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# RECOUNTING THE PAST

A Student Journal of Historical Studies at Illinois State University

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Number 7 (Spring 2001)

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**RETHINKING HELEN CAVANAGH'S  
*HOW LOCAL IS LOCAL HISTORY***

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**Charles Ian Chun**

In 1976, Helen M. Cavanagh, Distinguished Professor of History at Illinois State University in Normal, published *How Local is Local History?* “as a reminder of the Historical significance of the bi-centennial celebration of the United States...and as a Clarion Call (1) to preserve the American Experience in the Minds and the Hearts of Americans through excellent educational programs and (2) to awaken the citizenry to preserve vital documentary material, [in order to] insure an enriched and amplified history of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly to the United States’ Centennial in 1876, the bi-centennial produced numerous works on local history through the efforts of universities as well as state and local governments across the country, of which Cavanagh’s was one. John Cumming of Central Michigan University wrote of the importance of such documentation: “As a consequence of this notable event, much of the early history of many communities, that would otherwise be lost or forgotten, has been recorded and preserved.”<sup>2</sup> Cavanagh emphasized the crucial role local history plays in the development of a thorough and all-inclusive national perspective, that it is indeed defined by the sum of its parts. “As the United States matures as a nation, historians begin to look more carefully at the

smallest regions from the inside-out in order to build a more adequate national history.”<sup>3</sup>

However, the changing emphases in historiography, as well as the drastic transformation of the world’s state and function, has brought the need to view the context and study of local history with a different set of lenses. The emergence of what could arguably be called a global culture, though not rendering Cavanagh’s ideas invalid, requires that considerations taken in the study of local history now be put into a larger frame of reference. Historians must now work beyond the national context and demonstrate the relationship between locality and the *transnational* and global framework. This paper will attempt to accomplish the following things: to extract and develop Cavanagh’s ideas of local history as they were used in the context of the national framework, to provide a synopsis of the popular interpretations of *globalization*, and to rethink Professor Cavanagh’s ideas of *local history* by placing them in the context of world history in this period of globalization.

To Cavanagh, there was an undeniable relationship between local history and the construction of an adequate national history. For those unfamiliar with historiography’s evolution, this relationship may appear rather obvious or, perhaps, insignificant; thus, certain questions may come to mind. What was wrong with how national history had been written up to that point? What necessitated this emphasis on local history? When writing their own national history, American historians by Cavanagh’s time had been perceived as generally being inadequate for the task.

Conversely they achieve[d]  
flashes of brilliance and excellence  
when highly trained scholars,

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Cavanaugh, *How Local is Local History?* (Normal: Illinois State University, 1976), p. iii.

<sup>2</sup> John Cumming, *A Guide for the Writing of Local History* (Lansing: Michigan American Revolution Bi-Centennial Commission, 1976), p. 1.

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<sup>3</sup> Cavanaugh, *How Local is Local History*, p. 14.

whose education included wide historical scope with considerable depth, directed their efforts toward a better understanding of the necessary perspectives to build an adequate national history by placing emphases on less grandiose patterns.<sup>4</sup>

Cavanagh attributed American historians' inadequacy to the relative youth of the United States, allowing time to study only the highest levels of society and politics, without yet realizing the need to study all of society.<sup>5</sup> In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Peter Burke aptly describes the traditional historians' bias against endeavors such as the pursuit of local history. He quotes Sir John Seeley of Cambridge who said, "History is past politics: politics is present history." It was generally understood that politics meant matters of the state at the national and international level; studying history at the local level was considered "peripheral to the interests of 'real' historians."<sup>6</sup> It is no surprise, then, local history was once exclusively the field of amateur historians and antiquarians. However, before proceeding further, it may be useful to establish how this essay will deal with the meaning of the term, local history.

"Many ideas can profitably be introduced into the general maze of inadequacy now surrounding the explanation of that indefinite term, Local History," says Cavanagh.<sup>7</sup> She asserts, early on, the futility in attempting to give local history a concrete definition: "the meaning of Local History is largely in the mind of the

[labeler] and the beholder."<sup>8</sup> The process of determining local history can be confined within the most restrictive criteria or characterized by the boundless *imagination* and *insight* of the historian. In any case, the goal ultimately remains the same: to construct a history of all society, a *total history*. In this particular work, Cavanagh truly embraced the freedom allowed in defining local history. Her philosophical ideas and historical examples demonstrate an effective synthesis between the traditional and the *new* approach to history. Clearly, her work occurred during a time of philosophical and methodological transition for the field. By this time, recognition or validation of new histories was only beginning to gain widespread acceptance. Burke suggests these new histories, though not really new at all, generally refer to historiographical developments in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>9</sup> These new histories include previously ignored fields such as social history or women's history. This essay will only make mention of these fields, for it would be beyond the scope and capability of this essay and author to adequately introduce or discuss their roles in a total history with any specificity or sophistication. A work such as *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* would be a much better introduction and discussion of these increasingly important and influential fields. It is very likely that current students and practitioners of history will easily understand that local history in this essay can include any imaginable perspective, whether traditional or not.

On a superficial level, one may find the lack of parameters associated with local history to be quite liberating. In actuality, using local history to tell a national story can often be an overwhelming burden with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press: 1991), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cavanaugh, *How Local is Local History?*, p. 1.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writings*, p. 7.

grave responsibilities. In a way, traditional political history was much easier to conceptualize as it required fewer principal actors (the pool was reduced by more than half by excluding females), considered fewer levels of socio-economic status or culture, and often relied on fewer kinds of sources; the official sources and points of view usually worked just fine. In their defense, most traditional historians were not pressured by society or their profession to write a total history as it is currently stipulated. However, the standards have changed, and national or world historians, especially those who build their work with local history, are faced with additional challenges. By acknowledging the inadequacies of traditional history, misrepresentation, or simply a lack of it, becomes less excusable. All the bases must be covered.

Given such considerations, how does the historian present an adequate national history? The procedure can be truly mystifying, and almost always frustrating. Cavanaugh says the “unsuspecting searcher after truth” is often in the habit of forming relationships between the *particulars* and the *universals*.<sup>10</sup> This tendency would seem only natural. After seemingly endless research and reflection, historians must surely wish to present their theories and perspectives with some assertiveness. However, Cavanaugh laments, “With sufficient information historians dare to generalize.”<sup>11</sup> Justifying this professional regret, Cavanaugh offers historian Carl Becker's statement, “*Everyman His Own Historian* to the localized environment where he lives.”<sup>12</sup> The plausibility of this statement makes it easy to accept. Yet, accepting this idea further complicates the process since records of *Everyman* may not

only confirm, but might also modify or simply contradict, assumed universal qualities that contributed toward wide explanations, such as those of a national consciousness or identity. The state of *Everyman's locality* is ambiguous for he may represent numerous identities and interests. Geographic location also adds to the confusion, especially when several locations have to be taken into consideration. Even if his physical geographical location is constant, “he may simultaneously relate to the farm, the township, the county, the city... then to the state, the nation, the world... and today even to space.” As historians discover, their generalizations prove to be inadequate; notions that were thought to be universal turn out to not be universal at all.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the complexity of the past, and the desire to avoid lengthy and incomprehensible accounts, makes generalizations necessary. Thus, the historian has to make decisions about what to include in the account and on what scale the past will be examined. The historian must also decide which local histories have national significance, and therefore, should be included.<sup>14</sup>

If local histories are found to be significant to the national framework, is it truly accurate to refer to the history as local? This is precisely what the title of Cavanaugh’s work is asking: how local is local history? When discussing *Everyman*, Cavanaugh wonders how local he is or has ever been.<sup>15</sup> Whether consciously or unconsciously, humankind’s “many activities lead into many different realms so that their influence, actions, ideas, and contributions cut across state, regional, national, and international boundaries.”<sup>16</sup> In discussing *microhistory*, Giovanni Levi

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<sup>10</sup> Cavanaugh, *How Local is Local History?*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

illustrates this point quite effectively. He states that "it becomes immediately obvious that even the apparently minutest action of, say, somebody going to buy a loaf of bread, actually encompasses the far wider system of the whole world's grain markets."<sup>17</sup> When considering this, the impact of local history upon national, or even world, history is more than simply a matter of total representation, but an avenue towards a more complete understanding of the cause-effect relationships that explain how the world functions.

Burke says that "National history, which was dominant in the nineteenth century, now has to compete for attention with world history."<sup>18</sup> Additionally, scholars and non-scholars alike, agree the world is getting smaller; welcome to the era of *globalization*. Expectedly, approaches to history are not unaffected. Now, historians must conscientiously transcend their national boundaries and study how local history affects the world *globally*. How will local history impact the history of the world in a global era? Before we probe for an answer, it would be wise to make the important distinction between traditional world history and global history. Bruce Mazlish, in his article, "Comparing global history to world history," makes the following distinctions:

World comes from the Middle English for "human existence;" its central reference is to the earth, including everyone and everything on it. Worlds can also be imaginary, such as the "next world," ...or they can designate a class of persons - the academic world, for instance, ...the New

World...a first, second, and a third world...demarcating different levels of development.

[Globe] occupies a different valence, deriving from the Latin, *globus*, the first definition of which is "something spherical or rounded." Only secondarily does the dictionary offer the synonym, *earth*. Global thus points in the direction of space; its sense permits the notion of standing outside our planet and seeing "Spaceship Earth."<sup>19</sup>

Whereas traditional world history focused on civilizations, global history recognizes nation-states and "examines the processes that transcend the nation-state framework."<sup>20</sup> To better understand these processes, we must next examine the conditions that led this current state of globalization.

Although historians debate the definition and origins of globalization, it has become quite clear that many previous and current approaches to history (such as world history, as stipulated by Michael Geyer and Charles Bright) are on their way to becoming, if not already outdated, and that historical study must now be conducted with global considerations and implications.<sup>21</sup> As globalization is a relatively new phenomenon, its periodization is tenuous. Depending on the point of view, globalization began in the 1970s with the

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<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in Peter Burke, ed. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, p. 1.

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<sup>19</sup> Bruce Mazlish, "Comparing global history to world history," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28 (winter 1998): p. 389.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World history in a global age," *American Historical Review*, 100 (October 1995), p. 1034. Although the instruction of world history survives in academic institutions, Geyer and Bright argue that it is a "foolish enterprise." An explanation of this idea is included below.

emergence of revolutionary technology that has become commonplace today; or the 1950s during the aftermath of World War II and the transition into the Cold War; perhaps 1917, kicking off "a very short century of permanent crises and contestation over world leadership;" or even as early as the time of Christopher Columbus, which saw the development of Trans-Atlantic trade and foreign colonization by Western Europe.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of the point of departure, there is little doubt that the world is now in a global era.

Evidence of globalization is so pervasive that it is practically overwhelming. The problems and hindrances of spatial distance have been eliminated by the Internet, international capital markets, supersonic travel, cable television, satellite communication, as well as speedier and more cost-effective transportation of goods. The threat of nuclear war, the consequences of worldwide environmental and ecological abuse, and the economic totalitarianism impressed upon the world by multinational corporations fosters a sense of global unity by suggesting a common cause or the sharing of common problems in global proportions.<sup>23</sup> All at once, the world is connected and functioning "with new capabilities, to synchronize global time and coordinate actions within the world."<sup>24</sup> In 1774, German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder commented on the state of the world during a time of expanded European control and commerce:

All nations and all continents are under our shadow, and when a storm shakes two twigs in Europe, how the entire world trembles and bleeds. When has the entire earth ever been so closely joined together, by so few threads? Who has ever had more power and more machines, such that with a single impulse, with a single movement of a finger, entire nations are shaken?<sup>25</sup>

Reflecting on his own times, the prophetic value of Herder's observation is uncanny when placed in the context of the modern global era. Not only does he vividly describe the interconnectedness of the world, he also places the traditional West (Western Europe and, now, the United States) in the center of the action.

For the world historian, the problems presented by Cavanaugh become greatly magnified. Just as Cavanaugh's national historian has poorly written our national history, the world historian has poorly written the history of the world. In their article, "World History in a Global Era," Geyer and Bright outline this inadequacy very clearly. The Eurocentrism of traditional world history has been obviously apparent for some time and widely criticized, especially in the face of the emerging global culture. However, the reconciliation of this problem is difficult to achieve as historians have little beyond the European frame of reference from which to narrate the world's history. They cannot help but draw from the previous and often inapplicable paradigms that place the West in the center of the action as the "single cause or prime mover at work" from a metaphorical control booth. However, "this

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<sup>22</sup> Geyer and Bright, "World history," 1039. Mazlish, "Comparing global history to World History," p. 390; Kevin A. Yelvington, "Caribbean Crucible: History, Culture, and globalization," *Social Education* 64 (March 2000), p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> Emma Rothschild, "Globalization and the Return of History," *Foreign Policy* no. 115 (summer 1999), p. 107. Mazlish, "Comparing global history to World History," p. 389.

<sup>24</sup> Geyer and Bright, "World history in a Global Age," p. 1041.

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<sup>25</sup> Rothschild, "Globalization and the Return of History," p. 110.

is a crisis of Western imaginings, but it poses profound challenges for any historian: the world we live in has come into its own as an integrated globe, yet it lacks narration and has no history."<sup>26</sup>

It is difficult for global history to escape from the Western frame of reference. Globalization itself is a development spearheaded by Western powers. The *Westernization* of the world is certainly a phenomenon in transit, a "[new] European imperialism" designed to exploit and extract from other regions struggling to gain their own footing in the global setting. Global homogenization is the ultimate goal in this scenario with the use of technology and manipulation of regional infrastructures to facilitate a practically instantaneous transmission of Western culture. Countries and localities, in a stage of *self-improvement* and *self-mobilization*, find themselves sought out by the revamped imperialist powers for sources of labor, capital, and consumer markets.<sup>27</sup> To be included in the developing global framework, non-Western states are forced to adopt Western standards through the toppling of authoritarian governments and the improvement of weak human rights records.<sup>28</sup> Due to this development, the pursuit of local history gained importance and significance "as a site of contention, developing a veritable romance of the locality, politically charged as identity Politics. It ends with people asserting difference and rejecting sameness around the world in a remarkable synchronicity that suggests...the high degree of global integration that has been achieved."<sup>29</sup> This interaction has not simply

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<sup>26</sup> Geyer and Bright, "World history in a Global Age," pp. 1035, 1040.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 1041.

<sup>28</sup> Ziya Onis, "Neoliberal Globalization and the Democracy Paradox," *Journal of International Affairs* 54 (Fall, 2000), p. 284.

<sup>29</sup> Geyer and Bright, "World history in a Global Age," p. 1035.

been another example of Old World on New World domination and victimization; this global conquest has not had the expected results. Many of these "victims of Western expansion" have entered into these new relationships with agendas of their own. Geyer and Bright explain:

Running at full tilt themselves, they engaged Western power in complex patterns of collaboration and resistance, accommodation and cooptation to reproduce and renew local worlds, using imperialists to shore up to or to create positions of power, using sites of indigenous power to make deals, using the European and American positions as interlopers in order to selectively appropriate the ways of the conquerors to local ends.<sup>30</sup>

Unable to achieve this goal to their ends and "never impart[ing] a sure capacity to shape and mold the world into a homogenous global civilization," European expansionists received a *reality check* in the form of local forces and identities asserting themselves into the global structure.<sup>31</sup> According to Levi, practitioners of microhistory present history in a similar fashion. Demonstrating their Marxist roots, historians who align themselves with microhistory seek "realistic description[s] of human behavior." [They employ]

[They employ] "an action and conflict model of man's behavior...which recognizes his...freedom beyond...the constraints of prescriptive and oppressive normative systems. Thus all social action is seen to be the result of an individual's

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 1041-1042.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 1043.

constant negotiation, manipulation, choices and decisions...which...offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms.<sup>32</sup>

**It has become less satisfying and less acceptable to present these “victims” as acquiescent primitives, mystified by the West’s superior knowledge and technology, dazzled by the prospect of trading their abundant resources for shiny trinkets. Whether to the benefit or the detriment of these various groups, things happened because they let it happen. Once again, Everyman appears to complicate the historical account. However, to further develop Everyman and Everywoman’s roles as they confront the global era, it may be worthwhile to ask whether the relationship between locality and *globality* is essentially the same as Cavanaugh’s local/national dynamic, simply magnified, or if it is a unique phenomenon of its own. Geyer and Bright, rather esoterically, suggest the following:**

We would rather see these tensions as arising out of worldwide processes of unsettlement (the mobilization of peoples, things, ideas, and images and their diffusion in space and time) and out of the often desperate efforts locally and globally to bring them under control or, as it were, to settle them. The outcome of these processes is a radically unequal but also radically de-centered world.<sup>33</sup>

One cannot simply say that “this is going on locally” while “that is going on globally” as

if they were mutually exclusive ideas. Additionally, it becomes increasingly difficult to make global generalizations when confronted with the recognition of individually different, yet collectively integrated, localities. Like a sage, Cavanaugh reminds us that “history...is involved with the particulars and universals of organizational activity ranging from the smallest to the largest units of human participation which can never be studied wholly in a vacuum.”<sup>34</sup>

Although the above has discussed several challenges facing historiography in the fields of local, national, and global history, suggestions to resolve them are conspicuously absent. Additionally, only a few fundamental challenges and obstacles have been addressed; it is personally mind-boggling, realizing how much more could be discussed within this topic. So what conclusions can be drawn? There are no universals; there is no single underlying theme or generality representative of a global consciousness. One would be hard pressed to successfully pinpoint a local consciousness or identity, whatever that means. Whereas past historiography would have created limited and unfounded universals with confidence, no such attempts can be made with satisfaction today. A world that is recognizing and integrating a multiplicity of viewpoints requires “particularization to the local and human scale,” as Levi describes.<sup>35</sup> Even then, as people change, so will the standards. Jacques Revel’s definition of microhistory as “the attempt to study the social not as an object invested with inherent properties, but as a set of shifting interrelationships existing between constantly adapting configurations,” assumes this perpetual

<sup>32</sup> Levi, “On Microhistory,” p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Geyer and Bright, “World history in a Global Age,” pp. 1043-1044.

<sup>34</sup> Cavanaugh, *How Local is Local History?*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Geyer and Bright, “World history in a Global Age,” p. 1046. Levi, “On Microhistory,” p. 95.

volatility.<sup>36</sup> How can the human experience be defined in a global era by reducing the scale of examination to the person? It is a goal as elusive as objectivity. Perhaps the human experience cannot be comprehensively formulated into some pleasantly digestible theory of universality. If it could, human life would then have become so stagnant as to render it pointless, while surely reducing the number of available positions for historians and other social scientists. Levi says, “the true problem for historians is to succeed in expressing the complexity of reality, even if this involves using descriptive techniques and forms of reasoning which are more intrinsically self-questioning and less assertive than any used before.”<sup>37</sup> Historians must consider history at the micro-level, yet transcend the boundaries of locality and nationality, in order to narrate the story of *Spaceship Earth*. Rethinking Cavanagh's ideas of local history brings us to this point. Instead of asking, “how local is local history,” it may now be more appropriate to ask, “How global is local history?”

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<sup>36</sup> Levi, “On Microhistory,” p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

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## George Washington Carver: A Life of Purpose

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**Marla Ringger**

No individual has any right to come into the world and go out of it without leaving behind him distinct and legitimate reasons for having passed through it.

G.W.C. 25 May 1915<sup>1</sup>

George Washington Carver was born a slave. His curiosity and quest for knowledge led him to achievements that set him apart as an African-American during an era when “separate but equal” was absolutely separate, and anything but equal. This quiet and unassuming man felt the injustices of racial prejudice early in his life, yet he never gave in to the hate that generated it. Amazingly, he enjoyed the company and friendship of prominent white men who, in turn, were influenced by Carver’s zest for life and for learning. He was a scientist, to be sure, but what really stood out in this man was his faith in God, his purpose in life, and his devotion to his people.

George was the second child born to Mary, who had been purchased by Moses and Susan Carver when she was only thirteen years old. Mary was the only slave the Carvers ever owned and they treated her and her two sons well. In 1863, when George was three years old, attackers kidnapped him and his mother from their cabin. A search party later found the child

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<sup>1</sup> Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver, In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), p.1.

alone in an abandoned shack, but his mother was never found. The Carvers brought the two boys into their own home and raised them as their own sons. Because he had been born a sickly child, George never worked the fields with Moses and his brother, Jim. Instead, he was taught to do housework and less strenuous chores that women tended to do.<sup>2</sup>

George Washington Carver took tremendous interest in the garden and the orchard, and he eventually started a flower garden of his own. He became so adept at caring for plants that neighbors often consulted him about their vegetables. At ten years of age, he was found making “house-calls” for sickly plants.<sup>3</sup> Carver wanted to understand why things grew as they did. He had such a great desire to learn that Susan, whom he referred to as “Aunt Sue,” began to teach him to read with Webster’s blue-backed speller. Unable to attend the local white school because of his color, he often sat outside the door and listened as the children recited their lessons.<sup>4</sup> Then, he would go for long walks, gathering many different plant and animal specimens to study. But this would only create more questions in his mind, questions that he longed to have answered.<sup>5</sup>

In the autumn of 1876, Carver had heard that eight miles away in Neosha, there was a school that accepted black students. He was determined to attend and with the Carvers’ blessing, he set out. He boarded with Andrew and Mariah Watkins, a black couple who had no children and he attended this school until the end of 1877, when it ran

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<sup>2</sup> John Perry, *Unshakable Faith* (Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1999), pp. 122-124.

