

# *Recounting the Past*

A Student Journal of Historical Studies

At Illinois State University

Number 26 • Spring 2025



Department of History

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Readers of *Recounting the Past*:

The 2025 edition of *Recounting the Past* failed to include one of our students' extraordinary papers that had been accepted for publication. We would like to formally apologize to the author, Kylie Black, for our error. In addition, we apologize to our readers and supporters. This oversight is in no way the fault of the student, but rather was an editorial mistake. Since the error was caught after printing, we cannot include the paper in the existing hardcopy. We have also corrected one other error in the editor's note. Interested readers can retrieve a copy of the corrected journal from the history department website or by emailing the department at [history@ilstu.edu](mailto:history@ilstu.edu).

Sincerely,

Nathan Kapoor and Matthijs Tieleman  
Editors of *Recounting the Past*  
History Department  
Illinois State University

## Acknowledgments:

Through its journal *Recounting the Past*, the History Department is honored to recognize the research excellence of its undergraduate and graduate students, and the dedicated mentorship of its faculty. Alongside these students and faculty, many thanks go out to individuals who invested their time and effort at various stages of the production process. These include the University Marketing and Communication team that guided the journal through the publication process, and Trish Gudeman, Administrative Aide in the History Department, who served as the liaison with Marketing and Communication and provided her organizational expertise to realize the project.

## Cover Image

Roundel of benefactors at St Guthlac's shrine carrying scrolls detailing their donations to Crowland Abbey, and a demoniac being healed (the chain and ring around his neck are later additions). The benefactors are led by King Æthelbald who approaches the altar, followed by Abbot Thurketel. Æthelbald's scroll reads: 'Ego Rex Ethelbaldus do tibi sedem abbacie cum pertinentiis suis solutam et liberam ab omni seculari exactione' ('I, king Æthelbald, give you the seat of the Abbey with its appurtenances unburdened and free from all secular exaction') (c. 1175-1215 CE)

Source: Published with the Permission of the British Library, *Life of Guthlac* (the 'Guthlac Roll', or Vita Sancti Guthlaci), Harley Roll Y 6, Roundel 18.

## **Note from the Editors:**

This collection of essays and papers features the excellence of students in ISU's history courses. Students gave us, the editors and the professors that selected them, more than we should be able to expect of undergraduate and graduate researchers. These papers exhibit excellent research and weave together fascinating questions about how we conduct research and uncover historical narratives.

In our first paper, T. J. Marko explores the complex history and historiography surrounding Ælfgar and Gruffudd and the Cambro-Mercian alliance. Marko synthesizes how medieval historians treat Anglo-Welsh relations and argues that any meaningful analysis of this history, especially historians concerned with the Norman Conquest of 1066, must explore Anglo-Welsh relations and culture hundreds of years earlier than is typical. Next, Jon Oslerstein follows the life of Giovanni Giustiniani and how his transformation from pirate to one of Constantinople's top military officials enhances how historians understand the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the bureaucratic structure of the Byzantine Empire. Although the city fell, Giustiniani defense exposes betrayals and fractures within the Byzantine government.

Mason McClure examines the construction of English identity across the Atlantic using the case of Elizabeth Key's freedom. He expands the analysis of the case beyond the Virginia colony to the wider Atlantic, which reveals an anxiety among the English planter class that foreshadowed the politics of black enslavement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rileigh Van Duyne grapples with the life and writings of Edward Carpenter to better nuance how historians understand early gay-rights activists. Carpenter's story illustrates how many of the intellectual leaps in the acceptance of homosexuality took place within an exploitative social structure. Noah Ramos interrogates the varied ways people understood slavery to be the cause of the American Civil War. Before, during, and

after the war, abolitionists, revisionists, and politicians wielded slavery as a tool to advance their objectives.

Joey Lebar concentrates on the Nazi plan to dismantle the Polish Catholic Church by imprisoning priests at Dacau. By paying more attention to this racial violence, historians define and understand the genocides of the Holocaust. Bryce Harris investigates the work of Edward Wilson, *Sociobiology*, to show how late-20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers blended the biological theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with new studies of genetics and behavior. Across the political spectrum, people wielded sociobiology as a means of explaining opponents and to enforce legislation. Jason Pluister discusses the influence of Michael Harrington's political ideology from the 1960s on the New Left and argues that he could be understood as a bridge between the Old and New Left in American politics. Peder Sevig dives into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century publication of periodical literature to show how they shaped broader lesbian culture.

