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# ALPATA

*a journal of history*

VOLUME VIII SPRING 2011

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ALPATA

*a journal of history*

VOLUME VIII, SPRING 2011

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*Harper's Weekly*, August 1, 1863,  
page 484. Via <http://blackhistory.harpweek.com/7Illustrations/CivilWar/RiotsAtNY.htm>  
(accessed May 30, 2011).

ALPATA is the Seminole word for alligator.

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*a journal of history*

VOLUME VIII SPRING 2011

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**A Publication of the University of Florida**  
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**Janel Fontaine** is a senior in History with a focus on the Middle Ages. After graduating, she will spend the summer participating in the archaeological excavation at Pohansko in the Czech Republic and the following year teaching English in the same country. She then intends to continue her studies in graduate school. Her article is part of her larger undergraduate thesis about Anglo-Saxon involvement in the early medieval slave trade.

**Stew Kreitzer** is finishing his dissertation in the history of science exploring science, ideology, and world view in modern evolutionary biology. It follows the decades-long exchange between Ernst Mayr, one of the twentieth century's leading evolutionary biologists, and John C. Greene, an important intellectual historian of science. His essay on Nat Turner was originally submitted to a historiography seminar in 2004.

**Kevin Weng** is a senior double majoring in Political Science and History while minoring in Philosophy. His current interests include American foreign policy and Cold War Politics. After graduation, he will attend the University of Chicago for his Ph.D. in Political Science.

**Robert Wilkinson** is a first-year master's student in the Department of History studying nineteenth-century American history. His principal research interest extends to urban history with a focus on police and systems of authority along with urban violence and perceptions of criminality and deviance. He plans on applying to the Ph.D program this year and continuing his studies at the University of Florida.



## SPECIAL SECTION

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# THE FLEXIBILITY OF MEMORIES

## SPECIAL SECTION

# THE FLEXIBILITY OF MEMORIES

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*David Wright*

Memory, despite its capricious and nebulous nature, is the sinew of human culture; it is through the transmission of memories that cultures maintain their defining mores and traits across generations. As such, the study of history is primarily concerned with reconstructing the past formed by memories, written or oral, of a particular culture. Yet, historians must contend with a fundamental flaw of memory; namely, the malleability of memory. Indeed, it is not a novel assertion that any given memory, which in the end is really just an abstract creation by an individual or group, may deviate from reality. Such variance can at times be owed to non-conscious omissions and at other times is the result of intentional alteration.

The memory of Julian the Apostate is a prime example of this fundamental flaw. A self-proclaimed pagan, Julian reigned in Rome during the ascendancy of Christianity. Contemporary Christians, in particular Archbishop Gregory Nazianzus of Constantinople, portrayed the emperor as a servant of the Devil in a blatant attempt to turn the burgeoning Christian population against the pagan emperor. At the other end of the spectrum, contemporary pagans, such as Ammianus Marcellinus, sought to romanticize the emperor in memory; even the French *philosophes* actively sought to alter the negative memory of Emperor Julian to advance their attacks against the Catholic Church.

Yet, unsurprisingly, the previous example is not a historical singularity in which popular memory tends to be simplified into a dichotomy; memories of the American Civil War and the Yom-Kippur War also share this dichotomous nature. The American Civil War is known in popular American history as

the war that freed the slaves, implying the cause of the war solely to be the tension created by the mutually exclusive views held by the North and South vis-à-vis slavery. However, there exists a version of history, which serves as the mainstream view's doppelganger, best identified by the moniker "The Lost Cause." This particular memory asserts that the southern states seceded for cultural reasons, to wit, the preservation of honor; rather than slavery.

The antagonistic memories of the Yom-Kippur War are similar to those of the American Civil War in that they were created to advance the interests of their respective creators. Indeed, the memory propagated by Anwar Sadat is insistent in claiming that the war was a military and political success for Egypt. By contrast, Golda Meir attempted to instill the belief that the Yom-Kippur War was an undeniable and complete success for the Israelis. One must then wonder how such antagonistic and differing memories are able to be so prevalent; the answer is that the creators of these memories actively seek to engender a strong connection between the populace and the memory in question.

In laymen's terms, many memories that are antagonistic or dichotomous in nature owe their existence to propaganda. Indeed, regimes throughout time have relied on propaganda to influence popular memory, and thereby cultural identity. Apropos, it was the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that sought to redefine the cultural identity of those Germans living within its borders by engaging in a massive pro-Communism propaganda campaign. Yet, propaganda is not the only means through which inaccurate or non-consciously altered memories are propagated; evident through the evolving historiography of the Women's Movement in the United States. Once thought to be primarily the domain of white, middle-class women, further research of the movement has caused a gradual shift of opinion—one that recognizes the role of non-white feminists. Indeed, even the pioneer historian of this epoch, Sara Evans, recently conceded that inherent limitations at the time of her research left her original interpretation flawed.

Historians are thus forced to deal with a multitude of complicating factors when attempting to recreate the past. Primary sources (read: memories) present a problem because they are subject to the wills of their creators (as often are written sources), as such they often misrepresent reality. Moreover, as the example of Sara Evans shows, historians are subject to limitations of their own, i.e. conceptual abilities or perspective. These kinds of complications compel

historians to draw from a wide range of sources in an effort to account for the inconsistencies engendered by human creators; essentially, historians attempt to average out the extreme memories. Moreover, and perhaps more important, the malleability of memories allows different cultures, and even subcultures, to remember a specific event in a manner that upholds that culture's ideals. Therefore, it is the very flexibility of memory that aids in maintaining a particular culture's identity.

## SPECIAL SECTION

# DEMONIC MONSTER OR JUST EMPEROR: THE TWIN MEMORIES OF JULIAN THE APOSTATE

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*Matthew Chambers*

The historical memory of a powerful figure can obtain symbolic value equal to that of a major event. In ancient history, few figures are as salient and as controversial as the Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus, more commonly known as Julian the Apostate. After the process of Christianization begun by Constantine in 313 CE, Julian reigned as both the first and last emperor who called himself a pagan in late 361 CE. On one hand, Julian can be seen as a rebel striking out against the seeming tidal wave of Christianization by creating an entirely new form of paganism to compete with the new religion; on the other hand he ruled as a radical conservative attempting to return the empire back to as it had been centuries before. The memory of Julian remains a perplexing one. Unlike the romanticized accounts of Alexander the Great or the vilified caricatures of notoriously evil emperors like Caligula, the memory of Julian survives both to vilify and glorify him.

The negative depictions of Julian probably originate from invectives written by Gregory of Nazianzus between 362 and 363, the Archbishop of Constantinople and an outspoken rhetor. Though Gregory was primarily reacting to Julian's conversion to paganism, the archbishop also attacked Julian's attempts to divorce classical culture from Christianity. Gregory certainly found Julian's apostasy unforgivable; however, Gregory also wished to see Christianity and Classical culture combined.<sup>1</sup> The bishop was not alone among Christians

1. Susanna Elm, "Hellenism and Historiography: Gregory of Nazianzus and Julian in Dialogue," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 3 (2003): 494.

who attempted to cherry pick their way through pagan literature and philosophy. Nevertheless, there was a contingent of Christian leaders who agreed with Julian on the separation between Christianity and pagan learning. Gregory's invectives do more than simply attack Julian the man; they attack Julian as an idea. With these objectives in mind, Gregory created his image of Julian: a man with a sudden excited laugh, a lolling head, and whose eyes glanced to and fro "with a certain insane expression."<sup>2</sup> Clearly, something is wrong with Gregory's Julian. Gregory did not merely suggest the emperor's "insanity," he took his time in drawing it out. In short the bishop branded Julian as an instrument of the devil.

This idea began to take hold, especially in the eastern half of the Roman Empire and beginning as early as 363 CE among Christians, shortly after Julian's death. One of the many examples comes in the sixth century in the *Life of St. Basil* in which St. Mercurius kills Julian, characterized as the serpent, during the campaign into Persia. In other accounts, Julian violently persecutes Christianity (although the man, one time a Christian, understood the religion well enough to know that martyrdom only aided in its propagation and thus explicitly avoided creating martyrs) by tempting notable Christians with power and wealth. When these men refuse paganism, Julian executes them.<sup>3</sup> In many of these accounts Julian makes a deal with demons or in some way has demonic associations—a theme that would last well into medieval times. This demonized memory of Julian served as a way for later Christians to unite against an imaginary enemy and thus define themselves.

Despite this caricature of Julian, there existed more positive, and even perhaps romanticized versions of his life. This probably originates out of the pagan tradition. Ammianus Marcellinus, a pagan historian who fought under Julian during the 363 CE invasion of Persia, declared, "Julian must be reckoned a man of heroic stature, conspicuous for his glorious deeds and innate majesty."<sup>4</sup> Other pagans such as the famed rhetor of Antioch, Libanius, and the pagan historian Zosimus also seem to have had positive outlooks on Julian's life and accomplishments. For the late fourth- and fifth-century pagans, Julian's failed

2. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Julian the Emperor: Containing Gregory Nazianzen's Two Invectives and Libanius' Monody with Julian's Extant Theosophical Works*, trans. C. W. King (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), Oration 5.23.

3. Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 226–228.

4. Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, trans. and ed. Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 22.4.

defiance against Christianity probably seemed heroic if not tragic, especially as Christianity grew to become more intolerant and aggressive with respect to paganism. However, pagans were not the only ones who looked favorably upon Julian; two Christians in the West, St. Augustine and Prudentius, seem to have respected Julian despite taking a dim view of the emperor's religion.<sup>5</sup> These themes carried over—in the 1600s playwrights portrayed Julian as a tragic hero. Later on, the enlightened philosophers, such as Voltaire and Diderot, remembered Julian as a like-minded philosopher who rebelled against Christianity and religion in general, though their characterizations often overlooked Julian's own pagan zeal.<sup>6</sup>

Both traditions of Julian the Apostate have survived into modern times. These memories of Julian are based on some level of truth. However, stories about Julian, whether a enlightened hero or the demonic emperor, often tell us more about their authors than they do about Julian himself. In both cases someone has simplified Julian to an idea that the author fashions for his or her own self-definition or a definition of the notorious other.

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5. While this characterization of Julian was not perfect by any means, he was far from demonic and even tragic. Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, 225–226.

6. Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, 232–233.

## SPECIAL SECTION

# LOST CAUSE: A CIVIL WAR MEMORY EVALUATED

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*Melissa Klatzko*

No American war caused as much devastation as the Civil War. It left hundreds of thousands of people dead, and ravaged the economy and infrastructure of the South. By the time the South had surrendered, its economic wealth had decreased by sixty percent, and a quarter of its military-age white men lay dead.<sup>1</sup> The South lost the war and with it slavery, the mainstay of the southern antebellum economy. As the dust settled, it became necessary to justify the desolation. No longer could the South claim slavery as the primary cause—the nation, through the outcome of the war, had declared that line of reasoning politically dead. To retain some political power and control, the white South chose to remember its shared culture, not the institution of slavery. Historians refer to this memory as the Lost Cause.

The Lost Cause offered the region's whites meaning when their fundamental beliefs began to fail. It used "symbols, myths, ritual, theology and organization" designed to "meet the profound concerns of postwar Southerners."<sup>2</sup> According to the Lost Cause, the South fought for states' rights, not slavery. At the end of the war, Jefferson Davis, the former president of the Confederacy, "claimed that 'slavery was in no wise the cause of the conflict.'"<sup>3</sup> The Lost Cause memory also claims both the loyalty and happiness of slaves—a line of reasoning founded in

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1. Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, eds. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 11–34, <http://www.netlibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=68656> (accessed December 21, 2010), 13.
  2. Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 10–11.
  3. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 15.



the earlier defenses of slavery.<sup>4</sup> Defending slavery gained new importance for white southerners, and ministers continued to stress biblical support for the former doctrine, while explaining that God had allowed slavery to civilize and Christianize Africans.<sup>5</sup> Rather than focusing on slavery, the South claimed that cultural differences caused the Civil War and that the South had a superior culture to the North.<sup>6</sup> For example, the southern clergy painted northern invaders as barbarians and southern soldiers as righteous, moral, defenders of southern culture.<sup>7</sup> According to the Lost Cause memory, the South legally seceded from the Union—a line of reasoning the North had disagreed with during the war. Lastly, it venerates the Confederate leaders and soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Southerners denied slavery as the primary cause for leaving the Union, leaving states' rights, part of the language of secession, as their explanation for the Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

Groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and various memorial associations helped create and propagate the Lost Cause. They sponsored writings and speeches that transformed the southern view of the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> Southerners venerated the dead soldier, creating memorials and focusing on the soldier's honors and battles.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, this memory affected more than just the southern states by becoming part of the entire American cultural experience. Popular American movies, such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), portray happy and contended slaves alongside a reverence of the southern home-front culture. The national park system has preserved the area and building where "Stonewall" Jackson died—giving tours and reading testaments of his death.<sup>12</sup> In 1999 Virginian citizens debated whether to hang a portrait of Lee outside in the newly constructed Canal Walk. The year before, Virginians also debated the acceptability for their state to celebrate "Confederate History Month."<sup>13</sup> In such ways, American culture expresses the Lost Cause memory. However, the memory of the Lost Cause has decreased in importance since the early twentieth century, as the New South took the place of the old order, and Confederate soldiers died.<sup>14</sup>

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4. Ibid., 16.

5. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 102–104.

6. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 16–17.

7. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 40–41.

8. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 17–18.

9. Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*, (2001 repr., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 10–15.

10. Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865–1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4–5.

11. Ibid., 37.

12. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 16–19.

13. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, 6–7.

14. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 7–8.

Though pervasive in American culture, the Lost Cause memory represents a historically inaccurate view of the Civil War. The transcripts of speeches given by secession commissioners testify to the real causes of the Civil War. These men went to various southern states to convince them to leave the Union. Southern secession commissioners focused on race, racism, and slavery along with the fear of racial blending, racial wars, and racial equality, in their speeches, not states' rights, or southern culture.<sup>15</sup> In his speech to Georgia's legislature, William Harris cited multiple reasons for leaving the Union. He noted the North's abolitionist tendencies, and its failure to recognize and protect the individual right to slave property in southern states. Using racist ideology, he presented African Americans as incapable of self-government and claimed that the Founding Fathers allowed for slavery because they believed in an inferiority of Africans when compared with whites. Taking it one-step further, he claimed that the southern states would rather see all of their white populous dead than equal to black men.<sup>16</sup> Men such as Harris called for disunion, not for the sake of states' rights, but to preserve slavery and the racial order. They used the fear of racial equality to convince others, who may not own slaves, to join their cause.

Accounts from southern secession commissioners demonstrate that the Lost Cause memory misrepresents the South's reasons for leaving the Union. Yet it still offered a justification for leaving the Union. The Lost Cause gave white vers a memory that permitted them to maintain their honor while accepting defeat. It helped the South to support white supremacy, influence politics, and become a society that prized tradition and deference to authority.<sup>17</sup> A largely cultural movement, the Lost Cause demonstrated that memory can shape society and serve a profound purpose even if it contains inaccuracies.

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15. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, 74–81.

16. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion*, 83–89.

17. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 193–198.

## SPECIAL SECTION

# DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF VICTORY: ANWAR SADAT AND GOLDA MEIR REMEMBER THE YOM-KIPPUR WAR

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*Kevin Weng*

On October 6, 1973, during the Jewish holiday of Yom-Kippur, Egyptian and Syrian armed forces initiated a well-coordinated offensive against Israeli troops stationed in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. Although the ferocity of the Arab onslaught initially floored the Israeli Defense Force, Israel's armed forces quickly recovered its operational integrity and successfully stemmed the Egyptian-Syrian advance on two fronts. By the time the United Nations instituted a hastily conceived ceasefire on October 22, Israeli troops had already pushed Syrian forces back towards Damascus and had begun the process of surrounding the Egyptian Third Army.

In assessing the outcome of the so-named "Yom-Kippur War," Egyptian President Anwar Sadat proudly stated in his memoirs that Egypt's military had won a "victory [over Israel], which restored the self-confidence of our armed forces, our people, and our Arab nation."<sup>1</sup> Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, by contrast, stated emphatically in her memoirs that Israel won the Yom Kippur War. "I am convinced," Meir wrote, "that in their heart of hearts the political and military leaders of both Syria and Egypt know that they were defeated again, despite their initial gains."<sup>2</sup> Concerns over national pride obviously account for this disparity in opinions, but neither Sadat nor Meir knowingly fudged military and political realities for the sake of saving face. Both leaders, in fact, remained genuinely convinced of the veracities of their own accounts.

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1. Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* 2 ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 249.

2. Golda Meir, *My Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 420.

Since 1967, Israeli policymakers had seen little use for any diplomatic discourse with their Egyptian counterparts. Egypt, after being dealt an ignominious defeat during the 1967 Six Day War, operated under an embarrassing stigma of its own military ineptness. The country's political and military reputation changed, however, after the Yom-Kippur War of October, 1973. "The October War," Anwar Sadat wrote in his 1974 *October Working Paper*, "was the first war which [Egypt] started on [its] own initiative, away from the fear of Israel's domination, the inclinations of foreign countries and considerations of the international balance of power."<sup>3</sup> Overlooking the expected hyperboles of such a statement reveals that the Egyptian president linked his understanding of "victory" to the political recognition that came with Egypt's role as the initiator of the conflict. Indeed, the first four days of the Yom-Kippur War witnessed a stunning vindication of Egyptian military prowess, prompting even Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan to grudgingly note in his memoirs that "the standard of combat of the Arab soldier [during the October War] had improved."<sup>4</sup> The euphoria of Egypt's early military success, however, lingered in Sadat's mind even after Israel steadily reversed the military balance. In fact, when justifying Egypt's acquiescence to the eventual October 22 ceasefire, Sadat noted that diplomats made an agreement to end hostilities "on the basis of defining and maintaining the real magnitude of my territorial victory."<sup>5</sup>

Golda Meir, in her rendition of events, asserted that diplomats created a ceasefire in order "to get the Arabs out of the mess they had got themselves into and to rescue the Egyptian and Syrian forces from total defeat."<sup>6</sup> While the Israeli Prime Minister had a less nuanced opinion of the Egyptian army's fighting capability than her defense minister, Meir nevertheless held a firmer grasp of the realities on the battlefield than Sadat. Egyptian forces had not broken under the strain of a renewed Israeli counterattack, but few would deny that the Yom-Kippur War ended with Israel holding a significant strategic and tactical military advantage. Israel's "victory," Meir claimed, deserves credit for giving rise to "the only time the Arab states were prepared to recognize the existence of the State of Israel was when they attacked it in order to wipe it out."<sup>7</sup> Incidentally enough, Sadat later inferred in a 1978 speech that Israel recognized Egypt as a viable

3. Anwar Sadat, *The October Working Paper—Presented By: President Mohamed Anwar El Sadat* (Cairo: Ministry of Information, 1974), 25

4. Moshe Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: Story of My Life* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976), 510.

5. Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 270.

6. Meir, *My Life*, 437.

7. Meir, *My Life*, 437.

military rival only after the latter attempted to wipe out the former; Meir herself never acknowledged such an interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, both Sadat and Meir avowed that they actively sought the attainment of a meaningful peace. “I wanted my victory to be maintained,” Sadat noted, “because I regarded it as the avenue to the just peace for which I had worked unceasingly.”<sup>9</sup> On the other side of the debate, Meir wrote that “although we had neither wanted nor started the Yom Kippur War, we had fought and won it, and we had a war aim of our own—peace.”<sup>10</sup> Yet despite the likeness of their own self-professed wish for concord, Sadat and Meir possessed radically different viewpoints regarding the outcome of the 1973 Yom-Kippur War. How leaders define and remember the triumphs of their nation’s past falls down to the subjective standards of “victory” that they themselves derive in hindsight. In cases without clear-cut winners or losers (which are the most common by far), the difficulties of drawing facts from recollections become all the more prevalent.

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8. Anwar Sadat, *Speeches and Interviews of President Mohamed Anwar El Sadat* (Cairo: State Information Service, 1978), 115.

9. Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 270.

10. Meir, *My Life*, 437.

## SPECIAL SECTION

### A NEW PAST:

# EAST GERMAN PROPAGANDA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW IDENTITY

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*Lorn Hillaker*

The Berlin Wall was the physical manifestation of the difference between East and West. It represented the divisions of government, ideology, and, at its fall, the minds of separated peoples, but the Wall itself did not establish all of these potent abstractions with its presence. Instead, a difference of living conditions, economics, and propaganda generated the split reality of German life after the Second World War. People believed themselves to be different, and they were conditioned to feel that way. The leadership of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) understood that propaganda and dissemination of ideas to the people was particularly important in the creation of a new identity. With a shattered infrastructure, millions dead, and an uncertain future, the party leaders and de facto controllers (alongside the Soviets) of both the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ) and the GDR looked to the creation of a new *Volk*. These men wanted a new communist ideal to strengthen East Germany and set it on the “correct” path. As such, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) devised a particular brand of propaganda that used a new anti-fascist revisionism to construct a distinct East German identity.

If not immediately socialist, what then, was the core of a new East German identity? According to Dietrich Orlow, “The communists decided early that the cornerstone of the new German national identity had to be anti-Hitlerism and antifascism.”<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the new government needed to create a situation in which East Germans could remember their past and feel pride despite Nazism.

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1. Dietrich Orlow, “The GDR’s Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945–1989,” *German Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (October 2006): 538.

Anti-fascism soon developed a strong backing in the society and the SED buttressed it with a large number of anti-fascist heroes. In fact, the creation of “a pantheon of anti-fascist heroes for the emulation of the young afforded the State another opportunity to build a strong propaganda.”<sup>2</sup> The nature of anti-fascism varied from the purging of Nazi party members in education systems; to the creation of a personality cult for a murdered Communist Party of Germany (KPD) leader Ernst Thälmann, and even to the commemoration of the Buchenwald concentration camp as the place where German anti-fascists were “the first inmates.”<sup>3</sup> The GDR advanced a mythology of a valiant German past based on communist resistance to Nazism. With this comforting feature, the communists could claim they alone upheld justice and lived as “clean” Germans. A fast developing dictatorship of the SED could therefore be justified, because it represented the good in the German past and psyche. In fact, “without the myth of the antifascist legacy two facts above all lose their justification: the very existence of the German Democratic Republic and the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party.”<sup>4</sup>

East German propaganda thus emphasized the role of resistance in their society to avoid the landmine of Nazism and its crimes. This memory could be utilized in the construction of a new identity. Though nebulous, identity as a term can avoid oversimplification when referring to a people by restricting its understanding to determine the kinds of identity that the East German leadership attempted to place upon its people. On the one hand, Marxism-Leninism reigned and created the GDR’s necessary relationship with the Soviet Union, one in which the East Germans and Soviets coexisted as great friends as new ages of world communism developed.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, distinguished German communists attempted to develop their own versions of socialism, most notably Anton Ackermann and his work “Is there a Special German Way to Socialism?” This work did not deny the primacy of communist ideology or Marxism-Leninism, but rather stated that it was possible to avoid “the violence and social dislocation that characterized the building of socialism in the Soviet Union.”<sup>6</sup> However, as the ideology of the state took hold, and Walter Ulbricht began increasingly to accelerate the pace of socialism in the GDR, society began to change. Change culminated in a surge

2. Gregory Wegner, “In the Shadow of the Third Reich: The *Jugendstunde* and the Legitimation of Anti-Fascist Heroes for East German Youth,” *German Studies Review* 19, no.1 (February 1996): 129.

3. Randall Bytwerk, *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi German and the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 34.

4. Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 100.

5. *Ibid.*, 150.

6. Orlow, “The GDR’s Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945–1989,” 539.

of popular disapproval demonstrated in the East German revolution of 1953. Obviously, the revolution failed, and the people's dissatisfaction and demands for free elections remained largely unaddressed.<sup>7</sup> However, the demonstrations indicated that East Germans did not identify themselves as mere party members, or communists. Instead, they remained German individuals, who remembered a brief democratic interlude and experienced a tumultuous past.

East German identity remains a complex topic, largely due to the disconnect between party propaganda, popular perception, and actual sentiments. It is difficult to know for certain how an East German would have perceived both their past and themselves. However, the propaganda of the early German Democratic Republic worked to establish a new, socialist identity that maintained German distinctness. The GDR leadership worked to establish this through the veneration of anti-fascist heroes, but also attempts to alter the political system to represent German traditions and not rigidly follow Soviet models. As time wore on, the identity shifted in East Germany and became what is now canonized in former East German's popular memory, including Spreewald Pickles, queues, and the Free German Youth. Memory constructed identity in the early German Democratic Republic, but ultimately, propagandistic memory did not establish the primary forces for identity, instead living and common experience constructed what it meant to be East German.

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7. Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945–1989* (London: Routledge, 2005), 21–22.



SPECIAL SECTION  
A SHIFTING PARADIGM:  
COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE  
U.S. WOMEN'S MOVEMENT  
OF THE 1960s AND 1970s

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*Jessica Letizia Lancia*

Collective memory is a community's shared representation of the past. Studies of collective memory focus on why and how groups "remember" historical events in specific ways. Yet collective memory and historical analyses are also often problematically linked. As in other social movement histories, in the case of the U.S. feminist movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, this was in part due to the personal involvement of historians in the movements.

Sara Evans's 1979 *Personal Politics* was the first historical work on the subject. It argues that the feminist movement consisted mainly of white, liberal, and middle-class women rooted in the civil rights movement and the New Left.<sup>1</sup> Evans's experience as a movement activist anchored the influential text and helped to create the grand narrative of the movement as a white, liberal, and middle-class phenomenon.

Paradoxically, this grand narrative reinforced the collective memory of the movement. Other movement histories, like Alice Echols's *Daring to be Bad*, expanded the chronology of the movement while emphasizing similar historical subjects.<sup>2</sup> It would be several years before historians challenged the grand narrative of the movement, altering its collective memory.

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1. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Random House, 1979).

2. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

As the movement historiography developed to discover a wider range of feminist activisms, the narrow definition of feminism expanded. Stephanie Gilmore articulates the problem with conceiving the movement along these narrow lines well. In *Feminist Coalitions*, she argues that the grand narrative not only “fuels discontent but also serves to further marginalize the women’s movement.”<sup>3</sup>

Scholars have debunked this narrative in part by broadening our collective understanding of the subjects involved in the women’s movement. In producing studies of non-white, non-middle-class, and non-liberal feminists, these historians altered the way the women’s movement is perceived and remembered.

*Radical Sisters*, by Anne Valk, is one of the most significant books on the subject. Valk examines black and white feminists’ modes of thinking and the connection between the feminist movement and the black liberation movement. She argues that, while initially distinguished by racial and class lines, “eventually, these divergent streams of activism merged.”<sup>4</sup> Their merger formed a foundation for feminist thinking of the future.

Recent scholarly work on the labor movement has also dispelled the traditional narrative that middle-class activists comprised the women’s movement. In *The Other Women’s Movement*, Sue Cobble examines the history of labor feminism to challenge the concept that working-class women were not involved in the women’s movement.<sup>5</sup> Starting with the 1930s, she links socialist feminism to the leadership of labor women, helping to deconstruct the view that the women’s movement lay dormant for fifty years after the Nineteenth Amendment’s passage in 1920.<sup>6</sup> Along with Valk (and many others), she offers the theory that historians must expand their definition of feminist activists to those who considered race and class issues as equally significant to (and intimately connected with) feminist issues.

This critique of the grand narrative was not lost on Sara Evans, who accepted the shortcomings of her analysis. In 2008, she weighed in on *Personal Politics*, explaining, “I had neither the questions nor the conceptual

3. Stephanie Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 1.

4. Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 186.

5. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

6. Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 7.

tools to grapple with the complexities of differences *among* women beyond recognizing the historically specific circumstances that made cross-racial alliances very difficult in the late 1960s.”<sup>7</sup> Coming to grips with the legacy of her work, her latest book, *Tidal Wave*, examines the women’s movement from a broader temporal and cultural perspective, incorporating analyses of racial dynamics and the movement’s diversity that had been lacking in her previous book.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions*, viii.

8. Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 16.



## FEATURED ARTICLES

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# ENSLAVEMENT IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND, A.D. 500–800

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*Janel Fontaine*

The creation of slaves in medieval England was a significant aspect that impacted all inhabitants of Britain, be they Pict or Angle, peasant or lord. These social and ethnic groups all contributed to the perpetuation of an institution that dated from prehistoric and Roman times and maintained a presence in the British Isles as late as the twelfth century. The presence of these nameless slaves is preserved in documents of all types, including histories and chronicles, law codes, and saints' lives. The institution was maintained not only through violent capture associated with warfare, but also as a punishment for severe crimes. Both of these processes suggest that slavery was justified as a means of retribution. Enemy soldiers could be forced to endure the basest submission and servitude to those they fought against. Criminals faced the forfeiture of rights and possessions in response to violating the king's laws. Though little historiography exists that investigates this period, the time is no less important to the development of England and medieval class distinctions than slavery after 800. This institution as maintained by the Germanic migrants and the kingdoms they created remained an important part of Anglo-Saxon, and therefore English, history for the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, and even continued beyond the Norman Conquest of 1066.

To understand the process of enslavement in the early medieval period, it is necessary to first examine its precedents. Slavery in England can be traced back to the time before the first Roman campaigns under Julius Caesar in 55 and 54 B.C., when the Celtic tribes of the British Isles sold captives as slaves to the Roman Empire in Gaul.<sup>1</sup> Though no written sources exist from within Britain,

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1. Anthony Birley, *The People of Roman Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 145.

this ready supply of slaves to the Empire suggests that slavery was a practice known to the Celtic tribes even before the Romans. After the Roman conquest of A.D. 45, slave exportation of Celts to the Empire on the continent began to increase in volume. Historian R. G. Collingwood even asserted that slaves were Britain's greatest resource and one of the main drives for the Roman invasion.<sup>2</sup> As Romans emigrated to Britannia they probably brought their slaves with them, and it is known for certain that slaves were purchased from Pictish tribes.<sup>3</sup> A personal letter also survives that alludes to a slave market in London.<sup>4</sup> Slavery continued to exist after the withdrawal of the Roman armies from Britannia in the early 400s. Examples appear in the works of Saint Patrick, who himself was captured as a slave in southern England from a family of Romanized Britons.<sup>5</sup> His examples clearly demonstrate the commonality of slavery among the three main ethnic groups of the British Isles in the period between the Roman withdrawal and the migration of Germanic tribes, both in the volume of those captured and the frequency with which enslavement occurred.

The written sources demonstrate that the Germanic migrations were not peaceful.<sup>6</sup> The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle details battles from the fifth and sixth centuries, either between the new arrivals and the settled Britons or between

2. R. G. Collingwood and J. L. N. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1937), 52.

3. *The Digest of Justinian Volume IV*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krueger (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 886. "Pomponius libro primo ex variis lectionibus. Mulier in opus salinarum ob maleficium data et deinde a latrunculis exterae gentis capta et iure commercii vendita ac redempta in causam suam reccidit. Cocceio autem Firmo centurioni pretium ex fisco redendum est." Pomponius was a second-century jurist, and Cocceius Firmus' name is inscribed on the Antonine wall. For Pomponius, see Henry John Roby, *An Introduction to the Study of Justinian's Digest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1884), 171. For Cocceius Firmus, see Birley, 146.

4. Birley, 146.

5. Ludwig Bieler ed. and trans., *The Works of St. Patrick; St. Secundinus, Hymn on St. Patrick* (New York: Newman Press, 1953), 21, 41–42, 44–45.

6. For the purpose of this brief article, "Germanic" refers to those groups of people from Europe who immigrated to Britannia in waves which began in the mid-fifth century and continued for the next century. These groups included largely Saxons and Angles from areas of modern-day Germany, Jutes from modern-day Denmark, and even possibly Gauls and Frisians. For evidence of Frisian settlement during this period, see George C. Homans, "The Frisians in East Anglia" *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 10, no.2 (1957):189–206. While not all immigrants were Germanic, the term is used collectively in this study to easily differentiate the newcomers with the Britons and Romans already existing within what would become England. In spite of their diverse origins and likely intermarriage with Romano-Britons, these groups would eventually only become recognized in history as Angles and Saxons, giving rise to the later term "Anglo-Saxon" to describe the descendants of these varied migrants.

groups of the Germanics.<sup>7</sup> The medieval historians Gildas and Bede likewise detail the military exploits of the Germanic tribes, viewing them more as violent invaders than as peaceful immigrants. During this period, it is likely that Britons, Picts, and Scots were seen as a ready supply of slave labor for the influx of Germanic tribes, and doubtlessly captives taken from the native population, through either battles or raiding, were turned into an unfree labor force.<sup>8</sup> The ethnic groups on the Continent from which the migrants came were known to enslave and possess slaves.<sup>9</sup> Within the island of Britain, the seven powerful kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy emerged, and many wars were fought between them.<sup>10</sup> Documented by Bede, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and even hagiography such as the *Vita Wilfridi*, these battles signify strife between kingdoms. As the kingdoms of the Heptarchy solidified their power, conflict also arose between the remaining British kingdoms and principalities in the west. These regular violent conflicts involved the capture of individuals<sup>11</sup> and raids on settlements<sup>12</sup>, which created slaves.

7. Michael Swanton ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

All ASC citations are taken from the translation of the Winchester manuscript. While the Chronicle officially began compilation in the ninth century, the earliest versions were based upon sources that no longer exist, particularly church records. The Chronicle, unlike Gildas and Bede, who were closer in time to these events, gives a good overview of these conflicts without the overt religious message of the other two authors which occasionally obscures the true events in their texts. The Chronicle combines their works with other sources to present a concise overview of the events.

8. For clarification, the terms shall be defined thus. The word "Pict" refers to a culturally and politically independent group that lived in the North and East of what is now Scotland. While culturally similar, they maintained a number of autonomous kingdoms, much as in the Heptarchy, which will be discussed later. "Briton" refers to those of a mixed Roman and Celtic descent who existed in Britannia before the arrival of Germanic immigrants. While it is likely that intermarrying took place between these new arrivals and the Romano-Britons, as well as a certain degree of cultural assimilation, for the most part the "Britons" were pushed westward as Anglo-Saxon territory expanded, until the Britons occupied what is now Wales and Cornwall, where Brithonic languages are still spoken to this day. "Scots," also known as "Gael," are the Irish immigrants and their descendants who colonized areas of Britain along the western coast between the northern borders of British territory and into that of the Picts. The settlement of the Scots from the west occurred for the majority during the fifth and sixth centuries, concurrently with the Germanic migrations from the east and south.

9. David Pelteret, "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading in Early England" *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981): 99–114 and Pelteret, "Missing Half-Millennium," 100–101.

10. As its name suggests, the Heptarchy consisted of seven kingdoms: Wessex, Essex, Sussex, Kent, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria. It existed from the sixth century to the ninth century, and while the aforementioned kingdoms were the strongest, there occasionally existed more than seven, such as when Northumbria was divided into Dalraedia and Bernicia.

11. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 400–405. Bede tells the story of Imma, a Northumbrian thegn who is captured by Mercians after a battle and eventually sold into slavery.

12. Swanton, *ASC*, 584 and 661. These entries discuss the taking of British "war-loot" by the West Saxons and Mercian raiding, respectively.



Despite the endurance of slavery in the British Isles and its prominence in Anglo-Saxon England, it has only come to the attention of scholars within the past thirty years. Perhaps this oversight has occurred because of limited sources, especially during the early period of Anglo-Saxon settlement and rule in England. Even archaeological evidence is nonexistent (or highly ambiguous) due to the nature of medieval slavery and enslavement, despite the bountiful studies of this period. The skeletal remains of a slave are indistinguishable from those of a free peasant, and excavations of markets yield only the goods for which captives may have been traded. No evidence has been put forth for the existence of a distinct material culture associated with medieval slaves. While manacles discovered on the European continent are frequently assumed to be evidence of slavery, this is unlikely. Iron manacles were expensive to create, and the number of captives suggested by the sources makes the use of iron manacles unfeasible when rope and wood were more common and much less expensive. These iron examples are more likely related to the imprisonment of criminals than the enslavement and transportation of slaves and war captives.

Given this paucity of sources, the examination of slavery in Anglo-Saxon England only began with the 1981 publication of the historian David Pelteret's article "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading in Early Medieval England," and the topic has since broadened under investigation. Prior to 1981, Anglo-Saxon slavery was only addressed in passing by such noted historians of the period as John Kemble and F. M. Stenton, and then only in a vague way.<sup>13</sup> Kemble, whose two-volume historiography was published in 1876, devotes an entire chapter to the "unfree" class, though he uses the status of slave as interchangeable with that of the serf. He devotes more effort to outlining the hierarchical divisions within the larger caste of unfree peoples, and believes that the sale of slaves was the inevitable but unintended result of captive taking. Stenton, whose book is widely regarded as a classic amongst historians of early medieval England, published the monograph in 1943. Surprisingly, he devotes even less time to the discussion of slavery than his predecessor, noting class divisions as the origins of the manorial economy.

Nonetheless, since Pelteret's first publication, the study of Anglo-Saxon slavery has grown to encompass investigations of gender roles,<sup>14</sup> reasons for the

13. John Kemble, *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1876) and F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

14. Ruth Mazo Karras, "Desire, Descendants, and Dominance: Slavery, the Exchange of Women, and Masculine Power," in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. by Allan J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994), 16–29; and David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800–1200* (Boston: Brill, 2009).

decline of the trade in the twelfth century,<sup>15</sup> and the Danelaw.<sup>16</sup> While every book and article contributes greatly to our understanding of slavery in Anglo-Saxon England, little attention has been given to the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. Most studies address slavery from A.D. 800 or later, most likely due to the exponential increase in surviving source material compared to the previous centuries.

The only historian to discuss slavery from 500 to 800 has been David Pelteret in his 1981 and 2002 publications.<sup>17</sup> These investigations are, however, only partial. The former addresses the slave trade from the Roman withdrawal to the last vestiges of the institution in the late twelfth century. As such, the period from 500 to 800 only occupies a fraction of his investigation, and the discussion is limited to a small number of sources (law codes, hagiography from outside England, and Bede) to prove that slave raiding and trading did indeed take place throughout this time period. The latter article briefly discusses the seventh and eighth centuries to examine the nature of the institution and establishes that slavery existed with certainty in that time period. Neither of these investigations take into account the full scope of slave capture and creation from the sixth to eighth centuries and the Anglo-Saxons's involvement, either as slavers or slaves. This topic deserves further investigation given that it was such a common and possibly even vital part of society in the very beginnings of modern England. During the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, slavery was in all likelihood not a self-sustaining institution, and therefore it required a constant supply of people.<sup>18</sup> Slaves in Anglo-Saxon England came from a variety of cultural groups, and from all levels of the social hierarchy. Individuals were enslaved from either foreign nations or within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms themselves. Of these enslaved foreigners, Britons, Picts, and Scots appear with relative frequency as subjugated peoples. This is largely a result of the warfare that is documented in the sources, which reveals the less-than-congenial relations between the Anglo-Saxons and

15. Ross Samson, "The End of Early Medieval Slavery," in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. by Allan J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994), 95–124; and David Pelteret, "A Missing Half-Millennium: The Beginning and End of Slavery in Early Medieval England," in *Slavery across Time and Space: Studies in Slavery in Medieval Europe and Africa*, ed. by Per Hernæs and Tore Iversen (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2002), 69–95.

16. David Pelteret, "Slavery in the Danelaw," in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. by Ross Samson (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), 179–188.

17. Pelteret, "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading".

18. The best comparison for this is African slavery in the American South, which encouraged and fostered (many times against the slaves' will) procreation, which then increased the labor force on any given holding. This intentional 'production' of slaves was not as great a factor of Roman slavery, and written sources do not support it as an aspect of Anglo-Saxon society.

their neighbors to the north and west. Slaves were commonly taken after battles or raids, either to be sold for ransom, kept for purposes of forced labor, or sold for profit.<sup>19</sup> The Old English word *wealh* could refer to a Briton or a foreigner in general, but also to a slave. The dual meaning of *wealh* suggests that British slaves were common in some Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, though not all Britons were slaves. Ine's seventh-century West Saxon legal code frequently refers to *wealh* in both free and unfree contexts. The Irish were known to have conducted slave raids on Wales during this time period,<sup>20</sup> and it is likely that the Anglo-Saxons did the same. The etymology of *wealh* certainly leaves no doubt as to Anglo-Saxon ideas of subjugation regarding the Britons, or indeed any outsiders. Given the proximity of Wessex to medieval Wales, Ine's laws intend *wealh* for Britons specifically, but the connotation of "foreigner" certainly applies. The *Vita Richarii*,<sup>21</sup> which details events in the mid-600s after 645, and the *Vita Filiberti*,<sup>22</sup> composed after 684, both tell of clergymen journeying from the area of modern-day France to England for the purpose of redeeming captives. Thus *wealh* may not have only applied to Britons, but also to Gauls, or even Picts or Scots. Picts were probably an important source of slaves in northern Anglo-Saxon England. As previously discussed, Roman and early Irish sources link the Picts to slave raiding practices prior to 500. Tensions were high between the Anglo-Saxons and the Picts, and it is likely that this practice continued to some extent. It is most likely that the early Anglo-Saxons in Deira and Bernicia, and later Northumbria, found themselves increasingly at odds with the Picts as the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms coalesced. While surely this did not preclude peaceful trade (which may have included slaves), the violent dispute in the written sources stands as our only definitive proof of slaving between the Picts and Anglo-Saxons. In the seventh century, the *Vita Wilfridi* author Eddius Stephanus provides a glimpse at these difficult relations between the Picts and the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>23</sup> In approximately 671–673, the Picts launched an offensive against Northumbria, which was then ruled by Ecgriffrith. Ecgriffrith defeated the Pictish forces. Following the battle, the source twice refers to the Picts

19. While distinct examples exist for each, all are exemplified by Bede's story of Imma, who was captured after a battle, kept as a captive until he proved to be trouble, and then sold to a merchant in London. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 400–404.

20. Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 88.

21. *Vita Richarii Centulensis Primigenia*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, Script. Rer. Merov. 7 (Hannover and Leipzig, 1920), 448.

22. *Vita Filiberti Abbotis Gemetecensis et Heriensis*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, Script. Rer. Merov. 5 (Hannover and Leipzig, 1910), 596.

23. Dorothy Whitelock ed., *English Historical Documents c.500–1042* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), 694.

as existing in a state of slavery, which most likely represents both the figurative subjugation of the Pictish tribes via tribute to Northumbria and the capture of slaves following the battle.<sup>24</sup> Stephanus does not make this clear because, as with many examples, a discussion of slavery is not the purpose of the document. Nonetheless, in either instance it exemplifies slavery as a penal institution. In this case it is an expression of Ecgrith's dominance over the Picts, and the Pictish subservience to Northumbria both literally and figuratively. Here, enslavement is the punishment for those Picts who slaughtered Northumbrian soldiers in the battle.

In the north, Scots are known to have been taken as slaves, though the means by which this was accomplished is still unknown. In the *Vita Germani*, the saint frequented slave markets in France to purchase captives and free them.<sup>25</sup> Among the names of other European ethnic groups, "Scottus" is specifically mentioned by the author as those assisted by Germanus. It is likely that these Scots became captives as a result of warfare and were then sold into slavery, along with the "Britto" and "Saxo" also mentioned. Though these latter two terms could also denote people from continental Brittany and Saxony, it is quite possible that they too were Britons and Saxons of the British Isles, given the accompanying Scots. David Pelteret attributes the existence of Scottish slaves to the encroachment of the Germanic emigrants north and west, which threw the majority of the island into turmoil.<sup>26</sup> The *Vita Germani*, as with most hagiography, only addresses slavery in the context of Germanus' sanctity, and thus we know little of why or how these Scots were enslaved. Given that Scottish territory bordered that of Bernicia, Pelteret's supposition carries weight and establishes that these captives were also taken to symbolize Anglo-Saxon dominance over outside groups.

Though the Anglo-Saxons themselves had a ready supply of slaves from across their borders, it should not be forgotten that violent means of capture were used with some frequency between rival kingdoms. It is important to remember that although Anglo-Saxon England is frequently regarded as a unit, the term is anachronistic and the so-called unit was comprised of independent kingdoms. Thus the people of each kingdom would have regarded the people of all other kingdoms as foreigners. The best-known case for this is Imma, a Northumbrian thegn who was captured after a battle between the aforementioned Ecgrith, king of Northumbria, and Æthelred, king of Mercia. Declaring himself to be a

24. Whitelock, 694.

25. Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Germani ep. Parisiensis*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, Script. Rer. Merov. 7 (Hannover and Leipzig, 1920), 415.

26. David Pelteret, "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading in Early England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981): 102.

peasant, Imma was captured and enslaved by the Mercians.<sup>27</sup> Imma's enslavement demonstrates the clear desire of the Mercians to subjugate the Northumbrian as a continuing reminder of Northumbria's defeat in that battle. His Mercian owner, when he learns of Imma's high status, declares: "Et nunc quidem dingus es morte, quia omnes fraters et cognate mei in illa sunt pugna interemti."<sup>28</sup> To satisfy the blood feud, the Mercian believes that he ought to kill Imma for the kinsmen lost at the hands of Northumbria. Instead, the Mercian deems it a fitting punishment to condemn Imma to a life of servitude. While this story only comes to us because of its association with a miracle, it nonetheless provides insight into the capture of Anglo-Saxons from other kingdoms after battles.<sup>29</sup> While Bede believes Imma's status at the time of capture is remarkable, the fact that a band of Mercians would enslave a man left alive on the battlefield is not.

Roughly fifty years after Imma was taken as a slave by fellow Anglo-Saxons, Brihtwold, Archbishop of Canterbury, composed a letter to Forthhere, Bishop of Sherbourne, regarding a girl held captive in Glastonbury. Brihtwold implored Forthhere to convince the abbot who possesses the girl to accept 300 shillings paid by her family to ensure her freedom. The archbishop, clearly sympathetic to the family, wrote:

"Per quas obsecro, ut ipse omnino optineas a predicto abbate, quatenus pro eadem puella trecentos accipiat solidos...quo possit reliquum vitae suae spatium cum consanguineis suis non in servitutis tristitia, sed in libertatis transigere laetitia."<sup>30</sup>

Begging the abbot to accept the money, the Archbishop hoped that the girl could be freed of servitude to spend the rest of her life in joyous freedom. As the historian Dorothy Whitelock notes about this particular letter, the wergild of 300 shillings was the established wergild value of a nobleman in Kent, as established by the laws of Hlothhere and Eadric.<sup>31</sup> These examples demonstrate that the taking of Anglo-Saxon captives was an unexceptional occurrence, which occurred throughout

27. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 400–402. "Occisus est ibi inter alios de militia eius iuuenis vocabulo Imma; qui cum die illo et nocte sequenti inter cadauera occisorum similis mortuo iaceret...iuventus est et captus a viris hostiles exercitus et ad dominum ipsorum, comitem videlicet Aedilredi regis, adductus."

28. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 402–404.

29. Bede's story relates how Imma could not be bound by any fetters during his captivity at certain times of the day. This was attributed to Imma's brother, a clergyman, who daily said mass for his brother, whom he believed killed in the battle. Imma's fetters came unbound at the times of the masses.

30. Brihtwold to Forthhere Epist. 7, *Bonifatius et Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, MGH, Epp. sl. 1 (Hannover and Leipzig, 1916), 2.

31. Whitelock, 731. For the Kentish law, see F. L. Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 18. "Gif mannes esne eorlcundne mannan ofslahð þane ðe sio þreom hundum scell' gylde."

the various kingdoms, north and south. This also, unusually, shows direct attempts of redemption of a slave after capture. This interesting situation in which the family knew of the girl's whereabouts and had the means to ransom her provides tantalizing hints at a desire to enslave a member of a specific family. She may have been taken captive for a specific purpose, such as profiting off the ransom or humiliating the girl's family, or even both. The girl may very well have been enslaved as a punishment for some offense to the bishop.

During this time, slavery was unquestioningly supported and upheld by law, both to maintain the unfree position of captured individuals and to provide a means of punishment for breaking the law. All four surviving law codes from this time period were composed in the seventh century, and are attributed only to Kent and Wessex, thus making any inferences about penal slavery applicable only to the south during this time. Three of the four law codes address the subject of raiding, suggesting that the issue was a recurring problem that needed to be repeatedly addressed over the course of a century. The first issues appear in the laws of Æthelberht, promulgated in the first decade of the seventh century.<sup>32</sup> Two simple laws exemplify the matter:

24. If a man binds a free man, he pays 20 shillings.<sup>33</sup>

88. If a man binds another man's slave, he pays six shillings.<sup>34</sup>

Both of these address the possibility of either slaves or freemen being captured and forced into servitude, an act denoted here by binding. The twenty-fourth law sits among punishments for homicide, suggesting that reducing a free individual to slavery was akin to death. The eighty-eighth is in the section regarding compensation to an owner for crimes against a slave or servant, *esne*. Laws that provide punishments for the theft of both free and unfree people also appear in the code of Hlothhere and Eadric,<sup>35</sup> and that of Ine.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Hlothhere and

32. Whitelock, 357–359; tentatively dates as 602–603.

33. E. T. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 6. "Gif man frigne man gebindeþ, XX scill' gebete."

34. Attenborough, 16. "Gif man mannes esne gebindeþ, VI scill' gebete."

35. Kings of Kent, tentatively issued between 673 and 685 according to Whitelock, 360. Law 5 particularly addresses the punishment should a freeman steal a man, most likely either free or unfree. "Gif frigman mannan forstele, gif he eft cuma stermelda, secge an andweardne. Gecænne hine, gif he mæge: hæbbe þare freora rim æwda manna & ænne mid in aþe, æghwile man æt þam tune þe he tohyre; gif he þæt ne mæge, gelde swa he genoh age," Attenborough, 18.

36. King of Wessex, code issued between 688 and 694 according to Whitelock, 364. "Gif mon forstolenne man befo æt oþrum, & sie sio hond oðcwolen, sio hine sealed þam men þe hine mon ætbefeng tieme þonne þone mon to þæs deaden byrgelse, swa oðer fioh swa hit sie, & cyðe on þam aðe be LX hida, þæt sio deade hond hine him sealed; þonne hæfð he þæt wite afylled mid þy aðe, agife þam agendfrio þone monnan," Attenborough, 52–54.

Eadric found it necessary to restate these laws, less than a century after Æthelberht and in the same kingdom, demonstrates that slave raiding within Kentish borders was a recurring issue. Not only that, but Hlothhere and Eadric expanded upon the law, allowing the testimony of witnesses in the thief's defense, which suggests that before the code's promulgation, illegal enslavement was claimed to extract the 20 shilling wergild from others. Ine's is the first surviving law code for Wessex, though it is likely that previous kings similarly faced the prospect of slave theft. It is also reasonable to assume that the issue was not settled by the promulgation of Ine's law code, since the laws of Alfred of Wessex, issued in the late ninth century, continue to provide punishments for those who steal people.<sup>37</sup>

This theft of slaves or the impression of free people into servitude must have been common; laws were repeatedly issued in an effort to stop the practice. While the incentive itself is not important, it was great enough for individuals to continually risk legal punishment over the centuries. Furthermore, these laws may be seen as a means of distinguishing fellow subjects of a kingdom as different and of a higher value than foreigners, including the subjects of other kingdoms. For example, the laws of Æthelberht were probably never intended to protect East Anglian slaves or freemen from being stolen by people from Kent. The secular laws protected free people and slaves within the borders, and any conflict between kingdoms would most likely be arbitrated by the Christian Church, as exemplified by the case of the girl held captive in Glastonbury mentioned above.

Slaves within a kingdom could also be created via legal means: penal enslavement. This practice appears in the contemporary laws of Wihtred and Ine, and was reserved as a punishment for severe crimes. In both Wihtred's Kentish laws<sup>38</sup> and Ine's laws for Wessex, theft constituted a crime deserving of slavery.<sup>39</sup> In the former, a freeman only needed to be caught stealing, whereas the latter required that a theft be committed with the knowledge of a thief's household, in which case the spouse and children of the thief would also become penal slaves. Ine's third law also dictates that any freeman who works of his own volition on a Sunday shall forfeit his freedom, though some manuscripts allow a fine to be paid in place of servitude.<sup>40</sup> A penal slave could also be either Anglo-Saxon or *wealh*, a foreigner likely of Celtic descent, and were differentiated within Ine's

37. Issued between 871 and 899 according to Whitelock, 372–380. "Gif mon cierliscne mon gebinde unsynnigne, gebete mid X scill," Attenborough, 78.

38. Issued in 695, according to Whitelock, 361

39. In the 26<sup>th</sup> law of Wihtred, "Gif man frigne man æt hæbbendre handa gefo, þanne wealde se cyning ðreora anes; oððe hine man cwele oþþe ofer sæ selle oþþe hine his wegelde alese," Attenborough, 28. In the 7<sup>th</sup> law of Ine, "Gif he ðonne stalie on gewitnesse calles his hiredes, gongen hie walle on ðeowot," Attenborough, 38.

40. "Gif ðonne se frigea ðy dæge wyrce butan his hlafordes hæse, ðolie his freotes," Attenborough, 36.



laws in terms of punishment. Britons, as foreigners, were regarded as inferior to Anglo-Saxons, and the laws provide for their harsher treatment and lesser value.<sup>41</sup> The legal creation of slaves within a kingdom implemented the humiliation of subjugation. Penal slaves appear no different from captive slaves in the law codes, and likewise lost their rights as freemen. This demonstrates the use of slavery as retribution for flouting the king's authority, similar to enslaving war captives who fought against the king and his army.

It is significant to note that during this period, any member of society faced the prospect of enslavement, either via crimes or violence. Laws against theft and border raiding would most commonly have affected the lower classes, peasants and small landholders. Even though Imma was taken captive when he appeared to be a peasant, he was kept in slavery after his master discovered his true identity as a thegn. Members of the nobility who found themselves enslaved were most likely victims of wars and feuds. The girl in Glastonbury exemplifies this given that from 709 to 731 (the time frame of the letter's composition) Wessex went to war with Mercia and Sussex.<sup>42</sup> The girl could easily have been a captive taken as a result of these conflicts, and gifted to the abbot of Glastonbury. Balhild, a slave in Merovingian Gaul of Anglo-Saxon origins lived in the mid-seventh century and is believed by some historians to have been a member of the East Anglian nobility prior to her enslavement.<sup>43</sup> It is not known how or why Balhild was taken out of England, though her alleged status at birth and her later marriage to King Clovis II would suggest political motivations. Cultural groups, languages, or location did not limit slavery and methods of enslavement. No one individual was guaranteed perpetual freedom, and thus the slave class within Anglo-Saxon England was rather diverse. This in turn demonstrates that the institution of slavery could be used to demonstrate dominance over any member of society by forcing their submission and forfeiture of free rights.

The early institution of slavery in England remains remarkable because, despite massive social and political upheavals from prehistory to the High Middle Ages, it persisted as a significant part of society. Through Roman invasions, withdrawals, and the arrival of diverse new settlers, people were enslaved for a variety of reasons. The sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries were no different,

41. Attenborough, 42, 54. Ine's 23<sup>rd</sup> law sets the wergild of a Welsh slave at 60 shillings, and his 54<sup>th</sup> law states that Welsh penal slaves required an oath of 12 hides (a unit of land measure) to be compelled to suffer a beating. Anglo-Saxon penal slaves, however, required an oath of 34 hides. Since a greater amount of land was needed to ensure the beating of an Anglo-Saxon, the slave was not only worth more than a Welshman, but also it was easier to ensure the beating of a Welshman.

42. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 42.

