¹ However, Lesage then shows Beauchêne experiencing no difficulty at all when he eventually reconnects with his birth parents and rejoins French colonial society.³² Still, Lesage’s imagination of quasi-familial ties between French captives and Native captors is not too far off from reality.

Adoption was not the only way by which French settlers and Amerindians connected on fairly equal terms, for they also became blood relations. Without too much fear of miscegenation, both sides married and produced offspring that helped solidify bonds of alliance. While they were not necessarily settlers, French traders often married Indian women to access their kin networks, which provided excellent security in the native world and afforded the traders some protection from having their goods stolen or from being killed.³³ Those who had been captured in war were also forced to take wives or face death.³⁴ Lesage appears

to have been aware of these partnerships, for he visualizes Mlle Duclos urging Monneville to encourage his men to marry some of her tribeswomen, on the grounds that the tribe would view this favorably as an effort to strengthen ties between the French and natives:

I cannot, however, conceal from you, that the Chiefs of my Council are to conjure you not to disdain to take for Wives, during your Residence here, those who are most agreeable to you; if you grant them that Favour, you will see those whom you chuse [sic] respected, beloved, and called the Supporters of the Nation.³⁵

Additionally, one of the minor characters of the story, the Baron de St. Castin (who may be a fictionalized version of a real member of the de Saint-Castin family) is described as “the son of a French Baron and a Savage woman, whom his Father had married when he was a Prisoner among the Savages.”³⁶ Thus, Lesage’s depiction of marriage as a means of consolidating relationships, which had been initiated

through French interactions with native tribes, is fairly accurate as well.

But Frenchmen did not have to be adopted by a Native family, or married to a Native woman, in order to enjoy familial relations. If they were acknowledged as parental figures by native communities, and if they provided sufficient benefit to their tribe, they too could gain respect, loyalty and protection. Mlle Duclos fulfills this role by encouraging the Hurons to become increasingly dependent on her by introducing the products of civilization to them.³⁷ First, she teaches them how to use the household utensils that they have traded their furs for.³⁸ Then, she instructs the daughters of one of the most important Huron leaders in European manners, before going on to re-organize the entire agricultural and housing systems of the village.³⁹ Consequently, the Hurons' love for their leader was so strong that when she dies, the natives decided to sacrifice all twenty-five of the French prisoners upon her grave, and began performing a ceremony where they would smoke at her grave and ask, with "zeal and affection," "if she stands in need of anything."⁴⁰ In life and in death, Mlle Duclos was inseparable from her adoptive people.

Lesage's depiction of the natives as almost the adoring children of a French settler who takes care of them is not entirely hyperbolic, even if it is fictional. Native peoples welcomed, or at least pretended to welcome, the paternal role that French interlopers attempted to assume. Because of their matrilineal kinship systems, mothers had far more authority than fathers.⁴¹ It was acceptable to some tribes to refer to the French as "fathers" with the expectation that they would be as indulgent, generous, and weak as Indian fathers were.⁴² Such a mindset explains the attitude that the Iroquois had when they received Governor Frontenac in 1673. He declared to them:

If Your Father can come so far, with so great a force, through such dangerous rapids, merely to make you a visit of pleasure and friendship, what would he do, if you should awaken his anger, and make it necessary for him to punish his disobedient children?⁴³

The Iroquois responded that they were pleased that he, calling himself Onontio, had presumed to address them as his children, and that they rejoiced at meeting a real Father.⁴⁴ One might question the sincerity of this gesture, especially since the Iroquois were likely to have been wary of the fort that the French were building on Lake Ontario. Nevertheless, the Natives were willing to consider the Europeans as kin, even if only in name. The pleasantries that the Iroquois extended might have convinced Frontenac, years later, to defend the Iroquois by saying he did not believe that they "had all the evil designs that were being trumpeted forth, because for the past ten years they had always shown their good will and been very compliant."⁴⁵ This might not be quite a quid pro quo arrangement, but Frontenac's statement evinces his concern about reciprocating the Iroquois's compliance in a paternal way.

REAPING THE REWARDS OF COOPERATION

Having solidified their relationships through foster families, intermarriage, and leadership arrangements, the Natives and the settlers derived much benefit from their alliances. Military advantages were arguably the most significant. Beauchêne depicts numerous instances where the French work with one group of Amerindians to defeat the English and their Native allies, or vice versa. At the start of the volume, Lesage describes how the Canadians and Algonquin ambushed the Iroquois in one attack.⁴⁶ In one interesting episode, Beauchêne leads an Algonquin troop to launch an attack on the Iroquois, only to have the latter respond that they were not interested in attacking the French, but the English.⁴⁷ Later in the volume, Lesage tells his readers about Captain Baptiste, a Canadian who relied on a group of "only forty savages" to parry off the attacks that the English were making from the coast.⁴⁸ On the other side of the conflict, the English persuaded the Iroquois to make an attempt to take Governor de Frontenac prisoner, as Lesage reports.⁴⁹ With the British and other Indian tribes threatening access to land and resources, the French and their Native allies were willing to assist one another when it was expedient to do so.

Lesage's description of such forms of cooperation mirror developments on a larger strategic level. There were greater benefits to be reaped if the French and Indians were willing to engage in reciprocal diplomacy. Sometimes, one party was less willing than the other. For example, the Iroquois took advantage of the fact that Governor Joseph-Antoine de La Barre was deathly ill and pressed him into protracted negotiations in the 1680s.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, the French and Iroquois also made agreements that were more beneficial to both sides. After the 1701 Peace Treaty between the French and Five Nations Iroquois Confederacy, the French were extremely careful not to do anything that might cause Five Nations to abandon their neutrality, and the Iroquois honored their treaty obligation to be neutral when Anglo-French hostilities broke out again.⁵¹ Whether or not they were actually related by blood, the French and the Amerindians occasionally found ways to converge on military issues.