Nick Tallon places Working Women United and Women Against Violence Against Women as pivotal organizations in the legal and cultural framing of workplace violence. He shows that during the 1970s, the language of sexual harassment cases by the media and corporations reshaped the workplace and gave people a structure in which to challenge sexism. Nate Stadler tells the story of Hazel Johnson and the founding of People for Community Recovery. He historically situates Johnson and PCR within the broader environmental to movement to showcase the transformative power of African American activists and grassroots organizations that extended environmental justice initiatives to benefit marginalized communities.

Max Silkaitis highlights how Massive Multiplayer Online Games, such *Ultima Online* and *World of Warcraft*, provide key sources for historians of the late-20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. By looking at community building practices and culture building in video games, he convincingly demonstrates how historians can expand how they do recent history. And finally, Kylie Black follows the Soviet framing of the Cambodian

genocide through their press to condemn the horrific violence and criticize Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. She provides an extraordinary level of nuance in how we understand the causes and impacts of Cold War-era conflicts and how consequential the portrayal of violence in the media can be.

Each of the students in this journal show how people weathered turbulent moments of violence, cooperation, upheaval, and activism. They showcase the versatility of our department's students as researchers and reflect the exciting things happening in historical research. We as the editors, and as a department are incredibly proud of the work they put in writing and revising. We are excited to see how their work continues in future scholarship, museum work, or in the classroom.



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## **Brothers in Arms: Earl Ælfgar, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, and the History of Cambro-Mercian Alliance**

*T. J. Marko*

Anglo-Welsh relations is an understudied and much misunderstood topic in medieval history. Historians often overlook the early medieval period (before the Norman Conquest), and even when they do study it, they tend to examine either the English perspective or the Welsh perspective in isolation, instead of studying the complicated interweaving of English and Welsh history holistically.<sup>1</sup> But English and Welsh history cannot be so neatly separated. What happened on one side of the border affected the other. The artificial division of “English” and “Welsh” into monolithic ethnic groups belies the significant diversity within their populations. Some regions of England had more frequent contact with the Welsh, and the same applied to Welsh contact with the English. Especially the English earldom of Mercia and the northern Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd had a long history of interaction and cooperation throughout the pre-Norman period. The longstanding existence of Cambro-Mercian alliances shows how medieval frontier societies were not always hostile to each other, as is sometimes assumed. What is more, there is great danger in applying a simplistic oppressor/oppressed binary to medieval frontier societies, as the nuance of Cambro-Mercian relationships demonstrates.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this lack of attention is understandably because of fewer primary sources from earlier time-periods, especially coming from Wales. However, there are some sources, and there is a great deal of excellent scholarship on the period that could be better synthesized to create an understanding of a single narrative—or rather, different narratives that are always crossing paths, instead of two unrelated fields. Historians like Frank Barlow, Stephen Baxter, Ian Walker, and Simon Keynes focus on telling England’s story, only mentioning the Welsh when they must. On the other hand, people like Thomas Charles-Edwards, Kari Maund, and Sean and Michael Davies focus only on the Welsh point of view. Few historians work to combine the two perspectives into one story. There are a couple of notable exceptions in Lindy Brady and Ben Guy, but they are in the minority.

In the mid-eleventh century during the reign of Edward the Confessor, the Mercian earl, Ælfgar son of Leofric, and the Welsh king, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, made an alliance that is exemplary of the important nature of cooperation between Mercia and Wales. They sought to protect themselves from hostile outside parties in both England and Wales, namely, the Godwine family of Wessex, and the southern Welsh king, Gruffudd ap Rhyderch. By examining Ælfgar and Gruffudd's alliance, we gain a deeper understanding of medieval Anglo-Welsh relations and can expand our knowledge of medieval frontier societies overall. Thus, we avoid applying modern ideas of ethnicity and cultural identity to judge the early medieval world, and instead, examine it on its historical terms.

The quantity of primary sources for Britain in the mid-eleventh century is not excellent, but there are some major and valuable works.<sup>2</sup> The main English source is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Its name is misleading, since it is in reality a series of chronicles written in Old English over several centuries, and many different versions survive. Each has its own perspective on events. The versions covering the mid-eleventh century in detail are now called the C, D, and E Chronicles, which likely all derive from a lost common source.<sup>3</sup> There is debate on the periodization of these specific chronicles, but the greatest likelihood is that C is a contemporary chronicle for the years leading up to the Norman invasion of 1066 while D and E may have had later influences.<sup>4</sup> D in particular has somewhat uncertain dating, but experts agree its composition took place within several decades at least.<sup>5</sup> Still, they are all contemporary enough to be assumed as reasonably reliable when their biases are considered: C is generally pro-Mercian and sometimes anti-Godwine; E is usually favorable to the Godwines, and D differs in different situations.<sup>6</sup>

Another source from the English perspective is the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* (*Life of King Edward*). Edward's wife and Godwine's daughter, Queen Edith (c.