43. Paul Foracre and Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 102.



even with the arrival of the groups which would later be established as the Anglo-Saxons. Slaves were created from outside their kingdoms, but also from within, demonstrating that slavery was a convenient means of expressing dominance through retribution for military offenses or breaking the law. Slaves could be made from any cultural or social group to achieve these ends, peasant, foot soldier, or aristocrat. The three centuries discussed here constitute the crucial formative years of Anglo-Saxon power. This in turn provided the foundation of future power consolidations in the late ninth and tenth centuries, by kings such as Alfred and Æthelstan, who became known as the first king of all England. The institution's regular appearance in the early law codes demonstrates its part in the establishment and maturation of common law. Slavery remained a part of Anglo-Saxon life throughout this, making it pertinent to the study of the creation of England as a unified and strong medieval state. For this reason alone, slavery during these formative years of Anglo-Saxon England deserves closer study and analysis.

# PERCEIVING THE DANGEROUS MASSES: PRESS REACTION TO RIOTS AND POLICE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LONDON AND NEW YORK

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*Robert Wilkinson*

To study riots is to study social upheaval, whether in real or potential terms. While all riots and examples of collective crowd action originate from different historical circumstances and exist in separate and unique moments in time, they are connected in the sense that they all represent the symptoms of underlying conflicts within society. These conflicts can be understood as manifestations of underlying interpersonal antagonisms based on racial, religious, or class differences. These conflicts become apparent to an observer through the actions of rioters, the recipients of the collective crowd violence, and in the reactions and descriptions of the riots by observers and the press, which are directly shaped by their class and partisan worldview. While a riot in and of itself can illuminate the feelings of those actually involved in the crowd disturbance, what is more significant is how those actions are presented as a skewed perception of the events and shows how participants can create a lasting negative characterization.

In the chaotic atmosphere of a riot, the direction of the crowd in terms of who and what they direct their anger toward helps to illuminate their underlying antagonism. Historian Paul A. Gilje has stated that “rioters demonstrate what they are thinking not only by uttering slogans and obscenities, but by the actions they take and by the objects they attack” and that the actions taken in riots are not random, but represent the will of the masses that work at a more or less rational level.<sup>1</sup> This rationality and purpose can be seen when rioters composed of lower

1. Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), quote on page 2 and the concept of rationality is again discussed on page 7.

classes attack the symbolic and physical representations of wealth as well as the authority systems defending them. Even if justified in the minds of some rioters, these attacks and the way they are described can bring about a greater degree of control from the agents of authority working to maintain order in a rapidly growing urban environment.

Examining London and New York, the two largest cities in their respective countries, provides an excellent insight into the way in which society attempted to deal with the issue of maintaining order in an expanding urban setting. London's population doubled between 1750 and 1820, and New York's increased at an even more rapid rate, more than quintupling between 1790 and 1830. As the urban environment expanded, the geographical separation between rich and poor continued to grow greater and greater, and a new social characterization of the poor arose in the minds of the upper classes, created out of anxiety, based on misconception, and maintained by fear: that of the "dangerous classes."

When it comes to riots and crime, perception can often be more important and significant than reality. People who did not personally witness an event can only believe what they can read or hear, and in a growing metropolis like London or New York first-hand accounts may not reach middle- or upper-class homes. While press sources varied in their evaluation of police and military conduct, they split typically along lines of class and partisan allegiance. This biased worldview reinforced the perceptions of the middle and upper classes who saw the poor as dangerous and therefore in need of institutions, such as a professional police force, to instill a certain level of control. Whether a press release described police action against rioters as legitimate and necessary helped to reinforce a negative characterization of the mob's members in the eyes of the reader. Thus, the true actions of the crowd or the police are important, but how they are described can be just as significant in cementing the public view that stronger, and in many cases more brutal, tactics should not only be allowed, but encouraged as a way of maintaining order.

The actions of the crowd, the police's reactions to it, and the press reporting of the events can be seen as creating a positive feedback loop, which can best be understood as a type of runaway-train effect or a self-perpetuating cycle.<sup>2</sup> The concept was drawn from work in chemical reactions, but its' use in collective behavior theory comes from the early Chicago School of Sociology through the

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2. This scientific concept was first discussed by Norbert Wiener in his 1948 work on cybernetics, but it has been applied to such diverse events as boom and bust cycles, chemical chain reactions, and animal-herd behavior in incidences like a cattle stampede. A positive feedback loop occurs in a system where a variable A produces a variable B, which then produces more of variable A with the process then continuing on exponentially. Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1948), 95–116.

work of Robert E. Park and Herbert Blumer. A theory explaining the actions of those in a crowd that Park first described and Blumer advanced upon is the concept of a “circular reaction.” Blumer defined the process as “a type of interstimulation wherein the response of one individual reproduces the stimulation that has come from another individual and in being reflected back to this individual reinforces the stimulation.”<sup>3</sup> In short, the actions of an individual in a crowd are observed and then repeated by others, which can turn individual action into collective action. Seen in this light, a crowd gathered for any rational or reasonable purpose can still devolve into chaos if certain portions of the crowd begin acting in an unreasonable, or even violent, manner and that action is then repeated by others. While this model would seemingly run counter to Gilje’s notion of a crowd’s rationality, it can be separated in the sense that “circular reaction” only spurs a crowd to action but does not dictate to who or to what that action is directed upon.

In regards to nineteenth-century London and New York the process of the positive feedback loop can be seen in a broader context when a riot occurs, which can create its own violence but also brings on a violent reaction from the police or militia to quell it. These actions prompt the press to characterize the mob and its constituents as dangerous, which encourages authorities to institute stronger measures of law enforcement. Greater enforcement can illicit feelings of resentment and hostility from the populace, which can heighten the chances of creating a new public disorder and can turn peaceful events to violent affairs when police arrive on the scene. These events, when presented in the press, provide a convincingly skewed perception of both the menacing character of the crowd and the legitimacy of police action taken against them. These descriptions further entrench negative characterizations in the minds of readers who were not present on the scene.

The growth of the city made the lower classes less visible to the eyes of the upper and middle classes in symbolic and literal ways, and, therefore, the poorer elements of society would only be noticed when the press chose to write about them. British historian and criminologist Clive Emsley has written that because middle and upper classes in England rarely viewed criminal behavior, “perceptions of crime therefore depend largely on what they are told about it.” He goes on to state “that ‘crime waves’ and ‘moral panics’ could be accelerated, perhaps even generated, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by newspapers eager to boost their sales.” He also argues that the publication of crime statistics “together with reports of riots and disorders at home, and the repetition of notions like the

3. Herbert George Blumer, “Collective Behavior,” in *Principles of Sociology*, edited by Robert E. Park, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1939), 170–171.

concept of the ‘dangerous classes,’ possibly served to foster the perception of a longer-term crime wave in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> If crime was rising in the city, whether in actuality or simply through increased reporting, then there would need to be a police force dedicated to preventing it.

If the press, through its reporting, can make the poor visible to the upper classes then one must understand how they first became “invisible,” which is a more complex process than simple city growth defined on geographic and demographic terms. Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*, utilizes this industrial idea that visibility differed among the members of the factory hierarchy in order to legitimize the differential treatment of certain citizens by the government. In Smith’s mind the only individuals who could become self-governing were those that through their economic enterprise could be visible, such as in the transaction when a product is sold or traded, and therefore these people could not create the autonomous self-government that Smith felt could naturally be developed through interpersonal market transactions. Expanding urbanization left the working poor “in obscurity and darkness,” and “his conduct is observed and attended to by nobody, and he is therefore very likely to neglect it himself, and to abandon himself to every sort of low prodigality and vice.”<sup>25</sup> Without the moralizing gaze of other citizens in society acting upon them, the working poor could not develop this moral self-government naturally and therefore must be governed from above in order to help nurture their morality. This concept of visibility would become central in the development of governmental bureaucratic administration in the nineteenth century.

Engaged to the concept of instilling morality in the populace through bureaucratic means, Patrick Colquhoun, writing in 1806, was one of the first to discuss the idea of a preventive police force. Colquhoun was a Scottish merchant and statistician who founded the first preventive police force in England, the Thames River police, who were a privately funded force used to protect merchant vessels on the river. Colquhoun also saw the morality of working poor to be of the utmost importance for preserving an orderly society. In Colquhoun’s thinking, “an immoral man can never be a good citizen” and “the only means of securing the peace of society is by enforcing the observance of religious and moral principles.”<sup>26</sup> If the growing size of the working poor were becoming less visible to the elite, and in the same way, less moral, then the potential for those poor citizens posing

4. Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750–1900* (London: Longman, 1987), 245–246.

5. Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776; rpt., New York: Modern Library, 1937), 747, as interpreted in: Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, 33–34.

6. Patrick Colquhoun, *A New and Appropriate System of Education for the Laboring People, etc.* (London, 1806), 69–70, as referenced in A. P. Donajgradzki, *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 54.

a threat to the upper classes was dependent completely upon the perceived danger of those classes. This danger had little to do with any real danger as much as it had to do with the perception of danger, which bred fear. This fear is well described in Allan Silver's essay on the need for order in this new urban environment.

People saw themselves as threatened by agglomerations of the criminal, vicious, and violent—the rapidly multiplying poor of cities whose size had no precedent in Western history...the social order itself was threatened by an entity whose characteristic name reflects the fears of the time—the 'dangerous classes'... even when the term is not explicitly invoked, the image persists—one of an unmanageable, volatile, and convulsively criminal class at the base of society.<sup>7</sup>

This idea that there was one conglomeration of criminals and dangerous citizens at the base of society and that this element could potentially rise up and threaten the social order would dictate how the western world's two biggest cities would view and handle crime and disorder.

It is important at this point to discuss the historical background of the term "dangerous classes" because of the significant ideological baggage attached to the phrase. The term emerged in the American lexicon between the 1850s and the 1870s and was fully expressed by Charles Loring Brace in his 1872 work *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years Among Them*. According to historian Jeffery Adler, Brace, along with other social theorists of the time, "agreed that members of the dangerous class lived—or perhaps hid—among the poor, blurring distinctions between the unfortunate and the deviant."<sup>8</sup> These observers drew sharp distinctions between the working class and this "dangerous class" because the simple act of gaining and maintaining employment involved consent by the individual to participate in society and represented a positive act.

The heterogeneity of the American city, and especially New York, represented a dangerous cross section of unemployed and immigrant groups to urban elites who saw these two groups as "menacing because they lived apart from civilized society" in ethnic enclaves or slum conditions.<sup>9</sup> It is here that the concept of who is dangerous and who is not can be seen as relying greatly on the notion of visibility and employs the same type of thinking that Adam Smith used to determine the ability for the working poor to develop self-government and morality. As cities continued to grow, the upper class feared the potential for cooperation and unification among those in the lower classes and saw "the city was a powder

7. Allan Silver, "The Demand for Order in Civil Society: A Review of Some Themes in the History of Urban Crime, Police, and Riot" *The Police: Six Sociological Essays*, David J. Bordua ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), 3.

8. Jeffery S. Adler, "The Dynamite, Wreckage, and Scum in our Cities: The Social Construction of Deviance in Industrial America," *Justice Quarterly* Vol. 11 No. 1 (1994), 36.

9. Ibid., 38.

keg,” ready to explode at anytime in class or ethnic warfare. Whether or not this class actually did exist in anyway resembling the ideas of these reformers is less important than the perceived danger that these classes feared. The idea of the dangerous class “encouraged middle-class Americans to view the poor as a threat to society and persuaded policy makers to rely on the criminal justice system to address the effects of poverty.”<sup>10</sup> The reliance on the justice system and administrative government bureaucracy to handle this threat made it not only the goal of agencies like the police to handle these lower classes, but portrayed the failure to do so as an apocalyptic scenario that would destroy the American city.

The emergence of police forces in the nineteenth century dramatically altered how the public viewed a popular disturbance. In eighteenth-century England almost two thirds of popular disturbances were food or price riots.<sup>11</sup> These disturbances, in the eyes of historian E. P. Thompson, constituted a type of moral economy in which “men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs...that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community.”<sup>12</sup> This would change, however, with the loss of the communitarian aspects of nineteenth-century town life and the growing affinity for individual rights as supreme. As historian George Rudé has noted: “old notions of the ‘just’ price and ‘just’ wage imposed by authority or sanctioned by custom gave way to the new prevailing notions of ‘natural’ wages and prices in a freely competitive market.”<sup>13</sup> Public disturbances that were once an understood and expected part of society were now perceived as threatening or dangerous to the new economic order. As Silver has noted about industry in nineteenth-century England: “the market system was more allergic to rioting than any other system we know.... [A] shooting affray in the streets of the metropolis might destroy a substantial part of the nominal national capital...stocks collapsed and there was no bottom in prices.”<sup>14</sup> It would be this new type of economic thinking that placed a new emphasis on order that would prompt the creation of a new type of police and the idea that these disturbances not only could be stopped, but should be stopped.

The working-class population constituted a replaceable work force, but as historian Eric H. Monkkonen has contended in regards to New York’s developing industry, they “also necessitated the need for a depersonalized, visible, and

10. Ibid., Powder keg: 40, Second quote: 45.

11. John Stevenson, “Social Control and the Prevention of Riots in England, 1789–1829,” a section of Donajgrodzki, *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 28.

12. E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* No. 50 (1971), 78.

13. George Rudé, *The Crowd In History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730–1850* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), 226.

14. Silver, “The Demand for Order in Civil Society,” 20.

predictable police force to ensure social control of this work force so that economic interests could be maintained.”<sup>15</sup> It is difficult for the modern western observer, living in places that are patrolled daily by police, to understand or fathom a society operating before the creation of such a force. The old constable-watch system in England had been based on a half-century of “collective responsibility” in which the whole town was expected to heed the call of the “hue and cry” and work together to stop a public disturbance or crime.<sup>16</sup> With the expanding population of cities in the nineteenth century, this system lost effectiveness. For many, the potential threat from mobs necessitated a police force. However, to many others the potential for oppression from a standing paramilitary force was an even greater threat. To deal with the potential problems that a police force could bring the London authorities imposed a strict code of moral and physical restraint on its police force so that their force, though centralized and large in number, would appear to be legitimate and controlled in the view of the general public. This centralization of the police force made the individual policeman a symbolic representation of the will of Parliament in an attempt to make him “an institution, not a man.”<sup>17</sup>

The emergence of the London police force in 1829, the first professional force in a democratic society, was born from the events of the late-nineteenth teens and early twenties. During the Peterloo incident of 1819 the militia was used to quell a demonstration, which ended in bloodshed. Adding to this situation was the visible ineffectiveness of the militia to control the crowds at Queen Caroline’s funeral procession in 1821, which led many, such as Robert Peel, to work toward a stronger and more organized force. Robert Peel, an aspiring British politician who by age 24 had been appointed Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1816, had worked hard to implement the “Peace Preservation” bill, which provided the legislative basis for a permanent Irish uniformed police force.<sup>18</sup> The lack of organization was evident in the eighty-six separate law enforcement agencies that

15. Eric H. Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America 1860–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12.

16. Joseph F. King, *The Development of Modern Police History in the United Kingdom and the United States* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 15.

17. Wilbur R. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies: Police Authority in New York and London, 1830–1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 10–13.

18. Queen Caroline and her problematic marriage to King George IV added a great deal of drama to the royal household during the early 1800s. She was a much more popular figure than George and upon her death in 1821 a very large public crowd flooded London. The procession route was originally to pass by the outside of the city for fear that proceeding through it would spark civil unrest. Incensed at this the crowd forced the carriage procession off its main route and through the city. During the disorder, the crowd threw stones at the military guarding the procession and troops took fire at the crowd during certain moments. Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America*, 37–38.



policed London with little or no communication or coordination during 1820s. Through some political wrangling Peel was able to pass the Metropolitan Police Bill over opposition to a centralized force on the grounds that it presented the potential for despotic rule and on June 19 the professional London police force was born.<sup>19</sup>

One of the first tests for the newly formed London police would come in 1833 when a demonstration of the National Political Union for workingman's rights at Cold-Bath Fields turned into a chaotic display as 180 officers attempted to break up the crowd of four thousand and arrest the leaders. The *London Times*, opposed to the new professional police and sympathetic to the cause of the demonstrators, stated that "all the people who witnessed the conduct of the police cried shame and expressed their horror at their conduct...men, women, and children shamefully beaten."<sup>20</sup> The bad publicity raised from this event would lead to policies of increased precaution and preparedness for the police, which can be illustrated simply by looking at the amount of force and precaution taken to prevent any possible tumult during the 1848 Kennington Common Demonstration. Chartism posed a potential threat to the established social and political order and, according to historian Wilber R. Miller, the "working-class protest was defeated largely by middle-class commitment to the social order."<sup>21</sup> This commitment is illustrated by the over 100,000 special constables that were sworn in to prevent any possible turmoil when nothing close to a revolt occurred. In stark contrast to this controlled affair were the events of the following year across the Atlantic.

As the population of New York City grew from 95,519 in 1814 to 270,089 in 1834, the number of complaints that entered police courts rose more than four times during that same period.<sup>22</sup> According to Wilbur R. Miller, the massive looting and disorder in the "year of riots," 1834, "spurred business-oriented newspapers to campaign for reorganization of the police along London lines."<sup>23</sup> Due to the fears of many citizens of excessive government power, the push for a police force did not come until after fear of deadly crime arose in the public

19. David Taylor, *The New Police in Nineteenth-Century England: Crime, Conflict and Control* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 21.

20. *London Times*, May 16, 1833.

21. Chartism was a political movement for political and social reform between 1838 and 1850.

The main aims of the movement were universal suffrage for all men, no property qualifications for those in Parliament, annually elected Parliament members, and equal representation for the number of constituents. It was a working-class movement and while it did not succeed at the time it did pave the way for future reform movements. Discussion and quote from Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 9.

22. James F. Richardson, *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 25.

23. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 8.

mind with the unsolved 1841 Mary Rogers murder case, which was a highly publicized event that cast an ominous shadow on the current state of the city's law enforcement and highlighted the need for a stronger police force.<sup>24</sup>

The police force, created in 1845, was kept small and initially consisted of around eight hundred men.<sup>25</sup> It was also originally non-uniformed in an attempt to placate fears of a tyrannical standing army that conflicted with the democratic ideals forged in the American Revolution. While smaller in number than London's police, the New York police were given a greater degree of discretion in their use of force. The competing political forces of the city and state sought to control the police and in so doing weakened any possible attempt to expand the size of the police. In a scenario when a massive crowd threatened the public order, this lack of expansion proved especially problematic. In these cases, the small police unit could not quell the force of the crowd and the militia would have to be called in, leading to large amounts of bloodshed, which is exactly what happened outside the Astor Place Theater in 1849 where a crowd disturbance led to the death of thirty-one civilians.<sup>26</sup>

As historian Richard Moody describes in his history of the riot, the event was the result of a feud between the two actors William C. Macready and Edwin Forrest, "one a 'silk-stockinged' Englishman and the other a 'true-blue' son of America."<sup>27</sup> The running feud had started years before, and in the week leading up to the riot a day did not go by in which newspapers failed to cover an aspect of the controversy.<sup>28</sup> When Macready scheduled a string of performances at Astor Place, Forrest followed suit and scheduled to perform the same play, *Macbeth*, at the Browery Theater that same week. During Macready's initial performance on May 7, members of the balcony hurled insults, eggs, potatoes, and even a few chairs toward the stage, which caused the performance to end after only the second act.<sup>29</sup> Macready, fearful for his own safety, booked passage out of the country, but the following day a letter signed by prominent citizens, such as Washington Irving and Herman Melville, convinced him to stay on for another performance that Thursday. The letter, printed in full by many newspapers with

24. The Mary Rogers case received much press attention during the summer of 1841. She had reportedly disappeared in 1838 and her body was found floating in the Hudson River on July 28, 1841. The case was never solved and presented to many the ineptitude of the city's watchmen system of law. The case was also the inspiration for Edgar Allan Poe's story: "The Mystery of Marie Roget." Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 8.

25. Richardson, *The New York Police*, 38–39.

26. Richardson, *The New York Police*, 16–19.

27. Richard Moody, *The Astor Place Riot* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 2.

28. *Ibid.*, 99.

29. *Ibid.*, 108–111.

the list of signatories, illustrated to all the city of the allegiance of the upper class to Macready and made the lines of class stratification even more prominent.<sup>30</sup>

On the night of May 10, a crowd of over ten thousand New York citizens gathered in front of the Astor Place Opera House and, following the lead of an anonymous crowd member, started throwing large paving stones at the classical façade of the theater. The air was filled with the cries of “down with Macready!” and “burn the damned den of the aristocracy!”<sup>31</sup> Nearby sewer construction supplied the crowd with continual ammunition to bombard the windows and walls of the theater guarded by police stationed in and around it. What could have initially been an individual decision soon became the entire crowd’s decision as a continual shower of stones rained down on the theater. This embodies both the “circular reaction” theory in the spontaneous reproduction of stone throwing as well as the rational direction of the crowd as it was attacking a symbolic representation of wealth and class. Overwhelmed, the police dispatched a messenger to retrieve the waiting militia force.<sup>32</sup>

Thirty minutes later, around nine o’clock, the small militia force numbering less than two hundred pushed its way through the crowd to the front of the theater. Their appearance in front of the theater with fixed bayonets only raised the fury of the crowd. The stones, once aimed primarily at the walls of the building, began to bombard the rows of militia. The militia gave a proclamation calling for the crowd to disperse and gave an order to the troops to fire a volley over the heads of the crowd. With the sound of gunfire the masses retreated for a moment, but when it was obvious that no one had fallen from the blast, cries that the militia had fired blanks and other shouts filled the air.<sup>33</sup> Recorder Frederick A. Tallmadge ran into the crowd urging it to disperse, but fists and projectiles forced him to retreat behind the lines of the militia.<sup>34</sup> The militia was given the order to shoot and it proceeded to fire point blank into the crowd. It would take two more volleys to disperse the crowd. In the course of the turmoil, seventy-two police and militia were injured by stones and the crowd suffered thirty-one deaths and over one hundred injuries.<sup>35</sup>

30. The letter and names were listed in the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, *Morning Express*, and *The Evening Post* May 9, 1849. Referenced in Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2007), 209.

31. Testimony of Frederick A. Tallmadge from the Coroner’s Inquest as reported in the *Evening Post* May 14, 1849. Referenced in Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 8.

32. Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 2, 8, 136, 143.

33. Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 144–154.

34. Testimony of Frederick A. Tallmadge from the Coroner’s Inquest as reported in the *Evening Post* May 14, 1849. Referenced in Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 154.

35. Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 12.

The Monday following the riot, a Coroner's Inquest gathered testimony from bystanders and all officials involved and concluded, "the circumstances existing at the time justified the authorities in giving the order to fire upon the mob."<sup>36</sup> While American militiamen had killed rioters before, this marked the first time that they had fired numerous volleys at point-blank range into a crowd; actions which were legally upheld.<sup>37</sup> The string of press reports following the event would only crystallize the legal justification of the militia's action. The *Evening Post* was convinced that "the municipal authorities acted from the best of motives" and that they "should be the last to utter one word of censure against its officers."<sup>38</sup> The *Tribune* stated that "however much the destruction of human life might be deplored, a certain justice in the event would strike every mind and strengthen the satisfaction natural to the lover of order, when Law triumphs over wanton and brutal violence" and preached the "necessity of preserving the Public Peace and the Supremacy of Law."<sup>39</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* saw the event as displaying the opposing "law of the people and the law of the mob" and hoped that the event would teach the mob of "the absurdity of standing out against the power of the law."<sup>40</sup> Newspapers from other cities weighed in as well, *The Boston Times* stated, "the only fault was in using blank cartridges at the first firing, or rather firing over the heads of the mob."<sup>41</sup> The preservation of order was the cry of the day and those cries would make their way into upper-class ears through the press.<sup>42</sup>

The vindication of the police by the press and the government may have worked toward creating the perception that there was a "dangerous class," but the negative characterizations given by the New York press of the crowd outside the theater cemented that perception in the minds of middle and upper class readers. The *New York Tribune* described the theater as being "besieged by an invading army" and the *National Era* portrayed the crowd as "villains who would prey upon their fellow men."<sup>43</sup> The *Courier and Enquirer* stated "they came from

36. Coroner's Inquest in *The Evening Post* May 14, 1849, referenced in: Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 215.

37. Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots*, 241.

38. *New York Evening Post*, May 14, 1849, referenced in: Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 182.

39. *The New York Tribune*, May 14, 1849, referenced in: Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 205.

40. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 12, 1849.

41. *The Boston Times*, May 15, 1849, referenced in: Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 226.

42. It is important to note here that these newspapers all had intense political leanings and were often the most influential outlet for political candidates and partisan support. The *Tribune* was started in 1841 by Horace Greeley, a Whig politician, and the paper switched to a Republican leaning in the 1850s. Along with the *Tribune*, the *New York Times* was also a Whig and then Republican leaning newspaper. The *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* was closely connected to the Whig party. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was a firm supporter of the Democratic party from its outset in 1841.

43. *The New York Tribune*, May 11, 1849 and *The National Era*, May 17, 1849, both referenced in: Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 140 and 226.

an element of the community that, ungovernable in itself, knowing no law and having nothing at stake, is always ready to lend itself to mischief, for the mere sake of seeing how easily it can work mischief."<sup>44</sup> These characterizations showed the crowd as a lawless and mischievous element of society that had, with brute force, attacked a physical symbol of higher-class wealth in the theater and the personal representation of authority in the police and military working to defend it. The events at Astor Place brought on strong press characterizations of the mob as militant, uncompromising, and dangerous, and the actions taken against them would set the precedent in New York for the legitimate use of militia and violent force to quell riots in the future.

Astor place also brought about changes to New York's system of police. Chief Matsell sought to correct the problem of police ineffectiveness seen during the early stages of the riot by hiring a drillmaster to instruct the members of the force in the "school of the soldier," which included parade drill on public commons.<sup>45</sup> These new training techniques, in addition to the introduction of uniforms and the standard-issue baton for each officer, were all incorporated into the police reforms of 1853. Their uniforms made them a more visible force and, with the baton and the acceptance of officers carrying their own handguns, the police had more potential for violence.<sup>46</sup> While these new changes were intended to expand the policeman's control of the streets, they had the potential for producing greater bloodshed.

The press played an equally important role in the police reaction to mob demonstrations in London. On consecutive Sundays during the summer of 1855, disorder broke out in and around Hyde Park as many gathered to protest Lord Robert Grosvenor's proposed Sunday Trading Bill that forbade all Sunday trading in London.<sup>47</sup> This bill added to the working-class contempt for sabbatarian laws that had been brewing since the Wilson-Patten Act of 1854, which put restrictions on the Sunday operating hours of drinking establishments. The importance for some in instituting a moral influence on the lower classes can be seen in the language of moralists in Parliament who felt that the working classes were "very much in the influence of children" and that a law should help in their struggle with temptation.<sup>48</sup> On Sunday June 24, 1855, an estimated one hundred and fifty

44. *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, May 14, 1849, referenced in: Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 183.

45. Richardson, *The New York Police*, 68.

46. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 145.

47. Brian Harrison, "The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855," *The Historical Journal* Vol. 8 No. 2 (1965), 221.

48. Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Act to Prevent Unnecessary Trading on Sunday, *Parl. Papers* (1850), XIX (441), Q. 235, as referenced in Harrison, "The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855," 220.

thousand gathered for a meeting in Hyde Park.<sup>49</sup> Carriages of the wealthy who were partaking in customary Sunday afternoon rides through the park, were berated by calls of “go to church” from the crowd. According to a letter to the editor from one of those same carriage riders published in the *London Times* the following day, the outnumbered police lining the park roads were barely “able to prevent personal violence.”<sup>50</sup> Even with the park disturbance, Lord Grosvenor’s bill remained in the house and another public meeting was planned for the following Sunday.

The police, who had been ill prepared the preceding week, came with full force to meet the estimated one hundred and fifty thousand in the park on July 1. The *London Morning Chronicle* noted that the “military array” of the police implied a battle, and the crowd responded angrily when the police attempted to clear the carriageway.<sup>51</sup> The police used their truncheons to beat down any crowd opposition and carried off seventy-two men to the closest police station on Vine Street.<sup>52</sup> The crowd’s behavior the previous week had forced the police to present a stronger show of force, which had brought about a more violent reaction from the crowd and more physical force from police.