Even if they were not waging war together, settlers and natives brought material benefits to one another. For one, they could count on each other's support in non-combat situations. Lesage describes how Beauchêne enlists the help of three Algonquin men to join him in the search for two deserters from the colonial forces, and were together rewarded by the governor with brandy and provisions.⁵² More significantly, exchanges of gifts allowed both parties to receive goods that they desired. After visiting Mlle Duclos's Huron village, Monneville's delegation receives canoes laden with animal skins from the Huron, which they reciprocate with gifts of wine, brandy, and other presents.⁵³ In return for their efforts in fighting the Canadians and Algonquin, the adoptive Iroquois parents receive gifts of arms, cutlery, and brandy from the English.⁵⁴ The English, after all, had gained "several

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cantons of the Iroquois” in this manner.⁵⁵ It seems that it was a win-win situation when French and Indian groups could agree on how these exchanges should take place and what goods or services should be traded.

As with the case of other eighteenth-century writers who idealized Native American societies, Lesage’s presentation of these exchanges is admittedly much more pleasant than was the case in reality.⁵⁶ The barter trade of furs and alcohol had disastrous effects for the Indians, as observed by missionaries in the New France of the late seventeenth century. According to their report, kegs of brandy transformed one village into a vision of hell: terrible fights broke out between Indians and acts of infanticide and incest took place.⁵⁷ The French were also bad traders at times, such as when they failed to bring a sufficient amount of goods during the spring to trade for the Indian furs acquired over the winter, and raised prices on their goods for no apparent reason.⁵⁸ Some were not even interested in making legitimate deals with the Natives. In one case, four *coureurs des bois* reveled one night with the Iroquois, then murdered a family in the tribe to seize their pelts.⁵⁹ These unfortunate incidents aside, the natives found useful many of the other gifts that the French bestowed them. The French courted the Indians as assiduously as Lesage suggests, entertained them extravagantly when they visited Montreal or Quebec, and sent some of their chiefs to France to marvel at the splendors of Paris and Versailles.⁶⁰ Reciprocal relationships were difficult to negotiate, but could have great payoffs if managed correctly.

CONCLUSION

Reciprocal relationships went awry in a great number of ways that Lesage does not address in his work. The aforementioned barter trade in furs and alcohol, if not the large-scale territorial wars fought in North America, is only one example among many of how Natives and settlers clashed over competing interests. It would be interesting

to examine other eighteenth-century picaresque, utopian, and romance novels that heretofore have been approached solely from the perspectives of their literary genres. In these texts, one is likely to find differing representations of mutual agreements between Indian tribes and French settlers. Since colonial knowledge in the eighteenth century was almost exclusively a product of European authorship, these texts might have had some impact on how the metropole shaped its colonial policy.⁶¹

This is an important question to resolve, for as their colonial possessions increased over North America, the French gained more power to decide whether these relationships should be initiated. Depending on how valuable they were as trading or military partners, the French could choose to work with specific Amerindian tribes, but not others. Beauchêne is arguably more useful in demonstrating instances where the interests of settlers and natives converged, than in illustrating the major territorial conflicts which broke out between French forces and Indian tribes as New France expanded. Reciprocal relationships were exclusionary and unavailable in situations of the latter category.

Nevertheless, this multi-layered novel offers a representative and synoptic view of the attitudes of Canadians towards the Native peoples they encountered, as well as several insights on how Native peoples might have perceived the Frenchmen who entered their communities. It also shows that cultural identity was not fixed in New France. Over time, more and more individuals crossed over from one community to another, as prisoners, foster children, leaders, and traders. Adopting practices that were not their own, Native and French individuals came to resemble each other in their increasing ways. After all, they had myriad incentives to become more alike. With a rich storyline that contends with the above issues, Lesage evinces how the line between settlers and savages had essentially been blurred by the early eighteenth century. 🏰

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SANITATION AS A VEIL

The Role of Complex Social Tensions in the Rise of Institutional Racism in Cape Town from 1899 to 1923

Abstract: The “sanitation syndrome” captures the exploitation of public obsession with disease prevention and urban cleanliness in South Africa to provoke yet veil social conflicts that contributed to the rise of institutional segregation. In addition to tensions between European colonialist and African indigenous populations, status divisions among the latter group significantly impacted the passage of segregationist legislation. Cape Town’s historical context during the early twentieth-century provides evidence of a small yet important group of African elites. These elites simultaneously utilized urban sanitation concerns for sociopolitical gains while inadvertently supporting the implementation of racial segregation.

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At the turn of the twentieth century, a bubonic plague epidemic spread to South Africa and reignited colonialist fears surrounding an illness that previously decimated Europe.¹ By analyzing a period of rising sensitivity to disease prevention due to the plague outbreak, various scholars argue that urban sanitation promoted racial segregation across this region by veiling underlying social status tensions. Racial attitudes contributed to views of Africans as sources of disease, and sanitation efforts directly encouraged racial separation as a supposed measure to quarantine infections. European desires to preserve their ethnic and socioeconomic dominance motivated strategic manipulation of public sanitation fears to fuel support for segregation policy.²

In a recent publication however, Marc Epprecht, a Canadian historian at Queen’s University who published several books on African health, challenges the well-established argument using sanitation to explain the emergence of South African racial segregation. He claims, “‘sanitation syndrome’ is prone to ignore the diversity of opinion and motives of Africans in debates.”³ Epprecht critiques current arguments for limiting their focus to social tensions between European colonial and African indigenous populations during the rise of institutional racism from 1899 to 1923.⁴ Such arguments underscoring existing disputes between Europeans and Africans are valid; however, they overlook the status divisions within the African population in Cape Town. In this article, I posit that the latter also significantly contributed to the emergence of segregationist legislation. Particularly, Cape Town’s historical context created the economic and public health conditions that fostered the development of a small yet important African elite group who may have impacted the implementation of segregation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SANITATION SYNDROME

The Second Anglo-Boer War occurred in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 and had enormous implications on the public

health and economic landscapes of Cape Town. War brought additional ships through its ports to provide wartime supplies for the British army, which inadvertently carried infectious agents of bubonic plague from India and Australia to South Africa.⁵ The first Cape Town plague case appeared in 1901, which sparked public unrest and instilled new urgency for urban cleanliness among government health officials.⁶ Cape Town spent over 16,000 pounds on postwar disinfection schemes in its urban center according to a Medical Officer of Health report, highlighting an intense focus on sanitation in response to plague outbreaks.⁷