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<sup>2</sup> Monika Otter, "1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest," *Speculum* 74, no. 3 (July 1999): 579. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2886761>.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline Stafford, *After Alfred: The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Chroniclers, 900–1150* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 191, 207.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Baxter, "MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Politics of Mid-Eleventh-Century England," *English Historical Review* 122, no. 449 (2007): 1193–1194. doi:10.1093/ehr/cem322.

<sup>6</sup> Baxter, "MS C," 1189–1192.

1025–1075), commissioned it and it is unsurprisingly quite favorable to her natal family. The standard view holds that work on the chronicle began sometime between 1065 and 1066 and finished around 1067, though some historians claim the work is entirely pre-Conquest in composition.<sup>7</sup> Its name—like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—is misleading, since it implies that it is simply a work of hagiography. In reality, it is a combination of hagiography and history that cannot be dismissed from the corpus of the period.<sup>8</sup> There is strong evidence to suggest that the author of the work (most likely Goscelin or Folcard of Saint Bertin writing for Queen Edith) had access to inside information about his subject matter, and therefore, while looking out for the work’s Godwinist bias, it is still a valuable source for the period.<sup>9</sup>

A third English source is the Chronicle of John of Worcester. John wrote during the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries, and his chronicle is therefore not contemporary, but he undoubtedly used a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—possibly a lost one—as his source.<sup>10</sup> John often provides more detail on certain events than any other currently available contemporary source, so while his account must be treated carefully, it is still an invaluable resource. Being removed from the time he wrote about meant he had a different set of perspectives than contemporary writers, which makes for a helpful comparison.

From the Welsh perspective, there are fewer sources, and the mid-eleventh century is particularly lacking in source material.<sup>11</sup> The best we have are the two chronicle sources: the *Annales Cambriae* (written in Latin), and the *Brut y Tywysogyon* (written in Middle Welsh). Neither of them is contemporary, both

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Barlow, ed. and trans., *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1962), xxvii–xxx; Tom Licence, “The Date and Authorship of the Vita Ædwardi Regis,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 44 (2016): 259. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26332284>.

<sup>8</sup> Victoria B. Jordan, “Chronology and Discourse in the ‘Vita Ædwardi Regis,’” *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 8 (1998): 123–125. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45019935>.

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Grassi, “The Vita Ædwardi Regis: The Hagiographer as Insider,” in *Anglo-Norman Studies* 26: *Proceedings the Battle Conference 2003*, ed. John Gillingham (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 87–88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81v3r.10>.

<sup>10</sup> Barlow, *The Godwins*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 554.

being written down or compiled as we have them now in the thirteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, for the years of Ælfgar and Gruffudd's alliance, the *Annales Cambriae* contains almost no significant detail, leaving the *Brut* as a more thorough source. There is also Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* (*Concerning Courtiers' Trifles*) from the twelfth century, but this source is highly anecdotal and cannot be trusted much for reliable facts.<sup>13</sup>

Before dealing directly with Ælfgar and Gruffudd's alliance, there is an important question that must be addressed: what was its background? Was it exceptional, or was it part of a pattern in the larger histories of Mercia and Wales? On this issue, there is much debate in the historiography. Some historians argue that the actions of Ælfgar and Gruffudd were based solely on the unique circumstances of their time, and that the Mercians and the Welsh were traditional enemies earlier.<sup>14</sup> Other scholars, however, have proposed that Cambro-Mercian alliances and cooperation were quite common for centuries prior to Ælfgar and Gruffudd.<sup>15</sup> Examples of Anglo-Welsh relations both before Edward's reign and after the Norman Conquest show that Ælfgar and Gruffudd were not the first in the narrative of Anglo-Welsh cooperation, nor were they the last.