This back and forth between the crowd and the police did not perpetuate negative press characterizations in the way it did following the Astor Place riot in New York, however, only because of the way that the press perceived the crowd’s class composition. In characterizing the crowd, the *Times* noted, “many, judging from their dress, were of the respectable classes.” The opinion of the *Times* on the issue is illustrated in their assertion that “the sympathies of nine-tenths of the educated population are on the side of the rioters...the people of London don’t want a Sunday bill.”<sup>53</sup> The following day, the *Times* also deplored the “unnecessary violence the police used” and stated, “a more wanton assault was never committed by a gang of armed highway men.”<sup>54</sup> When “respectable” people were the recipients of physical force by the police the press expressed their sympathy with enthusiasm.

Prompted by the public backlash, Lord Grosvenor withdrew his measure. The working-class *Reynolds’ Newspaper* had seen the struggle over the bill as “betwixt the Aristocracy and Democracy; and the Aristocracy has been most

49. Harrison, “The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855,” 223. Hyde Park, one of the largest and most centrally located areas in London, was host to many political and social protests over the years.

During times of protest the park provides an interesting cross section of classes because of its use by the upper class for weekend carriage rides and picnics.

50. *London Times*, June 25, 1855.

51. *London Morning Chronicle*, July 3, 1855, referenced in: Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 13.

52. Harrison, “The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855,” 223.

53. *London Times*, July 2, 1855.

54. *London Times*, July 3, 1855.

soundly beaten.”<sup>55</sup> A Royal Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate the incident and concluded that “the police had shown excessive zeal,” but justified their attempt to prevent the meeting, feeling that when the events fell into perspective the reputation of the police would remain untarnished.<sup>56</sup> The following Sunday, a meeting was once again attempted in the park. The meeting was far less organized than the previous two Sundays and while the police maintained order within the park many in the crowd ventured onto nearby streets and broke over seven hundred windowpanes.<sup>57</sup>

The change in the press attitude between the previous two Sundays and this one reflected the perceived shift in the political and demographic nature of the crowd. The use of force by the police, which had previously been the target of contempt when administered against a “respectable” crowd demonstrating against a law deemed unjust by the press, was deemed insufficient when dealing with the new lower-class congregate. With the sabatarrian measure defeated, the *Times* was no longer politically supportive and took a more hostile characterization of the crowd. The reports of the following Sunday depicted the crowd as having “an unusual level of ragged boys and what is termed ‘roughs’” and criticized the police’s lack of force by comparing the two events: “the previous Sunday the police exerted an excess of authority.... [O]n this occasion they were rather under the mark.”<sup>58</sup> According to the *Manchester Guardian*, the protest had been orchestrated by “a set of ne’er-do-wells for whom there is no expostulation so suitable as a thick stick.”<sup>59</sup> Though the disorder had been minimal, the press determined the distinguishing line between respectable demonstrator and criminal ruffian. Whether there was a true shift in the demographic complexion of the crowd is hard to tell, but the descriptions of the crowds that gathered on June 24 and July 1 would appear in stark contrast to those on July 8, which could be just enough to convince a reader who had not personally been there.

This distinguishing line can be seen again in Hyde Park by the response to the disorder that accompanied the July 1866 protest against the Parliamentary

55. *Reynolds’ Newspapers*, July 8, 1855, referenced in: Harrison, “The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855,” 230.

56. *Royal Commission to inquire into the alleged Disturbance of the Public Peace in Hyde Park, Parl. Papers* (1856), XXIII (6), pp. x, xxii, referenced in Harrison, “The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855,” 224.

57. Harrison, “The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855,” 224.

58. *London Times*, July 9, 1855.

59. *Manchester Guardian*, July 11, 1855, referenced in Harrison, “The Sunday Trading Riots of 1855,” 224.



defeat of the Liberal reform bill.<sup>60</sup> In response to a proposed meeting in the park on the night of Monday, July 23, the government passed a provision effectively closing the park. As thousands descended upon the park, fifteen-hundred police stood ready to meet them. The police were effective in keeping the crowd from entering the gates, but in the confusion the crowd broke down a segment of the park's fences in an attempt to get in.<sup>61</sup> Again, here the physical nature of the crowd's action displays the chaotic and self-replicating nature of the "circular reaction" model. As a small portion of the crowd began to challenge the line of police protecting the park many others followed suit and the situation soon resembled a panic.

The *Times*, opposed to the Liberal reforms from the outset, stated that "the police had obeyed orders right well and held their ground," calling them "the friends of men and guardians of the peace," and that "the law, face to face with lawless boys, quelled them."<sup>62</sup> The *Times* depicted the crowd as "generally of the class known as 'roughs'" and "the foes of order and the natural enemies of quiet."<sup>63</sup> With the political sympathies of the *Times* opposed to those of the crowd it is again hard to say whether their characterizations of the crowd can be taken at face value, but their perception of the events would have been widely read and thus would have been influential in shaping public perception.

These broken railings in Hyde Park, while diagnosed as a mass affront to order in England, appear quite tame in comparison to the disorder of New York in the 1860s, which produced the largest public disturbance in United States history: the Draft Riots of 1863. According to Gilje, the Draft Riots "stand as the most violent and devastating of all American popular disturbances. More people participated, more people died, more property was destroyed, and authority was more challenged" than in any other event in United States history.<sup>64</sup> By the 1860s, the population of New York City had exceeded 800,000, but, in contrast to the large population, New York's police force had only reached 1,452 by 1863.<sup>65</sup>

Also, according to Jeffrey Adler, "more than any other event or force, the New York City Draft Riots of 1863 persuaded reformers that the urban population

60. Rejected in July of 1866, the Liberal Reform Bill was another failure of the working-class to gain suffrage. The bill contained an income qualification for enfranchisement and its rejection led to the meeting in Hyde Park. The Reform Act of 1867 did provide enfranchisement for working-class voters. Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867," *The Journal of British Studies* Vol. 6 No. 1 (1966), 100–03.

61. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 115.

62. *London Times*, July 26, 1866.

63. *London Times*, July 24, 1866.

64. Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763–1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 285.

65. Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 5, 42.



included a dangerous class” and that “this eruption became the model for dangerous class behavior in America.”<sup>66</sup> It was not only the violence and ferocity of the Draft Riots that scared reformers, but the fact that the riots invaded portions of the city that typically were untouched by urban strife, such as the neighborhoods of the city’s upper-class population. The Civil War brought about a business decline that increased Irish competition with blacks over jobs, and racial hatred only grew stronger when blacks were used to break a dock strike earlier in 1863.<sup>67</sup> That same year, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Conscription Act compressed the laboring classes like the proverbial powder keg ready to explode; all they would need is a spark.

On Saturday, July 11, the first names of the New York draft were drawn and printed in the *Tribune* for all to read and brood over on Sunday. On Monday morning, a large crowd had made its way to the front of the Ninth District draft office at Forty-sixth Street and Third Avenue. Not anticipating much trouble, Police Superintendent John Kennedy had sent only thirteen police officers to protect the draft office. After a short period, violence broke out between the crowd and the police. Led by members of Black Joke Engine Company Number 33, the crowd broke the windows of the office, destroyed the draft machinery, and attempted to burn the safe holding the draft papers.<sup>68</sup> Upon hearing the news via telegraph, Kennedy dispatched sixty more men to the scene and personally rode over in a carriage, but upon arriving the crowd recognized him and beat him within an inch of his life. The arriving police did little to stop the mayhem, and, believing Kennedy to be dead, the crowd then moved on to other parts of the city.<sup>69</sup>

With Kennedy beaten down, the job of police control rested solely upon Police Commissioner Thomas Acton, who attempted to gather all active officers at police headquarters to organize a response. It was this failure of preparation and organization coupled with the early easy victories over police that possibly encouraged many who might have remained spectators to join in the fray. Over the next three days, widespread violence and destruction of property enveloped the city, but the direction of the mob was not random. Homes of the wealthy were looted and burned as well as direct attacks on the offices of the *Tribune* whose publisher, John Sinclair, also found his house burned to the ground.<sup>70</sup> As Charles Loring Brace, social reformer, recalled two decades later: “who will ever forget the marvelous rapidity with which the better streets were filled with a

66. Adler, “Dynamite, Wreckage, and Scum in Our Cities,” 34.

67. Richardson, *New York Police*, 131.

68. Cook, *Armies of the Streets*, 56.

69. Richardson, *New York Police*, 135.

70. Cook, *Armies of the Streets*, 129.

ruffianly and desperate multitude...creatures who seemed to have crept from their burrows and dens to join in the plunder of the city.”<sup>71</sup> The mass destruction of property, violence, and the inability of police to quell the situation led to a call for a substantial amount of militia, and by the time the tumult was over on Thursday, there were over six thousand soldiers in the city.<sup>72</sup>

During the course of the riot, four hundred and forty three people were arrested by police with sixty-seven of those tried and convicted.<sup>73</sup> Historians have debated the official death toll, but it is estimated at around one hundred and twenty with around the same number seriously wounded. More interesting than the actual death toll is the inflated numbers given by government officials like Kennedy who estimated that 1,155 civilians had been killed in the riot.<sup>74</sup> Inflating the numbers in this instance can be seen as a way of illustrating both the bravery of the police and the danger and war-like circumstances of the riot. According to New York police historian James F. Richardson, “the department exhibited a strong collective pride in the way it exercised this responsibility regarding itself as the savior of the city.”<sup>75</sup> The characterization of the crowd given by Mayor Updyke would only add to the idea of the riot as a dangerous battle. He stated, “many were convicts, thieves and abandoned characters, the scum of this great city.”<sup>76</sup> The city had seemingly fought a criminal army and was victorious. Descriptions of the press would only cement this idea.

The *Tribune* best exemplified the class conflict at the heart of the riot, describing the rioters as “attacking indiscriminately every well-dressed man. The general cry was ‘Down with the rich men!’”<sup>77</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* likened the crowd to “a volcano,” which “is not more indiscriminate in destruction than is an infuriated mob when its passion is once excited.”<sup>78</sup> *Harper’s Weekly* spoke of the police’s “exemplary gallantry,”<sup>79</sup> and the *Times* stated, “nothing could exceed the courage and devotion with which the police performed their perilous duties.” The

71. Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years’ Work Among Them* (New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck Publishers, 1880), 30. Charles Loring Brace was a philanthropist and social reformer who founded the Children’s Aid Society in 1853 and was the promoter of the “orphan train” movement, which transported destitute children from eastern cities to the west where they would work on farms.

72. Cook, *Armies of the Streets*, 157.

73. Cook, *Armies of the Streets*, 178

74. *Ibid.*, 193.

75. Richardson, *New York Police*, 142.

76. Mayor’s veto message, July 25, 1863, in Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen, Special Session, July 27, 1863, vol. 150, MARC, referenced in: Cook, *Armies of the Streets*, 197.

77. *Tribune*, July 14, 1863, referenced in: James McCague, *The Second Rebellion: The Story of the New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1968), 71.

78. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 14, 1863.

79. *Harper’s Weekly*, July 19, 1863, referenced in: Richardson, *New York Police*, 142.

*Times* was also explicit in describing the mob as “the lowest and most ruffianly mob which ever disgraced the city,” and disassociated them from the general populace in stating, “the mob is not the people...made up of the vilest elements of the city.”<sup>80</sup> The *Times* viewed the attacks as stemming “from a malignant hate toward those in better circumstances, from a craving for plunder, from a barbarous spited against those in better circumstances.”<sup>81</sup> The *Times* added to the war-like characterization of the rioters by portraying them as “a ragged, coatless, heterogeneously weaponed army.”<sup>82</sup> These descriptions, an inflated death toll, visible destruction to wealthy homes and businesses, and the lack of questioning of the police or militia’s actions all cemented the notion that there was an underbelly of society ready to explode with unrestrained violence at any moment.

In their 1863 report, the police commissioners, prompted by the draft riots, did call for a prepared riot squad, but nothing official would result from that request.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the city was not about to let the events of the draft riots repeat themselves, and this would show on July 12, 1871, when it dispatched seven hundred police and over five thousand military men to protect approximately one hundred Orangemen marchers.<sup>84</sup> The members of the Loyal Orange Institution, or Orangemen, were marching to memorialize the victory of Prince William of Orange over King James II at the battle of the Boyne in 1690 and thus were commemorating Protestant ascendancy over Catholic rule.<sup>85</sup> Celebrating this event in a city filled with Irish Catholics had explosive potential, which could be witnessed in 1870 when Irish spectators attacked the precession of Orangemen and the situation turned into a street brawl, leaving five dead. In the early months of 1871 news of the Paris Commune heightened fears among the propertied that a working-class insurrection was indeed possible.<sup>86</sup>

80. *New York Times*, July 14, 1863.

81. *New York Times*, July 16, 1863.

82. *New York Times*, July 15, 1863.

83. New York police commissioners would continue to argue for the addition of a well-trained squad for the specific duty of riot control throughout the 1860s, but their efforts did not yield any results. The reason for this is partly because of the shifting nature of political control and the unpopularity of making the police represent a more militaristic force. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 22.

84. Hofstadter and Wallace, *American Violence*, 321.

85. Gordan, Michael A. *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2.

86. Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 55. The Paris Commune was the short-lived government of Paris between March 18 and May 28, 1871. The Commune was the result of an uprising that occurred in Paris following the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war. The movement created a working-class controlled government and proposed radical initiatives to French law. The bloody battle between the national guard of the commune and the regular French military gave the event ominous overtones for members of the upper class. It was followed extensively by American newspapers and presented the potential danger in a lower-class uprising.

Envisioning a potentially violent scenario, Police Superintendent James J. Kelso forbade the Orangeman procession in the week leading up to the event and tempers flared in the press. The *Times* stated that the city officials “now officially proclaim that the city is in the hands of the Irish Catholics.... [I]t is now decided that Protestants here have only such rights as Catholics choose to afford them.”<sup>87</sup> Also discussing the Draft Riots, the *Independent* said, “but in 1871 this same Irish Catholic mob, which hung Negroes and killed babies and burned orphan asylums, had but to threaten. The City surrendered.”<sup>88</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* chimed in stating that the “law can forbid or regulate processions, but the mob must not.”<sup>89</sup> The day before the proposed march, the governor reversed the police order and mandated that the marchers would be protected.<sup>90</sup>

On the morning of July 12, the marchers proceeded down Eighth Avenue surrounded by thousands of armed police and military. When the procession reached Twenty-fourth Street stones and other objects thrown from the spectators began to rain down on the procession. Multiple versions of the event were reported in the Coroner’s Inquest of the event and it is hard to determine whether or not there was an official order given to fire, but at that intersection the militia began firing directly into the crowd. When the dust settled and the disorder was over, thirty-seven civilians were dead and sixty-seven wounded.<sup>91</sup> That night, over five hundred policemen met outside of police headquarters, and assistant district attorney John R. Fellows stated that the men had “saved this fair city from ruin and disgrace.”<sup>92</sup> Superintendent Kelso informed them that the police board had voted to dismiss all but a small number of complaints against the police in recognition of a job well done.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to the Astor Place riot or the Draft Riots, the deadly action by militia and police in the Orangeman parade resulted from an imagined threat that had been worked up in the press and through rumors. These rumors, as the July 1 press release in the *Tribune* encapsulates, were based on the idea that “Roman Catholic secret societies were organizing, arming, and drilling bodies of men, preparatory to a bloody fight with the Orangemen.”<sup>94</sup> While the action by the crowd had been minimal, the possible threat they carried led to the great amount of military on hand and also added to the trigger-happy nature of the militia who may have held some anti-Catholic feelings of their own.

87. *New York Times*, July 11, 1871.

88. *Independent*, July 11, 1871, referenced in: Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 79.

89. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 11, 1871.

90. Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 89.

91. Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 120–133.

92. *World*, July 13, 1855, referenced in Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 147.

93. Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 140–147.

94. *New York Tribune*, July 1, 1871, referenced in Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 57.

The press accounts of the event produced conflicting visions. The *Herald* saw the outcome of the riot as “a glorious victory” and as “a battle having been fought and won for equal rights, the constitution, liberty, and law.”<sup>95</sup> The *Times* depicted some in the crowd as “evil-looking wretches, lowering browed, hallow-checked, shabbily dressed, and evidently the lowest of the low” and warned “let them once break forth, and their passion and violence would soon take its direction toward the property of the rich and well-to-do.”<sup>96</sup> The *Tribune* lamented, “in any large city such a lesson was needed every few years. Had one thousand of the rioters been killed, it would have had the effect of completely cowing the remainder.”<sup>97</sup> These reports not only reinforced the typical characterizations of the lower-class Irish, but also portrayed the militant response to the event as a necessary and unavoidable evil. The press had worked up the idea that the crowd would be dangerous, and in defending the action taken against the crowd had, in a way, proved that it was in fact dangerous. Perception, in this case, had truly become reality.

The *Irish World* described the event as “the most atrocious murder ever done by official authority...men, women, and children recklessly butchered.”<sup>98</sup> While this article, aptly titled “Slaughter on Eighth Avenue,” expresses the extreme overuse of force by the police, it would not deliver this message to a readership outside of the Irish community; thus, this paper’s sentiment would not reach to many outside the lower class. An anonymous correspondent to the *World* added solemn remarks on the press reporting of the event:

The newspapers, which make history, will carry down to posterity the narrative of the heroism, the gallantry, and the superhuman bravery displayed by the militia of this city.... The dastardly outrage in massacring our innocent fellow-citizens will be entirely overlooked; it will not be told that a body of raw and inexperienced soldiery, with little or no provocation, maliciously fired upon a mass of innocent spectators.<sup>99</sup>

This anonymous writer best encapsulates the disparity between the two press depictions of the event. The difference between massacre and praiseworthy victory over a dangerous underclass can be seen here as dictated not by action or blood, but with words.

It was a tumultuous and disorderly time in New York in the 1860s and early 1870s, but London fared much better in comparison during the same years. This was due in large part to a much more stable economy and the much

95. *New York Herald*, July 14, 1871, referenced in Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 164.

96. *New York Times*, July 16, 1871.

97. *New York Tribune*, July 23, 1871, referenced in Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 160.

98. *Irish World*, July 15, 1871, referenced in Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 154.

99. L. M. W. to *World*, July 19, 1871, referenced in Gordon, *The Orange Riots*, 155.

expanded and better disciplined Metropolitan Police. In the 1880s, however, economic downturn led to greater unemployment, overt poverty, and more public demonstrations. Middle-class fears of social insurrection and the possible alliance of the “residuum” and the “true working classes” began to grow and as historian Victor Bailey has noted the “true depth of these fears were revealed by the disturbances of 1886 and 1887 when for a brief but significant moment the urban poor represented a social menace to propertied Londoners.”<sup>100</sup>

The first of the two occurrences began with a two-platform meeting of the Fair Trade League and the Social Democratic Federation in Trafalgar Square on February 8, 1886 attended by ten to twenty thousand, many of whom were unemployed. After the meeting many began walking toward Pall Mall in the city’s wealthier area. The crowd began throwing stones and inflicted close to fifty-thousand pounds worth of property damage.<sup>101</sup> The *Pall Mall Gazette* described the occurrence as “the surging up to the surface of the bandits of civilization.”<sup>102</sup> The disturbance caused a severe blow to the public confidence in the ability of the police to protect the wealthier West End.

The following year the police, under the new direction of Sir Charles Warren, who instilled a renewed emphasis on military drill, would not be so relaxed in their approach. Seasonal unemployment in the autumn months had turned Trafalgar Square into an encampment of homeless poor.<sup>103</sup> Warren, at many points during the summer and autumn, asked the cabinet to forbid meetings in the square. However, it did not grant his request until November 8. On November 13, there was a proposed meeting by the Socialist Democratic Federation and the Irish National League and over ten thousand marchers descended on the square. Two thousand police attempted to dispel the meeting and in the process over two hundred civilians were injured and three died.<sup>104</sup> The lack of police action the previous year had brought about scorn from the wealthy populace, press, and government for their lack of action, which in turn had led to an over-excessive action by the police.

The *Times* described the meeting as a “gathering of the rough classes... composed of all that is weakest, most worthless, and most vicious in the slums of the great city”<sup>105</sup> and saw the results as “the beneficial effects of police action... the victory of order over disorder.”<sup>106</sup> Members of the stock exchange were keen to

100. Victor Baily ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1981), 94.

101. *Ibid.*, 95–96.

102. *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 9, 1886, referenced in Bailey, *Policing and Punishment*, 96.

103. Bailey, *Policing and Punishment*, 104–106.

104. Taylor, *The New Police*, 102.

105. *London Times*, November 15, 1887.

106. *London Times*, November 16, 1887.

express their gratitude to the police and opened a subscription list to reimburse the police for any injury. They raised 400 pounds in the effort.<sup>107</sup> No such public fund was made for the citizens who had been injured or the families of the deceased. The harsh criticisms of the demonstrators and the support for the police's use of force both perpetuated the idea that those in the crowd were a danger to the potential order and security of the city and thus warranted the action being taken upon them.

From the emergence of the modern police system to the events in Trafalgar Square, the fury of the mob has met the truncheon of the officer or the bullet of the militia. While the injuries and deaths may scream excessive force to the modern reader, these were not modern times. The massive and unprecedented growth of London and New York presented new and complex problems that needed to be dealt with to preserve order. London took the necessary legislative steps to ensure a larger police force, which allowed the government and police to have greater control over crowds during this period. The greater size of London's force, taken together with the choice not to arm its officers, resulted in less violence than New York during the same period. However, the events of "Bloody Sunday" in 1887 illuminate how even with superior control the fear and anxiety over the potential from the residuum was just as strong as in New York. In attempting to placate fears of a tyrannical standing army, New York kept its force small and when disorder occurred they could do little without the militia, which led to increased violence once a precedent of deadly force was set and legitimized. Order was the goal, but it often led to bloodshed.

The police, as the guardians of the peace, work to suppress disorder wherever it may appear, and when they use force against a crowd and are subsequently vindicated, then the crowd must have in some way warranted the action. This causes the representation of the crowd as the "dangerous classes" of society by the simple fact that they warranted the brutality acted upon them. The police are to suppress disorder and fight crime; so they did, so they were vindicated, and so therefore those they acted upon must be the criminal element. Those reporting on the action had just as much a hand in shaping how certain classes viewed each other than the actions of the mob or the use of force by the officer. While the press did not create the idea of the "dangerous classes," their reporting reinforced the characteristics of those classes to a readership that already held those beliefs and thus perpetuated the cycle of violence and biased characterization that worked to reinforce an already "dangerous" ideal.

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107. *London Times*, November 15, 1887.

# A SHORT HISTORIOGRAPHY OF NAT TURNER'S REVOLT: FACT, FICTION, AND WILLIAM STYRON

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*Stewart Kreitzer*

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."

Abraham Lincoln  
Second Inaugural Address  
March 1865

And the Holy Ghost was with me, and said, "Behold me as I stand in the heavens"—and I looked and saw...the lights of the Savior's hands, stretched forth from east to west, ... [a]nd I wondered greatly at these miracles, and prayed.... [N]ow the Holy Ghost had revealed itself to me, and made plain the miracles it had shown me.... [I]t was plain to me that the Savior was about to lay down the yoke he had borne of the sins of men, and the great day of judgment was at hand.

Nat Turner  
Interview with Thomas R. Gray  
November 1831



With Nat Turner's reputation ranging from that of an apocalyptic madman to that of a violent revolutionary, it seems odd to consider Turner's foreboding prophecy holding its own (with minor editing) next to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. Both expressed similarities in language, theme, and content, and both sound relatively moderate when compared with the extreme railings of some of the more rabid secessionists and abolitionists. While Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address is hailed as one of the most profound speeches in American political history, Turner's foreboding prophesy, coupled with the events surrounding it, has been charged as being among the most bizarre; and yet, Turner's insurrection is one of the most successful slave rebellions in U.S. history. These two views appear like bookends to an era when the legal foundations of American race-based slavery began to face an effectively violent challenge, and one ultimately resolved in a brutal conclusion.

Not surprisingly, the historiography surrounding Turner's 1831 slave rebellion has been intimately tied to the history of race relations in America, from the antebellum period to the civil rights era. As a result, differing "Nat Turners" appear in American history. This anomaly resulted not only from limitations in the historical record available at the time, but also from the latent cultural and intellectual agendas coloring the retelling of events. Furthermore, Turner's unconventional character could suggest a variety of intentions, which lend themselves well to a variety of interpretations.

Turner's shockingly ferocious 1831 insurrection lasted only a few days, but concluded with the violent deaths of sixty white men, women, and children, alongside two hundred blacks slaughtered by southern whites in retaliation. The uprising resonated not only with antebellum white southerners determined to maintain the status quo, but also with a northern abolitionist movement determined to end chattel bondage. Yet the coming Civil War did not resolve all conflicts, as nearly a century later Turner's legacy again erupted in the intellectual battles waged during the post-World War II civil rights era. Interpretations of Turner's legacy reflected not only the racial divisiveness of his own era, but also the conflicted credos of those who later wished to claim it as their own.

This essay will offer a short study of the historiography surrounding Nat Turner's life and legacy. It will examine primary accounts from Turner's own day, along with secondary analyses from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably, William Styron's influential 1967 Pulitzer Prize-winning historical "mediation" on Nat Turner, and the reaction that Styron's account inspired in an increasingly vocal African American intellectual community. In the case of

Nat Turner, fact and fiction have had their impact on the making and retelling of history.

## AN UNSETTLED INSTITUTION

Preserving the antebellum myth of the contented slave was important for maintaining the South's peculiar institution, yet Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943) cited documentation of over 250 instances of slave insurrections. Though a large percentage of these revolts comprised either spontaneous uprisings or small groups of slaves working to secure their personal freedom, a handful were well-planned insurgencies meant to overthrow the white dominated system of vassalage. In the years before Nat Turner's revolt, two cases stand out: Gabriel's Prosser's 1800 Rebellion in Virginia, and Denmark Vesey's 1822 South Carolina conspiracy.

Conservative estimates suggest that Gabriel Prosser organized well over a thousand armed slaves, but after assembling his forces, violent thunderstorms washed out the bridges leading to Richmond, leaving the conspiracy vulnerable to an effective counterattack. In South Carolina, Vesey's insurrection involved estimates of up to nine thousand, but a domestic servant in Charleston warned authorities of the plot on the eve of the attack. Though Styron incorrectly claimed that Nat Turner was a "man who led the only significant slave revolt in our history," Turner's 1831 rebellion *is* considered the largest sustained uprising.<sup>1</sup>

In a 1967 critique of Styron's account published in *The Nation*, Aptheker explained:

One of the themes of the novel is the uniqueness of this event. Of course, each event is unique, but... the actual fruition in uprising, in armed attack, occurred frequently in the United States on the part of slaves, from 1691 in Virginia to 1864 in Mississippi: this apart from uprisings in coffles and aboard domestic slave-trading vessels; the massive participation of runaway slaves in the Seminole Wars; and the persistent phenomenon of maroons everywhere in the slave region.<sup>2</sup>

1. William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 434.

2. Herbert Aptheker, "A Note On History," in *The Nat Turner Rebellion: The Historical Event and the Modern Controversy*, eds. John B. Duff and Peter M. Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 194. "Coffles" refers to a train of slaves fastened together. "Maroons" originally referred to fugitive slaves from the West Indies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

## AN INITIAL INTELLECTUAL ACCOUNT

Thomas Wentworth Higginson's 1861 essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," is credited as the first historical account of the rebellion. Higginson is described as "an important essayist" from "an old and aristocratic New England family."<sup>3</sup> His sympathetic tone towards Turner's cause was common among the abolitionists before the outbreak of the Civil War. Undoubtedly, the movement found inspiration in the boldness of Turner's insurrection as described by Higginson:

Who now shall go back thirty years and read the heart of this extraordinary man, who, by the admission of his captors...devoted himself soul and body to the cause of his race, without a trace of personal hope or fear,—who laid his plans so shrewdly that they came at last with less warning than any earthquake on the doomed community around,—and who, when that time arrived, took the life of man, woman, and child, without a throb of compunction, a work of exultation, or an act of superfluous outrage? Mrs. Stowe's *Dred* seems dim and melodramatic beside the actual Nat Turner.<sup>4</sup>

Though the Abolitionists preferred to avoid violence, they found in Turner a stunning example of Negro discontent. They promoted Turner's insurrection as an argument for the necessity of emancipation in order to avoid fresh acts of slave violence—something the southern cause accused the Abolitionists of inciting.