<sup>3</sup> Peter H. Martorella, “The Negro’s Role in American History: George Washington Carver – A Case Study”, *Social Studies*, (1969), p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> Peggy Robbins, “The Gentle Genius: George Washington Carver,” *American History Illustrated*, (1973), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 127.

out of answers for him. Unfortunately, this was not an uncommon scenario. After the Civil War, white teachers helped to organize and teach at schools for black children. Because the task was so great, many of them quit, and the job was left to the black teachers, who had a limited education themselves. His experience at Neosha, however, served Carver well. For one thing, the Watkins were devout Christians who encouraged him to read the Bible every day. Mrs. Watkins also planted seeds in the young man to learn for the sake of his own people. These two goals helped to shape a life purpose for Carver that would guide him for the rest of his life.<sup>6</sup>

Carver heard that there was a school in Fort Scott, Kansas, that accepted blacks and whites, so he accompanied a family who was heading there. His 75-mile trip in 1877 was actually a part of the largest migration of blacks in the post-Reconstruction years. Black leaders disagreed on the merits of this migration. Frederick Douglass believed that blacks should not abandon the South, where “they had a near monopoly on laboring jobs.” Between the years 1870 and 1880, the black population in Kansas grew from 17,000 to 43,000. In 1861, when Kansas became a state, there were only 635 free blacks living there.<sup>7</sup>

Once in Fort Scott, Carver worked all summer doing laundry for businessmen in order to pay for his schooling. He spent many lonely months attending school and intermittently doing odd jobs, such as cooking, household chores, clerking, and laundry. Often he was the butt of cruel jokes, and when two white boys destroyed his schoolbooks, he had to finish the school year without them. Still, he excelled. After Carver had been there for two years, he witnessed a lynching for the first time when a black man was dragged from the jailhouse

by an angry mob. This so disturbed Carver, that he packed his bags that very night and left town.<sup>8</sup>

Carver was twenty years old when he enrolled in the eighth grade at Minneapolis, Kansas. To his advantage, he did not look his age. His soft speech and high-pitched voice, which resulted from whooping cough and lung infections that he suffered as a child, endeared him to the students. His laundry business once again sustained him and paid for his school expenses. Five years later, he was accepted as a scholarship student at Highland College, a small Presbyterian school in northeast Kansas. When he arrived and presented his letter of admission, he was met by a surprised principal who had not realized that Carver was black. He was told that a mistake had been made and that “Highland College does not take Negroes.”<sup>9</sup>

The news devastated Carver. But rather than fight the injustice, he simply put his dreams on hold for awhile. He took advantage of the Homesteading Act of 1862, and made a small claim in Ness County, Kansas. There he lived with a white man named George Steely until he had his own sod house completed. Carver used his farm for agricultural experiments, where he planted corn, vegetables, and 36 fruit trees. He even attached a sod “greenhouse” to his own “soddie.” Carver’s friendly personality gained him a good reputation in Ness County. He took part in weekend musicals, and also became known as a talented artist. An article appeared in the Ness County News on March 31, 1888, stating, “He is a pleasant and intelligent man to talk with, and were it not for his dusky skin – no fault of his – he might occupy a different sphere to which his ability would otherwise entitle

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 128-129.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

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<sup>8</sup> Robbins, “The Gentle Genius,” p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Edward S. Jenkins, “Impact of Social Conditions, A Study of the Works of American Black Scientists and Inventors,” *Journal of Black Studies* (1984), p. 477.

him.”<sup>10</sup> Despite his achievements, Carver knew it was time to move on; his quest for knowledge drove him to Iowa where he was accepted at Simpson College, a Methodist school in Indianola.<sup>11</sup>

Carver’s experience at Simpson was a good one. He was the only black man on campus, but he soon had a large group of friends. Students liked him and used the laundry business that he had started to help him with tuition costs. He was always welcome in churches and at businesses. His art teacher, Miss Etta Budd, was especially interested in Carver. She saw great potential in his work with plants and she was the major force responsible for getting him to enroll at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Budd’s father was a professor of horticulture at Ames, and it is likely that she pulled a few strings to get Carver accepted.<sup>12</sup>

Among the faculty at Iowa State were agriculture professors James G. Wilson (who later served as Secretary of Agriculture under Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft) and Henry C. Wallace (who became Secretary of Agriculture for Presidents Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge). These men, among others, came to regard George Washington Carver as a friend. In fact, Wilson gave up his office space to Carver to use for his living quarters. Since Carver was the only black man at Iowa State, no one was willing to share a dorm room with him. His first days on campus were difficult; racial slurs were yelled at him and the dining hall manager made him eat his meals in the basement with the janitors. Despite these trials, Carver kept a good attitude about life and he did his best to avoid confrontations. He eventually won

over the faculty and the students with his friendly manner and his humble spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Carver’s time at Iowa State served him well. He excelled at his studies and was highly regarded by both students and teachers. It was at this school that he made his first contributions to science. He conducted a study on the growing conditions of ferns that grew in the North and Northwest and he, along with Dr. Louis Pammel, published a paper on the prevention and cure of spot disease in currants and cherries.<sup>14</sup> Before leaving Ames, Carver had earned both his Bachelor and Master of Science degrees, co-published several articles, taught freshmen classes, and served two years as Assistant Station Botanist. He even had one of his paintings chosen to be displayed at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893.<sup>15</sup>

Even though his colleagues at Ames hoped he would stay to finish his doctorate, Carver decided it was time to move on. He believed God was calling him to use his education to help his fellow blacks. On March 26, 1896, he received an offer from Booker T. Washington to teach at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and to fulfill the need for an agricultural department there. In his letter to Carver, Washington wrote,

I cannot offer you money, position, or fame. The first two you have. The last, from the place you now occupy, you will no doubt achieve. These things I now ask you to give up. I offer you in their place work – hard, hard work - the task of bringing a people from degradation, poverty, and waste to full manhood.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> Robbins, “The Gentle Genius,” p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 149.

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<sup>13</sup> Perry, p. 150.

<sup>14</sup> Martorella, “The Negro’s Role in American History,” p. 319.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>16</sup> Robbins, “the Gentle Genius,” p. 16.

The black vote had been responsible for creating Tuskegee in 1881, but by 1886, their vote was nonexistent, with segregation and Jim Crow laws becoming the law of the land in the South.<sup>17</sup> Carver lost no time deciding. He saw this opportunity as a way to make a difference and responded enthusiastically: “through Christ who strengtheneth me to better the conditions of our people...I will accept the offer.” He was paid an annual salary of \$1000 plus board.<sup>18</sup>

Carver was to spend the rest of his life working at Tuskegee, but it was not without problems; he had difficulties from the very beginning of his tenure. First of all, Carver discovered upon his arrival that there was no research laboratory, no equipment, no staff, and no established curriculum. He also had to share living quarters with other faculty members, with whom he met some resistance because his earnings doubled theirs. The other teachers saw his demand for more space for his research as arrogant and selfish. In addition, Carver had spent most of his adult life among whites where he was made to feel special; at Tuskegee, he was just another black teacher. Whites tended to see Carver as a model for what other blacks could become, but his regard for whites further offended his Tuskegee colleagues. Their criticism of him, in turn, served to make whites more favorable toward him. He was never quite able to escape that “vicious circle.”<sup>19</sup> Two months later, however, he did get more space for his lab, and in a letter to Dr. Pammel, he wrote, “I am enjoying my work very much indeed...I like it so much better than I

thought I would at first.”<sup>20</sup> Carver realized that he and Booker T. Washington shared the same vision of improving life for black people and he was determined to succeed.

Although they had the same goals, Carver and Washington also had many conflicts. Both were strong-willed individuals who wanted things done their way. Washington was orderly, with a passion for precision and procedure. He wanted written reports on all the activities and classes at Tuskegee. Carver, on the other hand, had a passion for experimentation and teaching at the expense of reporting and personal management. This caused a great deal of stress in their relationship. Carver felt that he was not respected and threatened many times to resign. He complained often to Washington in his reports on how he did not have the proper resources to do his job, even though the Agricultural Department was given more money than all the other departments combined. As time passed, both Washington and Carver became even more firmly rooted in their own philosophies.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these conflicts, their mutual vision for southern blacks kept them on course. Carver was invaluable to Tuskegee, and Washington hoped that his resignations would remain idle threats. Eventually, because of his lack of interest in his administrative duties, Carver was replaced as head of the Agriculture Department and made head of Agricultural Research instead. This action became the low point in Carver’s career because he believed he had been treated unfairly. Before he died in 1915, Washington did acknowledge Carver’s accomplishments: “One of the most gifted men of the negro race whom I ever happened to meet is George W. Carver, Professor Carver, as he is called at

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<sup>17</sup> Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver, Scientist and Symbol*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 197.

<sup>18</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 157.

<sup>19</sup> Kremer, *George Washington Carver*, p. 8.

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<sup>20</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 162.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Tuskegee...quite the most modest man I have ever met.”<sup>22</sup>

Carver’s first major contribution to the farmer came in the area of cotton, and not the peanut, for which he was to become famous. He crossed short-stalk cotton, which produced the fattest bolls, with tall-stalk cotton, which did not leave its bolls exposed to the sandy soil when it rained. What resulted was officially recognized as “Carver’s Hybrid” and it became internationally known. Carver also introduced the cow-pea<sup>23</sup> and the soybean to Alabama farmers to make up for the loss of nitrogen in the soil caused by cotton crops.<sup>24</sup> His answer for the southern farmer, however, rested with the peanut and the sweet potato. He argued that man could live by these two products alone, because “together they constituted a balanced ration.”<sup>25</sup>

Carver also tried to improve conditions by issuing bulletins to southern farmers. He offered basic farming advice to uneducated black farmers that helped them to understand crop rotation and diversification. Because many were illiterate, Carver followed up his bulletins with conferences. In a 1905 bulletin, he advised farmers to plant peanuts. Not only would peanuts replenish the nutrients in the soil that the cotton crop depleted, but they were also free from the risk of boll weevils.<sup>26</sup> Other bulletins encouraged mixing acorns with corn for livestock feed in order to save money and experimenting with sweet potatoes by growing them first without fertilizer and then with a mixture of

phosphate, potash, soda, and lime, and finally comparing the yields. With the Tuskegee Experiment Station served as his testing ground for crop varieties and fertilizers, this experimental work became Carver’s first love after 1910.<sup>27</sup>

Farmers listened and heeded his advice and started to plant peanuts in great abundance. However, this created another problem. How could all those peanuts be marketed, and what were they good for, besides eating? Carver spent hours in his laboratory and eventually came up with 300 uses for the peanut, promoting it as a way to build up the soil, as a versatile and nutritious food, and as a cost-effective cash crop. One of his bulletins in 1906 included 105 recipes that ranged from a coffee substitute to peanut pie. Other products that he made from peanuts were peanut talcum powder, face cream, rope, dye, Worcestershire sauce, soap, shaving cream, punch, and paper.<sup>28</sup> Many had little practical use and were actually more expensive to produce, but they did illustrate how independent a farmer could be with only his peanut crop to sustain him. Carver’s conclusion was that peanuts were a part of a “natural diet” that everyone could use.<sup>29</sup>

George Washington Carver loved his students. He taught in a somewhat unorthodox manner, for which other teachers often criticized him, but he was very effective. He centered his classes on field trips, class discussions, and experiments by which he could demonstrate the effects of fertilization, weather, and erosion. He continued to collect different plants on his early morning walks to use as teaching tools or specimens for his “museum collection.” He planned his lessons around his discoveries. For

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> The cow-pea was a bush-like plant in the legume family that was grown for forage and for the seed that could be cooked as a vegetable.

<sup>24</sup> Robbins, “The Gentle Genius,” p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Barry Mackintosh, “George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth,” *Journal of Southern History* (1976), p. 312.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 514.

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<sup>27</sup> Barry Mackintosh, “George Washing Carver and the Peanut” *American Heritage* (1977), p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Jenkins, “Impact of Social Conditions,” p. 482.

<sup>29</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 307.

instance, he would display the “delicate, spidery roots of peanuts and pods that fixed nitrogen in the soil.”<sup>30</sup>

Carver was eventually released from all teaching responsibilities at Tuskegee so that he could spend all of his time in research, yet he continued to take seriously the goal of the Institute to educate the whole person. The students at Tuskegee were grandchildren of slaves, whose needs were bigger than what botany or chemistry could satisfy; they had to be taught the “essentials of living in a hostile world.” Consequently, Carver tried to have a relationship with all the students, not just those who majored in agriculture. Living in the residence hall made him readily accessible to them. One student commented, “When advice is sought by the humblest student, there is no red tape to encounter in entering his office.” His love, understanding and humor gave credibility to his advice. When a student was wondering about marriage, Carver’s suggestion to him was to “get your birdcage before you take unto yourself a canary.”<sup>31</sup>

Carver never missed an opportunity to share his faith with his students. While still at Iowa State, he and Professor Wilson started a prayer meeting once a week that became very popular with students. Their purpose was “to pour out to God in prayer [their] problems, [their] needs, [their] hopes for help.”<sup>32</sup> His love of botany came from his belief that all creation was a gift from God. He saw the miracle of creation in all living things. Science did not threaten his religion but rather helped to enhance his belief in a “Creator” God. To Professor Carver, science and the Bible were compatible.<sup>33</sup> This philosophy endeared him to the traditional religious community who

had been put on the defensive by science as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

Carver believed his purpose in life was to help mankind through his research. He often fell asleep after trying to come up with a solution to a certain problem and when he awoke, he had his answer. He attributed it to divine inspiration and marveled at the incredulous responses he received when he stated this belief. He asked, “Why should we who believe in Christ be so surprised at what God can do with a willing man in a laboratory? Some things must be baffling to the critic who has never been born again.”<sup>35</sup> He was often criticized for having “divine inspiration” but Carver believed that God is a “no-nonsense teacher” who reveals his secrets when the right questions are asked. He gave God credit for the inspiration that brought about the discovery of some 300 products from the peanut and 200 from the sweet potato. Carver acknowledged,

No books ever go into my laboratory. The thing that I am able to do and the way of doing it comes to me. I never have to grope for methods; the method is revealed to me at the moment I am inspired to create something new.<sup>36</sup>

The New York Times accused Carver of using language that “reveals a complete lack of the scientific spirit” and stated that “real chemists...do not ascribe their successes...to inspiration.”<sup>37</sup> Despite negative publicity, Carver never apologized

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>31</sup> McMurry, *George Washington Carver*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>32</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 150.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 154

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<sup>34</sup> Mackintosh, “George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth,” p. 526.

<sup>35</sup> William J. Federer, *America’s God and Country*, *Encyclopedia of Quotations* (Texas: Fame Publishing, Inc., 1994), p. 97.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Jenkins, “Black Scientists and Inventors” *Journal of Black Studies* (1991), p. 316.

<sup>37</sup> “Men of Science Never Talk That Way”, *New York Times*, November 20, 1924, p. 22.

for his faith in God, nor did he cease to talk to the Creator about the peanut.

Carver understood that part of his purpose was to help his people survive in a hostile world. That did not mean that Carver was an activist in civil rights. In fact, just the opposite was true. George Washington Carver was apolitical. He, of course, felt badly about the segregation policies in the South; he had been the victim of prejudice many times throughout his life. He also understood that the hardships that kept blacks from achieving success were due more to white racism than from their own inabilities, but he never used that as an excuse. When his Bible students brought racism to his attention, he encouraged them to respond with love rather than bitterness. He tried to explain: “Fear of something is at the root of hate for others and hate within will eventually destroy the hater. Keep your thoughts free from hate, and you need have no fear from those who hate you...”<sup>38</sup>

Carver was often criticized, especially in the black community, for not speaking out publicly against racial injustices. But he defended himself by saying that he was a “scientist,” not a “sociologist.” He considered the costs; any time spent dwelling on the injustices of life would take away from the time he spent on his purpose, the task at hand.<sup>39</sup> During his many travels and speaking engagements, he appeared frequently before southern white audiences sponsored by organizations whose objectives were to close the gap between whites and blacks. His speeches were always about his work and never focused on race, yet after his death, Clare Boothe Luce stated that “Carver did more than any man

ever born to improve racial relations in America.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1921, the United Peanut Grower’s Association asked Carver to speak on their behalf before the Ways and Means Committee of The U.S. House of Representatives to help pass a bill that would place a high tariff on imported peanuts. Given an allotment of ten minutes, Carver brought out an exhibit that displayed several foods derived from peanuts, such as breakfast foods, chocolate-covered peanuts, peanut bars held together by sweet potato syrup, peanut hay ground into livestock food, peanut milk, etc. As he spoke, the chamber was mesmerized for forty-five minutes, after which they broke out in applause. The bill was passed, resulting in the highest protective tariff ever passed up to that time.<sup>41</sup>

The publicity that Carver received after his testimony gave him national acclaim. People were taken with this black scientist and his peanuts. He became known as the “Wizard of Tuskegee,” and Carver began to receive many offers of positions at huge salaries. Thomas Edison offered him a job with an annual salary of \$100,000. Henry Ford was fascinated with Carver and visited him at Tuskegee with a job offer that was declined along with all of the others, but the two became fast friends. Ford built a replica of Carver’s laboratory in his Dearborn museum, where they often visited together.

The media was perplexed as to why Carver would turn down such lucrative offers. He explained that he was opposed to making money from inventions that were intended to be for the good of mankind. He cared little for money. In fact, the bookkeeper at Tuskegee had to constantly remind Carver to cash his paychecks. When

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<sup>38</sup> McMurry, *George Washington Carver*, p. 107.

<sup>39</sup> Rackham Holt, *George Washington Carver, An American Biography* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1943), p. 92.

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<sup>40</sup> Mackintosh, “George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth,” p. 522.

<sup>41</sup> Perry, *Unshakable Faith*, p. 312.

he was working his way through school at Iowa State, Carver would never accept help that he thought was charity. He refused anything that he did not pay for. For example, when a book that he had ordered was delivered to him, he would not even open it until he was certain that his payment had been received. Wearing the same old cap and a worn tweed suit with baggy knees, caused from kneeling beside his plants, Carver allowed himself one luxury: he was never without a fresh flower in his lapel.<sup>42</sup>

Carver enjoyed his popularity and fame much more than money. He received many awards, among them an honorary doctorate from Simpson College. Called “Columbus of the Soil,” “God’s Ebony Scientist,” a “colored Horatio Alger,” he received invitations to speak all over the United States. Publications referred to him as “a man of international repute,” “acceded to be one of the world’s greatest scientists,” and a “wizard of organic chemistry.”<sup>43</sup> For all this acclamation Carver remained the most content when he was in his laboratory at Tuskegee.

George Washington Carver died at Tuskegee Institute on January 5, 1943, at the age of eighty-three and was buried beside Booker T. Washington. Carver was known as the Peanut Man, but his biography shows that he was so much more. He was an artist at heart; painting remained one of his greatest loves. He was a botanist who made many important contributions to mytology, the study of fungi. As a teacher, he inspired thousands of black students to persevere, to follow his example as a Christian living a life of hope and selflessness. As a black man, he taught other black men and women to rise above unfair conditions instead of just complaining about them. He proved that black men were equal to whites. And

he inspired both. A young white man, after hearing Carver speak, wrote,

The man who had been and is to this day the greatest inspiration in my life is a Negro. In the whole life of this saintly man I see the future of a great race. In his eyes I see the soul of a people who experienced God and understand the meaning of the Cross.<sup>44</sup>

He inspired people of all ranks and stations in life, regardless of their color. He became a “symbol of victory over centuries of crushing oppression and slavery followed by decades of discrimination.”<sup>45</sup>

George Washington Carver was a hero to many people. He began his life in slavery, but he never allowed himself to be enslaved to hatred and bitterness that many times accompany hardships in life. He saw life as a gift from God, and he chose to live it in an attitude of thankfulness. He was not perfect, but the attitude he possessed was one that many would covet, for it truly shaped his philosophy of life. George Washington Carver devoted his life to give his people a better future. He gave them more than just peanuts; he gave them hope for a better life.

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<sup>42</sup> Robbins, “The Gentle Genius,” p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Perry, Unshakable Faith, p. 323.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

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**AMELIORATION RATHER THAN  
EMANCIPATION: THE  
COMPROMISE OF CHRISTIANITY IN  
THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH**

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**Douglas Kotlarczyk**

African-American slave culture in the American South prior to the Civil War was one of the most thoroughly religious cultures to ever exist. Nearly all slaves shared deep religious sentiments which affected most aspects of slave life. Slave religion stressed the exodus of the Hebrews out of Egypt as a parallel for their own bondage, and even more emphasis was placed upon the eventual salvation of the slaves after their deaths. Slave religion had an otherworldliness to make up for the poor condition of slaves in this world. The religion of the slaves, however, was very different from the religion that was taught to them by white ministers. White ministers preached a control-oriented, this-worldly religion, emphasizing the subservience of slaves to their masters. Easter Jones, who had been a slave in Georgia, said that when she went to “de white folks chu’ch... all dey talk ‘bout was obeying Massah and obeying Missus.”<sup>1</sup> This white-taught religion would clearly have been unsatisfying to the slaves. Anderson Jackson, a South Carolina slave, said that when it came to religion, “I stays independent of what white folks tells me.”<sup>2</sup>

Some ministers enjoyed teaching this version of Christianity as little as slaves enjoyed learning about it. John Dixon Long,

a Maryland Methodist minister who worked among slaves from 1839 to 1856, complained about the “adulterated Gospel” he had to teach.<sup>3</sup> If neither the students nor some of the ministers approved of the religion that was being taught, then why was this approach taken? The answer lies neither with the slaves nor the ministers, but rather with the slave owners. The planters in the Old South had very different goals from those of the ministers and the slaves. The planter class often cared little for the spiritual advancement or well being of the slaves, desiring only their unquestioning obedience. Ministers, on the other hand, were typically interested in the conversion and salvation of the slaves. The conflicting goals of planters and ministers, interacting in the cultural pattern of the antebellum South in which planters held nearly all power, forced ministers to compromise the message of Christianity to provide what religious instruction to the slaves that the planters would permit.

Early in the history of the settlement and colonization of North America, masters were nearly unanimously opposed to the religious instruction of their slaves. Many planters were opposed to religious conversion because they operated under an assumption that the baptism of slaves would lead to their emancipation. Another significant reason was a general disinterest and apathy regarding the religious status of their slaves. As early as 1682, English visitor John Barbot disapprovingly commented that “Christians in America... take very little care to have their slaves instructed” in Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Planters’ interest in their slaves generally extended only to

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<sup>1</sup> George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (19 vols.; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 4.2, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene V. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 214.

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 98.

their economic output and productivity. English divine Morgan Godwin condemned this worldliness in a 1685 sermon he delivered to Virginians entitled “Trade preferr’d before Religion.”<sup>5</sup> Beyond apathy, however, the planter class disliked the values that they thought Christianization would impart to slaves. South Carolina minister Francis LeJau, who worked extensively among slaves in the mid-eighteenth century, expressed the views of the planters, saying that they believed that “Christianizing the Negro makes them proud and saucy, and tempts them to imagine themselves upon an equality with white people.”<sup>6</sup>

Slave owners feared that Christianizing slaves would incite slave rebellions. Religion gave slaves a reason to gather—for weddings, funerals, or revival meetings—and planters believed that these gatherings provided opportunities for slaves to conspire. This was particularly true with regard to funerals, at which powerful emotions would already be running deep among the gathered slaves. Thus, as early as 1687, several colonies had banned public slave funerals. In 1772, the corporation of New York mandated that slave funerals could only be held during the day; attendance at slave funerals was limited to twelve mourners or less.<sup>7</sup>

These planter fears of Christianization and slave rebellion were reinforced and given a somewhat different twist with the 1739 Stono Rebellion. This incident involved a mass exodus of slaves from South Carolina plantations, all of whom had

received religious instruction from their former Spanish and Portuguese masters. Pursuit by the South Carolina militia resulted in several pitched battles at Stono, which was only fifty miles from the Florida border. Although most rebels were killed or recaptured, a few escaped to Florida, where Spanish authorities protected the fugitives because they were Christians and knew their catechism.<sup>8</sup>

Strongly interested in the conversion of slaves, ministers both in England and in America were disappointed by the lack of effort on the part of the planters to provide for the religious instruction of slaves. The South Carolina clergy told Minister Gideon Johnston in March of 1712 that “The ignorance... of these poor slaves in the principles of Christianity is not so much their fault as their unhappiness in falling into the hands of such ill masters who not only neglect to instruct them but scoff at those who attempt it.”<sup>9</sup> To compensate for this lack of effort on the part of slaveholders, English Anglicans founded the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1701.<sup>10</sup> The SPG sent missionaries out among the slaves, particularly in the Chesapeake colonies, attempting to educate them about Christianity and convert them, often over the objections and sometimes vehement opposition of the planters. The SPG, with this sort of guerilla religious education, was not a mainstream movement, however.

Mainstream religion, both in England and in the colonies, attempted to begin the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Lester B. Scherer, *Slavery and the Church in Early America, 1619-1819* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Banning nighttime slave funerals effectively banned slave funerals altogether since practically no planters would allow slaves to take time off from work during the day for a funeral. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 194.

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<sup>8</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Washington Creel, “A Peculiar People”: *Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Known as the SPG. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, p. 60.

conversion of slaves by convincing slave owners that religious instruction would in fact make the slaves better workers. Cotton Mather, an eminent New England preacher claimed as much in the preface to his 1705 text, *The Negro Christianized*, a slave catechism. Mather stated that “the pious Masters, that have instituted their servants in Christian Piety, will even in this Life have a sensible Recompense” in the sense of more diligent workers.<sup>11</sup> As eminent a personage as the Bishop of London lent himself to the task of convincing colonial planters, claiming in 1727 that “So far is Christianity from discharging Men from the Duties of the Station and Condition in which it found them that it lays them under stronger Obligations to perform those Duties with the greatest Diligence and Fidelity, not only from the Fear of Men, but from a Sense of Duty to God, and the Belief and Expectation of a future Account.”<sup>12</sup> Despite the efforts of these and many other ministers to convince planters to allow religion among their slaves, most planters remained strongly opposed to the religious instruction of slaves throughout the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries.