Despite the efficacy of initial bubonic plague control measures, an outbreak of smallpox in 1904 refocused attention on urban hygiene efforts.⁸ These incidents coincided with additional socioeconomic effects of the Second-Anglo-Boer War that combined with interests in sanitation. The war vastly increased the number of African war prisoners in Cape Town who were captured from interior regions. Prisoners generally remained in the Cape Colony following their detainment, leading to a 25% increase in African population numbers to total roughly 900,000 by 1901.⁹ Many captives were placed as laborers in the agricultural industry during a postwar recession to the extent that white farm owners became heavily dependent on African labor to sustain their businesses. Despite readily available labor, employers became increasingly worried about maintaining traditional economic influence through European master and African servant relationships.¹⁰ Combined anxieties over controlling bubonic plague outbreaks and the balance of race-based labor divisions following the war contributed to the emergence of the “sanitation syndrome” in Cape Town.¹¹

CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS OF THE SANITATION SYNDROME

The Cape Colony Report on Public Health for 1904 and 1905 provides insight into the dual imperatives of sanitation and segregation. Exemplifying what Maynard Swanson, an African history professor at Miami University, characterizes

as the “sanitation syndrome,” the report demonstrated the sheer number of infectious diseases rampant in Cape Town.¹² A range of mild poxes to fatal plague cases validated European fears of illness. To rectify their concerns, Europeans viewed segregation as one solution to Cape Town’s public health crisis.¹³ The report displays how medical discourse contained racist attitudes that propelled a segregationist agenda despite successful efforts to control the spread of infections. For example, Dr. John Gregory, the Medical Officer of Health, described a public concern that a mild form of smallpox was “derived from the Native races.”¹⁴ He claimed there were, “doubtless number of points lending

It should be noted, however, that not all Africans were immediately segregated. Some employers wanted workers within close proximity leading to 8,428 Africans housed on private property in Cape Town year-round to fulfill roles in domestic work or small businesses.²¹ At this point, European economic control contributed to African social class divisions by differentiating the lowest class laborers who resided in locations from those who retained more access to urban resources. Sanitation and disease prevention justified segregation in the first place, hence its role as a guise for economic motives.

“Sanitation and disease prevention justified segregation in the first place, hence its role as a guise for economic motives.”

colour to this view,” even though the report later acknowledged that mild disease symptoms resulted from “smallpox which has been modified in its effect by vaccination.”¹⁵ However, Gregory intentionally did not share his knowledge of vaccination successes to bolster support for racial segregation in Cape Town using quarantine zones. The actions of public health officials converged with developing socioeconomic conflicts after the Boer War, such as rising unemployment among Europeans, that amplified support for segregation.¹⁶ Contemporary arguments tie evidence of the sanitation syndrome to European control of African labor, the emergence of racial segregation, and maintenance of social hierarchies.

The utilization of sanitation went beyond mere disease control, but was opportunistically used to address European desires to control labor relations in Cape Town. European employers relied on an influx of migrant male African workers and previous war captives for low-wage labor in industries like construction, agriculture, domestic work, and port docking.¹⁷ However due to a post-war recession and higher job competition, cheaper African labor sources exacerbated unemployment fears among white artisans and storeowners. Migrant African laborers were especially disconcerting since they were less bound by master-servant relationships as they flowed in and out of Cape Town’s center.¹⁸ To create a stable, low-cost African labor supply and control employment rates of these groups, Europeans sought to “domesticate their labor force” by instilling institutional segregation and urban pass law systems.¹⁹ The South African Native Races Committee, which reported annually on African affairs, outlined rules for the passes African laborers were required to attain before entering Cape Town’s city limit. The Committee’s 1901 publication describes how segregating Africans into reserves and quarantine location neighborhoods along the city outskirts functioned to provide the economy with workers “almost exclusively engaged in agriculture.”²⁰

Swanson argues, “the underlying question was one of social control: how to organize society to provide for mutual access of black labourers and white employers without paying social costs of urbanization or losing dominance of white over black.”²² Sanitation fits this purpose: despite actual socioeconomic goals, the Native Reserve Locations Act of 1902 was passed in Cape Town in order to isolate blacks from whites to prevent disease transmission according to the Medical Officer of Health Report.²³ Upon passage of the law, roughly 6,000 Africans were immediately transferred to the newly established Ndabeni temporary quarantine location (then called Uitvlugt) that later became a permanent residential area. Many blacks were not forcefully relocated at this point, considering the 255,901 Africans who remained in Cape Town.²⁴

In addition to relocation practices, the implementation of increasingly stringent pass laws further controlled the movement of Africans within Cape Town and between the city and locations. Unequal access to urban resources between individuals in reserves and those in the city in turn shaped their employment opportunities.²⁵ These economic and geographic differences set the stage for discrepancies in social mobility and increased status divisions within the African population, as will be further discussed. Contrary to disease fears, passes still allowed Africans to make daily contact with Europeans via work whether or not they lived in quarantine locations or Cape Town. Therefore, employment practices indicate that sanitation policies served as justification for segregation instead of as true efforts towards disease containment. Segregation supposedly protected the European community but was clearly set up to enhance an economic structure that favored them.²⁶

Unsurprisingly, utilization of sanitation to pass institutional segregation laws negatively impacted social status tensions in



Convicts cleansing and disinfecting infected buildings (1891)
Source: Drawing by H. Johnson (Wikimedia Commons)

Cape Town. In the Northern Cape Colony, the dependency of European-run industries on black labor intensified racial conflicts to the extent that laborers risked their status to testify against employers about maltreatment grievances.²⁷ Africans in Cape Town also practiced their own methods of resisting subjugation. Those forcefully removed to locations outwardly protested racial abuse and rebelled against the Native Reserve Locations Act by drifting back to urban residences during periods of reduced enforcement.²⁸ In 1907, for example, only 2,234 Africans remained in Ndabeni despite its initial population at 6,000.²⁹