Higginson's earthquake metaphor appeared as a popular literary device in abolitionist literature. Less than a month after Turner's Southampton rebellion, William Lloyd Garrison wrote an editorial in his then nine-month old newspaper *The Liberator*:

3. Duff and Mitchell, *The Nat Turner Rebellion: The Historical Event and the Modern Controversy*, 52. Higginson is also credited with the discovery of Emily Dickenson while writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*. Along with being a leading American abolitionist before the war, Higginson published in 1870 *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, describing his experience leading African American troops during the Civil War. His regiment spent time stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, engaged in reconnaissance and salvage work along the St. Marys and St. Johns rivers.
4. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Nat Turner's Insurrection," in *The Nat Turner Rebellion*, 65. Concerning Higginson's reference to Stowe's work, *Dred* (1856), the book was Stowe's successful follow up to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe stated in her footnotes in Appendix I: "As an illustration of the character and views ascribed to Dred, we make a few extracts from the *Confessions of Nat Turner*, as published by T. R. Gray, Esq., of Southampton, Virginia, in November, 1831. One of the principal conspirators in this affair was named Dred."

What we have so long predicted,—at the peril of being stigmatized as an alarmist and declaimer,—has commenced its fulfillment. The first step of the earthquake, which is ultimately to shake down the fabric of oppression, leaving not one stone upon another, has been made....

You have seen, it is to be feared, but the beginning of sorrows.... The crime of oppression is national. The south is only the agent in this guilty traffic.

For ourselves, we are horror-struck at the late tidings.... We have warned our countrymen of the danger of persisting in their unrighteous conduct.... The blood of millions of her sons cries aloud for redress! IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION alone can save her from the vengeance of Heaven, and cancel the debt of ages!<sup>5</sup>

Without surprise, the southern reaction to Garrison's editorial was hardly applause. Still, in a series of debates held a few months later, the Virginia legislature considered manumission as a strategy for maintaining social stability. The consensus held that the idea of "letting the tiger out of the cage" concerning the institution of slavery was too late in coming. Fear of how the blacks, once freed, would affect white society was a huge concern. The plan that received the most consideration leaned toward resettlement of freed? African Americans in the land from whence their ancestors were taken.

Blaming the northern abolitionists became the preferred strategy amongst southern slave owners for explaining social unrest. For example, Virginia Governor John Floyd wrote in his diary shortly after reading Garrison's newspaper:

I have received this day another number of the "Liberator," a newspaper printed in Boston, with the express intention of inciting the slaves and free negroes in this and the other States to rebellion and to murder the men, women and children of those states. Yet we are gravely told there is no law to punish such an offence. The amount of it then is this, a man in our States may plot treason in one state against another without fear of punishment, whilst the suffering state has no right to resist by the provisions of the Federal Constitution. If this is not checked it must lead to

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5. William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator*, September 3, 1831, in *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenberg (New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996), 69–70.

a separation of these states.... Something must be done and with decision.<sup>6</sup>

Southern reaction to Turner's insurrection portrayed him as an isolated religious fanatic leading a few deluded followers. While this description partly assuaged civilian fears, feelings of shock and hysteria were evident in the white counter massacre immediately following the rebellion. But were there any long-term fears inspired by Turner's vision to "prepare myself, and to slay my enemies with their own weapons"?<sup>7</sup> While abolitionists regarded the insurrection as a portending sign of a day of reckoning; in the South, Turner's catastrophic vision suggested something too ominous to consider. Blaming the northern abolitionists appeared the easier option.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever the case may be, Higginson reported that Thomas R. Gray's 1831 publication of *Nat Turner's Confessions* enjoyed an initial print run of 50,000 copies, though others reported 30,000. No doubt, Nat Turner's story reached a wide audience in an increasingly unsettling environment.

## EARLY ACADEMIC INTERPRETATIONS

John B. Duff and Peter M. Mitchell, history professors at Seton Hall University and editors of *Nat Turner: The Historical Event and Modern Controversy* (1971), offer an overview of the historiography of black-white race relations in the United States in light of Turner's legacy:

The Union victory in the Civil War helped to confirm Higginson's interpretation of Nat Turner as a symbol of retribution triumphant.... By the 1890s, however, moral outrage had dulled. In that decade of fervent nationalism... public opinion loudly acclaimed any step leading to reconciliation of North and South and historians stressed the necessity of a less partisan, less emotional evaluation of slavery.... [D]isenchanting with race questions and willing to believe that "the South knew the Negro best," they [scholars] could not see Nat Turner's insurrection

6. John Floyd, "Excerpts from the Diary of Virginia Governor John Floyd, 1831–1832," in *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, 107.

7. Nat Turner, "The Confessions of Nat Turner," in *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, 48.

8. If considering Turner's insurrection helped catalyze tensions leading to the Civil War, ironically his "enemies" did end up slaying each other with their own weapons.

(as Higginson had) as a “great work”; emancipation was properly the job of whites, not blacks.<sup>9</sup>

Duff and Mitchell further describe the historiography of African American scholarship as follows:

Stephen B. Weeks, 1890s—saw the abolition of slavery, while good for whites, as bad for blacks, who proved to have the “simplicity which marks the childhood race.” Duff and Mitchell comment, “these remarks, from an urbane and sophisticated historian, emphasize how difficult it is for any writer to escape his background; how easy it is to lapse into polemics.”<sup>10</sup>

Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, 1900s—“saw slavery as a benevolent institution, less cruel and repressive than gentle and humane, which trained a savage race to benefit themselves as well as their masters.... [B]lacks on the whole were happy with their life.”<sup>11</sup>

William S. Drewry, 1900s—author of the definitive *The Southampton Insurrection*, offered a thesis similar to Phillips that denied any “fundamental feeling of freedom among the black,...[and thus] found himself at a loss to explain why Southampton County” should be the scene of a violent insurrection.<sup>12</sup>

Duff and Mitchell comment that Phillips and Drewry, “and indeed an entire generation of scholars, held captive by racist anthropology and social convention... were frankly puzzled over how people given food and clothing and the necessities of life could become so ferociously angry at their owners.”<sup>13</sup> They argue:

Until recently, few historians acknowledged any validity... [to the] concept of an intense longing for freedom on the part of the oppressed as the prime motive for rebellion. Either implicitly or explicitly, they accepted

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9. Duff and Mitchell, *The Nat Turner Rebellion*, 47–48.

10. *Ibid.*, 48.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, 49.

Drewry's view of the insurrection as an unprovoked act of outrageous barbarity committed by superstitious slaves led by a religious maniac.... This type of writing makes the contemporary demand for the study of black history understandable.<sup>14</sup>

## TURNER OUTSIDE THE BOX

Thomas R. Gray, a prominent local who served as Turner's lawyer from the time of his capture through his trial and execution, had the freedom of access to dictate Turner's account. It formed the basis of a gripping text Gray published less than two weeks after Nat Turner's hanging. Gray's *Confessions* suggested that Turner felt only a nominal hatred toward anyone, whether black or southern white—a tone seemingly in contrast to the ferociousness of his rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Turner expressed a sense of detachment, as if he saw himself participating in an inevitable event beyond his personal control. Of course, Turner's declaration to "slay my enemies with their own weapons," nevertheless, remained menacing.

So whom exactly did Turner consider his enemy? Prior to the revolt, Turner appeared to maintain amicable relations with his fellow Southamptonites of both races. Turner even claimed that "Mr. Joseph Travis...was to me a kind master, and placed the greatest confidence in me; in fact I had no cause to complain of his treatment to me."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, when Turner explained his motives to Gray, rather than indulge in virulent indictments of an oppressive white race, Turner appeared to offer conciliatory statements describing how he "had been taught to pray, both

14. *Ibid.*, 51.

15. Turner's relationship with Gray is intriguing. Gray's notarized account of Turner's dictations from jail is the primary historical source available concerning Turner's thoughts. Sterling Lecater Bland, Jr., editor of the multivolume work *African American Slave Narratives: An Anthology*, offered the following description of Gray: "In the days following his capture, Nat Turner was asked by Thomas R. Gray, a white southern lawyer and slaveholder, to provide a firsthand account of his actions and the motives propelling those actions. It was dictated to Gray, who then wrote, edited, and commented upon it.... While Turner's control of the narrative is clearly compromised by Gray's close involvement with it and by some disparity between the narrative and official court documents, its details are largely corroborated by unrelated, contemporaneous documentation. The full extent of Gray's editorial involvement with Turner's story is unclear. What is abundantly clear, however, is that neither voice can fully exist as a freestanding, authorized voice on its own." Sterling Lecater Bland, Jr. ed., *African American Slave Narratives: An Anthology* Vol. 1 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 24. Bland further described how contemporary legal documents suggested that Gray's personal finances were at a low, thus offering a possible incentive for Gray to quickly publish his interview so as to take advantage of the hysteria surrounding Nat Turner. Gray published *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831) in Baltimore.

16. Turner, in *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, 46.

[by] white and black, and in whom I had the greatest confidence.”<sup>17</sup> As for the massacre itself, rather than tout his deeds as glorious, Turner referred to them with a sense of otherworldliness as “the work of death.”<sup>18</sup>

Another idea repeated by Turner was an apparent revelation, to “Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added to you.”<sup>19</sup> This statement suggests a desire to experience something mystical in union with an abode of the spirit, as something superseding worldly ambitions. In other words, Turner appeared preoccupied with apparently metaphysical ideals, as opposed to obsessions for political emancipation and personal glory.

After experiencing his vision of “the Saviour...about to lay down the yoke,”<sup>20</sup> Turner claimed:

...and I communicated it to many, both white and black, in the neighborhood.... About this time I told these things to a white man, on whom it had a wonderful effect[,]...and the Spirit appeared to me again, and said, as the Saviour had been baptized so should we be also—and...we went down into the water together, in the sight of many who reviled us, and were baptized by the Spirit—After this I rejoiced greatly, and gave thanks to God.<sup>21</sup>

Turner stated that after being “informed” that the judgment day was at hand, he went down by the river and baptized himself with a sympathetic white man “in the sight of many who reviled us.”

Turner’s ambiguous statements consistently leaned to the esoteric. Any idea of seeing himself as an inspired revolutionary seemed, at best, understated, especially when compared with the glut of virulent ideologies promoted during the years leading up to the Civil War. Turner appeared to possess a sincere, and perhaps even a genuinely, thoughtful sense of metaphysical insight of a sort. His tone throughout Gray’s account appeared consistent.

As for how Turner viewed himself, he claimed that his personal influence came about “not by the means of conjuring and such like tricks—for to them I always spoke...with contempt—but by the communion of the Spirit whose revelations I often communicated...and they believed and said my wisdom

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17. *Ibid.*, 45–46.

18. *Ibid.*, 46.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*



came from God.”<sup>22</sup> Ironically, Lincoln reflected on a similar point in his Second Inaugural Address; namely how “Both [races] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God.”<sup>23</sup> Turner claimed to represent the same tradition as that of the white slave owners—undoubtedly an unsettling Sunday meditation for those intent on maintaining the status quo.

## A MODERN-DAY TURNER

The next major scholarly interpretation involved Herbert Aptheker's 1940s critique of the Phillips-Drewry thesis.<sup>24</sup> Aptheker would later become a prominent critic of William Styron. According to Duff and Mitchell:

Professor Aptheker, whose *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943) remains the most complete and scholarly treatment of slave rebelliousness, is entirely revisionist of what he calls the white supremacist “magnolia-moonlight-molasses” mythology of the Phillips-Drewry interpretation. Aptheker aimed to demolish the stereotype of the docile slave, content with his lot and worshipful of his master; in doing so he has at times strained to find evidence of slave rebellions and inflated rumors into conspiracies. William Styron comments, “the title *American Negro Slave Revolts* is badly misleading, ‘Signs of Slave Unrest’ might have been more exact.”<sup>25</sup>

Duff and Mitchell describe how “Aptheker writes history as an avowed Marxist, a historical revisionist of the left.” They acknowledge that Aptheker's analysis “on the whole avoids squeezing facts into any preconceived theory of history. [Aptheker] does hint, to be sure, of the possibility of a class war, the slaves and servile whites united in rebellion against a caste system.”<sup>26</sup> For evidence,

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22. Ibid.

23. According to Lincoln, “Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.”—excerpt from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address.

24. William Styron, “Interview with William Styron” in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 221.

Concerning the popularity of Styron's work, Styron stated that it “was a number one bestseller, week after week.”

25. Duff and Mitchell, *The Nat Turner Rebellion*, 49.

26. Ibid.

Aptheker offered two sources: a letter from a poor white to a black slave stating that “they must act in getting their liberation,” and Governor Floyd’s claim that the spirit of the insurrection “was not confined to the slaves.”<sup>27</sup> Duff and Mitchell considered Aptheker’s analysis to be most effective when demonstrating gaps in Drewry’s scholarship.

Two years preceding Styron’s novel, Daniel Moynihan and Stanley Elkins published analyses on the lasting effect of American slavery. In 1965, Moynihan wrote an influential report as undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Labor that argued that the institution of slavery left a legacy that weakened among blacks normal family and gender relations.<sup>28</sup> Six years earlier, Elkins claimed in his controversial book *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959), that:

American slavery was a tightly closed system, not unlike the Nazi concentration camps in World War II, and so psychologically oppressive that it made the slave absolutely dependent upon the master, changed the personalities of many blacks and created “Sambo”—the happy-go-lucky, boot-licking, irresponsible, and ambitionless slave that Southern folklore presented as proof that blacks were incapable of responsible citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

Styron acknowledged Elkin’s work as “my breakthrough.”<sup>30</sup> Styron also appreciated Erik Erikson’s speculative, though classic, psychoanalysis of Luther and Gandhi. Styron claimed he saw parallels between these two famous historical figures and Turner’s austere personality. He argued: “[Turner’s] impulses...were those of the traditional revolutionary—that is to say, puritanical, repressive and sublimated.”<sup>31</sup> It appears that Styron found little evidence of nobility in Turner’s character.

## THE RETURN OF TURNER

In 1967, William Styron, a middle-aged and critically acclaimed author from the South, published what he described as a fictional meditation upon history, one

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27. Ibid.

28. Daniel Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action” (Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning and Research—US Department of Labor, 1965),

29. Duff and Mitchell, *The Nat Turner Rebellion*, 115.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 116.

that he also titled *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Random House quickly sold out its initial publication of 125,000 copies, and a new era of interest in Turner's legacy emerged that coincided with the cultural revolutions of the times.<sup>32</sup>

*Newsweek* ran a cover story soon after the book's release, while *Time* called Styron's work "a new peak in the literature of the South." Initial reviews were glowing:

*Book World*—"a wonderfully evocative portrait of a gifted, proud, long-suppressed human being who began to live only when he was sentenced to die"

*The New York Review of Books*—"a first-rate novel, the best that William Styron has written and the best by an American writer that has appeared in some years"

*New York Times*—"a dazzling shaft of light"

*The Wall Street Journal*—"the true American tragedy"

*The Nation*—"a stunningly beautiful embodiment of a noble man"

*Commentary*—"an immense understanding of the human spirit and a fine novelist's ability to make us see"<sup>33</sup>

But scathing reviews soon emerged in places like *The New York Times Book Review*, where Wilfrid Sheed declared: "Styron has performed a single, non-literary service in writing this book. Now, I hope he will get back to work." June Meyer, a black critic for *The Nation*, argued that "Styron's stunt merely gives point to a season of fantastic black-to-white 'dialog' miscarried by white-controlled media through the 'medium' of the now professional, white intermediary."<sup>34</sup>

Meyer's critique anticipated a wave of virulent criticism that culminated with the 1968 publication *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*. Written by prominent intellectuals involved in both the civil rights struggle and the emerging field of African American studies, the publication's combined essays shared a common repulsion for Styron's portrayal of Nat Turner as a weak and impotent leader. One author described Styron as offering "a standard Styron type:

32. James L. W. West III, *William Styron: A Life* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998), 376.

33. *Ibid.*, 376-377.

34. *Ibid.*, 337.

a neurasthenic, Hamlet-like intellectual in blackface.... We are not quibbling here over footnotes in scholarly journals.... *We are objecting to a deliberate attempt to steal the meaning of a man's life.*"<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, another author charged that Styron's account had "not been able to transcend his southern peckerwood background."<sup>36</sup> The editor of the compilation, John Henrik Clarke, added that "In addition to reducing Nat Turner to impotence and implying that Negroes were docile and content with slavery, Styron also dehumanizes every black person in the book."<sup>37</sup> In asserting for their intellectual authority to define their cultural heritage through a critique of Styron's *Confessions*, the "Ten Black Writers" attracted similar criticism, as did Styron, for "failing to do their best work because they were too interested in advancing views not supported by known facts."<sup>38</sup>

Sympathizers of the ten began to hound Styron at his public speaking engagements. Though he claimed in the "Author's Note" to his *Confessions* that he intended to "produce a...meditation on history," Styron never anticipated how disconcerting a historical meditation could be.

## MR. STYRON AND MR. TURNER

Kenneth S. Greenberg, who served as editor of *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion In History and Memory*, summarizes the underlying issues that lead to the barrage of virulent reviews:

Styron saw little merit in the idea that Nat Turner was a brilliant hero willing to give his life for the liberty of his people. As he bluntly phrased it...Nat Turner was "a *nut* who gathers together several followers, plows through a county one evening...and kills fifty-some white people, most of whom are helpless children. *Big Deal!* Fine hero."

Styron also added a sexual dimension to Nat Turner's life.... In the end, Styron implies, it was this twisted sexual desire which drove a vacillating Nat Turner toward rebellion.<sup>39</sup>

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35. Lerone Bennet, "Nat's Last White Man" in *William Styron's Nat Turner; Ten Black Writers Respond*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 5.

36. Vincent Harding, "You've Taken My Nat and Gone" in *William Styron's Nat Turner*, 29.

37. John Henrik Clarke, "Introduction" in *William Styron's Nat Turner*, viii.

38. Ernest P. Williams, "William Styron and His Ten Black Critics: A Belated Mediation," *Phylon* 37 (1976): 195.

39. Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, 29.

Styron's fascination with Turner began during his youth growing up in Virginia not far from Southampton County. As a teenager, Styron read a highway sign describing in cursory terms the insurrection, and he found himself wondering why Nat Turner's story was not better known. Styron later recalled that:

[w]hen I was still in my twenties, more than fifteen years before sitting down to begin *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, I wrote to my father: "I hope that when I'm through with Nat Turner (and God, I know it's going to be a long hard job) he will not be either a Great Leader of the Masses... or a perfectly Satanic demagogue, as the surface historical facts present him, but a living human being of great power and great potential who somewhere, in his struggle for freedom and for immortality, lost his way."<sup>40</sup>

Already recognized as a talented and successful author, Styron now aspired to write a great work for serving a socially progressive purpose. Unfortunately, he had no direct experience concerning "Negro life" in the South, other than viewing segregation with white discomfort. His most intimate involvement with black culture came in the early 1960s through his friendship with James Baldwin, a successful novelist and fellow intellectual who hardly typified the African American experience. Nonetheless, Styron was fond of recalling that Baldwin encouraged him to reach out as a white novelist and attempt to understand black experience in the United States.

William F. Cheek, a professor of history at San Diego State University and author of *Black Resistance Before The Civil War*, also noted how Styron's critics "alleged that, as a modern-day existentialist, [he] does not understand the power of religion to the nineteenth-century Negro."<sup>41</sup>

As one example, Styron appeared challenged in appreciating Turner's frequent use of Biblical references to express lofty sentiments—a practice long out of fashion for the hip and intellectual of the mid-twentieth century. Of course, for Turner, the Bible offered his primary access to a Western literary tradition and thus offered a natural framework for expressing ideas. Similarly, nearly all of Turner's contemporaries, both black and white, engaged Biblical cadence as a cultural *lingua franca* throughout the nineteenth century. Whatever Turner's

40. William Styron, "More Confessions" in *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 221.

41. William F. Cheek, *Black Resistance Before The Civil War* (Beverly Hill, CA: Glencoe Press, 1970), 116.

personal metaphysics might have been, he appeared to sincerely uphold Biblical literature as sacred.

As for Styron's metaphysics, he claimed to be an existential agnostic. Historian Eugene D. Genovese, a prominent defender of Styron's *Confessions*, explains how Styron felt:

[at] the heart of his life's work lies a brooding confrontation with the penchant for evil in everyman and with the possibilities for redemption. Thus Styron has described his novel as "a sort of religious parable and a story of exculpation.".... No matter that Styron speaks as an agnostic. Everything he has written leads back to that conundrum, which has plagued Christian theology from its beginnings.<sup>42</sup>

Though noble in many of his intentions, Styron might appear ambitious in setting his sights on resolving dilemmas besetting Western religion "from its beginnings." Understanding African American culture must have felt like a small project, by comparison.

Unfortunately, faithfully articulating African American religious experience in the antebellum South may not have been Styron's forte. While Styron's insights made for fascinating conversation among the intellectuals of his generation, perhaps it was naïve for him to assume that a twentieth-century sophisticate held an ultimate perspective from which to conclusively analyze the historical relevancy of nineteenth-century America.

## TURNER, THE MAN

But what about Nat Turner, the man Styron claimed to be writing about? Though Styron's Turner proved inspirational for projecting pet themes of sexual frustration that resonated with his audience, Nat Turner was also a very real historical figure whose life resonated profoundly throughout one of the most dynamic, and violent, episodes in American history.

To be certain, Styron could at times appear arrogant, even patronizing towards both his subject and critics concerning artistic license. The classic example involves Styron portraying "his" Turner as a thirty-year-old man who never consummated a relationship with a woman: instead, Turner is tormented

42. Eugene D. Genovese, "William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner: A Meditation on Evil, Redemption, and History*" in *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 216.

by desires for a white teenage girl. During the rebellion, Styron's Turner decided that the best resolution to his personal anguish was to rape the girl and then kill her, thereby implying that the rebellion was an excuse for Turner to live out his dysfunctional fantasies.

Styron further indulged his readers with tidbits concerning his fictional Nat's "alternative" adventures, are often repeated dramatic descriptions involving masturbation whimsies. Styron elicited tropes from his Turner, such as: "Then behold I come quickly," "I feel the warm flow into my loin," "I pour out my love within her...she arches against me," "Surely I come quickly."<sup>43</sup>

Even as Styron's fictional Turner prepares for the ultimate swing from a Southampton hanging tree, among his Turner's last Earthly thoughts are:

The same voice calls out: "Come!"

We'll love one another, she seems to be entreating me, very close now, we'll love one another by the light of heaven above...the voice calls again: "Come!"...

Surely I come quickly, Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.<sup>44</sup>

While it is not entirely clear why Styron spewed the word "come" all over his climactic pages, nonetheless, a contemporary reader can only hope that upon the fictional Turner's attainment of the Great Beyond, Turner should find in heaven a nice under-aged girl to frolic with in an existential interracial relationship, and thus finally settle down in eternal peace.

Meanwhile, in the real world, actual historical documents suggest that Nat Turner had a wife and child. Styron himself, however, denied the existence of Turner's spouse and family. As Styron freely confessed: "The absence of his [Turner's] wife was another charge which I disregarded from the very beginning and still disregard. I don't think there is any conclusive evidence of the existence of a wife."<sup>45</sup> Styron argued that the only evidence of Turner's wife and child he was aware of came from Higginson's essay, which was written thirty years after Turner's revolt.

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43. Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 426.

44. *Ibid.*, 428.

45. Styron, in *Nat Turner*, 223.

However, there were contemporary newspaper accounts apparently unbeknownst to Styron, as follows:

Thus, for instance, we know that Nat Turner's young wife was a slave; we know that she belonged to a different master than himself;....<sup>46</sup>

[and] one thing more which we do know of this young woman: the Virginia newspapers state that she was tortured under the lash, after her husband's execution, to make her produce his papers: this is all.<sup>47</sup>

This report, published in the *Richmond Whig* on September 17, 1831, was followed by another dated September 26: "Tis true, that Nat has for some time, thought closely on this subject—for I have in my possession, some papers given up by his wife under the lash"<sup>48</sup>

Historical analyses of these unsigned reports—standard protocol at the time—trace them to three lead investigators. Turner's lawyer, Thomas R. Gray, is considered one of the three.

While Styron's historical casting of Turner as a delusional, misogynistic virgin was one of the work's most criticized features, it was only one of many. Even more troubling was Styron's inability to acknowledge scholarly disagreement. While Styron could perhaps be forgiven for pursuing ambitious projects outside of his own field of expertise and even missing details in his enthusiasm to publish, it is less easy to overlook Styron's dismissive, marginalizing attitude toward contrary perspectives. Apparently, Turner as a middle-aged misanthrope with teenage obsessions was too convenient a plot device to pass on by.

## A TURNER ETERNAL...

Perhaps of most concern is that Styron's difficulties may have less to do with meditating upon history, and rather more with playing almighty with the past.

46. According to this account, Turner's wife lived on a neighboring farm next to the Travis Estate the rebellion bypassed—the only white farm spared in the immediate area. There are varying accounts of her name, as well as the names and number of children. The significant point is that there are numerous accounts from a variety of sources that Styron's research either missed or dismissed.

47. "A Communication to the *Richmond Whig*: Fears of a General Insurrection—September 17, 1831," in *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, 35.

48. Mary Kemp Davis, "What Happened In This Place?' In Search of the Female Slave in the Nat Turner Slave Insurrection," in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, 92.



The most obvious example is Styron's cavalier dismissal of evidence pointing to the existence of Turner's wife and children—historical inconveniences that undermined Styron's delusional black misanthrope thesis.

As William Cheek noted about the work's many critics: "The novel, they say, represents not the confessions of Nat Turner, but the confession of William Styron." Perhaps too much of Styron's fiction reflected his own unresolved internal concerns that fortuitously resonated with a white middle-class audience, and not enough of the Nat Turner of American history.<sup>49</sup>

Whatever his shortcomings, Styron's best-selling account brought important historiographical questions to the forefront of scholarly debate and public awareness. That accomplishment was no small thing, for Styron's work inspired a productive debate over who possessed the cultural authority to legitimately speak on behalf of Nat Turner and the African American experience in the United States. Styron's fictional Turner catalyzed an emerging African American academic community to find a voice that resonated deeply upon the public stage.

A quick search reveals nearly two-dozen scholarly works published since Styron's *Confessions*, all specifically on Turner. In 2003, PBS's *Independent Lens* showcased a documentary, *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*, that explored Turner's history and "troubled" historiography. The project included two award-winning filmmakers, Charles Burnett and Frank Christopher, as well as one of the leading historians of the field, Kenneth Greenberg. Christopher stated he felt specifically inspired to take on the project after reading Styron's *Turner*.<sup>50</sup>

Bringing the past to the present is important, whether through fictional meditations or disciplined academic rigor. There is often a fine line between negotiating objectivity and agenda, and taking that fine intellectual line for granted can turn perilous. While scholars can readily find historiographical bias latent in historical analyses written in the past, as Styron also did with the accounts that came before him, determining the relevance of the histories written in the present is more of a challenge. Fortunately, in the case of William Styron's *Confessions*, it appears that whatever sincerity Styron brought to bear upon his subject proved productive over time in spite of his work's many flaws. Perhaps alongside the efforts of William Styron, and his critics, the enigmatic Turner deserves some credit, as well.

*You mought be rich as cream  
And drive you coach and four-horse team,*

49. Cheek, *Black Resistance Before The Civil War*, 116.

50. Corporation for Public Broadcasting, "Nat Turner: A Troublesom Property." <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/natturner/> (accessed April 18, 2011).