The scholar David Hill argued that Anglo-Welsh violence was a constant in the early medieval period. In "Mercians: The Dwellers on the Boundary," he gives numerous examples from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Annales Cambriae* that mention battles fought between the English and the Welsh as evidence of the violence between them. Hill also claims that there is almost no evidence of trade between the English and the Welsh along the Mercian border.<sup>16</sup> (Though in a later article titled "Offa's and Wat's Dykes," he says that there *is* evidence of trade through the coinage of Hywel Dda in the tenth century, but not

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<sup>12</sup> Huw Pryce, "British or Welsh? National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales," *The English Historical Review* 116, no. 468 (September 2001): 782.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/579192>.

<sup>13</sup> Sean and Michael Davies, *The Last King of Wales: Gruffudd ap Llywelyn c. 1013–1063* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2012), 23–25.

<sup>14</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Lindy Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 109.

<sup>16</sup> David Hill, "Mercians: The Dwellers on the Boundary," in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, eds. Michelle Brown and Carol A. Farr (London: Continuum, 2001), 177.

from earlier.<sup>17</sup>) According to Hill, the Mercians built Offa's Dyke as a military defense against the Welsh, whom they had been raiding, but this solution did not work, and the Welsh continued to strike back at the Mercians.<sup>18</sup> There are problems with Hill's observations. First, the fact that the English and the Welsh fought each other, while true, was not special. The Mercians fought other English kingdoms in addition to the Welsh. Likewise, the Welsh kingdoms were often engaged in violent power struggles with each other. Hill also does not consider moments like in 893 when combined armies of English and Welsh soldiers fought against the Vikings at Buttington, and when there was support between the two groups, like in 915 with<sup>19</sup> Hill's claim that there was no trade across the Cambro-Mercian border is also disputed. Keith Ray, a researcher and archaeologist for the University of Cardiff, claims that the Mercians built Offa's Dyke to control *trade*.<sup>20</sup> This argument makes sense, since the Dyke was built during the period that historians often describe<sup>21</sup> If it was built in an era when Mercia was the dominant power in southern Britain, it was not likely a mere desperate and failed attempt to protect against an unruly neighbor. If it was a method to control trade, it would demonstrate that the Mercians and Welsh were engaged in peaceful and constructive activities together, thus making Ælfgar and Gruffudd's later cooperation no surprise.

In direct opposition to David Hill stands Lindy Brady. Her book, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England*, describes the type of cooperative coexistence fostered by both the Welsh and English in the borderland regions throughout the pre-Norman (and some in the post-Norman) period. She examines sources such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the Dunsæte Agreement, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and many others to prove the long tradition of Cambro-Mercian alliance. Helen Fulton has criticized Brady's approach, writing that Brady takes her position too far in understating how

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<sup>17</sup> David Hill, "Offa's and Wat's Dykes," *Offa's Dyke Journal* 2 (2020): 146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23914/odj.v2i0.269>.

<sup>18</sup> Hill, "Dykes," 144, 156–157.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 54–56, 67; Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 111–112; R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, ed. and Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk, trans., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester: Volume II: The Annals from 450 to 1066* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1995), 370–371.

<sup>20</sup> Keith Ray, "The Organisation of the Mid-Late Anglo-Saxon Borderlands with Wales," *Offa's Dyke Journal* 4 (2022): 145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23914/odj.v4i0.357>.

<sup>21</sup> Ray, "Organisation of Borderlands," 132.

transient Anglo-Welsh alliances could be, and that she does not look at all the evidence, particularly from the Welsh perspective.<sup>22</sup> This claim is unconvincing, since nearly all alliances in early medieval Britain—even between the English themselves—had some degree of transience and instability, and that fact does not disqualify alliances as important instances of cooperation. Brady even successfully shows that the Mercians and Welsh had a tradition of making alliances that was much more long-standing and stable than many individual alliances often were.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the tradition was the strongest in Gwynedd in the north (Gruffudd ap Llywelyn’s home) and was often used against the southern Welsh, exactly as Ælfgar and Gruffudd used it.<sup>24</sup> Brady’s argument is supported by Stephen Baxter, who agrees with her claim that Mercia and Wales had a history of working together.<sup>25</sup> Fulton’s qualm with Brady’s sourcing is also relatively inaccurate, considering that she spends a significant amount of time looking at the main Welsh chronicles, the *Annales Cambriae* and the *Brut y Tywysogyon*, and she even occasionally brings in Irish sources like the *Annals of Tigernach*.<sup>26</sup>