The first significant strides in the religious education of the slaves in the North American colonies came during the Great Awakening of the late 1730s and 1740s. George Whitefield may well have been the single driving force in this religious movement. Whitefield arrived at Lewes, Delaware, on October 30, 1739, and over the next several years preached throughout the colonies. Whitefield was able to build on the advances made by such ministers as Theodorus Frelinghuysen, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley to reawaken religious interest in many colonists and

instill in them an evangelical zeal.<sup>13</sup> This religious movement among whites would clearly have affected their slaves in many ways. As a general rule, the Great Awakening improved the conditions of slaves. It first aroused feelings of Christian charity among slaveholders, tending to make them less severe with their slaves.

The evangelical fervor produced by the Great Awakening also tended to make planters more amenable to the idea of Christianity among their slaves, and slave membership of most established churches grew by leaps and bounds during this period.<sup>14</sup> Growth of church membership was substantial among free whites as well as slaves during this period. The two denominations that experienced the most noticeable growth were the Baptists and the Methodists, both of which were strongly opposed to the institution of slavery. The Baptist church began its growth as a result of the Great Awakening around 1740 in New England. This growth not only increased the size of the church in that region; it also inspired evangelical missions to the middle and southern colonies in the 1740s and 1750s.<sup>15</sup> These missions became somewhat less prevalent in the following two decades as colonial attention became focused on English policies toward the colonies, particularly in New England.

The original anti-slavery feelings of the Baptists and Methodists boiled to a fever pitch with the American Revolution. Following the Revolution, sentiments of liberty and equality swept through the country and slavery became an increasingly unpopular institution. The Baptists and Methodists became extremely outspoken

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<sup>11</sup> Scherer. *Slavery and the Church in Early America*, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 103.

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<sup>13</sup> Wesley M. Gewehr, *The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740-1790* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930), pp. 4-8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

<sup>15</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1950).

against it. Francis Asbury, bishop of the entire Methodist church in America, drafted a resolution passed at the 1780 Methodist conference in Baltimore, stating that the conference “acknowledges that slavery is contrary to the law of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; [and] contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion.”<sup>16</sup>

The Baptists were equally vehement in their condemnations. The Baptist General Committee of Virginia passed a strong antislavery resolution in 1789, stating:

Resolved that slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government; and we, therefore, recommend it to our brethren, to make use of every legal measure to extirpate this horrid evil from the land and pray Almighty God that our honorable legislature may have it in their power to proclaim the great Jubilee consistent with the principles of good policy.<sup>17</sup>

These antislavery stances provoked the animosity of southern slaveholders, who flatly refused to allow Methodists and Baptists to preach to their slaves.<sup>18</sup>

The Methodists and the Baptists became mainstream in the South and more acceptable to southern planters during the Great Revival<sup>19</sup> of the early nineteenth century. The Great Revival developed out of the egalitarianism of the post-Revolutionary era; it was an evangelical tide that swept the

southern frontier of Kentucky and Tennessee. The first camp meeting that could be said to have begun the Great Revival was held at Red River, Kentucky, in June of 1800. On August 3, 1801, the Revival swung into full force with a massive revival meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky.<sup>20</sup> In the great flood of preaching that followed, denominational variations tended to be forgotten, with ministers of different sects working together to convert the masses. In spite of this multi-denominationalism, different religious groups experienced markedly different growth patterns. Baptists and Methodists, as during the Great Awakening of sixty years earlier, enjoyed the most remarkable growth. In fact, Baptist historians refer to the year 1801 as “The Great Year” because of the massive number of converts, over 10,000 in Kentucky alone.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, it was the resurgence in the Christian feeling of the Great Revival that led to the compromise of Christianity with regard to slaves.

With the massive numbers of white converts secured during the Great Revival, Baptism and Methodism became part of mainstream southern culture. Although all ministers brought something different to the Revival culture, the great majority of them were leery of the excesses of the revivals and camp meetings. Nevertheless, they were thrilled with the number of converts.<sup>22</sup> To these ministers, conversion was the great goal of the Revival, and taking a strong antislavery stance would have jeopardized this goal by alienating the powerful planter class. Furthermore, as the Revival progressed, revivalist ministers began to

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert Asbury, *A Methodist Saint: The Life of Bishop Asbury* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 86.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Baumer Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery, with Sidelights on Ecclesiastical Politics* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Also known as the Second Great Awakening. Robert A. Divine et al., *America Past and Present* (New York: Longman, 1999), p. 323.

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel T. Bailey, *Shadow on the Church: Southwestern Evangelical Religion and the Issue of Slavery, 1783-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 65-69.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Brownlow Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (N.p.: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Bailey, *Shadow on the Church*, pp. 82-83.

gain social status throughout the South. Some ministers, particularly those in the cities, became slaveowners themselves; of course, they became less inclined to condemn a system from which they benefited directly. The rural revivalist ministers, who constituted the vast majority of ministers and were typically poorer than their urban brethren, were loathe to condemn an institution in which others of their sect participated.<sup>23</sup>

The Great Revival thus ironically reversed the position of ministers: they became less interested in the condition of slaves, but became more capable of speaking to them about it. This reversal is evident among both the Methodists and Baptists. The Methodists began by ignoring slaves, refusing to issue them the sacraments as early as 1800.<sup>24</sup> In 1804, this pro-establishment sentiment became codified in church law with the command to Methodist preachers to “from time to time, as occasion serves, admonish and exhort all slaves to render due respect to the commands and interests of their respective masters.”<sup>25</sup> The reversal is perhaps more dramatic with regard to individuals. Francis Asbury, who drafted the 1780 condemnation of slavery, in 1807 began to insist in his public sermons that slaves should obey their masters “as unto Christ,” “with fear and trembling.”<sup>26</sup> In 1810, he explained this reversal:

Would not *amelioration* in the condition and treatment of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans than an attempt at their *emancipation*?...What is the personal liberty of the African, which he may abuse, to the salvation

of his soul—how may it be compared?<sup>27</sup>

The change of Baptist attitudes toward slavery was equally radical.

As Baptists became more mainstream and common in Southern culture, which truly began to occur in the years immediately following the Revolution, they began to drop their condemnations of slavery. John Leland, a prestigious Virginia Baptist who had drafted the 1789 antislavery resolutions, again condemned slavery in 1791, saying that it was a “violent deprivation of the rights of nature.” He urged public prayer against slavery, but began to show signs of compromising with the status quo by stating that if public antislavery prayer “would raise the anger of tyrants, or embolden the slaves to insolence,” then private prayer would be preferable.<sup>28</sup> In 1793, the Baptist General Committee of Virginia reversed its 1789 antislavery declaration, deciding instead to allow all white Baptists to decide for themselves on the moral acceptability of slavery.<sup>29</sup> This reversal in Baptist attitudes is easily understandable given the history of the faith in America. In colonial and revolutionary times, Baptists were often very poor and seldom, if ever, held slaves. At this time, they preached against slavery. But by the Civil War, the Baptists owned more slaves than any other denomination in the South, except for Methodists, a transition that began in the period immediately following the Revolution. This explanation is further supported by the fact that Baptist antislavery preaching continued longer in Kentucky and Tennessee than it did in the seaboard states of the South

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.

<sup>24</sup> Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery*, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Swaney himself is less generous in his appraisal of this change, saying that “for good or for ill, Methodist leaders made the momentous decision to compromise with a known evil.” (p. 15).

<sup>28</sup> Scherer, *Slavery and the Church in Early America*, p. 155.

<sup>29</sup> Sobel, *Trabelin’ On*, p. 89.

because Kentucky and Tennessee continued in a subsistence farming economy (i.e., non-slave economy) longer than the coastal states.<sup>30</sup>

The Great Revival and subsequent changes in the attitudes of ministers changed many planters' attitudes regarding the religious instruction of slaves. By the early nineteenth century, planters had become more accepting of Christianity among their slaves. Many reasons contributed to this change in attitude, not the least of which was the fact that after the Great Revival, Baptists and Methodists were seen as less of a threat to the status quo. It is also true that some masters were genuinely concerned about the spiritual well being of their slaves. But more likely to have been a significant factor in this reversal of the attitudes of masters is the fact that planters at this time began to recognize that religion could help slaves become more productive and less likely to rebel. The ability of Christianity to act as a social control, as had been preached a century earlier by Cotton Mather and so many others, finally began to be acknowledged by slaveholders. Further, planters had come to believe that Christianity could have positive effects on slaves. One planter noted that his slaves were "attentive to religious instruction, and greatly improved in intelligence and morals, in domestic relations."<sup>31</sup> Christianization of slaves had positive effects upon the South's external as well as internal relations.

The increased allowance for the religious instruction of slaves coincided with the development of abolitionist movements in the North in the 1820s and 30s. William Lloyd Garrison began publishing his antislavery journal *The Liberator* in 1831. It had been preceded by several other antislavery newspapers, although none of

them ever achieved the fame of Garrison's.<sup>32</sup> The refusal of planters to provide religious instruction to slaves was a powerful antislavery weapon for abolitionists to use in interacting with Christians in the northern United States and Europe. By providing that instruction, slaveholders were able to fully rebut that argument. In 1829, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a wealthy South Carolinian planter and congressman, urged his fellow planters that religious instruction of slaves was necessary to gain "the advantage in argument over... our northern brethren."<sup>33</sup> Religion was indeed used for this purpose: a British visitor to the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston had the full gallery of slaves pointed out to him by a layman who observed, "Here is proof that our domestic institution recognizes and provides for the religious wants of the slaves."<sup>34</sup> To some slaveholders, however, none of these arguments provided adequate reason to risk the religious education of slaves.

There were those planters who remained opposed to the thought of religion among their slaves right up until emancipation. Pro-religion and anti-religion planters were often neighbors, and there was little clear reason what would make a particular planter either for or against religion. Ex-slave John Brown recalled that

Sunday was a great day around the plantation.... Everybody got ready for the church meeting.... Mister John's wife would start the meeting with a prayer and then would come

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<sup>30</sup> Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, p. 89.

<sup>31</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 189.

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<sup>32</sup> Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961).

<sup>33</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 159.

<sup>34</sup> William Ferguson, *America by River and Rail; or Notes by the Way on the New World and Its People* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1856), cited in David Gerald Hewett, *Slavery in the Old South: The British Travelers' Image* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1972), p. 191.

the singing.... But the white folks on the next plantation would lick their slaves for trying to do what we did.<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that many masters remained opposed to the thought of Christianity among slaves well into the nineteenth century. By some estimates, as of 1831, there were only five known slave churches in the entire South and less than five percent of slaves attended a weekly Sabbath service.<sup>36</sup> Planters remained actively opposed to religion because of the deleterious effects they believed that it had on their slaves. One Virginia planter who refused to allow his slaves to go to revivals explained his opposition by saying that “it is the greatest misfortune that can happen” when a slave became a Christian.<sup>37</sup> Planters also still feared what they thought to be dangerous and incendiary ideas in Christianity.

This fear of slaves fully understanding Christianity manifests itself in the opposition of the planter class to slave literacy. Henry Bibb, an escaped slave, recalled that in the 1830s a poor white girl had attempted to open a Sabbath school for slaves.

Books were furnished and she commenced the school; but the news soon got to our owners that she was teaching us to read.... Patrols were appointed to go and break it up the next Sabbath. They were determined that we should not have a Sabbath

school in operation. For slaves this is called an incendiary movement.<sup>38</sup>

The thought of slaves reading the Bible became especially frightening to slave owners following the Denmark Vesey affair in 1822 and the 1831 Nat Turner revolt. Both Vesey and Turner were literate blacks who had read the Bible and claimed scriptural justification for their actions.<sup>39</sup> Events such as these caused southern states to adopt laws that made it illegal for slaves to read. A law to that end was adopted in South Carolina in 1834, and during the debate prior to its passage, Representative Whitmarsh B. Seabrook exclaimed that any southerner who wanted slaves to read the entire Bible belonged in a “room in the lunatic asylum.”<sup>40</sup> Planters distrusted ministers and missionaries among the slaves almost as much as they distrusted the slaves’ own interpretations of the Bible. One planter noted to visiting Briton John Godly, “These ministers are all abolitionists in disguise.... I would not let one of them come among my slaves.”<sup>41</sup> The abolitionist movement thus hindered the cause of slave religious instruction as much as it helped.

Also coinciding with the beginnings of the abolitionist movement was the migration of southern planters, their families, and their slaves from the established seaboard states to the Old Southwest in the 1820s and 30s.<sup>42</sup> The profile of those planters who established themselves in the Old Southwest is useful in understanding the social and

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<sup>35</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, pp. 219-20.

<sup>36</sup> R. Q. Mallard, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond, VA: Whitten & Shepperson, 1892), p. 144.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Mackay, *The Western World; or Travels in the United States in 1846-47: Exhibiting Them in Their Latest Social, Political, and Industrial; Including a Chapter on California* (3 vols.; London: R. Bentley, 1849), 2, in Hewett, *Slavery in the Old South*, p. 185.

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<sup>38</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin’ on Ole Massa* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 68.

<sup>39</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>40</sup> Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>41</sup> John P. Godley, *Letters from America* (2 vols.; London: J. Murray, 1844), 1, in: Hewett, *Slavery in the Old South*, p. 184.

<sup>42</sup> Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. Florida is occasionally included as part of the Old Southwest in spite of its geographic location because it was settled at the same time.

economic developments that later took place there. Southerners who moved west were generally younger sons of planters who desired to rebel against the status quo that had been firmly established in the seaboard South by the second decade of the nineteenth century. Economic troubles began along the seaboard around this period, and there was a desire among the younger sons of planters to escape the stifling eastern society for the freedom of the frontier. The memoirs of planters who moved west are full of references to an idea of “manly independence”<sup>43</sup> and the rejection of the traditional family and social relationships of the seaboard. This ideal of manly independence translated into a lifestyle of hard drinking, gambling, violence, and abuse of traditional relationships with dependents, the common boast among the men of the Old Southwest being that they lived “like... fighting cocks.”<sup>44</sup> This radical change in lifestyle from the seaboard South to the Southwest had a dire impact on slaves.

During the settlement of the Old Southwest, more than a million slaves were moved from the old seaboard states to the new states of the “Black Belt.” Living conditions in the Old Southwest were typically far worse than they had been on the seaboard. The Black Belt was settled by planters who moved west seeking wealth and independence, which resulted in a mentality dominated by economic concerns, chief among which was the perpetuation of slavery.<sup>45</sup> This problem was exacerbated by the development of short-staple cotton as a cash crop. The cultivation of cotton not only began to occur at this time, but the lands of the Old Southwest were also more

conducive to its cultivation than the lands of the seaboard. Short-staple cotton was a far more labor-intensive crop than the rice, tobacco, or indigo that had been grown in the seaboard states, which gave Black Belt planters an excuse to, in the words of one scholar, “ratchet up the level of exploitation” of their slaves.<sup>46</sup> The model used by planters of the Old Southwest in their treatment of slaves was created and vociferously advanced by Josiah Nott, an Alabama planter of the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. Prior to Nott, seaboard planters had advocated a paternalist view of slavery, in which slaves were viewed as children in the planter’s large family.<sup>47</sup> Nott, however, rejected paternalism in all its forms and developed a pseudoscience of race, which he used to prove that blacks were a different—and needless to say, inferior—species than whites.<sup>48</sup> This Second Great Migration had a crushing effect on the slaves.

The terrible results of the migration were in some degree mitigated, however, by the moral reform movements that swept the nation in the 1830s and 40s. The reform movements had actually begun in New England a decade earlier, but they did not reach the Old Southwest until the late 1830s. Movements for temperance, missions, and ministerial education were popular, and reform movements in the Black Belt were based out of New England. The seaboard South had never had a strong reforming tendency, most likely because of the controlling influence that the paternalism paradigm had in the society. The wildness of life in the Old Southwest, however, demanded reform to keep order.<sup>49</sup> Although these reforms had a mitigating effect on the

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<sup>43</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 29-35.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>45</sup> Bailey, *Shadow on the Church*, pp. 56-57.

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<sup>46</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 359-60.

<sup>47</sup> This is, of course, an incredible oversimplification of paternalist theories. Paternalism in the South is examined in great detail in Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.

<sup>48</sup> Cashin, *Family Venture*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>49</sup> Bailey, *Shadow on the Church*, pp. 203-5.

condition of slaves in the Old Southwest, abolitionism was a reforming tendency that was notably absent. One Presbyterian minister explained this apparent contradiction by explaining that after emancipation, slaves would be open “to the villainy of every white man.” Furthermore, the very societal ills that the reform movements were trying to combat—“blasphemy, profaneness, drunkenness, Sabbath breaking, dishonesty, lying, and defamation”—were claimed to be very prevalent among the free blacks of the North.<sup>50</sup> By the time of the settlement of the Old Southwest and the moral reform of the 1830s, slavery had been firmly established and tacitly approved by every major church in the South, and slaves could only at best receive a compromised version of Christianity.

Of course, many ministers did not even bother teaching a compromised version of Christianity to slaves. Corruption ran rampant in the system, and many persons and institutions manipulated the low social standing of slaves for private gain. British visitor Joseph Sturge heard tales of a Catholic church in Maryland that “sold some of their own church members in order to apply the proceeds to the building of a new place of public worship.”<sup>51</sup> A prime example of individual corruption is that of Matthew Tate, the Episcopalian rector of St. Helena Church in Beaufort, South Carolina, in the 1830s. In his personal documents, Tate makes very little mention of saving souls or administering sacraments. He instead brags about the money he made from conducting weddings and funerals as the only Episcopalian minister within forty miles of Beaufort. Tate also spent a great deal of his correspondence discussing the

many single and wealthy widows he knew in his congregation.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the corrupt ministers in the South, there were many who were simply cruel and insensitive to the condition of the slaves.

Slaves often found that ministers either did not understand or did not care about their situation. One of these ministers was certainly the Baptist preacher James L. Gotney. Gotney, like all ministers among the slaves, focused upon Biblical texts stressing obedience. The text of choice was Ephesians 6:5: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” Randolph Peter, a slave who heard Gotney’s sermons often, remembers a sermon of Gotney in which he said, “It is the devil... who tells you to try and be free.... If you run away, you will be turned out of God’s church, until you repent, return, and ask God and your master’s pardon.”<sup>53</sup> Reverend John B. Pinney perhaps managed to be even less sympathetic than Gotney when he gave a sermon in which he discussed the savagery of Africa and attempted to tell the slaves how lucky they were to be enslaved.<sup>54</sup> This form of religion had a very discouraging effect on the slaves. An ex-slave from Mississippi expressed typical disgust at this sort of preaching when he recalled, “They had a white man that would come over every fourth Sunday and preach to us. He would say, ‘Be honest, don’t steal, and obey your marster and mistress.’ That was all the preaching we had down in Mississippi.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” p. 136.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Randolph, “Plantation Churches: Visible and Invisible,” in Milton C. Sernett, ed., *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>55</sup> Rawick, ed., *The American Slave*, 19, p. 198.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841* (Boston: Dexter S. King, 1892), in Hewett, *Slavery in the Old South*, pp. 189-90.

Even those ministers who were genuinely concerned for the spiritual welfare of slaves were forced to preach subservience due to the social conditions of the times. Slaves were indoctrinated with this controlling message of the planters from the time of their induction into the church. Catechists were to tell slave pupils “That by their sin against God, they are fallen into a dreadful condition,” but by serving God “patiently and cheerfully in the condition which he orders for them their condition will very quickly be infinitely mended in Eternal Happiness.” Slave catechisms also took many liberties with the Ten Commandments, interpreting the Fifth Commandment to mean that slaves should honor all whites as fathers and mothers, and interpreting the Tenth Commandment to mean that they “must be patient and Content with such a Condition as God has ordered for [them].”<sup>56</sup> White ministers also took care to instill the doctrines of obedience and passivity.

Even ministers who were widely regarded as sympathetic toward slaves backed these doctrines. C.C. Jones, a South Carolinian Methodist who was generally regarded as a figure very sympathetic toward slaves, still relied upon “Servants, obey your masters,” and also on 1 Peter 2:18, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.”<sup>57</sup> Jones also developed a list of ten “Rules of Action” to guide the conduct of white ministers and missionaries among the slaves. These rules were widely followed and are extremely telling of the blind eye that ministers turned to the condition of slaves on the plantations. These rules of action include:

1. To visit no plantation without permission, and, when permitted, never without prior notice.
2. To have nothing to do with the civil conditions of the negroes, or with their plantation affairs.
8. To make no attempt to create temporary excitements to introduce any new plans or measures, but make diligent and prayerful use of the ordinary and established means of God’s appointment.
9. To support, in the fullest manner, the peace and order of society, and to hold up to their respect and obedience all those whom God, in his providence, has placed in authority over them.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps most disturbing was a sermon given by Right Reverend William Meade, Episcopal Bishop of Virginia. Meade, like Jones, was reputed to be very kind to slaves as a general rule. Nevertheless, Meade instructed slaves as follows:

Now, when *correction* [whipping] is given you, you either deserve it, or you do not deserve it. But, whether you deserve it or not, it is your duty, and Almighty God requires, that you bear it patiently. You may perhaps, think that this is a hard doctrine; but if you consider it rightly you must needs think otherwise.... [S]uppose you are quite innocent of what is laid to your charge, and suffer wrongly in that particular thing; is it not possible that you may have done some other bad which was never discovered, and that Almighty God, who saw you doing it, would not let you escape without punishment?<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Scherer, *Slavery and Church in Early America*, p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 208.

<sup>58</sup> Mallard, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation*, pp. 105-7.

<sup>59</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 208.

This compromise of the Christian message on the part of the white ministers to accommodate the desires of the slave owners does not represent quite as severe a betrayal of the Christian message as it might at first appear.

A Christian ideal of slavery that was conducive to the religious traditions in the American antebellum South developed in the early nineteenth century. The goal of southern missions among the slaves was to create a biracial religious community that functioned harmoniously. Christian humility would make the slaves diligent workers, and Christian charity would inspire slave owners to provide for their safety and well being.<sup>60</sup> Of course, part of this protection for the slave owners involved securing the religious well-being of the slaves. This would please the slaves, according to the Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the State of Mississippi, because of “that feeling of childlike dependence and leaning on their master, which is well known as one of the elements in their nature.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, southern religion placed only a secondary emphasis upon social conditions, stressing instead personal confrontation with God. Personal conversion and salvation, rather than the conditions in this world, were emphasized.<sup>62</sup> Thus, ministers could ignore the social condition of their slave congregations and instead focus on their spiritual condition, not betraying their religion in doing so.

Indeed, few ministers believed that they were betraying their religion. Missionaries among the slaves were certainly aware that

they had to obey strict legal and social codes in regard to the religious instruction of slaves, but this was only seldom mentioned in their writings of the period. The social control aspect of their instruction was all but ignored by them, and it would appear that many missionaries truly seemed to feel that they were doing God’s work on earth by bringing the Gospel to the slaves.<sup>63</sup> The Missionary Society of the Methodist Conference of South Carolina expressed this sentiment at the end of an 1841 report which read: “...to preach this Gospel... is the great object, and, we repeat, the *sole* object of our ministrations among the blacks.”<sup>64</sup> This statement was clearly made in part to assuage the fears of Southern planters, but it also reflects the otherworldly orientation of missionaries among the slaves. This concept was perhaps better expressed by a Baptist pastor in New Orleans, who observed:

Slavery is a political institution. As a Christian minister, I have nothing to do with politics. My business is to preach the Gospel... in this course I am sanctioned by the Apostle Paul. Slavery existed in his day; but he turned not aside from the great object to attempt its overthrow.<sup>65</sup>

Pursuing the “great object” alluded to here—the conversion and salvation of slaves—was the focus of southern religion, not turning aside to deal with a political, this-worldly institution such as slavery.