Social statuses continued to divide when Cape Town leadership further limited African voting rights. The former Native Voters Act of 1892 posed a barrier to enforcing pass laws and location acts because African landowners retained their voting rights according to its wealth-based criteria for suffrage. Postwar employment offered additional Africans an

opportunity to enter the middle class and potentially gain voting power through this legislation, which white leadership sought to preclude. In response, European politicians amended the previous voting act, denied suffrage to more Africans, and prevented resistance to racial segregation.³⁰

However, these legislative changes also contributed to widening social divisions among Africans by concentrating black political power among a small group of representatives. Members of the African upper class still evaded political restrictions because of their wealth and preserved their “non-racial Cape franchise” since the British promised “equal rights for all civilized men.”³¹ They comprised “registered voters... exempted from statutory residential segregation” and thus quarantine and pass policies surrounding sanitation.³² As sanitation was used as an argument to justify changes to new voter laws, it once again prompted segregationist actions that increased colonial status discrepancies and tensions.

THE OVERSIMPLIFICATION OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN ARGUMENTS OF SANITATION

Arguments in previous works demonstrate how Cape Town's public health and economic environment combined with sanitation concerns to produce racial segregation. While scholars have focused on social tensions between European colonizers and indigenous African groups in producing institutionally racist outcomes, they have ignored the impact of dynamic relationships within the African population that arose before and during early sanitation practices. Contrasting earlier arguments, Epprecht explicitly researches the development of South African institutional segregation in this time period through a case study of Pietermaritzburg and Durban. His rebuttal underscores how current discussions of sanitation syndrome lack information on diverse African opinions and actions regarding urban segregation. In Durban, Africans were not always forcibly removed from their homes. Some families purposely fled its urban center to outrun a growing number of sick Europeans in the area contrary to the common viewpoint that only the opposite occurred.³³ In Pietermaritzburg, most Africans not employed as migrant labor actually lived in approved city residences rather than

INSIGHTS FROM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Certain employers sought educated Africans for economic benefits, hence the admission of some individuals into schools in albeit limited spaces as shown in the following primary accounts. First, a minister named Ramsden Balmforth described ways to enhance African suitability for British economic needs by placing greater religious emphasis in their education.³⁷ While viewed as less subservient compared to uneducated laborers, educated Africans were sometimes preferred because of their "moral and civic development" and greater assimilation into English culture via education that better suited business settings.³⁸ Across South Africa in 1908, there were 133,000 African students in schools that, "scientifically trained [them] in the habits of industry to make them more efficient members of society," signaling that Europeans used education as a pipeline for producing future skilled laborers.³⁹ A new educated African class indicates the formation of a wealthy elite social strata conditioned into European culture.

Secondly, several hundred African schoolteachers existed throughout South Africa by 1911 who also made up an upper

“There were a series of political maneuvers meant to shape local debates surrounding racial segregation.”

locations.³⁴ Previously explained primary accounts also show that a substantial number of Africans remained in Cape Town for similar reasons. Epprecht identifies the presence of an African elite that influenced Pietermaritzburg debates to favor segregation, highlighting how some Africans participated in forming legislation rather than statically receiving them.³⁵

Ramifications of the African elite's influence do not reduce colonial responsibility for institutional racism, but considering both African and European motives complicates its emergence. Oddly, Swanson acknowledged the existence of an African upper class in his discussion of sanitation syndrome and its exemptions to forced relocation. He notes that more than 3000 franchised homeowners, domestic workers, and commercial workers remained in Cape Town after the Native Reserve Locations Act.³⁶ However, Swanson fails to account for effects of economic and political changes in Cape Town during this time period that fostered the growth of a small but significant African elite class. Class divisions within the African population then contributed to the rise of segregation. Since African labor was usually more affordable than white labor, increased demand for the former increased their job prospects. Some employers sought Africans for skilled positions, which created chances for education and relative social mobility. Political structures shifted to favor localized rule, which offered minor yet novel leadership opportunities to prominent African figures.

class respected by both Europeans and Africans. Despite their race, teachers followed curriculums designed to give African students "full knowledge of European modes of thought... to break the curse of Native Life" aligning with sentiments of a patronizing European civilizing mission to create Western cultural conformity.⁴⁰ Hobart Houghton's 1911 publication argued for establishing a South African Native College in Cape Town to help Africans "advance," providing a pathway for social mobility that is also indirect evidence of an African elite. Wealthy African families promised donations up to 10,000 pounds to the South African Intercolonial Native Affairs Commission in support of the university. An upper class must exist if families have these means, especially counting their hopes of becoming trustees of the institution.⁴¹

A colonial-designed education effectively created skilled African workers who were "cultured, sensitive, and...out of touch with their own race."⁴² However, intentional education curriculums failed to assuage the unease of European leadership who feared educated Africans maintained political ambitions and a desire to select their own leaders. This leadership formulated rules to restrict the power of Africans, such as bars to practicing law, but education nonetheless created a wealthy social status division in the Cape Town African population whose agendas deviated from the masses.⁴³



Adderley Street, Cape Town, looking SW / "View of Adderley Street, Cape Town, from opposite the Custom House (1899)
Source: Unknown, *Picturesque South Africa (Cape Town: Dennis Edwards & Co, 1899)* (Wikimedia Commons)

PRESENCE OF MINOR ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP ROLES

After the creation of reserves and quarantine locations, Cape Town political structures shifted to adapt to population dispersion. It allowed for increased local self-government through the establishment of District Councils. District Councils also allowed upper-class Africans to hold local leadership roles. For example, one account of a Cape Town District Council lists Africans holding positions titled Native Collector of Council Rates, Native Councillor, and Road Inspector.⁴⁴ Reasons for incorporating Africans into local government are not stated, but one possible explanation is to take advantage of their shared race with other African residents to increase compliance with policies. A secondary source by Bickford-Smith confirms that African members on Native Councils assisted in ruling local populations.⁴⁵

Additionally, Balmforth alluded to African leadership by describing “native representatives” who cooperated with English advisors to oversee education taxation, further highlighting influential roles elite Africans held relative to other laborers.⁴⁶ Leaders in minor positions and families occupying middle to upper-class employment were an “important reason for the emergence of a sizeable petty-bourgeoisie” who were neither segregated into locations nor denied suffrage because of their economic status.⁴⁷ Overall, extensive evidence of an influential African elite exempt from consequences of sanitation practices confounds simplistic views of social tensions in sanitation arguments. The motivations of this class, including ambitions to increase their social acceptance among Europeans, may have stimulated increased support for institutional segregation.