Even though Brady’s argument is more persuasive than Hill’s, there is a middle-ground between them. Hill is correct in his observation that the Mercians and the Welsh were often at each other’s throats. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has little praise to speak of the *Wealcynn* (Welsh), and the *Brut y Tywysogyon* likewise tends to speak of the *Saesson* (Saxons/English) as enemies of the *Bryttanyeit* (Britons/Welsh) and akin to the barbaric *Kenedloed* (Gentiles/Norse). However, an examination of the evidence demonstrates that the Welsh and Mercians were well-accustomed to working together and supporting each other. How can we reconcile these contradictions? Perhaps a worthwhile metaphor is that like a pair of close siblings sharing a bedroom, the Mercians and northern Welsh were fierce competitors, always looking to gain an edge over each other whenever they could. But when push came to shove, they had each other’s backs to stand against outside negative forces like Northumbria, Wessex, the Godwine

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<sup>22</sup> Helen Fulton, review of Lindy Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), *The Medieval Review* (7 May 2018). <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/24842/30800>. Accessed 3 October 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Baxter, “The Earls of Mercia and Their Commended Men in the Mid Eleventh Century,” in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000*, ed. John B. Gillingham (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 37, 120.



family, the southern Welsh, and even later on, the Franco-Norman invaders.<sup>27</sup> This metaphor of a sibling relationship explains how two peoples who seemed to say almost nothing positive about each other in their records could have been such ardent co-conspirators as Ælfgar and Gruffudd were, just like a pair of siblings who might think they hate each other, but each is always there for the other when it really matters.

Evidence for this type of relationship in Cambro-Mercian history is plentiful. Aside from the aforementioned events in 898 and 915, there was the seventh-century Penda, the pagan king of Mercia who worked with the British king, Cadwallon, against the Northumbrians.<sup>28</sup> There is also an account in the *Annales Cambriae* from 893 (though it may really be from 894<sup>29</sup>) that says, “*Anaraut cum Anglis uenit uastare Cereticiaun et Strat Tiui*. [Anarawd came with the English to ravage Ceredigion and Ystrad Tywi.]”<sup>30</sup> The context here is a northern Welsh ruler allying with the English to attack the southern Welsh. The Welsh historian Thomas Charles-Edwards has noticed that the chronicler refers to the English with the Latin word, *Angli*, in this instance rather than the usual Welsh practice of calling the English *Saxones*; he suggests that this means the northern Welsh’s allies were specifically Mercians (who were from the Anglian branch of the Anglo-Saxon peoples).<sup>31</sup> The careful word choice indicates that the northern Welsh viewed Mercians as different from the other “Saxons,” and that the Mercians could be trusted as allies in military operations. It is also evidence for a sense of understanding between the Welsh and the Mercians if the Welsh chronicler knew enough about the Mercians’ Anglian lineage to care about bringing it up in writing.

Despite the evident cooperation between the English and the Welsh, there could also be caution and distrust at times. The Dunsæte Agreement serves as an example of this phenomenon. Sometime in the tenth or early eleventh century, this treaty was made on the border of the Welsh kingdom of Gwent to

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<sup>27</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, “Wales and Mercia, 613–918,” in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, eds. Michelle Brown and Carol A. Farr (London: Continuum, 2001), 94, 101; Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 18; Darlington and McGurk, *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 88–91.

<sup>29</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 507.

<sup>30</sup> David N. Dumville, ed. and trans, *Annales Cambriae, A.D. 682–954: Texts A–C in Parallel* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, University of Cambridge, U.K., 2002), 14.

<sup>31</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 507.

stop cattle-thieving.<sup>32</sup> Both English and Welsh representatives drew up the agreement, which demonstrates the cooperative nature of borderland relationships—neither the English nor the Welsh were the dominant party as far as we can tell.<sup>33</sup> However, it contained clauses about penalties specifically for an English person killing a Welsh person or vice versa, which demonstrates that the English and Welsh, although they wanted to collaborate, also wanted to ensure that their counterparts would not betray them; trust was never complete.<sup>34</sup>

The Cambro-Mercian alliance had its origins in both geography and politics. The English king from 1043–1065—Edward the Confessor—was raised in Normandy as a child and came to England to be its king later in his life. However, his rule over England was not absolute. England was divided into earldoms, whose earls were subservient to the king in theory, though not always in practice. The three most influential earldoms were Wessex in the south-west, ruled by Earl Godwine; Mercia in the Midlands bordering Wales, under Earl Leofric; and Northumbria in the north-east, ruled by Earl Siward.