*But you can't keep de world from moverin' round  
Nor Nat Turner from gainin' ground.*

*And your name it mought be Caesar sure  
And got you cannon can shoot a mile or more,  
But you can't keep de world from moverin' round  
Nor Nat Turner from gainin' ground*

"Old-time Negro Song" published in "This Quiet Dust"  
by William Styron  
*Harper's Magazine*, April, 1965

# STRATEGIC RESTRAINT: EXPLAINING THE NON-USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS DURING THE KOREAN WAR

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*Kevin Weng*

During the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, the United States faced three moments of crisis in which the use of nuclear weapons came under serious consideration. The first of these incidents occurred during the war's initiation when North Korean forces launched their offensive across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on June 25, 1950. The second incident came about during the large-scale Chinese intervention of late November. The final moment of crisis arose during the middle of 1953 when newly elected U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, frustrated with the military stalemate that characterized the conflict, sought out new ways to break the strategic deadlock.

Despite the fact that U.S. policymakers had previously sought to integrate the atomic bomb into the overall outline of U.S. defense strategy, each crisis in the Korean War ended without the United States resorting to the active use of its nuclear arsenal.<sup>1</sup> Under the administration of President Harry Truman, U.S. policymakers gave considerable thought to the use of atomic bombs against North Korean forces and later against Chinese targets in nearby Manchuria. In both cases, Truman, who had previously ordered the twin atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not more than five years earlier, refused to follow through on any thoughts of nuclear strikes against North Korea or China.

Advocates of a so-called "nuclear taboo" invoke Truman's own moral abhorrence of the atomic bomb as a reason for the president's reluctance to

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1. David A. Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945–1960," *International Security* 7, no. 4 (1983): 22.

order the use of nuclear weapons in 1950.<sup>2</sup> Yet, such an explanation runs into complications when comparing Truman's directives as president with his overall detestation towards killing of any sort, "whether by atomic bomb or bow and arrow."<sup>3</sup> If Truman, a man who fantasized over the elimination of major Soviet cities in his diary, was willing to compromise his own anti-violence ideals by ordering the aforementioned atomic bombings and by sending U.S. troops into a warzone on a remote Southeast Asian peninsula, why would the president's ideals suddenly return to prevent him from utilizing nuclear weapons in Korea?<sup>4</sup>

Under the administration of President Eisenhower, the global stage witnessed a resurgence of policies of brinkmanship by the United States. Yet, despite Eisenhower's initial support for the use of atomic weapons, the United States ultimately refrained from making good on its nuclear threats. While it is possible that the convenient timing of the armistice that ended the hostilities in Korea precluded the need for nuclear strikes, proponents of the nuclear taboo credit U.S. nuclear restraint to the presence of a burgeoning norm against nuclear use.<sup>5</sup> The political costs of breaking the nuclear taboo or the tradition of non-use were so ponderous, such scholars claim, that even Eisenhower saw the folly in using nuclear weapons as one "would use a bullet or anything else."<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, both Truman and Eisenhower found the greatest obstacles to exercising nuclear use to be the presence of the Soviet Union. Fears of Soviet intervention in Korea and in Europe were enough to give both presidents reason to doubt the belief that using the atomic bomb would have no larger strategic ramifications. While the United States in 1950 still enjoyed a relative monopoly in nuclear weapons, the thought of engaging in a larger global conflict with the Soviet Union was no less distasteful to Truman and Eisenhower, especially so soon after World War II. Nuclear taboo proponent Nina Tannenwald argues quite convincingly that the Soviet Union was highly unlikely to have intervened in the Korean War on behalf of either China or North Korea.<sup>7</sup> Such an assertion, however, is only relevant if either one of two falsehoods reigns true: one, that Truman and Eisenhower had complete, or almost complete, knowledge of Soviet

2. Peter Gizewski, "From Winning Weapon to Destroyer of the World: The Nuclear Taboo in International Politics," *International Journal* 51, no. 2 (1996): 402–403; Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 116.

3. Harry S. Truman, *Mr. Citizen*. 5 ed. (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1960), 267.

4. Barton J. Bernstein, "New Light on the Korean War," *The International History Review* 3, no. 2 (1981): 271–272.

5. T. V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 50–53; Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 148–152.

6. Cited in Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 239.

7. Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 126–129.

intentions, which they did not; or, two, that Truman and Eisenhower were not particularly risk-averse, which they were. While normative considerations did have some effect on both presidents' policy decisions, the strategic and tactical implications of their policies ultimately dictated whether the United States would use nuclear weapons or not.

## THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE NON-USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

When North Korean forces launched their offensive across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on June 25, 1950, U.S. policymakers immediately scrambled to prevent the complete collapse of the South Korean government. Unsurprisingly, the use of the atomic bomb was one potential course of action that came under immediate consideration in the very first meeting regarding the invasion.

During a June 25 conference at the Blair House, the consensus among the military chiefs present was that U.S. airpower would be more than sufficient in eliminating North Korean armored units. Such a tactic, however, was limited, according to Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg, by the possibility that "Russian jets might come into action."<sup>8</sup> Upon evaluating Soviet military strength in the region, Truman openly pondered whether it was possible to "knock out" Russian air bases in the "Far East," a question that Vandenberg promptly answered in the affirmative, provided that "A-bombs" were employed. By meeting's end, Truman ordered the Air Force to "prepare plans to wipe out all Soviet bases in the Far East," with the clarification that this "was not an order for action but an order to make the plans."<sup>9</sup>

At the time of Truman's order, the United States possessed a near monopoly on nuclear armaments; the Soviet Union, a newly minted nuclear power since September 1949, possessed merely a handful of atomic warheads at best. Furthermore, the Soviet Union lacked the wherewithal to deliver said weapons to distant targets in a rapid manner.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite having a clear advantage in nuclear superiority, the United States remained persistently wary over the prospect of involving itself in a larger conflict with the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> While U.S. policymakers had engaged in policies of brinkmanship during the Berlin Blockade of 1948, Truman promptly shot down any propositions in favor of

8. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation, June 25, 1950," *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter referred to as "FRUS"), 1950 Korea, vol. 7, 159–160.

9. Ibid.

10. Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 115–116.

11. See Lebow, "Windows of Opportunity," 147–186; Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 4 (1980): 563–592.

an actual preventative war with the Soviet Union (as Winston Churchill had suggested during the blockade crisis).<sup>12</sup>

Truman's June 25 directive to the Air Force stemmed from the president's own belief that "what was developing in Korea seemed to [be] a repetition on a larger scale of what had happened in Berlin."<sup>13</sup> To back down in Korea, Truman assumed, would be to handicap U.S. commitments towards the defense of every other region of interest "between East and West, from Norway through Berlin and Trieste to Greece, Turkey, and Iran; from the Kuriles in the North Pacific to Indo-China and Malaya."<sup>14</sup> U.S. goals, therefore, were twofold: first, to meet the main thrust of "The Reds" on the Korean peninsula, and, second, to avoid any initiation of a larger conflict, which would lead to World War III.<sup>15</sup>

By late November 1950, both objectives of the overall U.S. war strategy seemed to be a distant fantasy. Although United Nations coalition forces successfully sent the North Korean army reeling back across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel after a daring counterattack at the port city of Incheon, a massive military intervention by the People's Republic of China on November 25 prompted U.N. forces to hastily retreat.<sup>16</sup> In a November 28 message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the overall commander-in-chief of the Far East, Douglas MacArthur, conceded that the United States was facing "an entirely new war."<sup>17</sup>

Even as the ferocity of the Chinese attack prompted U.S. policymakers to consider the possibility of a phased withdrawal from the Korean peninsula, Truman steadfastly refused to actively employ nuclear weapons in an effort to stave off a potential military defeat.<sup>18</sup> While normative concerns may have played some role in influencing the president's restraint, the primary inhibiting factor, which explains the non-use of the atomic bomb during both the initial North Korean invasion of June and the Chinese counter-offensive of November, was the

12. Lebow, "Windows of Opportunity," 169–170.

13. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman: Volume Two: Years of Trial And Hope* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, 1956), 337.

14. *Ibid.*, 330.

15. Later on, the U.S. National Security Council released a policy statement on September 11, 1950 which identified three crucial factors that were shaping U.S. policy in Korea. As recounted by Truman, they were: "action by the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists, consultation with friendly members of the United Nations, and the risk of general war." Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 345–346.

16. The 'People's Republic of China' will hereafter be referred to as simply 'China' and its conjugates when relevant.

17. U.S. Department of State, "The Commander in Chief, Far East (MacArthur) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 28, 1950," *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1237.

18. Bernstein, "New Light on the Korean War," 256; U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Position on Two Principle Alternative Courses in Korea," December 7, 1950," *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1441.

fear of Soviet intervention.<sup>19</sup> Such perceptions of probable Soviet action delved into two areas of concern: the ability of the Soviet Union to intervene in Korea and the ability of the Soviet Union to intervene in Western Europe.

As far as Truman and his cabinet were concerned, the genesis of the North Korean invasion could be traced back to Moscow.<sup>20</sup> While the soldiers that invaded South Korea may have officially answered to Pyongyang, they were nevertheless representatives of a larger entity of Communist Imperialism that, in Truman's mind, was already scheming to institute a follow-up to its initial gambit. The attack upon Korea, Truman noted in a statement to the press on June 27 had made it plain beyond all doubt that "Communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war."<sup>21</sup> How the Soviet Union intended to play the mid-game after the initial opening, however, was unclear, thereby lending a measure of uncertainty regarding the effective implementation of the United States' nuclear arsenal.

Judging from their experiences with the Berlin blockade crisis, U.S. policymakers had long assumed that the next international crisis would be Soviet-instigated; as a result, U.S. war plans that called for the use of atomic weapons, such as the 1948 Joint Emergency War Plan "Halfmoon" (later succeeded by "Trojan"), were specifically designed to cripple Soviet industry in the event of war.<sup>22</sup> The initiation of the Korean War, however, did not adhere to the aforementioned circumstances. Furthermore, as U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson noted, the attack on South Korea by a Soviet puppet state "did not amount to a *casus belli* against the Soviet Union"; nevertheless, the attack did represent "an open, undisguised challenge to [the U.S.] position as the protector of South Korea."<sup>23</sup> While the United States was entitled to come to the defense of its ally, that obligation on its own did not justify the expansion of the war to include a nuclear strike on an as-of-yet militarily unengaged Soviet Union. A study by the State Department's Policy Planning Staff put forth similar sentiments when

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19. This position is in direct contrast to Tannenwald's belief that "although concerns about provoking Soviet intervention may have played some role in inhibiting the Truman administration from using atomic weapons, such concerns do not appear to have been decisive." Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 129.

20. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation, June 25, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 157–161.

21. U.S. Department of State, "Statement Issued by the President, June 27, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 202.

22. David A. Rosenberg, "American Atomic Strategy and the Hydrogen Bomb Decision," *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (1979): 68–71.

23. Dean Acheson, *The Korean War*. 2 ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), 20.

it concluded that only an overt Soviet or Chinese military intervention in Korea could warrant a U.S. nuclear response.<sup>24</sup>

Truman's tentative consideration of using atomic bombs on Soviet airfields during the June 25 conference was indicative of U.S. policymakers' initial reliance on the strategies of previous Soviet-focused emergency war plans. Even when it became clear to the President that the Soviet Union had not (as of the moment) committed itself to the Communist offensive in any overt military fashion, Truman nevertheless continued to harbor worries that a Soviet intervention in Korea was not an impossibility.<sup>25</sup> To Acheson and the State Department, however, it was far more likely that China would enter the conflict rather than the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup>

In confluence with more apparent strategic concerns regarding the viability of utilizing atomic weapons on South Korean soil were the lack of viable North Korean targets that had not already been eliminated through conventional bombing, the need to maintain an effective nuclear deterrent in Europe, and the fear of accidentally expanding the war to include either the Soviet Union and/or China prevented U.S. policymakers from ordering the tactical use of nuclear weapons against the more immediate threat of North Korean army units pushing southwards down the peninsula.<sup>27</sup> One suggestion forwarded by the Chairman of the JCS, Omar Bradley, had proposed placing atomic weapons at the disposal of General MacArthur, but that proposal was shelved on July 9.<sup>28</sup> Later requests by MacArthur for the use of nuclear arms against encroaching enemy forces were rebuffed as well.<sup>29</sup> On July 11, Truman approved the deployment of a number of nuclear-configured B-29 bombers to Great Britain, followed almost three weeks later by another directive that sent a separate deployment of similarly composed aircraft to Guam.<sup>30</sup> The purpose of the deployments, however, had been to deter a Sino-Soviet entry into the Korean War rather than to tactically bomb North Korean military units.

24. U.S. Department of State, "The Question of U.S. Use of Atomic Bomb in Korea, July 15, 1950." Cited in Bernstein, "New Light on the Korean War," 261–262.

25. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation, June 27, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 200.

26. Acheson, *The Korean War*, 28.

27. Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," *International Security* 13, no. 3 (1988–1989): 57.

28. Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," 57; Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 46; Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 119.

29. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 46–47.

30. Truman would later recall the B-29 bombers from Guam without incident. Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 436; Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," 57–60.



Once China initiated its jarring counter-offensive, the threat of a Soviet intervention became an even greater concern amongst U.S. policymakers.<sup>31</sup> While some individuals, such as Dean Acheson, had previously cautioned the president that the Sino-Soviet bloc was not as monolithic as most of Truman's advisors believed, China's intervention appeared to prove otherwise.<sup>32</sup> This reaffirmation of Sino-Soviet unity brought along with it fresh concerns regarding the presence of enemy warplanes, whether Chinese or Soviet, based in the Far East. During a meeting on November 28, Truman asked if U.N. forces in Korea had any means of defense against air strikes launched from Chinese Manchuria. General Vandenberg replied that the only two options available were to bomb the airfields or to withdraw U.S. planes to Japan; neither option was particularly appealing to the President.<sup>33</sup> To vitiate the so-far dominant U.S. Air Force presence in Korea was entirely out of the question given the tenuous state of U.N. ground forces, but to launch strikes on enemy airfields in sovereign Chinese territory was even less of an alternative in the minds of many State and Defense Department officials. The United States "should give very, very careful thought regarding air action in Manchuria," Acheson warned during the November 28 meeting, "if [the United States were to] enter Manchuria it would be very hard to stop and very easy to extend the conflict. If [the United States] were successful in Manchuria, the Russians would probably enter to aid their Chinese ally."<sup>34</sup> While the members of the JCS were not pleased with the thought of constraining their military options, they too nevertheless concurred with the secretary of state's assessment:

**General Bradley** said the question was if the Chinese air comes in do we want to hit back. To do so might draw in Soviet air. If this is true, we may have to defer striking. He was not sure this question should be decided in advance.

**General Collins** strongly supported General Bradley. If we hit back, it is a strong provocation of the Chinese and may possibly bring in Soviet air and even submarines. The only chance then left to save us is the use or the threat of the use of the A-bomb. We should therefore hold back from bombing in China even if this means that our ground forces must take some punishment from the air.

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31. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum by the Acting Officer in Charge of Korean Affairs to the Deputy Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs, November 28, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1239.

32. Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," 574–575.

33. U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation, November 28, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1242–1243.

34. *Ibid.*, 1246.

**Admiral Sherman** said that he did not disagree with this provided we do not have to take too much from the Chinese air force.<sup>35</sup>

The closest that the United States actually came to bombing Manchuria occurred on November 6, when General MacArthur ordered the Air Force to destroy several key bridges spanning the Yalu River, which comprised the border separating Korea from Manchuria. However, at the last moment, Acheson rescinded the order, citing concerns over the close proximity of the targets to Chinese soil.<sup>36</sup> Truman himself had the same fears, but ultimately succumbed to MacArthur's repeated warnings that doing nothing would endanger the general's command. In the president's own words:

There were grave dangers involved in a mass bombing attack on a target so close to Manchuria and to Soviet soil. An overly eager pilot might easily bring about retaliatory moves; damaged plans might be forced to land in territory beyond our control. But since General MacArthur was on the scene and felt so strongly that this was of unusual urgency, I told Bradley to give him the "go-ahead."<sup>37</sup>

MacArthur would later call for deeper strikes into Manchuria and continued to promote the active use of nuclear weapons in North Korea up until his highly publicized dismissal by Truman.<sup>38</sup> The president, however, adamantly refused to tempt fate any more than was necessary. In recalling his relationship with MacArthur, Truman wrote:

I have never been able to make myself believe that MacArthur, seasoned soldier that he was,...did not realize that the Chinese people would react to the bombing of their cities in exactly the same manner as the people of the United States reacted to the bombing of Pearl Harbor; or that, with his knowledge of the East, he could have overlooked the fact that after he had bombed the cities

35. General Bradley would later complain that the Chinese "were actually sending military forces against us and did not call it a war, and yet if we drop one bomb across the Yalu they say we are making war against them." U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum of Conversation, December 1, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7. 1279; "United States Delegation Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee, December 7, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7.1457.

36. David S. McLellan, *Dean Acheson: The State Department Years* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1976), 288.

37. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 375–376.

38. Acheson, *The Korean War*, 83; John W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 187–207.

of China there would still be vast flows of materials from Russia so that, if he wanted to be consistent, his next step would have to be the bombardment of Vladivostok and the Trans-Siberian Railroad!<sup>39</sup>

Given the tentativeness surrounding the operation to destroy the Yalu bridges and the complete lack of U.S. conventional strikes on targets within China's borders, it is not surprising that Truman refrained from ordering the use of the atomic bomb to stem the Chinese advance. Even a relatively routine (by U.S. Air Force military standards) bombardment of the North Korean port of Rashin in early August had prompted feelings of consternation due to the target being only seventeen miles from the Soviet border.<sup>40</sup> If conventional strikes bore the stigma of expanding the conflict into an all-out war with China and quite possibly the Soviet Union, then it would have been illogical to assume that nuclear strikes on enemy targets would be any less controversial. Some figures, such as Generals MacArthur and Vandenberg, believed that the Soviet Union's own international interests would preclude the country from actively intervening in the Korean War, regardless of any action the United States may have taken relative to China.<sup>41</sup> However, after the debacle of November 25, Truman was in no mood to take any more risks, especially one that entailed the possibility of another world's war. Dean Acheson later noted, with no small amount of contempt, that many "revisionist" writers would claim that the administration's conclusions represented an overreaction to Communist action, but "even with such help as hindsight gives—which I do not regard as much—I do not agree and am glad that we did not consider the conclusions overdrawn."<sup>42</sup>

Concerns among U.S. policymakers regarding possible Soviet intervention did not extend solely to the boundaries of the Korean peninsula; Europe was another critical area of interest, which in the minds of some was even more essential to U.S. national security than Asia.<sup>43</sup> "Europeans generally assumed," Truman wrote in his memoirs, that a "new war would be a battle of atomic weapons, and the slightest mention of atomic bombs was enough to make them jittery."<sup>44</sup> That "jitteriness" became most prevalent during the outcry surrounding Truman's

39. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 415–416.

40. Ibid., 394.

41. Other officials who held this view in some form or fashion included: George Kennan, Dean Rusk, Philip Jessup, Gordon Dean, and James Gavin. Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 127.

42. Acheson, *The Korean War*, 79.

43. Graeme S. Mount & Andre Laferriere, *The Diplomacy of War: The Case of Korea* (New York: Black Rose Books, 2004), 84.

44. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 395.

notorious publicity gaffe during a November 30 press conference. As recounted by Truman:

At that conference I made the remark that “we will take whatever steps are necessary to meet the military situation, just as we always have.”

“Will that include the atomic bomb?” one of the reporters asked.

“That includes every weapon that we have,” I replied.

“Mr. President,” the questioner shot back, “you said ‘every weapon that we have.’ Does that mean that there is active consideration of the use of the atomic bomb?”

“There has always been active consideration of its use,” I told him. “I don’t want to see it used. It is a terrible weapon, and it should not be used on innocent men, women and children who have nothing whatever to do with this military aggression. That happens when it is used.”

After realizing that the chance innuendo of his remarks would likely lead to a public relations imbroglio, Truman hastily assigned his press secretary, Charles Ross, to release a clarifying statement:

The President wants to make it certain that there is no misinterpretation of his answers to questions at his press conference today about the use of the atom bomb. Naturally, there has been consideration of this subject since the outbreak of the hostilities in Korea, just as there is consideration of the use of all military weapons whenever our forces are in combat. Consideration of the use of any weapon is always implicit in the very possession of that weapon. However, it should be emphasized, that, by law, only the President can authorize the use of the atom bomb, and no such authorization has been given. If and when such authorization should be given, the military commander in the field would have charge of the tactical delivery of the weapon. In brief, the replies to the questions at today’s press conference do not represent any change in this situation.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Ross’s efforts at damage control, Truman’s statement set off a wave of unease among national and international policymakers, many of whom assumed

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45. *Ibid.*, 395–396.

that the president was overreacting to the threat in Korea.<sup>46</sup> In a telegram to Dean Acheson, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Warren Austin summarized the international response: "With exception of Latins, majority of [U.N.] delegates commenting expressed considerable concern when reports of President's statement first spread from newsroom. Number of European and Commonwealth delegates appeared greatly shocked. Subsequent clarification had calming effect but did not entirely satisfy them."<sup>47</sup>

British politicians, in particular, were struck by the apparent frankness of Truman's statement, with even Winston Churchill, ironically enough, going so far as to condemn the use of nuclear weapons against China during a speech to the House of Commons. "The United Nations," Churchill proclaimed, "should avoid by every means in their power becoming entangled inextricably in a war with China.... The sooner the Far Eastern diversion...can be brought into something like a static condition and stabilized, the better it will be.... For it is in Europe that the world cause will be decided.... It is there that the mortal danger lies."<sup>48</sup>

Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, decided to take up the task of representing the concerns of Europe by visiting Truman on December 4, ostensibly to dissuade the president from utilizing the atomic bomb.<sup>49</sup> Transcripts from the meetings between the two leaders of the world's premier democratic countries, however, show that the discussion of nuclear weapons actually took up very little time. The end result of the Truman-Attlee talks produced a joint-released communiqué from the U.S. president and the British prime minister with only a single paragraph dedicated to the atomic bomb issue:

The President stated that it was his hope that world conditions would never call for the use of the atomic bomb. The President told the Prime Minister that it was also his desire to keep the Prime Minister at all times informed of

46. Foster R. Dulles, *American Policy Toward Communist China: 1949–1969* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1972), 106–107.; "Truman Gives Aim," *New York Times*, November 30, 1950; "Paris is Opposed to Atom Bomb Use," *New York Times*, December 1, 1950; "U.N. Circles Wary on Atom Bomb Use," *New York Times*, December 1, 1950.

47. Additional concerns brought up by the Arab and Israeli delegates pointed to a possible Soviet nuclear response in another part of the world. Some Arab delegates also feared that the United States' use of the atomic bomb in Korea would demonstrate a willingness to employ nuclear weapons against "Asian" peoples; a view which was shared by a number of Indian and Pakistani delegates. How seriously Truman considered these concerns, however, is unknown. U.S. Department of State, "The United States Representative at the United Nations to the Secretary of State, December 1, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1300–1301.

48. Cited in Hastings, *The Korean War*, 180.

49. U.S. Department of State, "The Chargé in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State, December 1, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1296–1297.

developments which might bring about a change in the situation.<sup>50</sup>

Underlying this apparently non-eventful reconciliation was the shared agreement between Truman and Attlee regarding Europe's critical status as a bastion of liberalism against Communist (i.e., Soviet) expansionism.

Attlee, being the prime minister of a European state, naturally adhered to Churchill's opinion that Europe's interests, and more importantly, Great Britain's interests, should precede those of a non-democratic South Korean regime. While Attlee also made sure to mention the moral concerns of other Commonwealth nations, the British prime minister's own concerns were primarily strategic.<sup>51</sup> On the first day of the Truman-Attlee meetings, the prime minister outlined his concerns to all present:

We are very eager to avoid the extension of the [Korean] conflict. If our forces become engaged in China, it will weaken us elsewhere. (The President agreed.) As the President has said, the United Kingdom and France have other Asian interests, but it would help the Russians if we were fully engaged in Asia. (The President again agreed.).... We must not get so involved in the East as to lay ourselves open to attack in the West. The West is, after all, the vital part in our line against communism. We cannot take action that will weaken it. We must strengthen our hand in the West as much as possible.<sup>52</sup>

In conjunction with Attlee's concerns, the trepidation of losing Europe to a sudden Soviet military strike continuously influenced the president, and the Berlin blockade only augmented that fear. What comfort Truman may have derived from the United States' relative monopoly in nuclear armaments was limited by the knowledge that such an advantage did not preclude the Soviet Union from utilizing its relatively small arsenal of nuclear weapons. Going off of Truman's own view of the Sino-Soviet bloc, the belief that the North Korean and Chinese offensives were merely a Communist feint to draw in more U.S. forces provided a powerful incentive to keep the United States' nuclear arsenal in reserve for the defense of Europe. In addition, few U.S. policymakers at the time felt that the

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50. U.S. Department of State, "Communiqué Issued at the Conclusion of the Truman-Attlee Discussions, December 8, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1479.

51. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy*, 166–167.

52. U.S. Department of State, "United States Delegation Minutes of the First Meeting of President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee, December 4, 1950." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1365–1366.

United States possessed the strength, even with the atomic bomb, to completely cripple the Soviet Union's offensive capabilities.<sup>53</sup>

It was hardly surprising, then, that the two main conclusions of the Truman-Attlee talks were not concerned with U.S. atomic capabilities per se, but with the military capabilities of both the United States and Great Britain, and by extension all Commonwealth countries:

1. The military capabilities of the United States and the United Kingdom should be increased as rapidly as possible.
2. The two countries should expand the production of arms which can be used by the forces of all the free nations that are joined together in common defense. Together with those other nations the United States and the United Kingdom should continue to work out mutual arrangements by which all will contribute appropriately to the common defense.<sup>54</sup>

Truman, of all people, understood the strategic constraints placed on the United States' use of nuclear weapons and while the President was understandably annoyed by the limitations of his policy choices, he nevertheless accepted them.<sup>55</sup> Truman's successor, however, ascended to the presidency with a very different perspective regarding the viability of using nuclear weapons.

## THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION AND THE NON-USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

On January 20, 1953, Truman left the Whitehouse to be replaced by Dwight Eisenhower, who, unlike his predecessor, came to office with a more advanced knowledge of nuclear weapons through his previous role as army chief of staff.<sup>56</sup> Being a military man at heart, the new president had a penchant for quick and low-cost solutions to conventional conflicts; moreover, Eisenhower was ever reluctant to take risky gambits that sacrificed security for decisiveness. As a result, the ongoing stalemate between U.N. and Chinese forces on the Korean peninsula quickly became an issue of concern for Eisenhower. "If a satisfactory armistice could not be quickly achieved," Eisenhower recalled in his memoirs, "continuing [the war without a change in policy] seemed to me intolerable. We were sustaining

53. Lebow, "Windows of Opportunity," 154.

54. "Communiqué Issued at the Conclusion of the Truman-Attlee Discussions." *FRUS*, 1950, vol. 7, 1478.

55. Bernstein, "New Light on the Korean War," 271–272.

56. Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill," 27.

heavy casualties for little, if any, gain.”<sup>57</sup> In addition, the President was appalled by what he perceived to be Truman’s ill-advised refusal to order the bombings of enemy air fields in Manchuria. During a February 11, 1953, meeting with the National Security Council, Eisenhower reported that “he had never been able to understand why the UN command had ever abandoned its rights of hot pursuit of enemy aircraft to the bases, wherever they were, from which the aircraft had risen to attack.”<sup>58</sup> Even more galling to the new president was the knowledge that progress on the diplomatic front was no less forthcoming due to the stalling of the armistice talks at Panmunjom over the issue of prisoner repatriation. Dissatisfied with the current status quo, Eisenhower turned his attention to nuclear weapons, which in light of new developments in the field of atomic technology (such as the first thermonuclear bomb test in January of 1953) appeared to be the most promising tools capable of ending the conflict in Korea quickly and with as little risk as possible to the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Sharing in the president’s own amenability to the use of the atomic bomb was Eisenhower’s Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, whose famous concept of Massive Retaliation became a favorite target of later nuclear strategy analysts. In regards to the actions of the previous administration’s policies towards China, Dulles lambasted Acheson and Truman for believing that “by being nice to the Communist Chinese we could wean them away from the Soviets.”<sup>60</sup> Only “pressure and strain” on the Chinese, Dulles noted, could split the Sino-Soviet bloc that was causing U.N. forces so much hardship.<sup>61</sup> As a result, Dulles eagerly supported Eisenhower in promoting the use of nuclear weapons to break the stalemate in Korea, but noted cautiously during the February 11 meeting that there were “moral problems” and “inhibitions” on the use of the atomic bomb.<sup>62</sup>

The secretary of states’ own warnings on the existence of a nuclear taboo, however, did not deter Eisenhower. While the president acknowledged the existence of trepidation among U.S. allies regarding any talk concerning the use

57. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953–1956* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 178–179.