COLLISIONS WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL SEGREGATION

The majority of Africans in Cape Town could not vote per the Native Voters Act because they lived in poverty. Among a franchised African elite, however, alliances were formed over mutual interests that often favored overall African assimilation into European culture. Aligning with European policies enhanced the political acceptance and power of African elites within an English-dominated arena, even at the expense of working class laborers.⁴⁸

The influence and values of African elites in politics can be traced back to their desire for social respectability. Education, voting rights, leadership, and the adoption of English civic values helped them attain a degree of respectability in Cape Town society. To support this image, elites displayed enthusiasm about “Black British” identity and attempted to join exclusive elite societies. Effectively, the black elite also aimed to maintain their respectability by dissociating themselves from lower status groups, and may have supported residential segregation to this end.⁴⁹ In the Bishopstowe district of Pietermaritzburg, European leadership was confused by “the apparent alliance between Bishopstowe’s white residents and black elites from the other side of town” in support of a Native Land Act that implemented segregation.⁵⁰ Epprecht analyzed how whites did not want to share residential areas with blacks due to African worker stereotypes from their involvement in the informal economy. Black elites allied with whites because they also wanted to promote the image of a “decent’ class of African worker.” They feared a lack of segregation would allow for greater prominence of African roles in the local informal economy, which would hurt their reputations.⁵¹ By advocating for segregation, elites sought to socially and geographically distance themselves from unskilled African laborers through the construction of townships and locations.⁵² For instance, the Natives Land Act was passed in 1913 that intended to push members of the African middle-class to Cape Town’s outskirts by redistributing their valuable land to whites.⁵³ As a substantial group of wealthy and educated Africans existed by 1911, African elites would have been able to impact the passage of the Natives Land Act and movements towards institutionalized segregation.⁵⁴

There were a series of political maneuvers meant to shape local debates surrounding racial segregation. Epprecht’s case study showed how African elites outwardly persuaded those of the same race but lower in class to “create a respectable working class township” outside of Pietermaritzburg’s urban center.⁵⁵ One tactic used to increase support among black commoners for reserve building was promoting them as healthier options to inner cities to escape common infectious diseases and the drudgery of city life – referring to sanitation.⁵⁶ Sanitation concerns may have been analogously utilized by the African elite in Cape Town to mask social status divisions and associated goals within their own racial group. Epprecht noted that elites likely impacted segregation in Cape Town because they shared “concerns for health and morals... [and] political ambitions” as those in Pietermaritzburg.⁵⁷ Elites as an allied group would be motivated to favor segregation by potential increased access to urban planning, increased economic control, and greater authority in English-dominated politics. Another large gain for African elites occurred in 1923 with the passage of the Urban Areas Act that even more tightly controlled movement of black working-class laborers into city limits. In total, social status tensions among Africans played a role in implementing racial segregation in Cape Town and also drew from arguments on sanitation to justify these actions.

CONCLUSION

The sanitation syndrome veils more complex social status tensions during the development of institutional racism in Cape Town than many current works argue. While discrepancies are easily visible between European and Africans, a nuanced social division among Africans also contributed to generating support for racial segregation. This view does not aim to undermine any racist intent between colonizers and the indigenous population, but rather acknowledges the effects of intra-ethnic conflicts among Africans in Cape Town. Recognizing these impacts is pivotal because it confers greater influence and agency to Africans during this time period and reveals their active participation in forming systemic policies. 

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POLITICIZATION OF MEMORY

World War II as a Metaphor for Iraq

Abstract: This article explains how the administration of George W. Bush and media outlets invoked the memory of World War II to justify U.S. intervention in Iraq. Through metaphors between Iraq and the “good war,” the Bush administration attempted to confront the legacy of the Vietnam War and overcome the problems posed by their ill-defined policy goals. While these connections may superficially appear sound, they are ultimately artificial and display the political uses of history.

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In April 2003, Saddam Hussein’s government in Iraq collapsed, and U.S. Marines helped topple a 20-foot statue of the Iraqi president in downtown Baghdad. Weeks later, U.S. President George W. Bush stood aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln and proclaimed, “The tyrant has fallen, and Iraq is free”; he went on to reference Normandy, Iwo Jima, and Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms.¹ This invocation of World War II history was not a singular occurrence. For years, analogies between the “good war” and Iraq had suffused and shaped discourse surrounding American intervention in the Middle East. The Bush administration and media outlets used the popular memory of World War II to justify intervention in Iraq and to give form to hazy foreign policy goals. However, many of the WWII metaphors applied to Iraq break down under scrutiny, and some can even be applied against America itself. This article examines how these metaphors were constructed, how they topple under close examination, and how they ultimately display a politicization of history.