Of course, many people would disagree with the statement that slavery was an institution that was not the concern of the churches, including many ministers who preached in the South in the antebellum years. But if slavery was in fact a religious

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<sup>60</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, pp. 165-67.

<sup>61</sup> Bailey, *Shadow on the Church*, p. 251.

<sup>62</sup> John B. Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), pp. 142-43. Some theorists believe that this tradition was incorporated into southern religious culture via the Baptists and their foundations in the English Free Church tradition. Torbert, *A History of the Baptists*, p. 17.

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<sup>63</sup> Bailey, *Shadow on the Church*, p. 224.

<sup>64</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> Ebenezer Davies, *American Scenes and Christian Slavery: A Recent Tour of Four Thousand Miles in the United States* (London: J. Snow, 1849), in Hewett, *Slavery in the Old South*, p. 189.

institution as much as a social institution, religion was still powerless to stop it. Had Methodists and Baptists retained their antislavery stance, then Methodism and Baptism would not have grown as dramatically in the South as they did.<sup>66</sup> Instead, by compromising the message of their religion and teaching what the planters wanted their slaves to be told as much as what the slaves wanted to hear, Methodists and Baptists became the two largest denominations in the South, accounting for forty-five and thirty-seven percent, respectively, of the populace of the Confederacy at the outbreak of the Civil War.<sup>67</sup>

Ironically, the decision to go along with slavery to prevent the churches from becoming sectional in the end resulted in sectional churches anyway. On May 1, 1844, southern Methodists seceded from the General Methodist Conference to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and on May 8 of the next year, southern Baptists seceded from the National Baptist Convention to establish the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>68</sup> This religious secession over the issue of slavery became a grim precursor of the southern state secession that was to come less than two decades later, a connection noted by many contemporaries. The South Carolina Baptist Convention asked, in words that echo with ominous prescience, “If we, who profess to have but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, cannot remain united in the cause of benevolent effort, how can they expect to perpetuate their union on mere political principles?”<sup>69</sup> The institution of

slavery perpetuated such divisions—secular and religious—compromising moral virtue for economic expediency. This was clearly the case with regard to the religion white ministers taught to slaves in the antebellum South, a religion which was compromised by the demands of the economic interests of the wealthy southern planter class.

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<sup>66</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 186-87.

<sup>67</sup> David B. Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830-1865* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky*, pp. 139-41.

<sup>69</sup> Chesebrough, *Clergy Dissent in the Old South*, p. 5.

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**THE MEAT INSPECTION AND PURE  
FOOD AND DRUG ACTS OF 1906: A  
RESPONSE TO UPTON SINCLAIR'S  
*THE JUNGLE*?**

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**Brandon L. Caffey**

Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States (1901-1909), is regarded as one of the “strongest and most vigorous presidents” in American history.<sup>1</sup> In battles between business and labor, Roosevelt extended the power of the presidency as well as the federal government to protect what he saw as the public interest. His domestic social and economic reforms were the first federal attempts to deal with problems created by a modern industrial society. By the time Roosevelt was elected to his second term, he had the reputation of a person who “spoke softly and carried a big stick.”<sup>2</sup> The big stick to which Roosevelt referred was to symbolize the threat of war against nations as well as his intent to act boldly in situations in which he thought firmness was required by his administration.

One of those situations occurred in 1906, the year Upton Sinclair, a reformer and a socialist, published a book entitled, *The Jungle*. The book focused on the Chicago meatpacking industry and its unsanitary conditions. Sinclair describes how dead rats as well as other offensive ingredients had been incorporated into processed goods. *The Jungle* effectively heightened fears about the contamination and adulteration of

packinghouse products.<sup>3</sup> However, the book failed to heighten the public’s awareness of the conditions of the packinghouse workers. In the novel, men and women labor in “dark holes, by electric light.”<sup>4</sup> As a reformer and a socialist, Sinclair intended to “write the Uncle Tom’s Cabin of the Labor Movement.”<sup>5</sup>

Although the labor issue was ignored by the American public, many citizens became enraged and demanded reform regarding packinghouse products. Recognizing that a large portion of the public expected some sort of government intervention, Roosevelt summoned Sinclair to the White House in an effort to gain a more informed perspective on the situation. After the meeting, the president told William Allen White that although Sinclair was of “service to us,” he was “untruthful” and “three-fourths of the things he said were absolute falsehoods.”<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that Roosevelt emerged from the meeting a skeptic, he promised the American public that he would clean up the industry if Sinclair’s accusations were proven.

Concerned about the accusations against federal inspectors and the implications for public health, Roosevelt asked the Department of Agriculture (D.O.A.) to investigate. Visiting eighteen Chicago plants that used federal inspection and three that did not, the investigators reported that they found “good, fair, and bad conditions, often within the same plant.”<sup>7</sup> Dissatisfied with

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Gable, “Theodore Roosevelt,” *World Book Encyclopedia* (1997), 16, p.327.

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Kent, “Theodore Roosevelt: Twenty-Sixth President of the United States,” *Encyclopedia of Presidents* (Chicago: Children’s Press, 1988), p. 10.

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<sup>3</sup> William Parmenter, “*The Jungle* and Its Effects,” *Journalism Quarterly*, 10 (1983), pp. 14-17.

<sup>4</sup> Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York, 1960), p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> Louise Carroll Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” *American Studies*, 32 (1991), pp. 79-101.

<sup>6</sup> Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, (8 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951-54), 5, p. 321.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar E. Anderson, “The Pure Food Issue: A Republican Dilemma,” *American Historical Review*, 61 (1956), p. 560.

the report, Roosevelt asked the committee to perform another investigation. This time, he asked the D.O.A. to address specific criticisms in order to get a clear and definite answer. Once again, however, the investigators reported that sanitary conditions were uneven. Since the two investigations did not produce definitive answers, many believed that Sinclair selected the worst possible conditions which could be found in any establishment and ignored those plants where excellent ones prevailed.<sup>8</sup>

Once Sinclair was informed that his accusations had not been proven by the investigations, he feared that the public would toss his depiction and efforts for reform to the wind and forget about them. Thus, during the last week of May, Sinclair challenged the investigation. In an article in the *New York Times*, Sinclair described packinghouses as “overrun with rats” and food prepared by foreigners and blacks who had no knowledge of sanitation.<sup>9</sup> Sinclair managed to publish the piece before the government could release the findings of the Department of Agriculture’s investigation. This maneuvering by Sinclair forced the D.O.A. to release the report with an emphasis on the claims that could be supported. As a result, the public’s fears were reignited about the contamination and adulteration of packinghouse products. The public’s reaction led Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana to call for more extensive federal regulation of meat packing and forced Congress to pay attention to pending legislation that would set government standards for food and beverages.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, “Congress bowed

to public opinion and the President’s wishes” and passed the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. On the same day, Congress also passed the Pure Food and Drug act of 1906. The two acts were passed four months after Sinclair published *The Jungle*.

The speedy enactment of these bills has long been cited as evidence that the popular furor aroused by Sinclair’s novel lay behind their passage.<sup>11</sup> This conclusion, stated generally, implies that Congress typically passes legislation only when forced to do so by the weight of public opinion. While it cannot be denied that acts passed in 1906 followed closely upon public disclosures of wrongdoing, it is wrong to conclude that such legislation served the primary interest of protecting consumers. Consumer concern about the products was clearly at stake, but a large number of business interests and political interests were also involved.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the following question can be raised: Were the Meat Inspection and the Pure Food and Drug Acts of 1906 passed in response to public reaction created by *The Jungle*?

In an attempt to answer this question, this paper therefore examines the history of the controversy over the regulation of food and drugs in the years preceding the passage of the legislation. The two areas of focus will include the role of business and the political ramifications for passing such legislation. In addition, this paper will examine the credibility of Upton Sinclair and other key individuals who played a role in the passage of the respective acts. Based on primary and secondary sources, it reaches the conclusion that the respective acts (Meat Inspection/Pure Food and Drug) of 1906 were not in response to public opinion nor

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<sup>8</sup> Alison Wright, “Gut Reaction: Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and Progressive-Era America,” *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 22 (1992-93), p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Richard H. Collin, *Theodore Roosevelt and Reform Politics* (N.p.: GCL Company, 1972), p. 128.

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<sup>11</sup> Lawrence W. Reed, “Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906,” *Consumer’s Research Magazine*, 78 (February, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Donna J. Wood, “Business Support for the 1906 Food and Drug Act,” *Business History Review*, 59 (1985), p. 405.

the government's wish to protect the public interest.

First of all, when examining the history of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, it is important to understand that the push for such legislation did not begin with the publication of *The Jungle*. As early as 1870, American citizens had been aware of the contamination of goods and the unhealthy adulterants used to process them.<sup>13</sup> In fact, packinghouses themselves persuaded Congress to pass a federal meat inspection act in order to regain the customers of those countries which had banned the importation of American products. Public outcry at that time was high enough for Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, chief of the Bureau of Chemistry of the Department of Agriculture, to initiate an investigation of food adulteration. Between 1887 and 1893, his bureau published an eight-part study which demonstrated that citizens were consuming unhealthy foods.<sup>14</sup>

Although the study was highly technical and received little press attention, many educated citizens supported Wiley in his attempt to lobby for federal legislation. However, the government paid little attention to Wiley and his push for federal reform. Part of the reason the bills had little support in these years was their flavor of partisan legislation.<sup>15</sup> Wiley himself added to the impression of special-interest legislation. He repeatedly made statements favoring some companies' products over others. Such sentiments naturally placed Wiley in conflict with the makers of the products he condemned and also led state and national lawmakers to question his impartiality and wisdom. Wiley was creating opposition to the pure food

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<sup>13</sup> Walter I. Trattner, "The Federal Food and Drug Act: A Complete But Familiar Story," *Reviews in American History*, 18 (1990), p. 395.

<sup>14</sup> Clayton A. Coppin, "Wiley and the Whiskey Industry," *Business History Review*, 62 (1988), p. 286.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

legislation, but he attributed all of it to powerful special interests.<sup>16</sup>

Unsuccessful in his attempts, Wiley would gain the support of more citizens following the Spanish-American War of 1898. The press reported that "tons of rotten canned meat had been shipped to American troops."<sup>17</sup> After several states promptly enacted pure food laws, the Senate established a "fact-finding committee" to examine the problem of adulterated foods.<sup>18</sup> The Pure-Food Investigation Committee held a series of hearings during 1899-1900 in Chicago, Washington, and New York, producing a wealth of evidence and testimony on food adulteration. The federal and state hearings "produced a mass of evidence and prompted journalists to report that as much as 15 to 20 percent of America's food supply was adulterated."<sup>19</sup> The public was outraged by the findings in the report known as Bulletin 13.<sup>20</sup> With the public in such an uproar, why didn't Congress pass some sort of legislation in response to the findings? After all, "more American soldiers fell before their deadly beef than were hit by all the Spanish guns."<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, large producers hoped that small businessmen would have difficulty coping with federal regulations and thus be forced out of business. In addition, more reputable members of the business community, especially in the food processing industries, wished to set their houses in order regarding adulterated substances manufactured or processed in

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>17</sup> Reed, "Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906," p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Wood, "Business Support for the 1906 Food and Drug Act," p. 410.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Bernard A. Weisberger, "Harvey Wiley," *American Heritage*, 47 (February-March, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Wade, "The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*," p. 84.

America.<sup>22</sup> Enraged by a new invention imported from France, oleomargarine, which posed a grave threat to butter sales and hence to their economic well-being, dairy farmers also played a major roll in these efforts. Another advocate of some form of legislation was the whiskey industry. Distillers of “straight” whiskey, whose profits were threatened by “blended” whiskey producers, wanted federal intervention to force “rectifiers to differentiate their products from the more expensive but purer ones.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the pure food investigation he initiated in 1887, Wiley, beginning in 1902, conducted a series of experiments with his infamous “Poison Squad.”<sup>24</sup> Healthy young men volunteered for a year to obey strict dietary prescriptions and to have their excreta collected and analyzed.<sup>25</sup> The results were published beginning in the year 1904 in a seven-part series called Bulletin 84. The Poison Squad experiments were such a media sensation they inspired poems, songs, and colorful stories, as well as expressions of moral outrage. Wiley, who was the major figure in the pure food crusade, believed that when people were properly educated they would press the government to do what was right in the public interest. Although there was a great public outcry, neither President Roosevelt nor his administration responded to public sentiments. While the government chose not to address the issue of poisonous adulterants, it also chose to ignore a much more widespread problem that perhaps deserved greater attention.

Commercial fraud was seen as a problem in business ethics. Fraudulent

substitution affected the consumers’ ability to know exactly what they were purchasing and to get the full value they expected from dollars spent on food. In other words, “commercial fraud represented an economic loss to consumers.”<sup>26</sup> The D.O.A. suggested that 15 percent of American manufactured food products were adulterated.<sup>27</sup> This resulted in an annual cost of one billion dollars lost in value to consumers when they paid premium prices for inferior foods. With the American public taking such an economic hit from fraudulent foods, Roosevelt was now under attack by muckraking journalists in search of reform. For them, it was surprising Roosevelt had not swung his big stick in the direction of the beef industry. The fact that the muckrakers had begun to question Roosevelt is a key issue. Muckrakers played an important role in educating the public about issues the government would rather downplay.<sup>28</sup> For them, it was surprising that Roosevelt had not swung his big stick in the direction of the beef industry. Roosevelt’s reluctance to act boldly against the beef industry may have been a result of his strong ties to cattle ranchers. Roosevelt ranched for several years on the Little Missouri River in Dakota Territory. There is a wealth of evidence pointing to the impact of Roosevelt’s western experience on his subsequent political career and the development of his attitudes and beliefs.<sup>29</sup> The muckrakers, who were usually advocates of change, began to pressure Roosevelt harder than he ever expected.

In this particular instance, the

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<sup>22</sup> Wood, “Business Support for the 1906 Food and Drug Act,” p. 405.

<sup>23</sup> Coppin, “Wiley and the Whiskey Industry,” p. 291.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey W. Wiley, *Autobiography* (Indianapolis, IN: Anderson Publishing Company, 1942), p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

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<sup>26</sup> Reed, “Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906,” p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Wallace G. Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969).

<sup>29</sup> William W. Savage, Jr., “Wyoming and the Shaping of a Presidential Advisor: A Comment on Horace Plunkett’s Friendship with Theodore Roosevelt,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 45 (1973), p. 241.

muckrakers challenged Roosevelt on the issues promised in the “Square Deal.” With his Square Deal, Roosevelt sought to create a nation where Americans would not be given special privileges because they were rich or because they were poor.<sup>30</sup> In addition, with the Square Deal, Roosevelt distinguished between what he considered good and bad trusts. Did the Chicago packers constitute a bad trust? Roosevelt concluded that they did and took action. Although he was worried about the repercussions, he stated that any man “worth his salt would do his duty, and give the people the benefit of the doubt, and act in any way which their interests demanded....”<sup>31</sup> Although Roosevelt made such a statement concerning character, he did not act upon the statement until the following year (1905). Fearing that several companies might merge, Roosevelt and the Justice Department secured an injunction prohibiting collusion, and the Supreme Court upheld it.<sup>32</sup> Roosevelt now turned his attention to prosecuting packing company officials for violating the injunction. Despite the best efforts of government lawyers, the judge decided in favor of the packers in March of 1906, one month after *The Jungle* was published. The fact that Roosevelt failed to discipline the Chicago packers under the existing law was a negative blow to his administration.

In the midst of an election year, special interest groups were forming all over the country. It was Roosevelt’s intention to prosecute the bad trusts early, in order to avoid the labor issues addressed by Sinclair in *The Jungle*. Provided with advanced copies of *The Jungle* by Sinclair, Roosevelt

noted the socialist message the book intended to convey.<sup>33</sup> In his autobiography, Roosevelt expressed the following sentiments regarding the socialist movement, “I do disagree most emphatically with...the Marxian Socialist. These socialists are opposed to our industrial system.”<sup>34</sup> More so, Roosevelt was opposed to the socialist belief that national, state, and local governments are on the side of the employers. Although he was optimistic he and the Republican Party would prevail during the election year, the significance of the labor issue could not be minimized. During the period when *The Jungle* was published, two-thirds of the work force came from the ranks of common labor recruited from the forty nationalities that worked in the Chicago packinghouses.<sup>35</sup> With such a large number of minorities and foreigners employed by the packinghouses, Roosevelt feared that attacking the issue head on might result in an economic crisis.

Modern labor’s initial entry on the political scene was closely bound to the participation of Theodore Roosevelt in the election campaigns of 1906. The entry of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) forced the Republican Party to adopt a new strategy.<sup>36</sup> James S. Clarkson, a Roosevelt political advisor, urged the president to intervene actively on the labor front. Clarkson knew that the AFL made an important difference in Packingtown. The AFL was not only willing to organize unskilled labor, but female and black

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<sup>30</sup> David H. Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt, American Politician*, (N.p.: Associated University Press, Inc., 1997), p. 189.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), p. 365.

<sup>32</sup> Leroy G. Dorsey, “Roosevelt,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 25 (Fall, 1995), p. 725.

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<sup>33</sup> Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*, p. 367.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory R. Zieren, “A Century of Meatpacking and Packinghouse Labor in Chicago,” *Annals of Iowa*, 57 (1963), p. 693.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen J. Scheinberg, “Theodore Roosevelt and the A. F. of L.’s Entry into Politics, 1906-1908,” *Labor History*, 3 (1963), p. 135.

workers as well.<sup>37</sup> However, the government proved to be unresponsive to the demands of the AFL and other labor organizations. Samuel Gompers, founder of the AFL, was not willing to be brushed aside by the federal government. Gompers consulted on the political situation with Andrew Furuseth, the Washington representative of the AFL, and the two of them drafted what has become known as “Labor’s Bill of Grievances.”<sup>38</sup> This document embodied the major political demands of the AFL and was intended to show Congress and the president that labor expected action in its interest. Although Roosevelt showed concern when informed of the government’s negligence in enforcing labor laws, Speaker of the House Joseph Cannon forcefully replied, “Sam Gompers, you are not the whole works in this country!”<sup>39</sup> Faced with a negative reaction from the leader of Congress, Gompers decided to center his campaign against his foe.

Roosevelt now had limited alternatives to deal with this situation. He could have supported the AFL in its attempt to cleanse Republican ranks of those unfriendly to labor, or he could shy away from the campaign. The first alternative would have meant a clear split in the Republican Party. The second ran the risk of allowing labor to gain a strong political position. Forced to do something, he chose to intervene actively on behalf of the Republican congressional candidates. Roosevelt knew that some party members wanted a stronger stand against Gompers; however, Roosevelt told his Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson, “It is a bad business to solidify labor against us.”<sup>40</sup> However, much to his surprise, after

Roosevelt suggested to Charles Hughes, a candidate for the New York governorship, to accept the assistance of labor leaders, Roosevelt could find no labor leader of any stature who would venture to support Hughes. Although Hughes managed to win the election, Roosevelt knew that his party had to make a stronger appeal to labor. Thus, from a political standpoint, the speedy enactment of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was not necessarily a response to public outcry, but rather the Republican Party’s attempt to minimize a controversial labor issue in order to secure Congressional seats.

Thus, it is misguided for historians to continue to interpret the passage of the Meat Inspection and the Pure Food and Drug Acts of 1906 as a result of one causal factor. The public reaction to *The Jungle* certainly heightened the public’s awareness to the issue of pure food; however, Sinclair’s contemporaries failed to give him the credit that present day historians have. In fact, Roosevelt, who emerged as a hero from the passage of the acts, “graciously acknowledged Senator Beveridge’s help but said nothing about Sinclair or his novel.”<sup>41</sup> Contemporaries of Sinclair attribute this phenomenon to his lack of credibility. A leading journalist of that time, Jack Sullivan, warned readers to “avoid the error of classifying Sinclair and his *Jungle* with muckrakers.”<sup>42</sup> They were utterly different in their approach. According to Sullivan, the best muckrakers confirmed everything, while Sinclair was a “propagandist whose account of the conditions in the stockyards did not purport to have any more than the loose standard of accuracy that fiction

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<sup>37</sup> Anderson, “The Pure Food Issue: A Republican Dilemma,” p. 569.

<sup>38</sup> Schienberg, “Theodore Roosevelt and the A. F. of L.’s Entry into Politics, 1906-1908,” p. 140.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup> Chessman, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Power*, p. 269.

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<sup>41</sup> George L. Becker, “Upton Sinclair,” *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 15th edition (1980), p. 133.

<sup>42</sup> Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” p. 91.

demands for local color and background.”<sup>43</sup>

As evidence for Sullivan’s accusation, many contemporaries and modern day historians point out that Sinclair misinformed readers about life in what he called “Packingtown,” but which residents and reporters knew as “Back of the Yards.”<sup>44</sup> Such a simple and basic mistake caused many readers to reevaluate the honesty of the book. As the honesty of the book was questioned, the motives of the book then became an issue. Many readers were not surprised when Sinclair admitted that his indictment of the packinghouses of the Chicago stockyards was exaggerated. During an interview, he told a reporter that he made only three visits to the plants. One was an “ordinary” guided tour, the second was with a correspondent for the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, and on the “third and last trip, I was in the wake of a lawyer who had been brought up in the Packingtown district.”<sup>45</sup>

In addition, Sinclair told the interviewer that his knowledge of some plants came from a “story teller” he met at a bar.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that Sinclair’s accusations could not be proven by the Department of Agriculture’s investigations. The result of Sinclair’s lack of credibility undeniably led to the public’s lack of attention to his socialist message. If *The Jungle* misrepresented the packinghouses and the products, it is even more misleading about the workers and their community. Sinclair himself concluded in his autobiography that “*The Jungle* concerned packinghouse workers, but internally it was

the story of my own family.”<sup>47</sup> Sinclair’s admissions of misleading the public were published during the months preceding the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act. Thus, the conclusion can be made that the government was no longer pressured by public demand to pass such legislation. With this in mind, one cannot understand why Sinclair would write such a lurid tale and continue to contradict himself without understanding the complexities of his childhood.

Upton Sinclair was an only child, born in Baltimore in 1878 to an alcoholic father and a religious mother.<sup>48</sup> In an attempt to better his life, he moved back and forth between the bug-infested boardinghouses his father could afford and the glamorous houses of relatives. While attending college, he began to support his family’s income by selling jokes and short stories. His dream, however, was to write the “great American novel” and achieve wealth and social status.<sup>49</sup> Considered at the time to be a fair writer, his early efforts were often overlooked by critics and readers. After college, Sinclair would marry his college girlfriend but was unable to support her. He was forced to send his wife back home to live with her parents. Enraged at the social conditions of his family, Sinclair was seeking some type of outlet. It was at this critical juncture that Leonard D. Abbott of the *Literary Digest* gave him some socialist pamphlets.<sup>50</sup> Many other socialists of the time began to befriend him and introduce him to the socialist movement. Within six months of that initial meeting with Abbott in 1902, Sinclair began to write that the “deepest fact of my nature is a fiery, savage hatred of wealth, and all

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, “Gut Reaction: Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and Progressive-Era America,” p. 55.

<sup>45</sup> Zieren, “A Century of Meatpacking and Packinghouse Labor in Chicago,” p. 699.

<sup>46</sup> Jon A. Yoder, *Upton Sinclair* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1975), p. 74.

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<sup>47</sup> Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” p. 90.

<sup>48</sup> Yoder, *Upton Sinclair*, p. 75.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

that it stands for.”<sup>51</sup>

Many socialist journalists began to cultivate Sinclair and pay him an income high enough so that he could reunite his family. Sinclair increasingly focused his attention on the great American novel. Initially concerned with the topic of “nineteenth-century chattel slavery, he was persuaded by a five hundred dollar advance to focus on contemporary wage slavery.”<sup>52</sup> Fred D. Warren, editor of *Appeal to Reason* and author of several articles about “Packingtown” and the Chicago meatpacking strike, offered the advance. Sinclair, who had followed the articles published in *Appeal to Reason*, chose the Packingtown setting since he was somewhat familiar with the situation. Although Sinclair had some knowledge of the labor movement, he was not prepared for what he would encounter in Packingtown. More so, this would be the first time that he had ever written about industrial workers or, apparently, been inside a large factory. Unable to logically understand the complexities of the stockyards, he turned to three particular people who would help him shape *The Jungle*.