58. U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Discussion at the 131<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, February 11, 1953.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 770

59. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 180; Rosemary J. Foot, “Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict.” *International Security* 13, no. 3 (1988–1989): 96; Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo*, 140–141.

60. U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Discussion, February 11, 1953.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 770.

61. Cited in John L. Gaddis, “The Unexpected John Foster Dulles: Nuclear Weapons, Communism, and the Russians.” Found in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. Richard H. Immerman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 60–61.

62. U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Discussion, February 11, 1953.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 770.



of atomic armaments, he nevertheless dismissed those concerns by suggesting that “if [our allies] objected to the use of atomic weapons we might well ask them to supply three or more divisions needed to drive the Communists back, in lieu of use of atomic weapons.”<sup>63</sup> The subject of the nuclear taboo came up again during a March 31 meeting, in which both Eisenhower and Dulles came to the agreement that “somehow or other the tabu [sic] which surrounds the use of atomic weapons would have to be destroyed.” Nonetheless, Eisenhower admitted that utilizing nuclear weapons against China would be “worth the cost” if the United States could “achieve a substantial victory over the Communist forces.”<sup>64</sup> Later, Eisenhower would recount his sentiments in more detail:

...American views have always differed somewhat from those of some of our allies.... An American decision to use [atomic bombs in Korea] would have created strong disrupting feelings between ourselves and our allies. However, if an all-out offensive should be highly successful, I felt that the rifts so caused could, in time, be repaired.<sup>65</sup>

While the Panmunjom talks continued to lag, Eisenhower assigned the National Security Council to re-evaluate potential courses of action that would break the deadlock in Korea. The resultant report, labeled NSC 147, outlined six strategies in order of increasing escalation; the first three limited areas of operation to the Korean peninsula while the final three advocated an expansion of the war to include attacks on Manchuria.<sup>66</sup> With the exception of the first course of action, which advocated the maintenance of the military status quo, all suggestions of the NSC 147 report left open the possibility of using nuclear weapons. However, the report also listed several military disadvantages regarding its proposed options:

- a. Unless the use of atomic weapons results in a decisive military victory, the deterrent effect might be reduced.
- b. Any profitable strategic use requires extension of hostilities outside of Korea
- c. A precedent would be established, and UN forces and installations are, in general, better targets for atomic weapons than those of the enemy. ...

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63. *Ibid.*, 770.

64. U.S. Department of State. “Memorandum of Discussion at a Special Meeting of the National Security Council on Tuesday, March 31, 1953.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 827.

65. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 180.

66. For the full text of the report NSC 147, see U.S. Department of State. “Report by the NSC Planning Board.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 839.

- d. Use of substantial numbers will reduce the U.S. stockpile and global atomic capabilities.<sup>67</sup>

While NSC 147 never explicitly references the Soviet Union, it is difficult to imagine how the listed disadvantages would be applicable if not perceived relative to Soviet conventional and atomic strengths. Concerns over a diminishing deterring effect of the United States' nuclear capability, whether through stockpile reductions or a failure to obtain a decisive nuclear victory, were meaningless without the presence of a rival nation capable of exploiting an ebbing U.S. deterrent. Additional reservations over extending the Korean conflict as well as setting a precedent for inviting nuclear retaliation were a clear indication that NSC 147 was implicitly acknowledging the potential threat of the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal.

In their evaluation of NSC 147, Eisenhower's advisors reassured themselves during a May 13 meeting of the National Security Council that most of the political disadvantages listed in the report could be overcome by a swift and successful victory over Chinese forces, which would presumably prompt any dissenting allies to "climb back on the victorious bandwagon."<sup>68</sup> Eisenhower, however, displayed an unusual moment of reservation by openly questioning the effects that "such a bold line of action" would have on NATO's defenses.<sup>69</sup> In a departure from his previous sentiments, Eisenhower appeared more concerned with the disparity in opinions between the United States and its allies while noting, with no small amount of frustration, that most European countries "believe that global war is much worse to contemplate than surrender to Communist imperialism." Yet at the same time, the president proclaimed, "we desperately need...to maintain these outposts of our national defense."<sup>70</sup> Europe, the president acknowledged, could not be abandoned to the Soviet Union for Korea's sake.

On May 19, 1953, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that NSC 147 did not clearly emphasize the implicit risks associated with the use of the atomic bomb. Of particular note was the fact that the JCS specifically pointed to the dangers of getting involved in a large-scale conflict with China and the Soviet Union,

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67. Additional political disadvantages listed in the report cautioned against the effects that using nuclear weapons would have on the United States' relationship with its allies, particularly those in Europe. U.S. Department of State. "Report by the NSC Planning Board." *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 845–846.

68. U.S. Department of State. "Memorandum of Discussion at the 144<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, May 13, 1953." *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 1015.

69. *Ibid.*, 1016–1017.

70. *Ibid.*

along with the added risk of starting a global war.<sup>71</sup> While Eisenhower did not overly concern himself with the prospect of fighting a general war with China, he did voice his concerns regarding a larger conflict with the Soviet Union during a May 20 meeting with the National Security Council. While conferring with his advisors, the President admitted that his “one great anxiety” was “the possibility of attacks by the Soviet air force on the almost defenseless population centers of Japan. This, said the President, was always in the back of his mind.”<sup>72</sup> Later in the conference, Eisenhower mentioned his nervousness pertaining to the United States possibly becoming “involved in a global war commencing in Manchuria.” Interestingly enough, Eisenhower expressed further anxiety regarding whether the discussed courses of action would “go any further than those in the room,” and stated “his desire that a record should be made of those who had heard the military briefing.”<sup>73</sup> Why Eisenhower would have suddenly wished to keep the talks of a nuclear strike on China secret, when he had previously supported policies of brinkmanship to propel armistice talks, points to the possibility that the President doubted his early enthusiasm for using the atomic bomb. By the meeting’s conclusion, Eisenhower made sure to re-emphasize to everyone present that “his only real worry...was over the possibility of intervention by the Soviets.”<sup>74</sup>

In sharp contrast to his initial keenness on utilizing atomic weapons against Chinese forces, Eisenhower’s behavior during the May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting became noticeably more cautious regarding the expansion of the conflict in Korea. While it is unknown what went on in the president’s head to induce such a change in opinion, the fact that Eisenhower’s later vocal trepidations were so analogous to Truman’s strategic concerns is noteworthy.

Regardless of any hesitations the president may have experienced, Eisenhower and Dulles continued to engage in policies of brinkmanship to obtain the cherished armistice; whether such actions were bluffs or genuine acts of intimidation, however, remains uncertain.<sup>75</sup> Dulles, who was absent from many of the later meetings between the president and the National Security Council, insinuated to Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru on May 21 that should the armistice talks fail, “the United States would probably make a stronger rather than

71. U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, May 19, 1953.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 1061.

72. U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Discussion at the 145<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, May 20, 1953.” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 1065.

73. *Ibid.*, 1066–1067.

74. *Ibid.*

75. See: Dingman, “Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War,” 50–91; Edward Friedman, “Nuclear Blackmail and the End of the Korean War,” *Modern China* 1, no. 1 (1975): 75–91.

a lesser military exertion, and that this might well extend the area of conflict.”<sup>76</sup> Dulles noted in his report that he assumed the Indian prime minister would relay the message to Chinese negotiators, but whether the secretary of state intended his remarks to be a veiled diplomatic threat is debatable considering that he immediately followed up with the statement that the United States was “sincerely trying to get an armistice and only crazy people could think that the United States wanted to prolong the struggle.”<sup>77</sup>

Regardless of how effectively Eisenhower and Dulles’s threats of nuclear war brought about the eventual armistice to the Korean War, one verity of the conflict remained the same; namely, the fact that the strategic inhibitions which constrained Truman’s policies were just as effective in constraining Eisenhower’s policies. U.S. policymakers still perceived Soviet conventional capabilities to be a considerable threat to global peace, the well-being of U.S. allies continued to be a noteworthy cause of concern, and the prospects of a worldwide war were no less horrifying in 1953 than they were in 1950. Eisenhower’s own perceptions of the utility of nuclear weapons may have differed from those of his predecessor, but an increased confidence in the effectiveness of the atomic bomb would have been hard-pressed to overcome the many strategic obstacles placed in the way of actually using such a weapon. Quick solutions were preferable to drawn-out ones, but when the former entailed an inordinate amount of risk, no amount of payoff could induce Eisenhower to take such a gambit.<sup>78</sup>

## CONCLUSION

When assessing the policies behind U.S. nuclear restraint in the Korean War, it is convenient to credit moral inhibitions surrounding the use of atomic weapons as a crucial explanatory factor. The effects that normative concerns have on international policymaking, however, are mercurial at best and non-existent at worst. Regarding the case study of the Korean War, in which norms against the use of atomic weapons were still in their infancy, any analysis of U.S. nuclear restraint that does not take into account the sobering strategic realities of Cold War international politics is woefully inadequate.

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76. U.S. Department of State, “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, May 21, 1953,” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 1068.

77. “Memorandum of Conversation,” *FRUS*, 1953, vol. 15, 1068–1069; Dingman, “Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War,” 86.

78. For an opposing viewpoint regarding Eisenhower’s willingness to use nuclear weapons, see: Michael G. Jackson, “Beyond Brinkmanship: Eisenhower, Nuclear War Fighting, and Korea, 1953–1968,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2005): 52–75.

Throughout the Korean War, U.S. presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower periodically acknowledged the existence of normative constraints on the use of nuclear weapons. While these instances of moral pondering may provide some insight into both presidents' ethical outlooks, they do not necessarily show that normative concerns were decisive in explaining U.S. nuclear restraint. In fact, instances of the aforementioned sort are vastly outnumbered by occasions in which Truman, Eisenhower, and major U.S. policymakers expressed concerns over Soviet retaliation; whether the threat of an actual Soviet military intervention in the Korean War was genuine or not is irrelevant. Strategic concerns over the long-term defense of Europe, Japan, and South Korea from the U.S.S.R. were prevalent enough to the extent that Truman and Eisenhower ultimately dismissed the notion of nuclear attacks against China for fear of Soviet reprisal. Even as both presidents engaged in rhetorical brinkmanship, they nevertheless retained a keen understanding of geopolitical realities.

It is a mistake, however, to assume from the Korean War that strategic considerations regularly play the same roles in the U.S. policymaking process. Throughout their careers, both Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower demonstrated an ability to prevent natural moral qualms from developing into an inhibitory sentimentousness. That flexibility of personal character, then, was of crucial importance in actually enabling both presidents to accept the inconvenient truths of Soviet military might. While every leader perceives himself to be of a sound strategic mindset, few are willing to acknowledge any harsh realities that may interfere with their preferred policy decisions. Had either Truman or Eisenhower been less cognizant to the threat, genuine or not, of Soviet interventionism, the Korean War could have easily developed into a far more infamous example of the dangers that arise from wars by proxy.



## BOOK REVIEWS

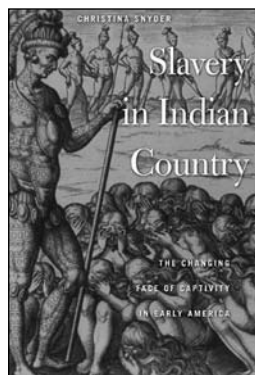
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## BOOK REVIEW

CHRISTINA SNYDER.  
*SLAVERY IN INDIAN  
COUNTRY: THE  
CHANGING FACE OF  
CAPTIVITY IN EARLY AMERICA.*

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Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010.



*Reviewed by Timothy D. Fritz*

For several generations, some of the major themes of early American history represented opposing binaries of slavery and freedom, both in racial and geopolitical terms. In *Slavery in Indian Country: the Changing Face of Captivity in Early America*, Christina Snyder takes important strides in expanding definitions of American slavery outside of proto-national narratives. Snyder begins with a caution concerning the South, that “[t]oo narrow a focus on the region as the inevitable cotton kingdom obscures the complexity of the region’s past and the diversity of its people” (8). The purpose of Snyder’s work is to extend conceptions of bondage in the American South beyond notions of simple slavery or captivity, and to expand its purposes beyond economic gain and social control. By employing native experience from the pre-Columbian through antebellum eras, her enlightening analysis displays the complex fluidity of a captive-taking process that characterized changing notions of Native American slavery as seen through the interactions of native, European, and African American peoples of the early South. By doing this, she effectively recounts the story of how southern Indians responded to new ideas of race.

Snyder begins with a discussion of Mississippian culture, identifying early conceptions of slavery as those captives taken in war who lacked kinship ties within chiefdoms. These people lived a liminal existence within these Indian societies because matrilineal clan membership was the basis for political identity. In many cases these captives served as prestige goods themselves, thus signifying the political power for which this warfare took place. Snyder also notes that the status of these captives was one of the first points of cultural misunderstanding between native southerners and Spanish conquistadores, as Europeans mistook native offers of



female captives as examples of women's status in the culture, rather than the show of the power and prestige of the local chief they actually represented.

Over time, native captivity practices evolved from being a component of warfare, to an economic, spiritual, and social tool in the centuries following the breakdown of Mississippian society. Snyder contends, however, that captives and an evolving system of ethnicity-based slavery still fulfilled an influential role in preserving native power relations amid the onslaught of the European invasion of what became the colonial South. As the demand for slaves intensified within British North America, the ensuing slaving wars and population loss caused Indian clans to increasingly use blood vengeance to avenge the death of relatives and adopt war captives in order to ensure the continuity of their culture. Indian slavery in the British colonies literally came under fire following the Yamasee War of 1715, as traders living among many of the settlements near the South Carolina colony were killed, thus eliminating European enticement for native slaves and causing colonists to question the practice as a whole. The enslavement of Native Americans did not peak, however, until 1724.

Snyder demonstrates the "fluidity of identity in early America" by discussing how captives were not always destined for slavery in Indian country (126). Sex and age, rather than race, were the primary characteristics influencing adoption into a native clan or enslavement. Slaves within Indian nations held a status as "owned people" similar to cattle, and were tasked with manual labor or traded for goods. At the beginning of the eighteenth century a variety of events, including the rise of pan-Indian viewpoints, crystallized race-thinking as kinship was expanded to include natives, while African Americans became codified as "other" as some Indian groups moved towards American-endorsed styles of government. The Seminoles of Florida, however, resisted civilization drives and maintained a more traditional system of captive taking by incorporating African Americans fleeing the growing plantation South as members of their society.

This book does an outstanding job of contrasting all forms of southern slavery, both European and Indian, while explaining how they informed each other and in turn influenced their respective societies. Snyder uses court documents, trade records, and manuscripts of both Native Americans and white southerners to show the variety of experience for captives within Indian society. These sources show that by the early nineteenth century, slavery among most Indians groups strongly resembled that of the developing Old South. Snyder fills an important gap concerning connections of slavery and race between the early and antebellum South and the wider experiences of those enslaved in these periods.

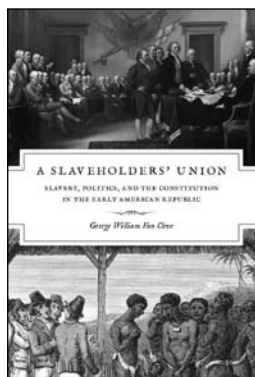
*Timothy D. Fritz is a doctoral candidate in American History.*

## BOOK REVIEW

GEORGE WILLIAM  
VAN CLEVE.  
*A SLAVEHOLDERS’  
UNION: SLAVERY,  
POLITICS, AND THE CONSTITUTION IN  
THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC.*

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Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2010.



*Reviewed by Brenden Kennedy*

George William Van Cleve traces slavery's role in American legal and political life from the Revolution to the Missouri compromises of 1820 and 1821. Van Cleve argues that the institution of slavery became so powerful by 1820 that the Constitution's "rule of law" no longer contained sectional tension over slavery. He defines rule of law as "agreed-upon moral foundations, allocations of political authority between different levels of government, and procedures for resolving disputes" (11). To support his argument, Van Cleve divides his analysis into three sections. First, he conveys how slavery emerged from the Revolution as stronger than before. Second, he demonstrates the foundational role slavery played in shaping the Constitution's political framework. Third, he discusses the federal government's indifference to regulating slavery in certain new states and territories and how this impacted sectional relationships. Van Cleve persuasively concludes that northern citizens' unwillingness to support abolition and their desire for a strong central government supporting commerce allowed southern representatives to continually increase slavery's institutional power at the state and federal level.

The American Revolution removed British imperial control over the institution of slavery. The subsequent Articles of Confederation created a weak centralized government, ardently supported by slave states. As a result, slavery's regulation remained largely in state control, allowing southern states to protect their slave property and permitting northern states to pursue abolition. This

abolition, however, remained tentative. New York and New Jersey contained almost as many slaves in 1810 as 1770. Northern citizens remained unwilling to support abolition unless the economic cost could be deferred to the ex-slaves themselves.

As a result, northern delegates at the Constitutional Convention had little incentive to waste political capital on issues regarding slavery. Instead, their constituents were more interested in establishing a strong central government capable of supporting commerce. Southerners also wanted a strong central government, but in terms of military protection. Congressional representation remained vital to resolving this issue. The resulting three-fifths compromise distorted national policy by increasing southern representation and therefore decreasing the political cost of pursuing purely sectional interests. Nevertheless, Van Cleve effectively demonstrates—despite some scholarly claims to the contrary—that this “premium” did not win Jefferson the White House in 1800.

As westward expansion continued, the North perceived no reason to combat slavery. Van Cleve highlights northern congressmen’s indifference to the extension of slavery to Tennessee and the Mississippi Territory. The federal government had no desire to inhibit the “market-driven expansion” of slavery or to carry out the necessary law-enforcement steps to enforce such a proscription (223). The Missouri controversy, however, became a “titanic economic and political struggle between America’s sections over their westward expansion” (225). In short, the Constitution’s federalism bolstered both state and federal protection of slavery, and was unable to contain sectional tensions once northerners and southerners collided on their westward migration. The Constitution could provide no permanent political compromise on the issue, as its supermajority amendment requirements rendered it void in a sectional dispute. The resulting compromises lacked constitutional support, as the judiciary was reluctant to act, and therefore subject to future debate. Consequently, the Constitution’s rule of law was removed, leaving politics the battleground for future sectional conflict.

While Van Cleve convincingly argues his case, some of the debates he engages are tried and trodden ground. For example, Van Cleve’s discussion of the North’s difficult road to abolition is not original and he enters into the long dispute over how the Revolution impacted slavery. Nevertheless, the author’s discussion of northern abolition represents the most powerful synthesis since Leon Litwack’s 1961 *North of Slavery: the Negro in the Free State, 1790–1860*. Moreover, *A Slaveholders’ Union* offers a fresh interpretation about how the Revolution impacted the institution of slavery. Instead of viewing the

Revolution as an impetus toward abolition or a movement intertwined with racism, Van Cleve posits that the extreme federalism of the Confederation granted slaveholders tight control over state political economies.

The author also enters into the debate over whether the Constitution was a pro- or anti-slavery document. Again, steering a middle course in the historiography, Van Cleve posits that neither the “republican” nor “progressive” school—the former views slavery as incidental to the formation of the republic and the latter sees it as foundational—is entirely correct. Instead, slavery’s influence was felt on a case-by-case basis, a mantra that Van Cleve effectively uses to probe existing historiographical conclusions surrounding slavery and politics in the Early Republic. Overall, *A Slaveholders’ Union* represents the most powerful monograph to date proving the Constitution’s pro-slavery bent.

*Brenden Kennedy is a doctoral student in American History.*

## BOOK REVIEW

### STEPHANIE MCCURRY. *CONFEDERATE RECKONING: POWER AND POLITICS IN THE CIVIL WAR SOUTH.*

*Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010.*



*Reviewed by Christopher Ronald Ruehlen*

The Confederate dream of a republic founded on the principles of slavery and mass political exclusion officially ended with military defeat in April 1865. Nevertheless, Stephanie McCurry suggests that this antidemocratic vision faced trials not only from enemy armies, but also from the people within the fledgling nation denied the rights of citizenship. In a dramatic reversal of heroic Confederate narratives, McCurry convincingly argues that the political acts of poor women and slaves doomed the Confederacy to failure.

According to McCurry, the Confederate founders' vision of "the people" as a brotherhood dedicated to protecting the rights of white men proved untenable as the structural problems of a slave society at war provided opportunities for marginalized individuals to gain political saliency. Poor women, for example, chafed under the unprecedented demands of a national government forced to enlist 85 percent of the adult white male population and enact considerable taxes. Facing starvation and a severe shortage of labor, soldiers' wives formed a powerful political constituency that demanded the government live up to its promises of protection. Poor Confederate women not only protested conscription and monetary policy with letters and petitions to state and federal government officials; they also turned to violence. In a series of at least twelve food riots in spring 1863, mobs of women attacked stores, government warehouses, and granaries in a powerful display of political activity. As a direct result, Confederate states underwent a profound overhaul in welfare policy, creating a budget for the subsistence of soldiers' wives unprecedented in the North or South. As McCurry notes, this palpable recognition of women as a force in politics gave life to the

Confederate vision of females as objects of male protection outside the realm of politics and war.

Similarly, viewed at the outset of the conflict as property vital to the southern cause, slaves asserted themselves politically to reveal the poverty of proslavery thought. According to McCurry, after Confederate independence slaves engaged in open warfare with their masters, fleeing plantations for enemy lines and providing key intelligence to the Union military through elaborate communication networks. These political acts forced changes in Confederate policy that proved crucial in destroying slavery's foundations. In particular, insurrectionary activity compelled some states to charge slaves with treason under military law, a practical acknowledgment that slaves stood as part of the body politic with duties to the government. Slaves' unwillingness to labor for the Confederate cause, moreover, forced the federal government to resort to impressment, a decision that undermined the very principle southerners waged war to protect: a master's unquestioned right to slave property. Finally, at the end of the war, Confederates experienced the ultimate reckoning with proslavery ideology as a desperate government lobbied for rebellious African Americans' loyalty with legislation enlisting and emancipating slaves.

McCurry presents her thesis convincingly in clear prose that scholars and general readers will find accessible. Certain aspects of the argument, however, seem overstated. Case in point is McCurry's conception of the Confederacy as a singular political project dichotomous to the United States. While the author is absolutely correct that the Confederacy stood out as a modern proslavery nation, its exclusion of women and African Americans from the body politic largely mirrored the political situation in the North, especially at the beginning of the war. As McCurry notes, in 1861 limited numbers of black men could only vote in four New England states while both white and black women were universally denied the privilege. Even after 1863, emancipation represented a controversial and polarizing war aim in the North. Historians would do well to remember that in many senses, both the Union and Confederacy stood by the proposition that all men were not created equal.

Finally, McCurry is perhaps too triumphant in her conclusion that "the poverty of Confederates' proslavery political vision had been proven once and for all time" (357). While the institution of slavery died with the Confederation nation-state, proslavery ideology certainly did not. As historians such as John David Smith have argued, for years after Reconstruction and Redemption, white southerners relied on proslavery thought to deny African Americans the rights of citizenship with Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, and extralegal violence. Not until

the civil rights movement of the twentieth century did the antidemocratic vision of the Confederacy face ultimate defeat.

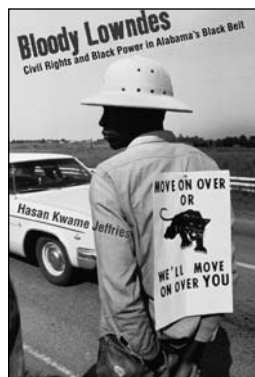
Nevertheless, these critiques are minor problems in a path-breaking work. In asserting the significance of the disfranchised in political history and the centrality of events in the South in the struggle for emancipation, McCurry makes a novel contribution to historians' understanding of the Civil War.

*Christopher Ronald Ruehlen is a doctoral student in American History.*

## BOOK REVIEW

### HASAN KWAME JEFFRIES. *BLOODY LOWNDES: CIVIL RIGHTS AND BLACK POWER IN ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT.*

*New York: New York University Press, 2009.*



*Reviewed by Michael Brandon*

In 1966, rural, black Alabamians, with the aid of organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), implemented a radical experiment in democracy. Forming an independent political party, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), these courageous Americans challenged not only the validity and utility of the two-party system, but also offered an alternative vision for constructing an egalitarian society. Adopting a defiant black panther as its political icon (a logo later adopted by the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense), the LCFO sought political power, social justice, and economic fairness in the Alabama Black Belt, a notorious citadel of white supremacy. In *Bloody Lowndes*, Hasan Kwame Jeffries provides the first historical examination of this fascinating movement, while also broadly chronicling the black freedom struggle in Lowndes County since emancipation. With passion and precision, Jeffries produces novel insights into the relationship between the local and the national movements, the struggle's geographic contours, the rise and nature of black power, and the periodization of the movement.

Some historians have advocated a “long civil rights movement” that dates back as far as the nineteenth century. Others insist that post-*Brown* mass-action protest was rather distinct in its leadership, strategy, agenda, and message. Jeffries avoids both poles of periodization. In the Alabama Black Belt, where physical violence, disfranchisement, and economic coercion had rendered African American activism a nearly suicidal pursuit since the 1890s, an overt social movement did not emerge until 1965—a date that is often acknowledged as the beginning of the end the civil rights activism at the national level.

Rather than emphasize the time in which activism emerged, Jeffries focuses on the substance of black demands for equality, which he refers to as “freedom rights,” or the “assortment of civil and human rights that emancipated African Americans



identified as the crux of freedom.” For Jeffries, freedom rights included civil liberties, suffrage, property rights, economic mobility and security, and the right to receive an adequate education (4, 8). In Lowndes County, the quest to obtain these constitutive markers of citizenship represented a long freedom struggle for Black Belt Alabamians. As a result, Jeffries endorses the “black freedom struggle” paradigm, maintaining that both the post-*Brown* and “long civil rights movement” models are not long enough—whether forwards or backwards in time—and that general periodization models cannot account for the organizational and temporal dynamism of locally oriented sociopolitical activism (257–58). Jeffries merely traces activism on the ground, avoiding semantic arguments about the precise origins of “the movement.” *Bloody Lowndes* demonstrates that the “long civil rights movement” debate distorts more than it reveals.

Jeffries’s most significant contribution is a reinterpretation of black power. Since the 1990s, examinations of black power have largely focused on the centrality of the urban context in spawning an ideological shift from liberal integration towards black nationalism. However, *Bloody Lowndes* reorients historical analysis of black power to the South, where African American radicalism in the post-voting rights era emerged in a decidedly rural context. Jeffries notes that the shift to a black power-based agenda in Lowndes County resulted from the conclusion that the acquisition of the vote alone did not actually produce political power. As white physical violence and economic coercion continued unabated, the Lowndes County movement also faced entrenched, white political power in vital local offices governing education and federal relief. Thus, Jeffries maintains that the transition to a black power agenda, characterized by an emphasis on racial consciousness, community control of resources, and independent politics, was an evolving process by which local activists located power and sought to achieve it. By geographically reorienting black power scholarship to the South, *Bloody Lowndes* buttresses the crux of previous works examining urban centers—that black power is to be understood as an outgrowth, if not a continuation, of the movement, which emerged and sought to address local concerns.