THE “GOOD WAR”

Though World War II ravaged Europe and involved the deaths of over 50 million people, it occupies a surprisingly positive place in the collective memory of Americans. Known as the “good war,” WWII represented an ideal war for the U.S.: “Fought for an unquestionably just cause, ending in total victory, World War II could be reliably invoked to remind Americans of their own best selves.”² American citizens viewed this war in highly moralized terms – good triumphing over evil. And this righteousness became linked with force. Professor of Peace Theology Ted Grimsrud describes this phenomenon when he writes, “It [WWII] provided a mythology of the redemptive possibilities of violence. It was a ‘good war’ that defended the American way of life and defeated forces that were clearly evil. As such, it set the tone for belief that America was a force for good in the world, that America’s ongoing military actions were in continuity with the Good War...”³ Thus, the remembrance of the Second World War signaled an intersection of national



Statue of Saddam Hussein being toppled (2003)
Source: Tim McLaughlin (Wikimedia Commons)

exceptionalist pride with the view of America’s new role as an omnipresent military power. Despite the trials and tribulations of the late twentieth century, World War II always served as a reminder of America’s exalted place in the world, a “moral touchstone” for United States citizens.⁴

Because of the historical space World War II inhabited, American officials began employing memory of the War to gain popular support for military intervention and to simplify U.S. foreign policy towards Iraq. The main factor necessitating

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the use of WWII memory was the lack of popular desire to go to war. Largely due to America's experience in Vietnam, the idyllic post-WWII view of military might as a panacea had dissipated. Professor Emeritus of History Jeffrey P. Kimball supports this view by explaining that the U.S. experience in Vietnam represented a "shattering of the myth of American omnipotence" - a myth that had stemmed from earlier U.S. success in world affairs, such as in World War II.⁵ Therefore, to mobilize the American public to support a war in Iraq, the Bush administration had to overcome "Vietnam syndrome," or the growing reluctance of Americans to use military force as a policy tool.⁶

Another barrier to intervention was the haziness of U.S. foreign policy goals in Iraq. Unlike in most previous conflicts, American citizens in the wake of 9/11 had no grasp of the enemy: Were they to target just the perpetrators of the attacks? Or were they to target the roots of those attacks, the terrorist organizations or even the states harboring those organizations? President Bush's ill-defined "war on terrorism" did not adequately answer these questions, and the public was still reticent to expand U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. To confront both these problems (the legacy of Vietnam and ill-defined policy goals) the Bush administration began to draw connections between contemporary events and World War II. Invocations of the Good War reinvigorated popular belief in the "necessity and even moral 'goodness' of military force" while reducing Middle Eastern conflict into metaphors that the public could easily consume.⁷ Analogies between WWII and Iraq quickly proliferated. For historian John Dower, "such plundering from the last 'good war' was natural, irresistible, almost addictive, and took on a certain momentum all its own."⁸

CONSTRUCTION AND TOPPLING OF METAPHOR 9/11 AS PEARL HARBOR

A year before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, conservatives who would later become influential in the Bush administration's foreign policy contemplated "some catastrophic and catalyzing event - like a new Pearl Harbor" that could facilitate a shift towards military expansion in the Middle East.⁹ This soon became reality. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, newspaper headlines instantly cemented the connection that those neoconservatives had made a year before. The Boston Globe headline proclaimed "New day of infamy," while the Washington Post plastered Franklin Roosevelt's exact quote on its front page: "A Date Which Will Live in Infamy."¹⁰ These media outlets signaled the onset of a very powerful analogy between 9/11 and Pearl Harbor that pervaded American discourse. To most, the connection seemed solid. Both the Islamic terrorists and the Japanese displayed a "holy-war fanaticism," and both times American officials failed to anticipate the attack.¹¹ The feeling of vulnerability that Americans had felt after Pearl Harbor resurfaced in the wake of 9/11, for American soil was very rarely attacked. Additionally, both attacks appeared reckless, yet revealed

imminent threats. Speechwriter David Frum explained the Bush administration's espousal of these historical connections in his insider account of the Bush presidency:

"Saddam was as reckless as the Japanese had been. He had started two mad wars already - one against Iran, one against Kuwait. During the Gulf War, not content with fighting the United States, Britain, France, Canada, Australia, Turkey, and all the Arab states except Jordan, he had also tried to provoke an air attack from Israel. No country on earth more closely resembled one of the old Axis powers than present-day Iraq. And just as FDR saw in Pearl Harbor a premonition of even more terrible attacks from Nazi Germany, so September 11 had delivered an urgent warning of what Saddam Hussein could and almost certainly would do with nuclear and biological weapons."¹²

These implicit, superficial threads connecting 9/11 with Pearl Harbor inhabited the minds of the Bush administration, political pundits, media outlets, and everyday Americans. Soon, the connections were expanded and cemented into American discourse through metaphor.

Since most Americans already saw the parallels between the two attacks, war hawks only had to build on these existing thoughts to push their agenda. One way to further affix the Pearl Harbor metaphor was through a rhetorical use of language. For example, some news sources likened the 9/11 attacks to kamikaze attacks, despite Japanese kamikaze tactics having no relation to Pearl Harbor; also, the smoldering remains of the World Trade Center were designated "Ground Zero," a name originally given to the obliterated sites of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹³ Even though these two historical connections had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor, they subtly linked terrorist activities with the actions of Japan during World War II, forging a subliminal connection between terrorists and Japan. Another way to solidify this analogy was emphasizing "remembrance." This tactic functioned on two levels: on the surface level, remembrance securely fastened 9/11, and the existing connections to Pearl Harbor, into American minds through repetition and ubiquity. It would have been hard for Americans to push the event out of their minds with politicians, media outlets, and peers constantly reiterating, "Never Forget." On a deeper level, remembrance did not merely secure the analogy, but furthered it. The rallying cry "9/11 - We Will Never Forget" mirrored the oft repeated phrase "Remember Pearl Harbor." Pulitzer Prize-winning author John W. Dower explains that, "Like the language of 'infamy,' the call for everlasting remembrance of September 11 was all the more effective because most adult Americans immediately grasped - or grasped at - the resonance between the two catastrophes."¹⁴ With all of these intersecting linkages between 9/11 and Pearl Harbor, many Americans conflated the two. However, this conflation was for a political purpose; war hawks simplified the two events into a historical parallel in order to increase the public's receptivity to military intervention.