The first person Sinclair relied upon was Algie M. Simons, a socialist organizer and editor of the *International Socialist Review*. A former charity worker in the stockyards, Simons had become a socialist journalist in the late 1800’s.<sup>53</sup> Simons would introduce Sinclair to Adolphe Smith, an English socialist who wrote favorable articles about the European slaughterhouses. The last of the influential three was Ernest Poole, who had come to Packingtown to cover the 1904 labor strike. Educated at Princeton, Poole was credited with having a great wealth of knowledge about the strikers and the

conditions of the neighborhood people.<sup>54</sup> Many of Poole’s works had already gained the attention of President Roosevelt. Although Sinclair had reputable sources, time and money pressed him. The lack of financial resources caused Sinclair to return home to New Jersey. Unable to finance a second trip to Chicago, he finished the novel with “everything I knew and thought my readers ought to know” about socialism.<sup>55</sup>

The novel seemed so outlandish that five separate publishers refused to take the book without substantial revisions. Sinclair recognized that in order to produce any major reaction from the public, the manner in which he wrote the novel must remain intact. In fact, contemporaries that praised the book alluded more to the style of writing than its factual truth. Winston Churchill, who did an early review of *The Jungle*, stated, “*The Jungle* pays tribute to the author’s powers of description and recognizes the breadth of human appeal that would make it one of great bestsellers of all time.”<sup>56</sup> Determined that the book would become a best-seller, Sinclair began to sell copies through different publications as well as establish a publicity office in order to promote the novel. The “purpose of Sinclair’s activities was to convince critics that the novel was an exact and faithful picture of conditions as they existed in Packingtown.”<sup>57</sup> Sinclair although often proved to be his worst enemy. He told readers of the *Appeal to Reason* that the novel was designed to “drive home to the dullest reader” the point that the destruction of families was the result of economic systems.<sup>58</sup> This, however, contradicts Sinclair’s financial motives for writing the

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<sup>51</sup> Becker, “Upton Sinclair,” p. 137.

<sup>52</sup> Yoder, *Upton Sinclair*, p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” p. 93.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> Becker, “Upton Sinclair,” p. 140.

<sup>58</sup> Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” p. 95.

novel. Although he believed in the socialist movement, Sinclair stated, “I really paid little attention to the meat question while I was in Chicago.... I did not see half as much as I might have seen had I tried harder.”<sup>59</sup>

This admission of misrepresenting the Chicago packinghouses only confirmed the sentiments of those who believed the tales Sinclair described were a result of the socialist movement. The majority of the public believed that socialists held extreme views that were supported by little, if any, truth. If this is so, the actions taken by Roosevelt and his administration were not a result of public demand for reform. On the contrary, these actions can be seen as Roosevelt’s attempt to challenge the beef industry, as a battle between big business and government regulation. The notion that he acted on behalf of public interest is vaguely supported. It is much more plausible to accept the theory of Robyn Muncy, who believes that the intervention of Roosevelt was due to the fact that the battle between big business and government was the crux of Progressivism. Muncy concludes that the Square Deal offered by Roosevelt rested on the assumption that the independence people sought came in the form of ownership of their own farms or businesses.<sup>60</sup> If this is the case, leaders of organized labor tried to undermine that independence.

Historians have failed also to examine the motives of Dr. Harvey Wiley. While history has credited everyone from Sinclair to Beveridge and Roosevelt, it was the works of Wiley that were reflected in the passage of the bill. Over time, Wiley has also emerged as a peoples’ champion. Historians have described Wiley as the only

man who had the public interest at heart. Wiley has been portrayed as “morally upright, solicitous of the health and welfare of the consumer, and opposed on principle to inferior products and fraudulent labeling.”<sup>61</sup> However, if closer examinations had been conducted, historians would have discovered that Wiley himself, after his resignation, argued that the public interest had been “captured and subverted by the fake whiskey industry.”<sup>62</sup>

It is now clear that Wiley’s interest in the pure food legislation “stemmed from his desire to enhance the importance of his own bureau.”<sup>63</sup> After fighting so hard for the passage of pure food legislation, Wiley was determined to have the act placed under the enforcement of his own department, the Department of Agriculture’s Chemistry Division. However, during the early years of his campaigning, a “number of amendments were introduced that would have placed enforcement in another department.”<sup>64</sup> In 1903, another threat to Wiley’s bureau surfaced when the National Association of State Dairy and Food Departments proposed the creation of a separate bureau within the federal government to administer the pure food law if it were passed. In an effort to gain support, Wiley directed his efforts to the debate over “blended” or “straight” whiskey.<sup>65</sup> The whiskey debate was a long-standing battle over exactly what constituted a blended or straight whiskey. Distillers of straight whiskey wanted provisions that forced blended whiskey to be labeled as an “imitation.” Although blended whiskey was cheaper and contained fewer poisonous ingredients, Wiley campaigned in favor of straight whiskey. If Wiley were acting in the

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<sup>59</sup> Zieren, “A Century of Meatpacking and Packinghouse Labor in Chicago,” p. 701.

<sup>60</sup> Robyn Muncy, “Trustbusting and White Manhood,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 25 (Fall, 1995), p. 35.

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<sup>61</sup> Weisberger, “Harvey Wiley,” p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Coppin, “Wiley and the Whiskey Industry,” p. 288.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>65</sup> Wood, “Business Support for the 1906 Food and Drug Act,” p. 430.

best interest of the public, why would he campaign in favor of a more harmful product? The answer to that question appears to be quite simple. In his campaign for straight whisky, Wiley convinced Charles Reed of the American Medical Association to testify that only straight whiskey should be used for medical prescriptions.<sup>66</sup> As a result, the bill was eventually placed under the supervision of the Chemistry Division, and Wiley was named chairman of the interdepartmental committee charged with administering the Pure Food and Drug Act.

Thus, it is quite clear that the actions of Wiley had little to do with the public's interest. Wiley's efforts were, if anything, harmful to the public because straight whiskey was the more poisonous product in comparison to blended whiskey brands. In addition, Wiley knew that the distillers of straight whiskey were more than "eager to return the favor by supporting him financially to gain control over the act once it passed."<sup>67</sup> The efforts of Wiley paid off as the Bureau of Chemistry expanded rapidly after the passage of the legislation. The total number of personnel of the bureau increased from 110 in 1906 to 250 in 1907. The financial appropriations of the bureau increased dramatically as well. The whiskey episode is then in part consistent with the theory expressed by Muncy. The regulation efforts of Wiley were a mutually "beneficial exchange between particular business people and government officials."<sup>68</sup> The idea that Wiley acted solely upon a concern for consumer safety is misleading and inaccurate.

In conclusion, it is important to re-examine the multiple reasons behind the passage of the Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug Acts of 1906. If we continue

to believe that the legislation was in response primarily to public demand, we fail to understand the importance of big business and its role in the political arena of that era. The whiskey industry in particular used Wiley to gain an advantage over its competitors by supporting him in his efforts to secure more power for himself and his department. If we begin to understand this strategic behavior practiced by private industry and government, we may begin to recognize that the title of hero that was bestowed upon Roosevelt and others is not warranted. Today, Roosevelt, who had little to do with the passage of the acts, is given the primary credit. In fact, it is quite clear that Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana played a far more important role in the process than President Roosevelt. It was Beveridge who was startled by the investigation performed by Wiley. Although his role has been overlooked by many historians, Beveridge actually drafted and pushed the bill through Congress. Nevertheless, Walter Trattner recently wrote that "Roosevelt turned his attention to measures to protect the public against harmful meat and drugs and almost single-handedly got Congress to pass the Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug acts."<sup>69</sup> Most works, past and present, have arrived at similar conclusions.

If we continue to accept the notion that the government responded to the public reaction of *The Jungle*, we accept to a certain degree the conditions which Sinclair described in his novel. It is now, more than ever, evident that Sinclair purposely misled the readers of *The Jungle* in order to promote his own career. Should educators and historians continue to use a novel that was based on exaggerations and misleading information? To continue to accept his novel as the basis for the legislation passed by

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>67</sup> Coppin, "Wiley and the Whiskey Industry," p. 308.

<sup>68</sup> Muncy, "Trustbusting and White Manhood," p. 36.

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<sup>69</sup> Trattner, "The Federal Food and Drug Acts: A Complete But Familiar Story," p. 393.

Congress is to accept a flawed and exaggerated picture of urban immigrant industrial life in the early twentieth century. Beyond that, historical novelists are perhaps receiving the message that it is all right to use vivid imagination in place of good research. Cushing Stout argues that historical novelists need what he terms a “veracious imagination.”<sup>70</sup> Sinclair does not meet Stout’s criteria—a respect for both the documentable and the imaginative without sacrificing either to the other. In the end, Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* did not cause the passage of the Meat Inspection Act or the Pure Food and Drug Act.

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<sup>70</sup> Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” p. 101.

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## POLISH NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AMERICA

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### Carrie Borowski

Polish immigration to the United States from 1870-1917 can be described as one of the “great migrations” in history. Poles came from every region in Poland to settle in a country completely foreign to them. They immigrated to this country for a variety of reasons, but, in general, the majority of Polish immigrants came to the United States in search of a better life for themselves and, more importantly, their children. They knew neither the language, the culture, nor the religion of the United States. These linguistic and cultural differences that the Poles faced in America contributed to the prejudice that they felt in the political and economic sectors. “Making such fine distinctions, employers established the pecking order of their workers on the basis of race, ranking white native-born Americans at the top; Irish, Scots, English, Welsh and Germans below but near them; Poles, Magyars, Italians, Slovaks, and Russians next, in various orders; and Black Americans in the bottom category.”<sup>1</sup>

Although the Poles faced rough times upon arrival in the United States, America provided them with something that they had never experienced in partitioned Poland—a sense of identity and pride in their Polish heritage. While some characteristics kept the Poles separate from other immigrant groups and native Americans, they also brought them together with other Poles. Therefore, Poles discovered who they were in the

United States rather than in Poland. They formed a strong Polish community in the United States, Polonia, which still exists today. This Polish community and its social networks—including organizations such as the Polish National Alliance, the Polish Falcons, and the Polish Women’s Alliance—enabled Polish-Americans to forge a link between assimilation into American culture and retention of Polish heritage.

Polish immigration to the United States reached its zenith in the years 1899-1932. According to the table entitled *Permanent Immigration of Ethnic Poles in the United States 1820-1980*, there were 33,489 persons who identified themselves as Polish from 1820 to 1885. During the period 1885-98, persons identifying Poland as their land of birth numbered 131,694. Hitting their peak in the years 1899-1932, Polish immigrants, defined as persons identified as Polish by race or people, reached 1,148,649.<sup>2</sup> Before one can understand the great influx of Poles into the United States, it is essential to understand the role that historical Poland plays in the equation.

Poland ceased to exist as an independent country during the high immigration years 1870-1917. Not until after World War I did Poland achieve the status of an independent country again. After 1795, Poland had been separated into three spheres, each controlled by Poland’s powerful neighbors: Russia, Prussia and Austria. “In 1795, after the failure of a massive revolt against the partitioning powers led by Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Russia, Prussia and Austria again divided the remnants of Poland and erased the state from the European map.”<sup>3</sup> Poland had gone from a Polish independent

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of Polish-Americans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 21.

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Pienkos, *PNA: A Centennial History of the Polish National Alliance of the United States of North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

state rich with culture and scholastic achievements to a people and a culture repressed by their occupiers. During the partitioning of Poland, the Poles faced harsh treatment under each of the three powers. Prussia and Russia even established programs of forced control of the Polish language in schools, churches, and governmental administrative and judicial agencies during the partition.<sup>4</sup> The history of Poland since 1795 illustrates why Poles were so willing to give up everything familiar and immigrate to a land in which they had only the principles of freedom and economic prosperity in common with the Americans.

Poles have been in United States since the American Revolution. In fact, one of the earliest heroes in this country was Casimir Pulaski, who aided in the fight for independence. However, Polish immigration did not attract large numbers until around the time of the American Civil War. According to Andrzej Brozek, Poles immigrated to America after 1854 due to certain push and pull factors. "Political and cultural oppression, improper land distribution, and overpopulation acted as 'push' factors, while a generous American immigration policy and favorable prospects for employment drew the discontented and ambitious here."<sup>5</sup> Polish immigration to the United States was by no means homogeneous in nature. Reasons for immigration ranged from unemployment to fear of conscription into the Russian army. The emigration movement from Poland was composed of political exiles, peasants, religious dissidents, and others. However, the Polish peasantry which left Poland after

the 1850s was far larger in number than any other emigration group due to the worsening of economic conditions as the nineteenth century progressed. As the population grew and industrialization failed to keep up, the Polish peasant was left with little choice but to immigrate to a foreign country.<sup>6</sup>

One example of Polish immigration to the United States is the story of a Polish woman, Marie Zakrzewska (1829-1902), who fled Prussia in 1853. Being a woman of Polish ethnic background, Zakrzewska was denied her medical degree by a hospital in Berlin. She immigrated to the United States, where she earned her medical degree and became a pioneer in medical and nursing education for women. "Little really is known in Berlin about America, and to go there is considered as great an undertaking as to seek the river Styx in order to go to Hades....But this could not prevent me from realizing my plans.... I had idealized the freedom of America and especially the reform of the position of women...."<sup>7</sup> Although Zakrzewska was rather ignorant of the United States, she, like thousands of other Poles, risked everything to immigrate here. "A stranger in a strange wide land, not knowing its habits and customs, not understanding its people, nor its workings and aims, yet my mind was not clouded with loneliness....I was happy."<sup>8</sup>

Hilda Satt Polacheck's immigration to the United States was very different from Zakrzewska's immigration. For one thing, Polacheck was Jewish. Although Polacheck was only a child when she left Poland in 1892, she had already experienced the discrimination that faced Jews in Poland. As an old woman, Polacheck could recall the

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<sup>4</sup> Josephine Wtulich, ed., *Writing Home: Immigrants in Brazil and the United States 1890-1891* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Brozek, "Polish Americans 1854-1939," *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Spring, 1988), p. 105.

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<sup>6</sup> Pienkos, *PNA: A Centennial History*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> Marie Zakrzewska, "My Education and Aspirations Demanded More," in Maxine Schwartz Seller, ed., *Immigrant Women*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

religious intolerance and national hatred that she experienced while living in the section of Poland partitioned to Russia. "As far back as I can remember, the Poles hated the Russians and the Germans. The Germans looked down on the Poles and the Russians. There was a mutual hatred among the people of the three countries... But there was always a double dose of this hatred for the Jews."<sup>9</sup>

An important source for understanding Polish immigration to the United States is the book *Writing Home*, which is a compilation of immigrant letters that were sent back to Poland. It illustrates first hand the difficulties and benefits that Poles faced in the United States. It also highlights the Polish social network that was already in place in 1890 in the United States. In letters to their families back home, Poles wrote about Polish friends and family who attempted to make their arrival in the United States easier. "They treat me not as an uncle and aunt would, but as parents. I get my meals in their house, and uncle also pays 3 dollars a month for my lodging. At Uncle Chuna's I am learning how to sew on a machine."<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand, immigration to the United States was extremely traumatic for Poles given the extreme differences in language, religion, and culture. But, on the other hand, these differences helped to create a Polish national consciousness. Prior to arriving in America, many Poles did not distinguish themselves as such. Stefan Barszczewski, the author of the first history of the Polish National Alliance, discussed this phenomenon in 1894: "In answer to the question, 'where are you from?' our immigrants reply almost unanimously, 'from under the Prussians, the Austrians, or the

Russians,'...Not surprisingly, American census officials report thousands of immigrants from those countries, but few Poles, when the exact opposite is true."<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. Census Report of 1900 further illustrates this lack of a Polish identity. After examining the Census population statistics from the Town of Cicero in Cook County, Illinois, Barszczewski's position is strengthened. As to the place of birth, census officials listed Prussia and "Poland Germany" for many Chicago Poles in 1900.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it was here in America that many immigrants became fully conscious of their Polish identity.

By the time of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Poles were fully conscious of their Polish identity, especially in Chicago which was already the second largest Polish city in the world. Polish communities, churches, schools, and social organizations had been formed throughout the United States. Each country represented at the Columbian Exposition enjoyed a national day to celebrate its achievements and successes. Although Poland was not yet an independent country, Poles were given October 7, 1893, as their day to celebrate. The October 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Chicago Tribune* recalls the grand parades and ceremonies that dominated Chicago on Polish Day. Over fifty thousand Poles gathered in the streets that day to pay homage to their heritage. Polish bands, military companies, and social groups, including the Polish National Alliance, were present the parade.<sup>13</sup> Justice M. A. La Buy was one of the speakers at this great event.

The Polish people have been driven from their native soil, not at the point of the bayonet, but by despotism, tyrannical laws and

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<sup>9</sup> Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Wtulich, *Writing Home*, p. 225.

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<sup>11</sup> Pienkos, *PNA: A Centennial History*, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Illinois Census Population: 1900*, Population Schedules.

<sup>13</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1893, p. A4.

oppressive taxation; they have selected their homes under liberal governments such as Switzerland, France, England, and last, but not least, 2,000,000 of Poles have selected their homes under the protection of the proud flag of the United States. We Polish Americans are here to declare our love and reverence for the laws, institutions, and governments of the American people. It is well that our forefathers, Kosciusko, Pulaski, and others, assisted George Washington, the Father of our adopted country, in his great battles of independence; for we are reaping the fruits of that great victory. We are proud that Polish patriots have fought in the battles of Bull Run, Wilderness, Shiloh, Lookout Mountain, and at Richmond in the defense of the Stars and Stripes. We are here assembled to congratulate each other that we are under the flag of the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Polish education was also displayed at the Columbian Exposition. In Polacheck's autobiography, she recalls her participation in the exposition. "In the exhibit of the schools, the Jewish Training School was well represented. And I almost swooned with excitement when I saw my name attached to a small canvas bag that I had made. My sister, who was several years older, had embroidered a delicate white silk cover and pillow for a doll's bed."<sup>15</sup>

On the most important level, the Columbian Exposition illustrated Polish national consciousness and the ability of the Poles to retain their heritage while adopting American ideals. The sense of Polish identity that was discovered in the United States led to the birth and growth of the Polish-American social and organizational

network. The social organizations and networks that Polish-Americans formed in the United States helped them assimilate into American culture while also maintaining the importance of their Polish heritage. Organizations such as the Polish National Alliance, Polish Falcons, and the Polish Women's Alliance provided the stability and security that was needed by the Polish community. These organizations were able to coalesce both American and Polish principles while forming a unique Polish-American identity that still exists today. Polish-Americans are one of the few ethnic groups in America that retain much of their heritage even into the late twentieth century. The current memberships of the Polish Falcons and the Polish National Alliance highlight the importance that Polish ethnicity still plays in the lives of Polish-Americans. The Polish language is still spoken in many homes, churches, and grade schools, especially in the heavily Polish populated areas of Chicago.<sup>16</sup>

Because there are numerous Polish organizations in America—in fact far too many to discuss in this paper—I will focus on three of the most influential Polish-American organizations formed in the late nineteenth century: the Polish Falcons, the Polish National Alliance, and the Polish Women's Alliance. The strength of these Polish organizations highlights the strength of the Polish national identity in America. Each of these organizations has helped to ease the transition for Poles into American society while also continuing to emphasize Polish heritage and pride. These organizations can be further connected on a geographical basis due to their relationship with Chicago.

The Polish National Alliance (PNA) is the oldest Polish fraternal organization in the United States. The PNA was founded on

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Polacheck, *I Came A Stranger*, p. 40.

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<sup>16</sup> Polish Falcons of America Website, <http://www.polisfalcons.org/membership.html>, 1.

August 10, 1880, in Philadelphia, in response to the religious nature of an earlier Polish organization, the Polish Roman Catholic Union.<sup>17</sup> The founder, Julius Andrzejkowicz, called for the creation of a strong organization that represented all Poles in America rather than just Catholics. Andrzejkowicz, along with others, argued that immigrants must enter American society rather than to remain apart from the cultural mainstream. “Only through full integration into American life would it be possible for Poles to advance socially and along the way to attain increased influence in promoting the Polish cause to non-Poles.” However, the preservation of Polish culture had to be taken into consideration. Accordingly, the PNA committed itself to form a more perfect union of the Polish people in America with the rest of the citizenry of the United States and to transmit this relationship to future generations; to insure to them a proper moral, intellectual, economic and social development; to foster and cherish the best traditions of the cultures of the United States and of Poland; to preserve the mother tongue, and to promote all legitimate means leading to the restoration and preservation of the independence of the Polish nation in Europe.<sup>18</sup>

The PNA also aided the Polish community by becoming an insurance fraternal organization. Poles were able to purchase death insurance through membership in the PNA, which insured each male member at \$500.00 and his wife at \$300.00.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Casimir Wronski, “Polish Organizations of Chicago,” in *Poles of Chicago, 1837-1937* (Chicago: Polish Pageant, 1937), p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> Pienkos, *PNA: A Centennial History*, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Wronski, “Polish Organizations of Chicago,” p. 150.

By reading the mission statement of the PNA, one is able to deduce the importance of both assimilation and retention of the Polish culture. The PNA was critical to the development of the Polish-American social network because it was the first organization that adopted a secular outlook. This secularism expanded the Polish community to include many non-Catholic Poles who had been denied membership in the Polish Roman Catholic Union. As the years progressed, the PNA executive board seemed to liberalize even more with regard to membership. “At the 1895 [meeting], the PNA voted to drop its opposition to the admission of socialists and adopted a resolution encouraging acceptance of anyone who subscribed to its aims, regardless of his political or religious affiliation.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the PNA attempted to look beyond religion and political ideology when trying to unite Polish-Americans. By broadening its membership base to include non-Catholics, the PNA has been the dominant secular force in the Polish-American community for over 100 years.

The PNA aided in the fight for Polish independence, offered hope and security to Polish immigrants, and educated many American-born Poles on the importance of the Polish language and culture. The PNA was successful in uniting Poles in terms of Polish national consciousness. As discussed earlier in the paper, the PNA led the participation in the October 7, 1893, “Polish Day” celebration at the Chicago Columbian Exposition. “For this occasion, approximately 25,000 Poles, many attired in martial or folk costumes glorifying Poland an America’s histories, took part in a massive parade culminating at the city’s lake front fair grounds.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pienkos, *PNA: A Centennial History*, p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Although Teofila Samolinkska was one of the spiritual founders of the PNA, the PNA continued to refuse women as voting members until 1900. The fundamental reasoning behind this discrimination was the patriarchal character of Polish immigrant life at the time. According to the sociologist Helena Lopata: "Polish culture contained at the time of migration...many assumptions as to the nature and proper roles of women in each major stage of their life course... Peasant families expected girls to continue the work of their mothers, learning to keep the home, sew, cook and take care of younger children."<sup>22</sup> This description of Polish immigrant women does not do justice to the Polish women who fought for their equal rights in the face of discrimination and sexism. Women activists such as Samolinkska and Stefanie Chmielinska led the battle for equal rights within the PNA until 1899 when they decided to form a separate organization, the Polish Women's Alliance. The motivation behind the new women's alliance was and has remained the winning of universal respect for the principle of the full equality of women with men in both American and Polish-American life.<sup>23</sup>

The Polish Women's Alliance (ZPA) holds the same aims, promoting pride in Polish heritage and creating a system of fraternal insurance for its members as does the PNA, but it takes a different approach to them. The ZPA focuses more on social work and education than the PNA. Thaddeus Radzialowski states that "the most important activity that the ZPA devoted itself to was the education of Polish women and children."<sup>24</sup> In the early twentieth century,

the ZPA conducted schools in Polish, opened reading rooms to women in Chicago, and conducted summer camps for Polish immigrant children from the cities. These activities aided in retaining a strong Polish identity in the United States.