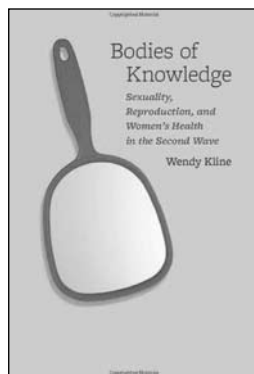
Although some narratives continue to locate the decline of the movement in the rise of black power, *Bloody Lowndes* challenges such declension narratives. Jeffries observes that in Lowndes County, the movement’s decline began in the 1970s and 1980s as the “freedom politics” of the LCFO gave way to a more traditional form of electoral politics that emphasized individual politicians instead of collective action (245). Jeffries’s engaging writing style fabulously complements a political narrative that drips with drama and speaks to the very heart of American democracy—the quest of the marginalized to foster a more perfect union.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### WENDY KLINE. *BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE: SEXUALITY, REPRODUCTION, AND WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE SECOND WAVE.*

Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2010.



*Reviewed by Jessica Letizia Lancia*

In *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women's Health in the Second Wave*, Wendy Kline delves into the female reproductive health movement and feminist activism of the 1970s and 1980s to understand the “historical relationship between scientific knowledge, women’s bodies, and medical practice” (1). Kline seeks to unravel a perplexing feminist paradox: why second wave feminists would build a reproductive-rights movement based, in part, on an essentialist argument of female biological difference that had historically been used to reinforce an oppressive gender hierarchy. These “difference feminists,” as she terms them, placed the female body at the center of their identity, claiming that their biological difference from men could be a source of female empowerment.

Through five case studies, Kline demonstrates the utility and limits of difference feminism *vis à vis* the women’s reproductive-health movement. She shows how, over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, reproductive rights activists privileged the experience of the female body to challenge conventional scientific norms, such as the subject/object division, in which medical professionals conceived of patients as objects of study rather than subjects with valuable experiential knowledge concerning their own bodies. By developing the idea that women should have access to information about their bodies and that they should help create that knowledge, these activists succeeded in challenging conventional thinking about the female body and its medicalization. However, the very concept of a universal female body and experience—cross-culturally and trans-historically articulated—proved problematic as it failed to address fundamental differences among women and romanticized the female experience.

According to Kline, by the 1980s, some activists had undermined their very own notion of difference by becoming professionals in the field of reproductive health (as physicians, consultants, etc) and appropriating accepted scientific language. They used their professional credentials rather than their experience as female-bodied individuals to make claims for changing the system. This professionalization proved to be a double-edged sword by allowing the women's health to enter the mainstream medical establishment but also weakening the movement's ideological basis.

Using an impressive array of sources, Kline's first chapter, on the making of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* delves into how the women's health book provided women with an alternative knowledge base on women's health and gave women readers the ability to "challenge medical decision making"(11). Her second chapter looks at the Pelvic Teaching Program created by Boston feminist health activists in 1976 to introduce medical students to a new view of women's bodies by using a role reversal technique in which patients instructed medical students regarding the correct way to perform pelvic exams. The experiment's failure over the course of three protocols revealed the limitations of a health care model based solely on subjective experience but raised awareness about the importance of taking the patient seriously. The third chapter traces the development of abortion and women's health activism in Chicago from an illegal underground system to a growing and vibrant network of women following the legalization of abortion in 1973. Through it, she demonstrates both the fractures and fatigues activists encountered. The fourth chapter discusses the controversial contraceptive Depo-Provera and the 1983 US Food and Drug Administration's board-of-inquiry hearing held to determine its safety. She shows how health activists were professionalized and forced to compromise their position on subjectivity to make substantial gains for women's health. The final chapter, on Fran Ventre, a midwife who bridged the gap between lay midwives and certified nurse midwives, looks at the philosophical divide between the two groups.

Kline's great accomplishment with this book lies in her convincing explanation of the advantages and limitations of essentialist claims of difference to the reproductive health movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The book has two main limitations—its organizational structure, which only partially explains the history of the movement, and its failure to fully delve into the challenges posed by non-white health activists and organizations. For instance, the National Black Women's Health Project, created by Byllye Avery in 1981 to address specific health needs of African American women and the internalized and medicalized racism of the healthcare system, is only mentioned briefly, and the main protagonists throughout the text remain white and middle class, perpetuating, rather than displacing, the master narrative of the feminist movement. Overall, however, this accessible book is a must read for individuals interested in feminism, reproductive rights, and social movements of the late twentieth century.

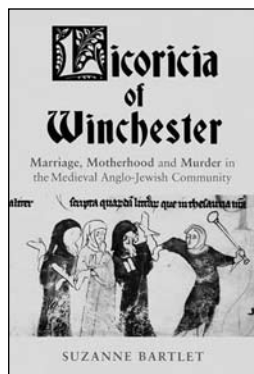
*Jessica Letizia Lancia is a doctoral student in American history.*

## BOOK REVIEW

SUZANNE BARTLET.  
*LICORICIA OF WINCHESTER:  
MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD,  
AND MURDER IN THE  
MEDIEVAL ANGLO-JEWISH COMMUNITY.*

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London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009.



*Reviewed by Alana Lord*

Excavations of a medieval Jewish cemetery near her home in Winchester inspired Suzanne Bartlet to investigate the story of Licoricia, a prominent businesswoman who died in 1277. As stated in the preface of *Licoricia of Winchester: Marriage, Motherhood, and Murder in the Medieval Anglo-Jewish Community*, “the temptation to research the life of someone who might just be interred under her house proved too great to resist” (ix). Bartlet indulges this temptation in a work that follows the activities of Licoricia and attempts to connect them to the history of Winchester and, more broadly, England, during the decisive reigns of Henry III and Edward I. Bartlet argues that by focusing on one historical character, Licoricia, and the city in which she was based, it is possible to delineate both her particular life story and the experiences of the Anglo-Jewish community during this precarious time.

Relying on sources such as bonds, court case documents, and Rolls, Bartlet begins Licoricia’s story in 1234 when she first appears in the records as a young, widowed businesswoman. Following the chronology of Licoricia and her family’s life, Bartlet illustrates their tumultuous existence through the next six decades. She chronicles Licoricia’s second marriage to David of Oxford, their unstable relationship with Henry III and Edward I, the family’s relationship with the Christian majority, Licoricia’s murder in 1277, her son’s execution during the coin-clipping pogrom in 1278, and the family’s expulsion from England with the rest of the Jewish community in 1290. To narrate this story, Bartlet alternates between chapters and sections on various aspects of Licoricia’s life and those with more general information on the Anglo-Jewish community, the city of Winchester, and

contemporary events. In doing so, she is able to demonstrate how Licoricia's behavior accorded with or deviated from the rest of the Jewish population.

The study of medieval Jewish women is a relatively new area of focus that only recently has found a footing within the field of Jewish and medieval history. In the past, historians such as Avraham Grossman and Elisheva Baumgarten have sought to include the activities and experiences of women to provide a more detailed picture of the Jewish community, but have focused less exclusively on them as individuals. As a result, a biography on such a respected female figure offers an alternative viewpoint and, as such, holds great potential. In many ways, *Licoricia of Winchester* lives up to expectations. By framing the life of Licoricia within the context of medieval Jewish culture and contemporary events, Bartlet successfully connects her actions and experiences with those of the larger Anglo-Jewish community, providing an unprecedented angle on the worsening conditions for the Jews in thirteenth-century England. This angle also enables Bartlet to engage additional critical questions of the field, including the dynamic relationship between Jewish and Christian communities and the difference between legal prescription and the reality of everyday life.

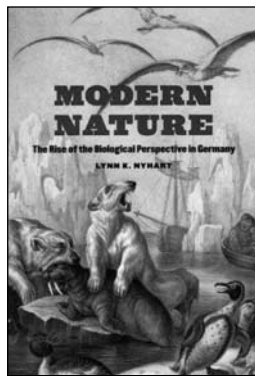
The most significant weakness of *Licoricia of Winchester* stems from Bartlet's desire to bring the historical actors to life. Although she effectively uses existing records to detail the layout of the city and the places and people that Licoricia and her family would have frequented in their everyday lives, Bartlet frequently makes assumptions about their personalities and actions that available evidence cannot support. For example, after pointing out that Licoricia's sons lived in different towns and did not act in a family consortium, Bartlet asserts that this "implies a wish to distance themselves from their forceful and powerful mother" (78). While this is possible, Bartlet never considers other reasons such as the advantages of expanding to other cities and towns which would lead to further business opportunities and an increase in clientele for the family business. In addition, Bartlet occasionally mentions pieces of information about Licoricia's life that she neglects to expand upon. For instance, she states that Licoricia "is known to have undertaken quite lengthy journeys," but fails to disclose where or why and in what context this is mentioned in the sources (68). Such an explanation would have added nuance to Bartlet's depiction of Licoricia and her experiences. Nevertheless, these criticisms should not detract from the important role that *Licoricia of Winchester* will play in the field of Jewish and medieval history. Bartlet's meticulous investigation and unique angle on Licoricia and her family will certainly encourage scholars to revisit the Jews of Winchester and instigate further studies on this intriguing community.

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## BOOK REVIEW

LYNN K. NYHART.  
*MODERN NATURE: THE  
RISE OF THE BIOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVE IN GERMANY.*

Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2009.



*Reviewed by Stew Kreitzer*

Lynn Nyhart's *Modern Nature: The Rise of the Biological Perspective in Germany* traces the history of Germany's ecological appreciation of the natural world through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nyhart does this by highlighting the careers of several prominent advocates, while locating them in social structures associated with natural history museums, like their patronage networks, educational patterns, and career trajectories.

Initially, the influence of these men did not draw from "the elite realm of university science," but rather "the civic realm of museums, schools, zoos, and other public enterprises" (4). Their efforts to "democratize natural history" helped expand and refashion "public institutions that integrated nature appreciation and study into the heart of civic consciousness" (5). Their emphasis on an organism's relationship to its natural environment inspired a new emphasis on ecology in which "humans and nature had to live in harmony...[and] nature and human culture were components of a larger whole" (6).

Nyhart begins her story with Philipp Leopold Martin (1815–1886), a "practical naturalist" who introduced new ideas to the realm of taxidermy and museum exhibition. Martin began his career as a taxidermist, travelling to South America in 1842 as the preparator for a private collecting expedition. While there, he met the famous German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. In the early 1850s, Martin worked as a technical assistant at the Berlin zoology museum, where he had the use of a museum workroom to run a "lively" taxidermist business on the side. He established his own private museum in the 1860s, after working as an innovative designer of zoological parks.

Martin frequently criticized “the dead uniformity of animals taxidermically prepared for museums” (50). He felt dismayed by cabinet systematicists who rarely got out in the field, leading to the “reduction of the living animal, an individual with a life, to a scientific specimen intended only to illustrate a taxonomic diagnosis” (51). As an alternative, Martin promoted artistic displays featuring animals in natural settings as a method for engaging the museum-going public with the natural world.

Nyhart follows with a rich account of Karl August Möbius (1825–1908), an influential zoologist rising out of humble beginnings as an elementary teacher who pioneered the study of marine biology and ecology. Möbius coined the term biocoenosis to describe the significance of biological ecosystems in his classic work on oyster cultivation published in 1877. He also designed Germany’s first public aquarium and helped establish the Hamburg Zoo. After a professorship at the University of Kiel, Möbius earned recognition as one of Germany’s leading zoologists as director of the University of Berlin’s Museum of Natural History. Among the numerous reforms Möbius initiated, he set aside large public galleries filled with engaging exhibits, while archiving the bulk of the collection behind the scenes for scientific research.

Möbius’s biological perspective of a living community emphasized “the importance of functional relationships” in “a larger system of dependences” that appreciated the autonomy of the individual—concepts that resonated in Germany’s recently politically unified liberal meritocracy. (160) Inspired by Möbius’s work, Fredrich Junge (1832–1905), a “self-taught teacher-naturalist” and education reformer, incorporated this vision into “a natural history curriculum that could be used for both the conservative social ends of the character educators and the progressive pedagogical ends of the hands-on educators, through [a] focus on the ‘living community’” (173). Junge’s influential textbook, *Natural History in the Primary School: The Village Pond as a Living Community* (1885), further emphasized teacher creativity in developing class lessons—innovative at the time—and encouraged “field trips outside the walls of the school, to learn about nature *in* nature” (175).

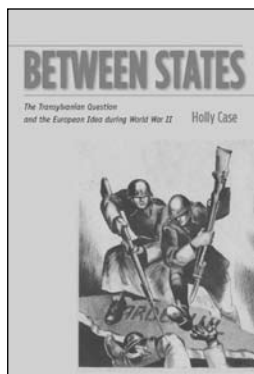
Through featuring life stories of proponents such as these, Nyhart’s work presents a meticulously researched account of the rise of a modern “biological perspective” in science and society. In addition, in her concluding chapter, comparing German and Anglo-American developments, she proposes that an American experience with a vast wilderness invited a sense of separateness from a pristine nature, while centuries of German settlement facilitated a feeling of being part of a larger natural order. Though at times overly dense, *Modern Nature* is a valuable book, sure to serve as a major reference work for historians of science and for Europeanists interested in institutional sites like museums.

*Stew Kreitzer is a doctoral candidate in the History of Science.*

## BOOK REVIEW

### HOLLY CASE. *BETWEEN STATES: THE TRANSYLVANIAN QUESTION AND THE EUROPEAN IDEA DURING WORLD WAR II.*

Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2009.



*Reviewed by Johanna Mellis*

In this compelling work, Holly Case discusses the contentious history of Transylvania, a region that has experienced nearly as many border changes and as much political strife as Alsace. In emphasizing that “small states matter” (1), she analyzes Hungary and Romania’s claims to this region as a case study, hoping to exemplify how notions of “Europe” and belonging to the “European idea” developed in Central and Eastern Europe (quotation marks she uses). By shifting the focus of World War II politics onto these smaller states, Case aims to broaden the period’s historiography by emphasizing that an in-depth look at Hungary and Romania produces a shift in the way World War II is perceived by historians.

In her overview of the “Transylvanian Question,” Case illustrates how intellectuals and elites in Hungary and Romania under the Habsburg Monarchy forged national identities that included the territory of Transylvania. Transylvania, geographically located in a borderland area, was considered a cultural heartland by both peoples by the time it was unified with the Kingdom of Hungary in 1868. Thus, during the twentieth century, Hungarian and Romanian leaders repeatedly appealed to the major powers on both sides of the world wars for support in retaining or recovering the territory. Within their propaganda efforts, which continued unabated throughout both world wars and the interwar period, these leaders presented the Transylvania Question as one that affected greater European interests and ultimately peace. After losing Transylvania to Romania in the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Hungary received Northern Transylvania from Germany in the 1940 Second Vienna Award (which Case terms the Second Vienna Arbitration). In an attempt to keep conflict at bay,



Germany and Italy mediated over issues in Transylvania throughout World War II, which Case argues reveals the extent to which the major Axis powers understood the Hungarian-Romanian regional dispute to be of the utmost importance.

Case's chapter on the "Jewish Question" *vis-à-vis* the "Transylvanian Question" is the product of her postdoctoral fellowship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. She discusses what she views as a problem with the current historiography, namely that it tends to view the Jews as the single determinate factor on policies regarding the Final Solution in these countries. Case argues that Hungarian and Romanian anti-Jewish policies were oftentimes linked to territorial ambitions, and therefore manipulated with that goal in mind. Case's final chapter concerns her argument of the "European idea" and its development in these two states since 1945, especially with respect to post-1989 politics. By offering statements from post-communist Hungarian and Romanian leaders, she demonstrates how the "Transylvanian Question" remains very much alive today. In addition, the European Union, much like the League of Nations and Germany and Italy in World War II, continues to serve as the "standard-setter" of European-ness and mediators of interstate interaction—and thus, of the actions between Hungary and Romania, and their claims of legitimacy on Transylvania.

While Case's ideas regarding the molding of the "European Idea" in Central and Eastern Europe and the Jewish Question in the region are undoubtedly the highlights of the work, they do not blend in seamlessly with the other chapters. It appears as though Case decided to focus on the Transylvanian Question and Central and Eastern European ideas about Europe separately, and then hastily packed them into one book. The final chapter seems rushed, and only in the conclusion does she finally explain one of her main goals: that by looking at these interactions between Hungary and Romania, people perceive and utilize nationalism and irredentism in transnational terms. Without explaining this framework in its entirety earlier, it may be lost on some readers, regardless of how many examples she employs throughout.

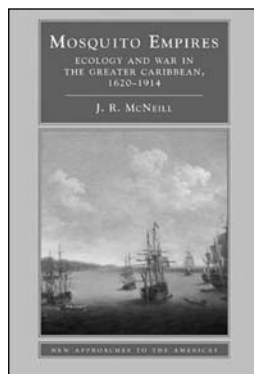
Without favoring either Hungary or Romania, Case succeeds in weaving these complex national, and inherently transnational, histories together. Thus, the focus on Hungary and Romania as having distinct yet interrelated politics and national identities shines through. Particularly striking is her portrayal of how these countries viewed seemingly tangential issues, such as the Jewish Question and attempts to boost troop morale in World War II, through the lens of either retaining or recovering Transylvania. Case's impressive use of unconventional research, such as tavern conversations turned brawls, and her view of Europe from the perspective of small states, makes this work a valuable contribution to the historiography.

*Johanna Mellis is a doctoral student in European History.*

## BOOK REVIEW

J. R. McNEIL.  
*MOSQUITO EMPIRES:  
ECOLOGY AND WAR  
IN THE GREATER  
CARIBBEAN, 1620–1914.*

*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.*



*Reviewed by Christopher Wooley*

J. R. McNeil's *Mosquito Empires* is more than just a history of how yellow fever and malaria influenced the imperial balance of power in the greater Caribbean. To be sure, as the author convincingly shows, they did. But humans and mosquitoes, the vectors that transmit the diseases, are both part of the same ecological system, and as one changes, so does the other in an ongoing process McNeil refers to as a “cotillion of co-evolution” (7). McNeil argues that the particularly lethal disease environments of the greater Caribbean were anthropogenic reflections of the geopolitical and economic systems of the region. Humans likely brought both yellow fever and falciparum malaria to the Americas from Africa as a byproduct of the slave trade. Sugar production ensured an ideal breeding ground for the yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*), just as the rice paddies of the North American low country proved perfect for swarms of hungry *anopheles* mosquitoes.

The book does an excellent job of tying the scientific particulars of this ecology together with the broad historical picture of the greater Caribbean. McNeil hinges his argument on the notion of “differential immunity” (or “differential resistance,” in the case of malaria), the idea that local populations, due to past exposure, were mostly immune to yellow fever and resistant to malaria. Outsiders, however, especially those from temperate northern climates, died by the scores from these mosquito-borne pathogens, often suffering mortality rates of sixty to eighty percent within months of landing. If it was epidemic disease that facilitated Spain’s conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century, the argument goes, then it was yellow fever and, to a lesser extent, malaria that protected this valuable empire from foreign occupation. By 1690, McNeil argues, the “Spanish hold in

the region, shaky for most of the seventeenth century, was now inexpensively buttressed by mosquitoes and microbes” (136).

The first part of the book develops the biological and ecological context of yellow fever and malaria in the greater Caribbean and, especially, the relationship between ecological change and the emergence of yellow fever as an important historical force in the seventeenth century. The second part offers a collection of case studies demonstrating the strengths of the author’s thesis by comparing the Dutch invasion of northeastern Brazil, before the emergence of yellow fever, with the disastrous attempts by the Scots, the French, peninsular Spaniards, and the British to settle in the American tropics and intervene in the geopolitics of the region after the disease had taken hold. The final part explores the role that differential immunity played in deciding the outcomes in the American, Haitian, and Spanish American wars of independence. As McNeil demonstrates, Caribbean military leaders, including Toussaint L’Ouverture himself, understood well the advantages conferred by differential immunity and employed them to their fullest extent. Even if they did not understand the pathology of the disease or its connection to mosquitoes, they were fully cognizant of the effect the “pernicious climate” of the region had upon those unfortunate enough to venture into the humid tropics without the necessary antibodies.

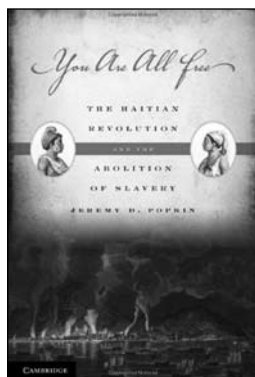
Throughout the book, McNeil skillfully blends his own primary research with an impressive understanding of a very large body of secondary literature. Although scholars have long been aware that yellow fever and malaria played a part in this history, McNeil’s study is the first work to successfully move from specific case studies to an understanding of the role these diseases played in shaping the contours of power in the Caribbean over a three-hundred-year span. As McNeil himself freely admits, there are times when the argument seems a bit deterministic. However, given the depth of research into the demographic catastrophe that befell almost all European ventures to the greater Caribbean after the middle of the seventeenth century, it seems that McNeil’s emphasis is well warranted. *Mosquito Empires*’s geographic, historical, and disciplinary breadth ensures its value to scholars interested in European empires, the greater Caribbean, and environmental history. Furthermore, the book’s clear, unstilted writing makes it accessible to advanced undergraduates and people working in fields beyond the humanities. Above all, McNeil’s excellent book reminds us that all history, on some level, is also ecology. The stories of human beings and their environments are, in the end, one and the same.

*Christopher Woolley is a doctoral candidate in Latin American History.*

## BOOK REVIEW

JEREMY D. POPKIN.  
*YOU ARE ALL FREE: THE  
HAITIAN REVOLUTION AND  
THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.*

*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.*



*Reviewed by Erin Zavitz*

Invoking the freedom cries of black slaves on June 20, 1793, Jeremy Popkin draws the reader into a complex narrative leading up to the first abolition of slavery in the Americas, initiated by the French National Convention in February 1794. For Popkin the tumultuous events that occurred in the French colonial port Cap Français constituted a turning point in not only the Haitian Revolution but also in the history of abolition and French colonialism. June 20, 1793, eliminated the “continuation of white colonial rule,” “breach[ed] the institution of slavery,” and provided an opening for abolition and the Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture (385–86). The results of this turning point, however, are secondary to Popkin’s larger focus on the intriguing combination of factors that led to June 20, 1793.

Contrary to the classical images of abolition in which the proponents are moral metropolitans or rebelling slaves, Popkin argues the first French emancipation arose from internal struggles among Saint Domingue’s free population, specifically competing factions of white Frenchmen (19). Over the initial chapters, he eloquently builds these tensions, demonstrating how the strata of Saint Domingue’s society responded to and interpreted the events and rhetoric emanating from Paris. These conflicts were complicated by the arrival in 1792 of the second French civil commissioners Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Etienne Polverel, who sought to imitate their republican brothers in France by implementing a revolutionary government in the colony. As Popkin points out, this essentially equated forming a dictatorship “in the name of the French nation” (124). Tensions grew over the spring of 1793, and with the arrival of General

François-Thomas Galbaud, the city's white population found a rallying figure who would stand up to the commissioners. Leading a band of angry white sailors, Galbaud attacked Sonthonax and Polverel and, unintentionally, initiated the call for abolition. To defend the city, the commissioners turned to the potential support of the region's slaves, "promising freedom to any slave who offered to fight for them" (212). Their decree and fighting in the city set off a wave of migration as colonists of all colors sought refuge in the United States and France. The impact of this movement of people, Popkin illustrates, helped to spark the debate on abolition in France. Thus, he traces how Galbaud's failed attempt to unseat Sonthonax and Polverel unexpectedly led to the 1794 abolition decree.

A narrative of only a few years, Popkin's account offers a meticulous reading of underused sources on the revolution and a valuable study of the initial phases of the Haitian Revolution. Moreover, the work significantly revises our understanding of the abolition process. The 1794 decree is not the product of mobilized abolitionists in the metropole, as is the case in Britain and the northern U.S., but rather an unexpected series of events begun in the colony. Popkin's study proves the limited nature of using a model to explain historical change, such as abolition. The book also provides an important addition to the study of the French Revolution. Popkin masterfully illustrates how France, Saint Domingue, and even the United States were connected in a network of exchange. People and ideas migrated among the three locations influencing each other, their revolutions, and the direction of history.

*Erin Zavitz is a doctoral student in Latin American History.*

## BOOK REVIEW

### ANNE KELK MAGER. *BEER, SOCIABILITY, AND MASCULINITY IN SOUTH AFRICA.*

*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.*



*Reviewed by Michael Gennaro*

Anne Kelk Mager examines the sale and social use of alcohol in South Africa from the end of prohibition (1950s) to the present. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Mager deftly draws from sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and historians to discuss beer consumption in socio-economic terms. Mager argues that beer consumption brought men together communally and was connected to social status, even in the face of an unequal and segregated society. Mager moves beyond the study of colonial oppression and African resistance to look at the growth of beer as a commodity by linking it to African males' leisure time and space. She also looks at how beer marketing in South Africa was at times able to conform to apartheid's racial boundaries and also break through apartheid to an imagined multiracial future.

The major focus of her study and central to the theme of beer and sociability is the role of South African Breweries (SAB), who controlled 90 percent of the beer market in South Africa from the 1950s to the present. SAB succeeded in its goal of making its beer the most popular form of alcohol for men. By deconstructing SAB advertising strategies, Mager shows how SAB used different brands of beer to tap into popular and socially configured ideals of masculinity and male drinking habits with sought-after male traits (i.e., rugged or muscular). She demonstrates that SAB's decision to sponsor sporting events (soccer for blacks and rugby/cricket for whites) created a culture of heavy beer drinking, or the "male-centered culture of mass spectator sport" (7). These sporting rituals also fashioned male camaraderie. To this aim, Mager credits SAB for helping to create a robust masculine beer culture that shaped drinking and social values in South Africa.

The strength of the book is Mager's ability to weave different themes into her narrative and to move beyond apartheid into global economics. She starts in the 1950s with the debates and controversies surrounding the ending of prohibition and the rise of illicit beer drinking establishments (*shebeens*), where African men preferred "European" bottled beer and a sense of conviviality to the state run beer halls, which felt more like prisons. Mager then moves into the beer wars of the 1970s between English and South African commercial interests to show how SAB gained its monopoly over the beer market while creating "a corporate culture" built on "the values of masculine domination" (46). Mager also looks at antisocial drinking behavior and the ways in which racial stereotypes and segregation shaped attitudes of alcohol abuse and dependence. For example, non-white Africans were denied social services for alcohol dependence because they were racially constructed as "naturally heavy drinkers" (79). Mager then looks at beer and politics and how debates and contestations over masculinity through beer drinking culture shaped anti-apartheid politics. She finishes her study with a look at the role of SAB in global consumerism of beer with its takeover of American Miller Breweries in 2002 to establish itself as the fourth largest brewer in the world. By the 1990s, global competition rather than "economic nationalism," was the driving force behind technological and labor changes in SAB brewing to maintain a global foothold in the present.

The most interesting chapters focused on beer advertising and globalization. For instance, in one chapter she argues that SAB's branding of beer as a symbol of "masculinity, sociability, and heritage [was] conveyed by insignia, color, and packaging" (65). The branding strategically linked a heritage of South African brewing with an imagined future of multiracial drinking that welcomed "a host of men of all hues...into the colonial drinking scene." (54). Mager later shows how SAB, after the fall of apartheid, used its beer promotion and marketing to construct new images of what it meant to be South African, providing a connection between "the corporation, the nation, and its people" (10).

This book resembles a collection of essays, which link themes of masculinity and sociability to illicit drinking and prohibition, sports, advertising, politics, world markets, and antisocial drinking. Her focus on beer and her use of oral history, advertising, promotions, sponsorship, and corporate records provide a unique social and economic history of South Africa. This study will aid historians in understanding how big businesses and corporations shape society. By focusing on the social, economic, and cultural aspects of alcohol consumption, Mager provides a new and refreshing take on the history of South Africa.

*Michael Gennaro is a doctoral student in African History.*

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