Plumes of smoke billow from the World Trade Center towers after the September 11 attacks (2001)

Source: Michael Foran (Wikimedia Commons)

When closely examined, the Pearl Harbor analogy reveals deeper policy goals and cracks in logic. Rahul Mahajan, an administrator of the anti-war coalition United for Peace and Justice, adeptly summarizes the main purpose for lumping together the two attacks: “It’s not difficult to surmise that the invocation of Pearl Harbor was a way to galvanize the nation, assert that the danger to the world was similar to that posed by the Axis in World War II, suggest that the retaliation on yet unnamed targets should be as severe as it was in that war...”¹⁵ The construction of this parallel aimed to inculcate the public’s response to Pearl Harbor: widespread support for war. As Mahajan points out, this metaphor also served as a substitute for an information void; the public would be open to war despite lacking the knowledge of who the targets were. The Bush administration would be able to retroactively define the war after the public already pledged their support for it. Similar to FDR in World War II, constructing 9/11 in a similar light as Pearl Harbor “enabled Bush to don the cloak of a ‘war president.’”¹⁶ Many scholars, nonetheless, saw through this ploy and questioned the accuracy of linking 9/11 with the Japanese attack. To start, Pearl Harbor was a “purely military objective.” The U.S. had implemented an oil embargo against Japan, an act of aggression, so tensions existed between America and Japan; when Japan launched its surprise attack, it exclusively targeted American military assets. Conversely, the 9/11 attacks were unprovoked and took the lives of many innocent civilians. These attacks “lacked the essential relationship between violent means and political ends that ...

must govern any act of war.”¹⁷ The two attacks also differed in the threats they posed, with the Pearl Harbor attack supported by a nation with a powerful economy and military, and the 9/11 perpetrators a small group of militants with much fewer resources.¹⁸ Once these, along with other criticisms of the metaphor, surfaced, John Dower saw a unintentional offshoot of the Pearl Harbor/9/11 analogy, which he dubbed the “boomerang effect.” Instead of connecting Pearl Harbor to 9/11, he compared Pearl Harbor to America’s eventual decision to invade Iraq. In both Pearl Harbor and the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the attackers had no endgame; they were so concerned with the initial offensive drive that they did not adequately think about the ramifications.¹⁹ In one fell swoop, Dower subverts the mainstream metaphor and flips it on its head. This demonstrates the malleability of memory and the factual holes in the Pearl Harbor metaphor. However, the World War II seed had been planted in the mind of the general American public, and “‘Infamy’ and ‘Remember Pearl Harbor’ turned out to be but opening notes in an expansive rhetorical interplay of past and present.”²⁰

POST-WAR IRAQ AS POST-WAR JAPAN

When confronting concerns about occupation of a post-Hussein Iraq, the Bush administration once again turned to a World War II metaphor to simplify their problem. Questions over America’s ability to democratize Iraq after removing Hussein’s government permeated public discourse and raised doubts about the prudence of invasion. To quell these



Saddam Hussein addressing state television (2001)
Source: BBC News (Wikimedia Commons)

fears, government officials referenced the success of U.S. occupation in post-WWII Germany and Japan. Particularly using Japan (since it was not partitioned as was Germany), officials used examples from history as “a reassuring preview of what could be anticipated in Iraq: cordial welcome of the conquerors, followed by impressive accomplishments in reconstruction and democratization.”²¹ This comparison ignored the societal, political, and historical uniqueness of Japan and Iraq to create an artificial, simplistic parallel between the two societies. But accuracy did not matter as long as the comparison could be used instrumentally to advance the Bush administration’s agenda.

As before, scholars quickly grasped the incongruity of the two regimes and attempted to redefine the discourse through offering historical facts. John Dower once again rose to the challenge. In a *New York Times* op-ed article entitled “Lessons From Japan About War’s Aftermath,” Dower completely dismantled the administration’s conflation of a post-war Iraq with post-WWII Japan. His discussion addressed many problems with the Japan-Iraq metaphor, but a few points particularly stand out. First, the Japanese occupation had legitimacy, both “moral and legal,” in the eyes of the world community and the Japanese; this critique proved very prescient, for the U.S. ended up breaking international law to invade Iraq, depriving the invasion of any legal legitimacy. Next, Dower explains how Japan was

physically isolated from potentially intrusive neighbors and lacked the “religious, ethnic, regional and tribal animosities that are likely to erupt in a post-war Iraq.” Also, Japan had prewar democratic traditions and a surviving bureaucratic apparatus, which fostered America’s democratization efforts. Iraq would have neither. Dower ends his article by trying to shift the way history was being used: “While occupied Japan provides no model for a postwar Iraq, it does provide a clear warning: Even under circumstances that turned out to be favorable, demilitarization and democratization were awesome challenges. To rush to war without seriously imagining all its consequences, including its aftermath, is not realism but a terrible hubris.”²² Through this vitriol, he tries to shift Japan’s legacy from an all-clear to a warning. History should not be reduced into easily digestible schemata for political purposes but instead be examined carefully, in all its complexities, to make informed decisions. And the hauntingly prophetic nature of Dower’s article serves as an example of the benefits of this approach.

THE “AXIS OF EVIL”

“States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.”²³ In his 2002 State of the Union address, President Bush resolutely proclaimed that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea were seeking to develop WMDs and provide them to terrorists. Despite the reductive good/evil invocation, Bush’s metaphor had a more mundane, political purpose: “...Bush’s main concern was to link Iraq with 9/11 and fasten on weapons of mass destruction to justify preemption – in a way, however, that would still move Congress to support him if no WMDs were found.”²⁴ Part of the efficacy of this soundbite was its clear relationship to World War II. Foremost, the usage of the word “axis” clearly referenced the AXIS powers – the tripartite pact between Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo in WWII. Investigative journalist Bob Woodward assents, stating that, “It was a nice phrase with overtones of the World War II Axis powers.”²⁵ David Frum, the figure primarily responsible for defining the case for intervention in Iraq, explained that the relationship between terror organization and terror states resembled the Tokyo-Rome-Berlin Axis because the only unifying factor in both cases was “resentment of the power of the West and contempt for democracy.” Beyond that, they only shared distrust, contempt for free thought, and love of death, characteristics that Frum argued mirrored those of WWII-era European fascism.²⁶ President Bush added to this connection: “The terrorists are the heirs to fascism. They have the same will to power, the same disdain for the individual, the same mad global ambitions. And they will be dealt with in just the same way.”²⁷ The rhetorical repetition of “the same” subtly enhances the more overt attempt to establish continuity with the past. Also, by playing into the dynamics of good and evil, the “axis of evil” metaphor related to the memory of World War II as a triumph against evil. Paul Wolfowitz, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, saw the benefit of this strategy of oversimplification and understood

how defining the problem in these reduced, dichotomous terms grabbed the public's attention without committing to any concrete policy.²⁸ The words "axis" and "evil" both referenced the memory of World War II – a simpler conflict where enemies were tangible and the U.S. public was unified on a moral mission; the Bush administration tried to link the "War on Terrorism" with these ideals to surmount the problems posed by an ill-defined enemy and divided public.