The symbol of the Polish Women's Alliance illustrates the motivation behind the organization. The emblem shows representatives of the women of Poland and America with their hands touching across the Atlantic Ocean in a sign of solidarity of values and service. In the background of the emblem is a sun which symbolizes the freedom and opportunity women cherish for themselves, their families, and their homelands, in addition to their pride in their heritage.<sup>25</sup> The Polish Women's Alliance was able to bring together modern American principles of female suffrage and traditional Polish principles under one motto.

In the beginning, neither the Polish National Alliance nor the Polish Women's Alliance was open to young people. Nevertheless, a great number of PNA members realized the need for a Polish youth organization and fought for its inception. The Falcons movement, unlike the other two, was already popular in Poland. The national order of Polish Falcons (Sokols) was established in Poland over 150 years ago and around 100 years ago in the United States. "The aims of its founders were: the fostering of brotherhood, discipline, subservience of private interests for the good of all, and equality of rights and obligations within the nation; to bring up coming generations, healthy in body, sound in mind, beautiful in character, lofty in ideals and conscious of their duties as citizens of a free commonwealth."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>23</sup> Polish Women's Alliance Website, <http://www.pwaa.org/history.html>, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Thaddeus Radzialowski, "Let Us Join Hands: The Polish Women's Alliance," in Seller, ed., *Immigrant Women*, p. 191.

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<sup>25</sup> Polish Women's Alliance Website, <http://www.pwaa.org/history.html>, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Wronski, "Polish Organizations of Chicago," p. 159.

More than the previous two organizations, the Polish Falcons concentrated on physical fitness among its members and military training for Polish independence. From 1905 to 1912, the Falcons were composed of young men and women in their late teens and twenties who became one of the most assertive voices in all of Polonia for Polish independence.<sup>27</sup> Even though the Falcons were the closest of the three organizations to their Polish heritage, they were also able to combine American ideals and Polish traditions. An example of this is the figures that the Falcons selected for its patrons: General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a national hero of Poland, and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>28</sup>

Polish immigration dominated American life for more than fifty years. During this time, over two million Poles immigrated to the United States for a wide range of reasons. Once in the United States, Poles established extensive organizations that aided in the assimilation process. American ideals and history were taught through these organizations by direct and indirect means. The indirect means was the fact that Poles were able to organize a group, form a Polish newspaper, and provide support to other members. These things were aided by democratic rule in the United States. Poland was being ruled at this time by authoritative regimes in all areas of the country. The organizations that Poles formed once in the United States also taught Polish-Americans that it is all right to retain your Polish heritage. You can be American and Polish at the same time.

By placing emphasis on both American ideals and Polish tradition, Polish social organizations such as the Polish Falcons, the

Polish National Alliance and the Polish Women's Alliance have acknowledged that there is nothing wrong with being American and retaining one's Polish heritage. In fact, these organizations promoted a Polish national consciousness that is still present among Polish-Americans.

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<sup>27</sup> Donald Pienkos, *One Hundred Years Young: A History of the Polish Falcons of America 1887-1987* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Wronski, "Polish Organizations of Chicago," p. 160.

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## THE MANHATTAN PROJECT SCIENTISTS AND THE DROPPING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB

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### Rod Githens

The end of the Cold War brought with it a renewed interest in what is now history. This interest is seen through popular television shows, such as CNN's *Cold War*. Questions sometimes arise such as, "What if the Cold War had never happened?" or "Could the Cold War have been prevented?" In studying the Cold War, one often overlooks how the scientists felt about it, especially what their feelings were about the dropping of the bomb. Few are aware of the warnings about the use of the bomb that were given by the scientists. Obviously, the Cold War could not have existed for as long as it did without the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb caused an arms race that took nearly forty years to end. Few realize that the designers of the bomb opposed its dropping because of their fear of an arms race, their belief that it was unnecessary to end the war, and their concern about the senseless killing of civilians.

The question of whether the bomb needed to be dropped to end the war should be explored. There are obviously opposing views regarding this question. The orthodox view of the need for the bomb being dropped to end the war and therefore save thousands of American lives has been affirmed by authors such as Herbert Feis,<sup>1</sup> who was the adviser to three World War II-

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).

era cabinet secretaries.<sup>2</sup> The traditional view was challenged by Gar Alperovitz's "bombshell,"<sup>3</sup> *Atomic Diplomacy*,<sup>4</sup> which challenged the widely-held assumptions as to the reasoning behind the dropping of the atomic bombs. Published during the Vietnam War era, when many were already questioning American foreign policy, Alperovitz's accusations became popular. Since Alperovitz's book, many other authors and historians have questioned the military and diplomatic rationale behind dropping the bombs.

Alperovitz continues to be one of the leading writers in the ongoing debate about the real reason(s) for dropping the bomb. He alleges that the public does not fully understand the circumstances regarding the wartime situation in Japan and the Pacific. New evidence shows that the bomb was not the only way to end the war. When the Soviets agreed to enter the war in the Pacific, Truman wrote in a letter to his wife that the declaration meant, "we'll end the war a year sooner now, and think of the kids who won't be killed!"<sup>5</sup> Alperovitz claims that this and a comment in Truman's Potsdam journal indicate that he understood that after the Russian promise to enter the war, the Japanese would be forced to surrender. Therefore, Truman's previous claims of a quarter million to millions of casualties, without the dropping of the bomb, seem to be false.<sup>6</sup>

One possible implication of this knowledge is that if the bombs were not used by the time the Soviets entered the war,

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<sup>2</sup> Gar Alperovitz, "Hiroshima Historians Reassess," *Foreign Policy*, no. 99 (Summer, 1995), *Expanded Academic ASAP*.

<sup>3</sup> James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), p. 301.

<sup>4</sup> Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965).

<sup>5</sup> Gar Alperovitz, "Hiroshima Historians Reassess."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

then there would be no time to use them. Therefore, two proposals emerge explaining the real reason the bomb was used (whether consciously or unconsciously): Congress would demand an explanation for the \$2 billion spent on the Manhattan Project,<sup>7</sup> and the U.S. position against Russia would be strengthened if the new weapon was used.<sup>8</sup> According to Alperovitz, there is considerable evidence to suggest that this reasoning heavily influenced the decision made by Truman and his top advisers.

Even orthodox supporters of the bomb, such as Herbert Feis, later acknowledged that if the U.S. had told the Japanese of the plans for Soviet entry and assured the emperor's position, that the war could have been ended without the dropping of the bombs. He states that if "the American and Soviet governments together had let it be known that unless Japan laid down its arms at once, the Soviet Union was going to enter the war. That, along with the promise to spare the Emperor, might well have made an earlier bid for surrender effective."<sup>9</sup> However, Feis goes on to explain that he believed the prospects of the Soviets announcing their intentions of entry were unlikely because of the likelihood of Japanese preparations for a Soviet assault.<sup>10</sup>

Feis, however, was certainly not an opponent of the use of the bomb. He staunchly defended the official view of the dropping because of the American lives reportedly saved by ending the war quickly. He believed that the dropping of the atomic bomb shocked the Japanese into surrendering quickly.<sup>11</sup> Feis concluded that the U.S. desired to end the "defiant, crazed, useless" prolongation of the war by Japan.

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<sup>7</sup> Davidson and Lytle, *After the Fact*, p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> Gar Alperovitz, "Hiroshima Historians Reassess."

<sup>9</sup> Feis, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*, p. 187-88.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

He also stated that the entry of the Soviet Union into the war needed to be accompanied by the actual dropping of the bomb in order to persuade the Japanese to surrender.<sup>12</sup>

Robert Maddox found that the claim that several of Truman's advisers attempted to persuade him against the use of the bomb because it was "militarily unnecessary or immoral, or both" was false.<sup>13</sup> He explains that there is no conclusive evidence that any such petitions were made. However, Maddox and others fail to report that many of the top scientists who designed the bomb vehemently opposed the way in which it was used against Japan.

According to Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, the atomic scientists warned the world about the nature of nuclear weapons and the apocalyptic implications that they carried. Although Lifton and Mitchell acknowledge that there were a variety of responses from the scientists, a group of "prophetic survivors" emerged that helped antinuclear activists spread their gospel.<sup>14</sup> They conclude that most of the scientists were "neither able to fully condemn nor accept it, but expressed their special knowledge in fervently testifying to nuclear danger."<sup>15</sup> A smaller group of scientists vocally opposed the decision to drop the bomb, although there were some who forcefully defended its use. Lifton and Mitchell assert that the scientists' guilt was channeled into proclamations of social responsibility in nuclear weapons usage and testing through organizations such as Leo Szilard's Council for a Livable World. This proclamation enabled the scientists to

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Robert James Maddox, "The Biggest Decision: Why We Had to Drop the Atomic Bomb," *American Heritage*, 46 (May-June, 1995), p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1995), p. 245.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

“confront the source of that guilt in a manner that could lead to positive action.”<sup>16</sup> Lifton and Mitchell further conclude that the scientists had the most varied opinions of those involved in Hiroshima and that they were the most successful early challengers of the “official narrative.”<sup>17</sup>

This challenging of the “official narrative” is seen in the many documents that the scientists produced. The primary sources examined vary from official correspondence and diary entries to later memoirs of those involved in the Manhattan Project. These materials are published in various forms: some are in documentary compilations, others are primary source quotations in secondary sources, two are published newsletters, and others are autobiographical in nature. The wide variety of source types allows for a more representative and accurate sampling of scientists’ documents.

A book containing Leo Szilard’s thoughts and correspondence provides many insights into his moral views on the dropping of the atomic bomb.<sup>18</sup> His wide-ranging correspondence and other documents allow the researcher to understand his concern for humanity. His correspondence proves to be very valuable because it was written during a time in which Szilard’s views were not popular and caused him to have to participate in an ongoing battle with the military. In one instance, when Szilard pressed to have a non-secretive petition released, the military threatened to have him fired from the University of Chicago and “prosecuted under the Espionage Act.”<sup>19</sup> The book also contains parts of his autobiography recorded

while he was in the hospital. Obviously, an autobiographical account recorded while one is dying could be tainted with personal preferences and hindsight. However, Szilard’s actions and the plethora of correspondence from the time of his active participation in the Manhattan Project seem to verify much of what he states in his autobiographical accounts.

Among other valuable documents are the actual facsimile copies of the poll of the scientists<sup>20</sup> regarding the suggested course of action in the dropping the atomic bomb. These documents were classified correspondence and, therefore, their value is very significant. Another important document is The Franck Report.<sup>21</sup> This report to policymakers was an official statement signed by seven top scientists involved in the Manhattan Project. This document gives us an idea of the consensus of those scientists who were generally opposed to the dropping of the atomic bomb.

Leo Szilard was the most vocal and active scientist in opposing the dropping of the bomb prior to its use. This Hungarian scientist was the initial instigator of the Manhattan Project. He convinced Einstein to write a letter to Roosevelt (which only Einstein signed because of his notoriety) encouraging the president to begin the project by obtaining the necessary quantities of uranium. Roosevelt was warned that the Germans had already taken over Czechoslovakian mines and that there was an urgency to continue to develop this technology because “some of the American work in uranium is now being repeated [in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>18</sup> Spencer R. Weart and Gertrud Weiss Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard: His Version of the Facts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, p. 67.

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<sup>20</sup> Farrington Daniels to A.H. Compton, July 13, 1945, in Michael B. Stoff, Jonathan F. Fanton, and R. Hal Williams, eds., *The Manhattan Project: A Documentary Introduction to the Atomic Age*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), p. 173.

<sup>21</sup> J. Franck, chair, *The Franck Report*, June 11, 1945, in *ibid.*, pp. 140-47.

Germany].”<sup>22</sup> Because of Szilard’s initial steps, the Manhattan Project quickly came into existence.

Nearly six years later, Einstein wrote another letter to Roosevelt. This time it was a cover letter, introducing a secret memo that Szilard had composed for the president. Szilard was still unknown to Roosevelt, in spite of the fact that his co-discovery of the nuclear chain reaction was what “all present work on uranium is based.”<sup>23</sup> Once again, Einstein’s letter would help insure that the memo reached the President. Einstein’s letter was sent through Eleanor Roosevelt in order that an appointment could be set up with the President and to increase the chances that it was not stopped along official channels.<sup>24</sup> In the memo, Szilard warned that the use of the bomb could “precipitate a race in the production of these devices between the United States and Russia and that if we continue to pursue the present course, our initial advantage may be lost very quickly in such a race.”<sup>25</sup> Szilard understood the consequences of keeping the bomb a secret from the Soviets and suggested developing a system of controls with Russia and Great Britain rather than keeping Russia from knowing about the weapons. He also suggested that a government department handle the emerging nuclear situation for the post-war United States.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, Szilard implied that the morality of the United States would be compromised if the bomb was used. He said that “from a purely military point of view

this may be...favorable.”<sup>27</sup> However, if the bomb was used, Szilard said many of his fellow scientists believed there would be “destruction of the strong position that the United States hitherto occupied in the world.”<sup>28</sup> The implication is that the opposition to the use of nuclear weapons was not strictly in diplomatic and military terms, but also in moral terms.

However, because of Roosevelt’s death, the memo never reached the president. Szilard eventually got an appointment at the White House and was redirected by President Truman to James Byrnes in South Carolina. Byrnes, a former high-ranking government official who had held several White House posts, was now a private citizen and occupied no position in government. However, it was clear that Byrnes would soon occupy a high office in the Truman Administration. Szilard reported in his recollections that when he met with Byrnes he said that the government should decide how the bomb situation would be handled before its existence was disclosed. However, Byrnes initially showed concern over Congress questioning the two billion dollars spent on the bomb if it was not disclosed. Byrnes explained to Szilard “that Russia might be more manageable if impressed by American military might, and that a demonstration of the bomb might impress Russia.”<sup>29</sup> Szilard was “flabbergasted” by this assumption. Szilard recalled that he realized he could get nowhere with Byrnes and that he “was rarely as depressed as when we left Byrnes’ house. How much better off the world might be had I been born in America and become influential in American politics, and had Byrnes been born in Hungary and studied physics. In all probability there would have

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Einstein to Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 2, 1939, in *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Einstein to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 25, 1945, in Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 205.

<sup>24</sup> Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> Leo Szilard to Franklin D. Roosevelt, in *ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 184.

been no atomic bomb and no danger of an arms race between America and Russia.”<sup>30</sup>

The visit to Byrnes caused an “uproar” in Chicago. Szilard recalled that “the Army had violently objected to our visit to the White House and to Byrnes.... Groves told him that I had committed a grave breach of security by handing a secret document to Byrnes, who did not know how to handle secret documents.”<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of this uproar, Arthur Compton, head of the Chicago project, organized a committee to be led by James Franck to report on whether the bomb should be used against Japan. The report suggested that because of the nature of the atomic bomb, “new and imaginative methods” should be used in demonstrating it. The report suggested that an ultimatum be given to Japan to evacuate certain regions or face total destruction by the bomb.<sup>32</sup>

Szilard stated that at this point he realized that the bomb would be used against Japanese cities. He wanted the scientists to go on record against the bombing on moral grounds. Szilard reported that fifty-three people signed the first draft of the petition, including “all the leading physicists...and many of the leading biologists.”<sup>33</sup> A second petition gained a “significantly larger number [of signatures]” because of its milder wording.<sup>34</sup> The actual petition went through regular channels because James Franck would not sign it otherwise. However, Szilard worried that it would be sabotaged by being held until after the war. The petition never reached

President Truman, as revealed later by Army Lieutenant R. Gordon Arneson.<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, the petition is certainly significant in understanding the rationale of the scientists. It stated that they had been working on the atomic bomb because of the threat of nuclear attack by Germany. Even though the atomic bomb might be effective in quickly ending the war, the scientists state that its use could not be justified until the post-war terms were made public and “Japan was given an opportunity to surrender.”<sup>36</sup> The petition goes on to explain that a nation that uses these “newly liberated forces of nature for purposes of destruction may have to bear the responsibility of opening the door to an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale.”<sup>37</sup> The scientists state that this new power could end in the destruction of many American cities through later nuclear warfare. In addition, they proposed that the moral standing of the United States would be weakened if the bomb was used. It is also significant to note that this petition was sent to Los Alamos but was not circulated, at Oppenheimer’s direction.<sup>38</sup> The Chicago group tended to be more active in opposing the use of the bomb than the Los Alamos group, probably because of the remoteness and high security of the Los Alamos area. The persistence of Szilard is significant. Scientists such as Szilard and Eugene Rabinowitch were active in proclaiming nuclear containment before the dropping of the atomic bomb because of the impending arms race. They saw the immorality of using the bomb and worked to keep it from being used, even in a time of anti-Japanese sentiment when most

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 184-85.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> J. Franck, chair, *The Franck Report*, in Stoff, Fanton, and Williams, eds., *The Manhattan Project*, p. 144.

<sup>33</sup> Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 187.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

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<sup>35</sup> Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey, “The Fight Over the A-Bomb; Secret Revealed After 18 Years,” *Look*, August 13, 1963, pp. 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> *A Petition to the President of the United States*, July 17, 1945, in Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 211.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 213.

Americans would probably have agreed to use it if they had prior knowledge of it.

After the dropping of the two bombs, Szilard “realized very quickly in Washington that for the time being at least the scientists who were regarded as being responsible for the creation of the bomb had the ear of the statesmen.”<sup>39</sup> Szilard felt that some people in Washington were starting to understand that American possession of the bomb did not mean infinite American security. He tried to organize a conference between Russian and American scientists for the purpose of collaborating on safeguards for the world. However, Secretary of State Byrnes vetoed the proposal, in spite of its endorsement by Assistant Secretary of State William Benton (former vice president of the University of Chicago).<sup>40</sup> After this failure, Szilard continued to be involved in the process of urging nuclear containment and eventually founded the Council for a Livable World.<sup>41</sup>

Szilard later condemned himself in a parable called “My Trial As a War Criminal.”<sup>42</sup> He said that he was guilty because the petition he circulated earlier was sent through proper channels; he should have acted more radically, as had been his impulse.<sup>43</sup> He made a comment about the prominence and attention that the scientists received in the years following the bombing, saying that “It is remarkable that all these scientists...should be listened to. But mass murders have always commanded the attention of the public, and atomic scientists are no exception to this rule.”<sup>44</sup> The atomic scientists received much fame and attention

and frequently spoke on a wide-range of subjects after the bombing.

The scientist who was the primary writer of the *Franck Report*, along with Szilard, was Eugene Rabinowitch. Rabinowitch edited the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, a journal which dealt with many public policy and scientific issues. In an editorial, he criticized the U.S. government for ignoring earlier warnings of the impending nuclear arms race. He also criticized Americans for failing to work closely with the Soviets in reconstruction after the war.<sup>45</sup> Rabinowitch describes the day when a group of scientists “walked the streets of Chicago” before the bomb was dropped on Japan, imagining the devastation that might be brought upon Chicago if a nuclear attack was to occur.<sup>46</sup> The idea of “the steel skeletons of skyscrapers bending into grotesque shapes and their masonry raining into the streets below”<sup>47</sup> disturbed Rabinowitch so much that he seriously considered leaking the news of the planned drop to the media. In a later letter, Rabinowitch said: “Twenty-five years later, I feel I would have been right if I had done so.”<sup>48</sup> He said that the American people should have been alerted so that they would feel responsibility for the mass murder committed in their name without their prior knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

Only one scientist actually left the project when it was apparent that Germany would surrender. Joseph Rotblat left because of the “disagreeable shock” of hearing first-hand from General Groves that “the real purpose in making the bomb was to subdue the Soviets.”<sup>50</sup> After leaving the project he began to work in the area of nuclear

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, p. 249.

<sup>42</sup> Leo Szilard, “My Trial As a War Criminal,”

*University of Chicago Law Review*, (Autumn, 1949).

<sup>43</sup> Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, p. 248.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 61.

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<sup>45</sup> Eugene Rabonowitch, “Five Years After,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 7 (January, 1951), p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Eugene Rabinowitch, Letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 28, 1971.

<sup>49</sup> Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, p. 249.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

medicine. He called his involvement with the project a “traumatic experience... Our concepts of morality seem to get thrown overboard once military action starts.”<sup>51</sup> Several of the other scientists were vocal in moral opposition to the bomb after it was dropped. Robert Wilson, another project scientist, became physically sick after hearing that the bomb had been dropped and later said he would never forgive himself for not leaving after the defeat of the Germans. In 1980, he said, “I cannot understand why I did not act.”<sup>52</sup>

Seth Neddermeyer confessed in a later interview that he was now “overwhelmed” by guilt. He recalled, nearly in tears, “This is what bugs me more than anything else—I don’t remember having any strong feelings about [the bombings] at the time. I guess I just got caught up in the mindless hysteria.”<sup>53</sup> However, others never publicly expressed guilt over the bombings. Luis Alvarez said he had little sympathy for his colleagues who had guilt over the bombings. In fact he felt “great pride” over having helped create the bomb. Edward Teller, another staunch advocate of the bomb, claimed that notion of nuclear weapons being lethal in the long term was exaggerated. Pointing to the rapid recovery of Hiroshima, he dismissed such a conclusion as “a dangerous myth.”<sup>54</sup>

The committee that was to oversee the use of the bomb, headed by Secretary of War Henry Stimson, agreed that the bomb should be dropped without warning, as it was. Four scientists were on the Interim Committee, but Szilard said he initially knew that of the two who would be against its use, neither would be persistent. Robert Oppenheimer was also on the committee, but Szilard said there was no question that

he would be for dropping the bomb because of his vested interest in its making.<sup>55</sup> On the committee, only Secretary of the Navy Ralph A. Bard voted against dropping the bomb, after which he resigned from the committee.<sup>56</sup> It could be speculated that Bard’s vote dealt with possible loss of Navy prestige if the Air Force (then part of the Army) was seen as winning the war. The placement of four scientists on the Interim Committee shows that scientists did have a voice in the decision to drop the bomb. However, those scientists who were staunchly opposed to its use were not on the influential committee.

Even though some of the scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project did not oppose the use of the atomic bomb on Japan, there were a significant number who were opposed to it being used unannounced. A poll of the atomic scientists found that of 150 scientists, only fifteen percent advocated the bomb being used in whatever manner would bring “prompt Japanese surrender at minimum human cost to our own armed forces.”<sup>57</sup> Forty-six percent advocated giving “a military demonstration in Japan, to be followed by a renewed opportunity for surrender before full use of the weapons is employed.” Twenty-six percent wanted “an experimental demonstration in this country, with representatives of Japan present; followed by a new opportunity for surrender before full use of the weapons is employed.” Eleven percent advocated “withhold[ing] military use of the weapons, but mak[ing] public experimental demonstration of their effectiveness. Two percent supported “maintain[ing] as secret as possible all

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

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<sup>55</sup> Weart and Szilard, eds., *Leo Szilard*, p. 186.

<sup>56</sup> Stoff, Fanton, and Williams, eds., *The Manhattan Project*, p. 137.

<sup>57</sup> A.H. Compton to Farrington Daniels, July 13, 1945, in Stoff, Fanton, and Williams, eds., *The Manhattan Project*, p. 173.

developments of our new weapons, and refrain[ing] from using them in this war.”<sup>58</sup> This poll, from July 13, 1945, shows that only a small percentage of scientists desired the bomb to be used in the prescribed manner.