For how influential the "axis of evil" language ended up being, its origin story reveals the sloppy fabrication of the metaphor. Michael Gerson, President Bush's chief speechwriter, asked Frum to delineate a reasoning for war against Iraq. Accordingly, when Frum finally formulated his idea about a network of terrorists and states, he originally singled out Iraq; only later was Iran added, and then "North Korea as a seemingly casual afterthought."²⁹ This story reveals how the Bush administration crudely fit current events into rigid historical paradigms. The three member states of this twenty-first century "axis" had no relation to the original WWII AXIS powers. Iraq, Iran, and North Korea did not have the military pact, formal ties, armies and arsenals, or professed expansionist plans that the original AXIS powers had.³⁰ American officials just bundled them together in a forced analogy to create a good sound-bite and rally the public by connecting to an uncontroversial war. Also, this analogy vested the Bush administration with massive power in constructing the foreign policy climate. Most notably, the administration used this metaphor to define who the enemy was: first, it focused on retaliating against the perpetrators of 9/11; then, it expanded that focus to stopping terrorists from obtaining weapons of mass destruction (WMDs);

Snyder, research professor at the National Defense University, explains that Munich has "come to symbolize the dangers of ignoring geopolitical reality in favor of salvaging a peace that appeared to some to be within reach and to be worth whatever price was asked."³³ Compromise became anathema and isolationism was enabling. The Bush administration clearly fell into this ethos, signaled by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's assertion at the 2003 Conference on Security and Cooperation: "To fail to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein would be to fail to learn the lesson of Munich."³⁴ Though scholars like Jervis recognize that this "lesson" is "a caricature of the events that transpired in 1938," the legacy of Munich redefined foreign policy strategies in the later twentieth century and continued to appear in discussions of U.S. intervention in Iraq.³⁵

"A suggestion: anyone resorting to the term *Munich* should be obliged to identify the Hitler actor – that is, the insatiable expansionist – in the situation under discussion," writes Cornell history professor Walter LaFeber.³⁶ And the Bush administration did exactly that. The "axis of power" metaphor had already invoked fascism, and references to Munich had invoked appeasement; naturally, a Hitler figure emerged – or rather, was constructed. Marilyn B. Young, the late New York University professor of history, explains that President Saddam Hussein filled this role. With his history of persecution, savagery, and moustaches, Hussein appeared to be the perfect parallel to Hitler. Additionally, his 1990 invasion of Kuwait served as the perfect parallel to Hitler's expansionistic policy.³⁷ Much like the "axis of evil" language, the creation of a figurehead to epitomize evil gave the American people a concrete enemy. Consistent

“With his history of persecution, savagery, and moustaches, Hussein appeared to be the perfect parallel to Hitler.”

finally, it linked terrorist organizations to states, and aimed to prevent these states from supplying WMDs to terrorists.³¹ Through the metaphor, and the resulting shift in focus, Bush and his associates made an ambiguous, alien foreign policy situation seem clear and familiar. Additionally, circulating language of fascism and the AXIS powers opened up avenues for other World War II metaphors.

THE “LESSONS” OF MUNICH

In the aftermath of World War II, America's foreign policy had been drastically altered. In what political scientist Robert Jervis coined the "deterrence model," Western powers began to believe that compromise with tyrants should be rejected and that military-backed interventionism should be embraced.³² This dramatic shift in paradigm primarily stemmed from the failures of the 1938 Munich Agreement and the policy of appeasement in pacifying Hitler's expansionistic thirst. Jed C.

with the other WWII metaphors, however, the supposed relationship between Hussein and Hitler quickly collapses under scrutiny. Rahul Mahajan summarizes the employment of the Hitler-Hussein metaphor and then points out a flaw in the connection:

“In a similar vein were the numerous invocations of Neville Chamberlain's concessions to Hitler in Munich (where he accepted Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia), always in response to any antiwar arguments. It had a powerful emotive force, because of the obvious fact that capitulation then had meant that the eventual war with Germany was far more destructive. For similar reasons, the same analogy was repeatedly used when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, even though Hussein had neither the capability nor the will to invade any other countries. The analogy was also strained by the fact that no one in the antiwar movement or elsewhere advocated appeasement.”³⁸

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This argument deprives Hussein of the defining characteristic of a Hitler figure (at least as defined by LaFeber): the role as “the insatiable expansionist.” Thus, the depiction of Hussein as Hitler was a straw man that the Bush administration created to mobilize the American public against a visible, tangible enemy. In his *House of War*, James Carroll elucidates the devious ways in which historical memory can be twisted; he describes how Hussein’s worst crimes like gassing the Kurds and Shiites in the 1980s, those crimes that would connect him with Hitler, had never drawn protests from Washington until the administration needed a Hitler figure.³⁹ This detail displays how those in power can selectively use history to their own political agenda. Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein had almost nothing in common, yet the Bush administration managed to fabricate an analogy between the two that increased the urgency American intervention in Iraq by connecting with a popular perception of evil.

CONCLUSION

Through these various World War II metaphors, Washington officials twisted, simplified, and misapplied history to advance their political agenda in the Middle East. They played on popular memories of the Second World War as the “great war,” crudely fitting contemporary people and events into historical templates. Though these analogies may have been based in historical fact, close examination completely destroys the rationale behind them. Americans must learn from history but do so without overgeneralizing it into cookie-cutter paradigms. And as these cases display, collective memory is easily constructed and manipulated. Therefore going forward, citizens must be prudent about blindly accepting information, remembering that objective historical events are always interpreted and disseminated through subjective human agents. 🏛️

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