The evidence shows that the way in which the bomb was used on Japan was not in keeping with most scientists’ desires. Although a few influential scientists wholeheartedly supported its use, the majority were opposed to the manner in which it was used. They knew of the horrendous devastation that would be caused to human life and property when the bomb was dropped, and most did not want their creation to kill innocent civilians. The debate continues as to whether the bomb needed to be dropped to end the war quickly. However, we see from the previously-stated evidence that it is very probable that U.S. officials knew that the war would be won quickly without the bomb. Because of the shortsighted views of some presidential advisers wanting to control Soviet expansion, Soviet cooperation was not sought and the already adversarial relationship continued to get worse between the Soviets and the Americans.

There were a few voices, however, that predicted the ensuing Cold War. Leo Szilard and Eugene Rabinowitch were steady in voicing their unpopular views of the impending arms race. In addition, they viewed the unannounced slaughter of Japanese civilians as being intolerable. The scientists’ fears were ignored by close advisers to the president, who failed to give him their warnings. Had the president been aware of the warnings, the world might be a very different place. Possibly thousands of innocent lives could have been saved. Another possibility is that Russian and American cooperation would have prevented the Cold War, thus saving billions

of dollars in resources that could have been invested elsewhere. These billions of dollars could have been channeled into research that could have resulted in medical advancements that we have yet to see. Perhaps we can learn from our past mistakes and work to prevent similar diplomatic catastrophes in the future.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

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**SAINT OF THE WOLF:  
FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND CREATION**

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**William Steinbacher-Kemp**

In the landmark essay titled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. proposed infusing an environmental conscience into Christianity through the example of St. Francis of Assisi. In that essay, first appearing in the journal *Science* more than thirty years ago, White called the twelfth-century saint the “greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Francis, born in 1182 (or 1181) and the founder of the Order of the Friars Minor, was a remarkably original figure on several fronts. Yet for the purposes of this paper, it is Francis’ views on nature that call for further examination. White, in his oft-cited and debated essay, argued that societal ideas about the natural world are conditioned by religion, and that if one traced the lineage of belief systems that contributed to the current environmental crisis, the single greatest culprit would be Christianity. The Judeo-Christian notion of linear time fostered “an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient,” argued White.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Bible succinctly outlined humankind’s divinely acquired right of dominion over nature. For example, in Genesis 1:28, God commands of male and female: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and [fill] the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that

moveth upon the earth.”<sup>3</sup> “Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen,” declared White.<sup>4</sup> If the roots of this crisis are religious, he added, then the solution must also be rooted in notions of humankind’s relationship with the creator and creation. White believed that St. Francis represented “an alternative Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it,” for the Little Poor Man of Assisi “tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation.”<sup>5</sup>

This paper will not address the convoluted and interwoven relationship between Christianity and the use and abuse of the natural world. Instead, employing White’s choice of Francis as a Christian exemplar for a more sustainable, loving relationship between humankind and nature, this paper will examine both the ideas and legacy of his views on creation.

Francis’ father, Pietro di Bernardone, was a well-to-do textile merchant and his mother was from a prominent French family, thus making his renunciation of wealth and property sometime in 1206-1208 all the more remarkable. As a young man, Francis was a leading young noble of Assisi, and he participated in a brief war between

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science*, 155 (March 10, 1967), p. 1207.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1205.

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26 states: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” C. I. Scofield, ed., *The New Scofield Study Bible*, authorized King James version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), will be used for chapter and verse citations.

<sup>4</sup> White, “Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” p. 1205. “To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.” See p. 1206.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1207.

his hometown and nearby Perugia, hostilities that led to his capture and imprisonment in 1202. Francis' "transformation was not one single moment of blinding incandescence, but a gradual movement away from his old way of life to a new understanding of himself and of his mission in the world," according to theologian Jaroslav Pelikan.<sup>6</sup> Poverty was the defining principle of the Franciscan order, and the vision of Christ as a destitute monk shaped Francis' life and ministry. "Poverty was not merely the absence of property, but was a positive good, 'the queen of virtues,' because of its identification with Christ and with Mary."<sup>7</sup>

Francis also represented a radicalized figure to the church establishment given his remarkable ideas about the natural world. Medieval hagiography offers a wealth of stories detailing Francis' unique relationship with plants, animals, and the elements. To provide but one example, the *Fioretti*, dating to the latter half of the fourteenth century, related the story of Francis and a small village terrorized by a fierce wolf "so rabid with hunger that it devoured not only animals but even human beings."<sup>8</sup> Francis, despite pleas from the frightened residents of Gubbio, left the safety of the enclosed village and greeted the wolf, chastising it for "committing horrible crimes by destroying God's creatures without any mercy." He then secured a promise from the wolf that it would no longer harm the residents or their

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<sup>6</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, "Christ—and the Second Christ," *The Yale Review*, 74 (April, 1985), p. 333. He quotes Dante, who said of Francis, "a sunrise broke again upon the world."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>8</sup> This story is detailed in *Little Flowers of St. Francis (Fioretti)*, a modern English translation from the Latin, in Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), pp. 1348-51. This standard work will be used when citing both Francis' writings and the medieval hagiography on his life.

livestock, and proceeded to lead the animal into the village. Before the amazed villagers, Francis announced: "Listen, dear people, Brother Wolf, who is standing here before you, has promised me and has given me a pledge that he will make peace with you and will never hurt you if you promise also to feed him every day." The wolf lived for two more years, going door to door for its meals. "It hurt no one, and no one hurt it. The people fed it courteously. And it is a striking fact that not a single dog ever barked at it."

In 1209 or 1210, in response to the growing numbers following Francis' lead, Pope Innocent III sanctioned the small monastic order. After a failed attempt to convert Moslems during the Fifth Crusade, Francis returned home and became increasingly removed from the day-to-day governance of the order, choosing instead to devote his remaining years to contemplation. In 1224, while secluded on the mountain of La Verna, he received the stigmata, the first recorded instance of this phenomenon. His last years were marked by blindness and failing health, and he died in Assisi in 1226, only to be canonized two short years later by Pope Gregory IX.

One must approach Francis with caution, for the saint has undergone repeated reinterpretation throughout the centuries. To cite but one remarkable example, in the early 1970s Francis was perceived by some as the hippie saint. The Order of the Friars Minor, according to Joseph Roddy, were anti-establishment mystics representing the "unchurchable young." Francis (whom Roddy described as "the scruffy little Umbrian figure . . . a bearded, barefoot, slightly prankish, and largely unfathomable man") and his followers represented "medieval precedents" for those "hailing from the hippie communes."<sup>9</sup> It is within

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Roddy, "The Hippie Saint," *Look*, April 20, 1971, p. 32. "The faith of these new Franciscans—like the first Christians—is in a counter-culture. Their

this tradition of interpretation, reinterpretation, and misinterpretation that one must approach with circumspection pronouncements on Francis as an environmentalist. “Medieval reactions to the natural environment, and, in particular, St. Francis’ reactions to nature, are issues that have been subjected to a very great deal of partisan distortion and mythologizing,” noted scholar Roger D. Sorrell.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, Francis is increasingly viewed as the “green” saint capable of mending centuries of Christian-sanctioned indifference, neglect, and abuse of the natural world. In 1979, Pope John Paul II declared Francis the heavenly patron saint of those interested in ecology. “Among the saints and illustrious men who had a special cult for nature, as God’s magnificent gift to mankind, St Francis of Assisi is deservedly included,” stated the papal bull.<sup>11</sup> In a 1990 speech on the environment, John Paul II contended that Francis “offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation.” The saint invited “animals, plants, natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon” to honor and praise the creator. “It is my hope that the inspiration of Saint Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of ‘fraternity’ with

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hopes are that the world will turn truly communal fast or the very roof of heaven will fall in.”

<sup>10</sup> Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 3. “[Francis] has been seen as a pantheist, a Protestant, a devout Catholic, a Catholic liberationist, and a heretic who miraculously escaped the stake,” he noted in a brief overview of the “misinterpretation and distortion” common to studies of the saint. See p. 5. Sorrell’s work will be the most oft-cited secondary source.

<sup>11</sup> “S. Franciscus Assisiensis caelestis Patronus oecologiae cultorum eligitur,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis—Commentarium Officiale* (Acts of the Apostolic See) vol. 71, 1979, pp. 1509-10, translated in “Papal Bull of John Paul II: Naming St Francis of Assisi the Patron Saint of Ecology,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, May 12, 1980, p. 12.

all those good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created,” announced John Paul II.<sup>12</sup> In fact, for a growing number of activists in the Catholic Church, ecological health is increasingly interpreted within the framework of social justice. For instance, Catholic bishops of the American Northwest and British Columbia are heading a three-year study of the ecological health of the Columbia River watershed, with a pastoral letter forthcoming.<sup>13</sup> And Franciscans remain in the forefront of this emerging environmental movement cast in spiritual terms. The SouthWest Environmental Equity Project (SWEET), to cite one example, was organized in 1992 as the first Franciscan organization dedicated to the environment.<sup>14</sup> The Secular Franciscan Order includes the National Ecology Commission, deriving its charge from article eighteen of the Franciscan *Rule*: “Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which ‘bear the imprint of the Most High,’ and they should strive to move from exploiting Creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.” Pronouncements from this commission include letters on endangered species and

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, “The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility,” Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990. “The poor man of Assisi gives us striking witness that when we are at peace with God we are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace with all creation which is inseparable from peace among all peoples.”

<sup>13</sup> Trebbe Johnson, “The Second Creation Story: Redefining the Bond between Religion and Ecology,” *Sierra*, November-December, 1998, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Warner, O.F.M., “From Parishes to Maquiladoras,” *Sojourners*, 26 (May-June, 1997), p. 39. This organization is active in the low-income Latino communities of the American Southwest. “SWEET embraces Francis of Assisi’s devotion to the poor and his love of creation. The result is a blend of community organizing, Franciscan spirituality, environmental education, and political advocacy.”

California redwoods, and “A Franciscan Vision for American Forests.”<sup>15</sup>

One must now pose this question about Francis: “Do his writings and deeds warrant the current interpretation of the saint as proto-environmentalist?” At least on one level, his life does represent a potential opening between the insular Christian tradition and nature. Although not alone in praising the natural world, the degree to which Francis interpreted creation in joyous, rapturous terms was unique for his era.<sup>16</sup> Sorrell noted that “the sheer number of anecdotes relating positive encounters with creatures dwarfs the number recorded in the masterpieces of hagiography from the ages before Francis.”<sup>17</sup> For Francis, wilderness did not represent chaos and temptation. Rather, it was an expression of the fullness and benevolence of God. The *Legend of Perugia* related that Francis asked a friar to reserve a portion of a garden plot for “all kinds of aromatic herbs and flowering plants” in order that such a celebration of scents and colors would “invite all men who looked at them to praise God; for every creature says and proclaims: ‘God has created me for you, O man.’”<sup>18</sup> J. Donald Hughes asserted that the “central characteristic” of Francis’ spirituality was

“his instance on the goodness of creation,” even so far as deeming “Sister Death” a blessing.<sup>19</sup> As with other issues such as the righteousness of poverty and the evils of property ownership, Francis’ belief in the goodness of creation ran counter to the prevailing attitudes of the papal authorities. “[Francis’] view can be distinguished from the idea of creaturehood as a brutal state, which is evident in Innocent III and the medieval Church generally.”<sup>20</sup>

A more thorough examination of the writings and life of St. Francis will shed additional light on his attitudes toward what today is called the environment. Much of his writing on the subject remains, including material that addresses, both indirectly and directly, nature, including *The Admonitions*, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, and *The Praises of Virtues*. There also exists a body of biographical work. The most reliable medieval works on St. Francis are the two primary works of Brother Thomas of Celano.<sup>21</sup> His *First Life of St. Francis (Vita Prima)* was commissioned by Pope Gregory IX around 1228. Sixteen years later, Celano agreed to write a *Second Life (Vita Secunda)*, this time at the behest of the minister general of the Franciscan order. The *First Life* relied on first-hand accounts of those who witnessed and participated in

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<sup>15</sup> “National Ecology Commission, Secular Franciscan Order, U.S.A.,” in National Ecology Commission Home Page. On-line. Internet. Available from <http://www.pages.map.com/SecularFranciscanEcology>. Accessed September 9, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the neo-platonic dismissal of any inherent value of nature, Francis’ view is “overwhelmingly positive,” according to Elizabeth Dreyer. “Nature is rarely seen as seriously tainted with evil, as something to be fled, as temptation to sin.” See Elizabeth Dreyer, “Ecology, Theology, and the Medieval Franciscan Tradition,” *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, 12 (February, 1991), p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, translated by Paul Oligny from the annotated French version by Damien Vorreux, with an introduction by Theophile Desbonnets, O.F.M., in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, p. 1029.

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<sup>19</sup> J. Donald Hughes, “Francis of Assisi and the Diversity of Creation,” *Environmental Ethics*, 18 (Fall, 1996), p. 314. Near the end of *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, Francis declares: “All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, / From whose embrace no mortal can escape.” See *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, “Francis of Assisi and the Diversity of Creation,” p. 316.

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas of Celano, *First and Second Life of St. Francis*, translated from the Latin, with introduction and notes by Placid Hermann, O.F.M., in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, pp. 177-611. These two works of Celano will be referred to herein as *First Life* and *Second Life* respectively.

Francis' wanderings, sermons, and miracles. Celano also made wide use of Francis' writings, including his masterpiece, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*.<sup>22</sup> Sorrell maintained that after Celano's two works, the most reliable source for information about the life of Francis is the *Legend of Perugia*, since archival research has demonstrated that its early chapters are based on the since-lost writings of Brother Leo, a confidant of Francis.<sup>23</sup> Leo was a longtime companion of Francis, and during the saint's final years he acted as his personal secretary, nurse, and, in the end, his confessor.<sup>24</sup> Additional information and commentary can be found in several other thirteenth-century works, including the *Mirror of Perfection* (*Speculum Perfectionis*), a work based at least in part on the writings of Brother Leo. Last, there are St. Bonaventure's *Major and Minor Lives of St. Francis* (*Legenda Maior* and *Legenda Minor*), the former dating to 1263.

In Celano's *First Life*, Francis is described as "a man of very great fervor and great tenderness toward lower and irrational creatures." Even of greater import is the idea that Francis and the natural world shared a reciprocal bond, for even irrational creatures "recognized his affection for them and felt his tender love for them."<sup>25</sup> Bonaventure noted the story of a cicada that would sing to Francis as he prayed. The insect's song

inspired the saint to rejoice in God, for "he could admire the glory of the Creator in the most insignificant creature."<sup>26</sup> In the *Second Life*, Celano stated that all creatures "tried to give their love in return to the saint and to reply by their own gratitude according as he deserved; they were glad when he caressed them, they agreed when he requested anything, they obeyed when he commanded anything."<sup>27</sup> Stories abound in the writings of Celano and other earlier biographies detailing Francis' deep and expressive relationship with animals. "He had so much love and sympathy for [creatures] that he was disturbed when they were treated without respect," noted the author or authors of the *Legend of Perugia*. "He spoke to them with a great inner and exterior joy, as if they had been endowed by God with feeling, intelligence, and speech. Very often it was for him the occasion to become enraptured in God."<sup>28</sup> Francis and several Franciscan brothers once found themselves feeding table crumbs to a pair of birds, male and female. "The holy man rejoiced in creatures like these and he coaxed them, as was his custom, and offered them grain solicitously," recounted Celano.<sup>29</sup> Sometime thereafter, the adult birds departed, entrusting to the friars the care of their hatchlings. The Franciscans lovingly watched over the birds, until realizing that

<sup>22</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan calls this canticle "the first significant work in the history of Italian literature." See Pelikan, "Christ—and the Second Christ," p. 339.

<sup>23</sup> "The *Legend* thus arguably reflects the views of Francis and his inner circle of followers." See Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, pp. 149-50. Also see Appendix II, titled "Analysis of the Early Franciscan Sources," pp. 149-51.

<sup>24</sup> See introduction to *Legend of Perugia*, p. 959. "This portrait has all the qualities of a memoir. Its tone is simple; there is no labored style nor tendency to moralize that betrays the professional writer who is thinking of his public like Celano or St. Bonaventure." See p. 970.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, pp. 277, 279.

<sup>26</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life of St. Francis*, translated from the Latin by Benen Fahy, O.F.M. with introduction by Damien Vorreux, O.F.M., in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, p. 695. Although Bonaventure's work was a reworking of the preceding hagiographies, he had access to all available sources, including liturgical records, as well as written and oral recollections. Bonaventure's "laborious pilgrimage to the sources" makes him "an irreplaceable and unequalled master in helping us in our search for that element on which the authenticity of our Franciscan life depends." See introduction, pp. 618-19.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Second Life*, p. 496.

<sup>28</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, p. 1027.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Second Life*, p. 404.

the largest of the hatchlings was stealing food from his smaller siblings, even though his hunger was satiated. Commenting on this display of avarice, Francis predicted that the bird would “come to a bad end yet.” And sure enough, the greedy bird fell into a vessel of water and drowned. “No cat was found nor any beast that would touch the bird that had been cursed by the saint,” recorded Celano.<sup>30</sup> Francis had a special love for birds in general and larks in particular. Noted the *Legend of Perugia*:

We who lived with blessed Francis and who have written these memoirs bear witness that many times we heard him say, “If I could talk to the emperor, I would beg him, for the love of God, to grant my prayer and to publish an edict forbidding anyone from trapping our sisters the larks or from inflicting any harm on them.”<sup>31</sup>

Francis also wished that leaders would entreat their subjects to celebrate Christmas by scattering grain along roadsides, “so that on this great solemnity the birds and especially our sisters the larks would have food.”<sup>32</sup>

Francis was said to have communicated not only with animals such as birds, rabbits, and wolves, but inanimate objects as well, such as water, boulders, and even fire. Celano recorded that when Francis encountered a cluster of flowers, “he preached to them and invited them to praise the Lord as though they were endowed with reason.” He further noted: “In the same way he exhorted with the sincerest purity cornfields and vineyards, stones and forests and all the beautiful things of the fields, fountains of water and the green things of

the gardens, earth and fire, air and wind, to love God and serve him willingly.”<sup>33</sup> In his *Second Life*, Celano recounted Francis’ treatment for deteriorating eyesight, a condition that required the use of a red-hot iron for cauterization. For Francis, fire was a brother that could be reasoned with based on a shared love for the Creator. “My brother fire, that surpasses all other things in beauty,” exhorted Francis. “Be kind to me in this hour, be courteous. For I have loved you in the past in the Lord. I beseech the great Lord who made you that he temper your heat now so that I may bear it when you burn me gently.”<sup>34</sup> Celano described how the “iron was plunged into the tender flesh with a hiss,” yet Francis revealed no outward signs of pain. “In truth I say to you, I did not feel either the heat of the fire or any pain in my flesh,” he remarked to his Franciscan brothers, who had fled in horror at the sight of the iron.<sup>35</sup> According to the *Legend of Perugia*, Francis cautioned the friars against scattering campfire embers or logs. Instead, “he wanted them to be placed gently on the ground out of respect for Him who had created them.” Such careless disregard demonstrated a lack of appreciation for such a strong, beautiful, and useful “brother.” Sister Water was treated with the love and respect accorded fire. “When he washed his hands, he chose a place where rinse water would not be trampled under foot.”<sup>36</sup>

It must be stressed that Francis’ beliefs, however original they appear to the modern reader, must be grounded in the medieval climate whence they were formed. Sorrell noted that for a saint depicted today as a lover of nature, it is surprising (at least to the

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 405. Celano added this moral: “Greed in men is surely a horrible evil if it is punished in such a way in birds. The words of the saints too are to be feared if punishment follows upon them with such ease.”

<sup>31</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, p. 1086.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, p. 297.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Second Life*, p. 496.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. The doctor then proclaimed: “I say to you brothers, I have seen wonderful things today [Celano’s italics].” See p. 497.

<sup>36</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, pp. 1028-29.

twentieth-century observer) to learn that he never used the term *natura*. “Francis instead talks of the ‘heavens,’ ‘earth,’ and ‘the world,’ and ‘all creatures which are under the heavens.’” Francis’ worldview was shaped by the Vulgate Bible and the uncompromising belief in the biblical story of divine creation “organized according to a plan that is hierarchical and unchanging, with all parts having their established positions and dependent on divine will and action.”<sup>37</sup> For example, his love of animals was limited, at least in certain instances, to those mentioned in the Bible. Bonaventure stated that Francis “reserved his most tender compassion for those creatures which are a natural reflection of Christ’s gentleness and are used in Sacred Scripture as figures of him.”<sup>38</sup> For Christmas, he asked that a statue of the Virgin Mary be placed in the crèche between live animals, and “that everyone be obliged to give our brothers the oxen and the asses a generous amount of feed.”<sup>39</sup> The *Mirror of Perfection* stated that Francis’ reverence for water was due to its central role in Christian worship, for during baptism “the soul is cleansed from its stains and receives its first purification.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, he walked “reverently and fearfully” over boulders “out of love for Christ Who is called *The Rock*.” He also cautioned against wasting timber, instructing a friar “that he must never cut down the whole tree, but remove branches in such a way that part of

the tree remained intact, out of love for Christ, Who willed to accomplish our salvation on the wood of the cross.” And Francis’ request that another friar reserve a section of the garden for flowers was based “out of love for Him,” who is referred to in the Bible as “The Rose on the plain and the Lily on the mountain slope.”<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the most celebrated legend in the life of St. Francis is his sermon to the birds. During a journey through the Spoleto valley near Bevagna, he encountered a large number of birds of various species, and “being a man of very great fervor and great tenderness toward lower and irrational creatures,” he left his traveling companions and ran toward them. As he neared the mix of doves, crows, and others, Francis “was filled with great joy and humbly begged them to listen to the word of God.” Celano’s *First Life* includes a fragment of the sermon:

My brothers, birds, you should praise your Creator very much and always love him; he gave you feathers to clothe you, wings so that you can fly, and whatever else was necessary for you. God made you noble among his creatures, and he gave you a home in the purity of air; though you neither sow nor reap, he nevertheless protects and governs you without any solicitude on your part.<sup>42</sup>

The birds, acknowledging Francis’ admonishments “according to their nature,” stretched their necks and opened their

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<sup>37</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, pp. 7, 8. Francis’ views of the natural world are firmly rooted in “the terms and conceptions he found in the Vulgate Bible, especially in the Psalms and Canticles of the liturgical offices he recited daily.” See p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 692.

<sup>39</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, p. 1086. During Christmas Francis called upon all to “give handsome presents not only to the poor but also to the domestic animals and birds.”

<sup>40</sup> *Mirror of Perfection*, translated by Leo Sherely-Price, with an introduction by Theophile Desbonnets, O.F.M., in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, p. 1256.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1256-57. See Deuteronomy 32:4 for one example of the God-as-rock metaphor. “He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

<sup>42</sup> See Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, pp. 277-78, for a detailed account of the sermon. Celano viewed his role as an historian seriously, at least from a medieval perspective. Many legends in his two works are attributed to either Francis or those that witnessed them. The flock’s reaction, for example, is prefaced with “as Francis himself used to say. . .” See p. 278.

wings. After receiving a blessing and a sign of the cross, they finally departed. Upon witnessing the joyous reaction of the flock, Francis chided himself for failing to preach to creatures in the past. "And so it happened that, from that day on, he solicitously admonished all birds, all animals and all reptiles, and even creatures that have no feeling, to praise and love their Creator," recounted Celano.

Francis' notions of faith and the natural world reached their maturity in *The Canticle of Brother Sun*. "It represents the final expression, the final synthesis, of Francis' thought in the area of relationships between humanity, creation, and Creator."<sup>43</sup> The *Legend of Perugia* described Francis' frame of mind at the time of the *Canticle's* composition. Nearing the end of life (it is believed that the strophes relating to nature were composed in the winter of 1224-25, less than a year before his death), with his deteriorating health leaving him in constant pain, a voice told Francis to "be glad in the midst of your infirmities and tribulations; as of now, live in peace as if you were already sharing my kingdom." This assurance reinvigorated Francis. According to the *Legend*, Francis composed his "Praises of the Lord" first and foremost as a celebration of the natural world. "These creatures minister to our needs every day: without them we could not live; and through them the human race greatly offends the Creator," Francis declared. "Every day we fail to appreciate so great a blessing by not praising as we should the Creator and dispenser of all these gifts."<sup>44</sup> This work is a testament to Francis' exuberant joy and love toward creation, even in light of his pain and suffering. It is also interesting to note that Francis composed this work in vernacular Italian instead of Latin in the hope of reaching the widest possible audience.

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<sup>43</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 98.

<sup>44</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, p. 1021.

Sorrell maintained that this work is linked to the vernacular troubadour tradition of poems, stories, and songs, and thus was "clearly not meant to be obscure, esoteric, or literary, but, rather, popular and oral. It is a medieval attempt to propagandize."<sup>45</sup> After several introductory lines praising and glorifying God, the *Canticle* invoked the magnanimous strength and vigor of the Sun.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,

And first my lord Brother Sun,

Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.

How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendour!

Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

After praising "Sister Moon and Stars," Francis rejoiced in the beauty, usefulness, and power of the elemental forces.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,

And fair and stormy, all the weather's moods

By which you cherish all that you have made.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water,

So useful, lowly, precious and pure.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,

Through whom you brighten up the night.

How beautiful is he, how gay! Full of power and strength.

Last, for our purposes, he addressed the earth, its fertile soil and its wild and domestic bounty.

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<sup>45</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 114.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother,

Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces

Various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.<sup>46</sup>

One must be careful not to romanticize or simplify the ideas behind this work.<sup>47</sup> “[The Canticle] expresses an essentially religious attitude to nature and contains the authentic Christian outlook on nature,” maintained Franciscan Eric Doyle.<sup>48</sup> For Francis, the *Canticle* represented an exhortation to praise and rejoice in God’s magnificent beneficence. Yet the *Canticle*, though composed within the bounds of accepted medieval theology, is remarkable for its excessive praise of nature. The use of the word brother and sister throughout the work is one of its most defining and original characteristics. Sorrell maintained that the lines dedicated to the natural world diverge “from the more traditional expressions in medieval spirituality . . . to his very personal spiritual view of creation: the ‘enfraternization’ of creatures and the honoring them with titles in spiritualized chivalric deference.”<sup>49</sup> Remarkd Sorrell:

In a simple and childlike way, each creature is praised—its best physical qualities are described with wonder and enthusiasm. It is this unaffected sense of loving personal connection with and approval of individual

creatures which gives the poem its unique spirit and aesthetic and which is one of its greatest original contributions to Christian attitudes toward the environment.<sup>50</sup>

“The realization that everything comes from the same source filled Francis with greater affection than ever,” stated Bonaventure, “and he called even the most insignificant creatures his brothers and sisters, because he knew they had the same origin as himself.”<sup>51</sup> According to Doyle, the word “friar” (or brother) was one of the “most sacred in his vocabulary . . . one might even say that for St Francis this was a primordial word.”<sup>52</sup> Sorrell viewed Francis’ use of brother and sister as evidence of his elevation of chivalric *noblesse oblige* as a guiding principle in the relations between humankind on one side and plants, animals, and natural forces on the other. Francis’ use of chivalry “creates a mutual regard and honorable deference between brothers serving God together, even though they are on different levels of the divine hierarchy.”<sup>53</sup>

Although the Canticle can be read as a celebration of the natural world, its potential aesthetic and spiritual power is much greater, according to Sorrell. The underlying meaning of the work is still a matter of dispute. The basis of the controversy is the interpretation of the Italian *per* in the central stanzas relating to nature. Seven lines feature the phrase *Laudato si . . . per*. One could read the lines either as “Be praised, my Lord, *for* Sister Moon and the Stars” or “Be praised, my Lord, *by* Sister Moon and the Stars”<sup>54</sup> Sorrell favored a third interpretation: “Be praised, my Lord, *because of* Sister Moon and the Stars.” This

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<sup>46</sup> For the complete text of *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, see Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>47</sup> “[Francis’] profoundly Christian love of creation (*Canticle of the Sun*) has, unfortunately, not always been properly understood and has often encouraged romantic enthusiasts.” See L. Hardick, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), VI, s.v. “Francis of Assisi, St.,” p. 130.

<sup>48</sup> Eric Doyle, O.F.M., “Ecology and the Canticle of Brother Sun,” *New Blackfriars*, 55 (1977), p. 397.

<sup>49</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 129.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 692.

<sup>52</sup> Doyle, “Ecology and the Canticle of Brother Sun,” p. 398.

<sup>53</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

is the more radical, from an environmental perspective, of the competing interpretations. “It depicts the Canticle as the positive, injunctive form of an extremely unusual and forceful accusation by Francis—that medieval society does not appreciate creation and is not grateful for creatures’ benefits to humanity.” Added Sorrell: “Such a direct, outspoken criticism coupled with a positive injunction is, so far as I know, unique for Francis’ time and perhaps unparalleled in medieval history before him.”<sup>55</sup> Even if one does not agree with this interpretation, the *Canticle* remains a powerful medieval work encouraging humankind to appreciate and celebrate nature.

Again, it must be underscored that Francis can only be seen and understood if one accounts for the medieval climate of opinion. The appearance of miracles, also known as thaumaturgy, is a common event in the legends, and his ability to wield seemingly supernatural influence over animals is one aspect of his life that runs counter to the modern environmental view of a nonhierarchical nature. The wolf of Gubbio is but one of many legends whereby Francis commanded creatures or the elements to abide by his word (and by extrapolation the word of God). Bonaventure’s story of the cicada of Portiuncula is another example of Francis’ reliance on thaumaturgy. “Then one day he called it and when it hopped on to his hand as if it had been taught by God, he told it, ‘Sing, my sister cicada. Sing a song of praise to God your Creator,’” recorded Bonaventure. “Immediately the cicada started to chirp and never stopped until the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-19. “For it is not primarily creation that would be exhorted to praise God, but *people*, because of their offensive ingratitude to God. Thus the *per* would be interpreted as ‘Be praised, my Lord (by humankind) for (because of) Sister Moon and the Stars.’” See p. 121. For a thorough examination of this debate, see pp. 115-24.

saint told it to go back to its usual perch.”<sup>56</sup> After narrating the story of Francis’ successful effort to rescue the ill-fated town of Greccio from both rapacious packs of wolves and damaging hailstorms, Bonaventure noted that the saint’s “loving compassion” brought forth “savage animals into subjection . . . training those which were tame already and claiming obedience from those which had rebelled against fallen mankind.”<sup>57</sup> In this excerpt, it is clear that Bonaventure viewed Francis’ mastery over animals as the ability to regain at least a flickering gleam of remembered Eden. After recounting the story of the glowing iron and Francis’ seared and cauterized flesh, Celano surmised: “I believe that he had returned to primitive innocence, for whom, when he wished it, cruel things were made gentle.”<sup>58</sup> Sorrell argued that Francis’ contemporaries and earlier hagiographers did not interpret Francis’ path as radically divergent from tradition, but rather as an attempt in “restoring and participating in the apostolic age, extending the Christian mission to its logical finality—to ‘preach the gospel to all creatures,’ as the Bible literally commanded.” Mark 16:15 reads: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Thus the assertion: “Where moderns would see innovation in Francis’ expressions, the early official sources [Celano and Bonaventure] see Francis as the resurrector of all that was good in ancient Christian tradition.”<sup>59</sup>

There is near universal recognition that Francis’ estimation of the natural world was indeed revolutionary, for his time as well as ours. Yet, as noted earlier, his views did not

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<sup>56</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 695.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 697-98. Bonaventure, citing 1 Timothy 4:8, added, “This is that virtue which subjects all creation to itself and ‘is all-availing, since it promises well both for this life and for the next.’”

<sup>58</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Second Life*, p. 497.

<sup>59</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, pp. 62, 50.

arise out of a social and theological vacuum. An early form of Christian monasticism, noted historian Jaroslav Pelikan, predates Christianity, and there existed deeply rooted hermitic and monastic (both Jewish and pagan) traditions in the Egyptian desert wherefrom Christianity arose.<sup>60</sup> Sorrell also devoted a lengthy chapter to the relationship between the Christian ascetic tradition and Francis. The familiar stories of Francis' intimate relationship with animals have parallels in earlier medieval hagiography, according to Sorrell.<sup>61</sup> This is of little surprise when one considers that those pursuing the eremitic life (a hermetic existence for religious purposes) frequently lived in brute wilderness and made contact with large predators, such as wolves and bears. In all likelihood, many hermits and Christian ascetics, before and after Francis, enjoyed profound relationships and extended dialogues with the wild. "While Francis' vision of interdependence between humankind and animals was uniquely his own," surmised Sorrell, "his basic values of respect and gratitude for creation's aid to humanity were not innovations."<sup>62</sup>

One must be careful not to mistake Francis' life and writings as expressions of a Buddhist-like contemplation on the oneness of existence. Lynn White labeled Francis' view toward humankind and nature as "a unique sort of pan-psychism of all things animate and inanimate, designed for the glorification of their transcendent Creator."<sup>63</sup> Others were not so eager to interpret Francis along these lines. Argued Hughes: "His devotion did not immediately dissolve multiplicity into oneness, but glorified God in each created being and

delighted in their individuality."<sup>64</sup> He differentiated between what he believed was Francis' *panentheism* and the term *pantheism*. The former can be used to describe Francis' recognition and appreciation of God's goodness in every living and nonliving object. Hughes contended that Francis was not a panpsychist or pantheist, if those words are defined in terms of "all beings share a single soul." From a Christian perspective, such oneness "belittles" individuality, be it "the distinctness of man or black bear or oak tree."<sup>65</sup> One must also be careful not to misinterpret Francis' love of nature. The infinite revelations of the natural world—the wooded groves, streams, granite cliffs, migrating flocks, and buzzing cicadas—are but an expression of God. For Francis, to praise creation and not the Creator would be wholly inconceivable, an exercise in absurdity at best, blasphemy as worst. The danger of pantheism (or at least its superficiality), according to the Franciscan Eric Doyle, is that it "destroys the diversity of creatures" by removing independence of the many for the sake of the "All." Such reasoning creates an insurmountable teleological problem (at least from a Christian perspective). For if one accepts a fusion of creation into one pulsing unknowable, "it makes change, finitude and even evil, intrinsic to God Himself."<sup>66</sup> In addition, it must be noted that Francis had no interest in understanding creation from an intellectual or scientific perspective, and he no doubt would have deemed as pointless such fields as biology, chemistry, or ecology.

Though Francis was not a pantheist, as stated earlier, certain elements of his

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<sup>60</sup> Pelikan, "Christ—and the Second Christ," p. 323.

<sup>61</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>63</sup> White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," p. 1207.

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<sup>64</sup> Hughes, "Francis of Assisi and the Diversity of Creation," p. 311.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>66</sup> Doyle, "Ecology and the Canticle of Brother Sun," p. 392.

relationship with nature were revolutionary. For example, there is general agreement that he was what we would call today a Christian nature mystic. Whereas Francis' extension of the evangelical mission into the natural world was rooted, at least in part, in Christian tradition, his forays into nature mysticism represented a radical departure.<sup>67</sup> There are startling intimations in the hagiographies of Francis losing himself in the contemplation of the natural world. For instance, in a previously excerpted account in the *Legend of Perugia*, Francis receives "great inner and exterior joy" in the contemplation of animals. "Very often it was for him the occasion to become enraptured in God."<sup>68</sup> There is evidence of such rapturous contemplation in the other sources. "We who were with him have seen him take inward and outward delight in almost every creature," surmised the *Mirror of Perfection*, "and when he handled or looked at them his spirit seemed to be in heaven rather than on earth."<sup>69</sup> In his *Major Life*, Bonaventure stated:

Francis sought occasion to love God in everything. He delighted in all the works of God's hands and from the vision of joy on earth his mind soared aloft to the live-giving source and cause of all. In everything beautiful, he saw him who is beauty itself, and he followed his Beloved everywhere by his likeness imprinted on creation; of all creation he made a ladder by which he might mount up and embrace Him who is all-desirable.<sup>70</sup>

Sorrell maintained that these and other passages embodied the ideal of nature

mysticism, "a vision of sublime creation catalyzing a mystical experience with the divine."<sup>71</sup> The *Major Life* recounted the story of Francis crossing Lake Piediluco and being offered a bird by a fisherman. He accepted the gift and attempted to set it free, but the bird remained cradled in his arms. "The saint stood there praying with his eyes raised to heaven, and after a long time *he came back to himself* [italics mine] and once more encouraged the bird to fly away and praise God."<sup>72</sup> In another story, Celano described a scene whereby Francis was given a fish on the Lake of Rieti. He placed it in the water, and during his prayer the fish "played in the water beside the boat and did not go away from the place where it had been put until his prayer was finished and the holy man of God gave it permission to leave."<sup>73</sup>

If Francis' views on nature are being rediscovered and reinterpreted, this is in itself an indication of the centuries of neglect that predated this renaissance. In 1266, all the *legandae* about St. Francis, including Celano's works, were ordered destroyed in an attempt to introduce a less radicalized saint. Although the dispute between the pope and the order centered upon an extreme interpretation of poverty among friars, the loss of a dynamic and dangerous Francis also represented a loss in the understanding and appreciation of his intimate relationship with creation. Authors Father Peter Hooper and Martin Palmer

<sup>67</sup> "Francis' nature mysticism was his most untraditional positive reaction to creation." See Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 79.

<sup>68</sup> *Legend of Perugia*, p. 1027.

<sup>69</sup> *Mirror of Perfection*, p. 1257.

<sup>70</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 698.

<sup>71</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 93.

<sup>72</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 694.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas of Celano, *First Life*, p. 280. Francis and the fish "seem to enter an enchanted world of their own, a world filled with joy, respect, kindness, and unity, where they share a mysterious and sacred sort of communication," stated Sorrell. The scene is one of "an indefinable and elusive feeling of transcendence" between a saint and a fish "who have entered together the realm of the sacred and share there an ineffable rapport for a short time." See Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 96.

argued that the saint's deep love and respect for creation was, upon his death, "almost immediately forgotten, or romanticized into a slightly soppy version of Francis who chatted with birds." In time, "the conventional understanding of nature as being below us returned and swallowed Francis's more challenging and more beautiful vision."<sup>74</sup> Only a small number of Franciscans, such as Duns Scotus and Roger Bacon, both from the thirteenth century, would address nature on a level comparable to Francis.

The debate over Francis' ideas and legacy, ignited by Lynn White thirty years ago, continues today. At one end of the spectrum stand those who view Francis as a harbinger for the modern environmental movement. This view is represented in modest terms by White's assertion that Francis stands as the patron saint of ecology, and recklessly by others who, instead of finding a humble Franciscan, have inexplicably uncovered an anti-establishment flower child. The other end of the spectrum is represented by those asserting that Francis is first and foremost a medieval figure; to dovetail his beliefs into modern conceptions of both Christianity and the environment is impractical. The truth is perhaps somewhere in between. In his notable study of Francis and nature, Sorrell concluded that several of Francis' essential expressions relating to the natural world were original (at least "original to Western Christianity"). These ideas included Francis' repeated interpretation of nature as benevolent, and, more importantly, a nature capable of worshipping the Creator. In addition, Francis broke new ground with his recorded forays into nature mysticism and his utilization of chivalric *noblesse oblige* to

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<sup>74</sup> Father Peter Hooper with Martin Palmer, "St. Francis and Ecology," in Elizabeth Breuilly and Martin Palmer, eds., *Christianity and Ecology* (New York: Cassell Publishers Limited, 1992), p. 84.

expand notions of humankind's relations with plants, animals, and natural forces. Yet in the end, one must conclude that St. Francis' ideas regarding nature have been somewhat overstated. Although the original elements in Francis' views on nature "may lean toward modern ideas, the motivation behind them stems from a mind that is, even though original, profoundly medieval," stated Sorrell.<sup>75</sup> Francis was a profoundly devout monk whose attitudes toward nature were shaped by the Vulgate Bible. "He would sew pieces of rope on the inside of his tunic if he found the garments not coarse enough; he mingled ashes with his food, to keep it from being too palatable; he whipped his body when he felt sexually tempted, saying to it, 'There, Brother Jackass, that is how you deserve to be treated,'" Pelikan recounted. "Yet even these extremes of ascetic self-denial were part of the total view of the world and of life."<sup>76</sup> If one ignores Francis' complete immersion in Christ, one risks losing not only the saint, but of losing the man as well.

Yet if the saint's ideas have been overstated, his legacy, conversely, has been underutilized. The distinction is an important one, and is outlined by scholar J. Donald Hughes: "While Francis's thought *per se* cannot be held to prefigure ecology, his attitude has been widely recognized as a precursor of positive environmentalism. Not least is this true of his appreciation of the diversity of creation and his recognition of

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<sup>75</sup> Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 139. "Many of Francis' expressions which seem original or to have parallels in modern ideals must be understood within their thirteenth-century context, however, so as not to be misinterpreted." Attempting to understand Francis' *Canticle*, for example, without acknowledging the underlying Christian tradition is akin to understanding and appreciating a child without knowing its mother. See p. 130.

<sup>76</sup> Pelikan, "Christ—and the Second Christ," p. 339.

the unique value of every creature.”<sup>77</sup> For example, Francis obviously had no conception of biodiversity, an idea central to modern environmentalism. Yet his love for creation and, more importantly, his unbounded gratitude to the Creator for the seemingly limitless diversity of His creations, both animate and inanimate, has remained a potent symbol for more than 800 years. Francis’ original views do not lead “directly and overtly to present ecological concerns,” concluded Elizabeth Dreyer, but his “example of caring love for all creation” remains vitally important to the twentieth century.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps it is Francis’ attitudes toward humankind and his conception of a spiritual life that hold the most promise for a Christianity more attuned to the deepening, planet-wide ecological crisis. St. Bonaventure wrote that compassion so penetrated the inner depths of Francis that he was able to share in the sufferings of Christ on the cross:

It is loving compassion which united him to God in prayer and caused his transformation into Christ by sharing his sufferings. It was [compassion], which led him to devote himself, humbly to his neighbor and enabled him to return to the state of primeval innocence by restoring man’s harmony with the whole of creation.<sup>79</sup>

“The key to an understanding of Francis is his belief in the virtue of humility—not merely for the individual but for man as a species,” argued Lynn White.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the most profound lesson of Francis’ life is the danger of hubris. Humankind’s overbearing

pride and ignorance in its supposed mastery over the natural world is surely a grand display of hubris. In his *The Praises of the Virtues*, Francis declared:

Pure and holy Simplicity puts  
all the learning of this world,  
all natural wisdom to shame.  
Holy Poverty puts to shame  
all greed, avarice,  
and all the anxieties of this life.  
Holy Humility puts pride to shame,  
And all the inhabitants of this world  
And all that is in the world.<sup>81</sup>

“What have you to be proud of?” he asked in *The Admonitions*, twenty-eight brief exhortations addressed to the friars. “If you were so clever and learned that you knew everything and could speak every language, so that the things of heaven were an open book to you, still you could not boast of that.”<sup>82</sup>

The image of the Little Poor Man of Assisi, hungry, cold, and alone, handing over his last handful of grain and his threadbare cloak to a foul-smelling leper stands as a grand lesson of Christian giving. Yet it can also stand as a grand lesson for the environmental awakening of mainstream Christianity. Issues of consumption, such as consumerism and advertising, are now viewed as leading causes in the rapacious destruction of the natural world. Earlier this decade a team of scholars representing various religions—including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and aboriginal belief systems—gathered to examine environmental issues. “[W]e concluded that the global market economy, with its teleology constantly to increase

<sup>77</sup> Hughes, “Francis of Assisi and the Diversity of Creation,” p. 320.

<sup>78</sup> Dreyer, “Ecology, Theology, and the Medieval Franciscan Tradition,” pp. 44-45.

<sup>79</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, p. 688.

<sup>80</sup> White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” p. 1206.

<sup>81</sup> *The Praises of the Virtues*, in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, p. 133.

<sup>82</sup> *The Admonitions*, in Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*, pp. 80-81.

consumption, was as strong, if not stronger, threat to the earth's ecology than population increase," reported Harold Coward.<sup>83</sup> Consumption is an issue the West finds profoundly unsettling. This study noted that a child born in Western Europe or North America will consume roughly thirty times more natural resources (and consequently spew forth, directly and indirectly, thirty times more pollution) than his or her counterpart in the Third World. "It is the babies of the well-off parents of the first-world who pose the largest threat to the ecology—not the babies of the underdeveloped Asians, Africans, or Latin Americans,"<sup>84</sup> Coward wrote. James Nash, executive director of Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, noted:

Frugality is an indispensable virtue in our time. It is precondition of distributive justice and sustainability under conditions of relative scarcity, where "enough" can be available to all—human and nonhumankind, present and future—only if essential resources are not "hogged" by economic elites. Frugality was once near the heart of Christian economic ethics . . . . It is a severely neglected norm now, but it must be revitalized as a witness to a culture that is literally consuming itself to death.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Harold Coward, "New Theology on Population, Consumption, and Ecology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65 (Summer, 1997), p. 265.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260, 264. "Therefore, it is the child who has the most, the first-world child, whom the world can least afford." See p. 264.

<sup>85</sup> James A. Nash, "Toward the Ecological Reformation of Christianity," *Interpretation*, 50 (January, 1996), p. 12. "If God the Creator, Christ, and Spirit is love, then the process of creation itself is an act of love," stated Nash, adding that the "love of nature" is a universalized expression of the "love of neighbor." Thus his assertion: "The Christian faith, when properly interpreted, has the impressive

"Self-denial is an essential part of Christian discipleship, and Christians ought to take the leadership in teaching and practising it in its obvious connections with ecology," stated Doyle. He believed that "someone has to have the courage to tell us and show us as graphically as possible that we must be prepared to make sacrifices, to say 'No' to ourselves, as the only way to combat the greed and selfishness that is at the root of the crisis."<sup>86</sup> Perhaps that "someone" is St. Francis of Assisi.

In Bonaventure's *Major Life*, the story is told of Francis coming across a beggar on a road from Siena. Francis decides to give the beggar his short cloak. "We'll have to give this cloak back to that poor beggar, because it belongs to him," he says. "We only got it on loan until we found someone in greater need of it." Francis' companion protests, arguing that the ailing saint needs the cloak as much as the destitute panhandler. Francis rebuked his fellow traveler by saying, "God the great Almsgiver will regard it as theft on my part, if I do not give what I have to someone who needs it more."<sup>87</sup> This is a powerful allegory for the absolute obligation of the haves to comfort and support the have nots. But Francis' insistence that he is "borrowing" the cloak can also serve as a metaphor for the sustainable care of the earth. Each generation is wearing a borrowed "cloak" (a metaphor for the earth and its bounty—soil, fossil fuels, water, etc.) until it comes time to hand it over to their children. "We only got it on loan until we found someone in greater need of it," Francis says. In *The Admonitions*, one can

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potential to provide firm foundation for ecological integrity—second to none." See pp. 7, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Doyle, "Ecology and the Canticle of Brother Sun," p. 401.

<sup>87</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Major Life*, pp. 691-92. Chastising a friar who refused to aid a beggar, Francis said, "My dear brother, when you see a beggar, you are looking at an image of our Lord and his poor Mother." See p. 691.

glimpse Francis' belief in the potentiality of faith among plants, animals, the elements, and even inanimate objects. In *Admonition V*, a warning against pride, Francis states: "Try to realize the dignity God has conferred on you. He created and formed your body in the image of his beloved Son, and your soul in his own likeness. And yet every creature under heaven serves and acknowledges and obeys its Creator in his own way better than you do."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See *The Admonitions*, p. 80.