Wales did not have a single king like England but comprised multiple different kingdoms, each with its own independent ruler. Welsh kings tended to have a great deal more independence in their doings than English earls.<sup>35</sup> In the eleventh century, the Welsh kings demonstrated their independence by fighting violent wars with each other for dominance, rather than using more subtle tools of political manipulation, like exile. Some of the more notable Welsh kingdoms were Gwynedd and Powys in the northern region, and Deheubarth and Gwent in the south. The borders of these kingdoms shifted frequently as different kings rose and fell from power. The Welsh kings who were of the greatest importance to this narrative were Gruffudd ap Llywelyn of Gwynedd and Gruffudd ap Rhyderch of Deheubarth (and also Gwent at times).

Within England during Edward’s reign, the dominant political force was the Godwine family. Earl Godwine had risen to prominence under the reign of

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<sup>32</sup> George Molyneux, “The Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte and the Anglo-Welsh Frontier in the Late Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 40 (2011): 249. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675111000111>.

<sup>33</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 1,4.

<sup>34</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 3, Molyneux, “Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte,” 268.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Guy, “The Changing Approaches of English Kings to Wales in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” *Offa’s Dyke Journal* 4 (2022): 87. <https://doi.org/10.23914/odj.v4i0.355>.

the Danish king of England, Cnut. By Edward's time, Godwine was the most powerful man in England. As the earl of Wessex, he wielded immense wealth and influence, and his children carried on his legacy, with his daughter Edith marrying Edward, and some of his sons—Harold, Tostig, Gyrrh, and Leofwine—holding major earldoms, Harold eventually becoming king in his own right. Godwine and his family were generally hostile to Leofric, Ælfgar, and Mercia, which was an immediate catalyst for Ælfgar to seek out the protection of the Mercians' traditional allies to the west: the Welsh.

Godwine had been the most successful of the English opportunists under Cnut.<sup>36</sup> Cnut made Godwine earl of Wessex, a position which he held into Edward's reign. After Cnut's death in 1036, a power struggle for the throne ensued which ended with Edward's coronation in 1043. According to the *Vita Ædwardi*, Godwine was the leader in choosing Edward as king, and the English *witan* (council) listened to him on account of their respect for him.<sup>37</sup> This is questionable, since other accounts in versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tell of Godwine's enmity with and murder of Edward's brother, Alfred.<sup>38</sup> A more likely answer is that Godwine—the earl of Wessex and former favorite of Cnut—wielded too much power to be denied his will. He brought Edward in as king to control him and rule England from behind the scenes.<sup>39</sup> Edward's marriage to Edith in 1044 further solidified his ties to the Godwine family. The *Vita Ædwardi* describes Edith, saying, "*Cuius consilio pax continet undique regnum, atque cauet populis, uiolent ne federa pacis.* [By her advice peace wraps the kingdom round and keeps mankind from breaking pacts of peace.]"<sup>40</sup> There can be little doubt that this advice was always in the best interests of Edith's family, whether others in the kingdom approved of it or not.<sup>41</sup> Edward may have resented this influence, because in 1052, he exiled Godwine and his sons, and sent Edith to the convent of Wherwell, breaking free from the family's yoke.<sup>42</sup> His freedom was short-lived, however, because the next year, Godwine returned with an army, killing and taking hostages at liberty until Edward was forced to reinstate him and his family to their former positions, including Edith as queen.<sup>43</sup> In 1053,

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<sup>36</sup> Barlow, *The Godwins*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 103–104.

<sup>39</sup> Barlow, *The Godwins*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Barlow, *The Godwins*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 123–124.

Godwine died and both his earldom of Wessex and mantle as the dominant leader in England passed to his son, Harold. Effectively, Edward as king of the English was subject to the will of Godwine and his family, and this meant that the other earls and regions of England could not expect the king's aid when their interests conflicted with Godwine and his family.

Besides Godwine, the other two major English earls were Leofric of Mercia, a member of the old Mercian noble house and the father of Ælfgar, and Siward of Northumbria, a Dane who had been appointed by Cnut. Neither of them appreciated being in a Godwine-dominated England, and Leofric led the charge on this front with Siward likely to follow him in most situations.<sup>44</sup> Leofric and Siward's opposition to Godwine is clear in their support for the latter's exile in 1052. The D Chronicle says, "*siððan hy wiston hu hit þær besuðan wæs, þa sendon hi norð ofer ealne heora earldom & leton beodan mycele fyrde heora hlaforde to helpe...*" [after they had understood how things were in the south, they sent north throughout all their earldoms and had a great army called out for the help of their liege lord...]<sup>45</sup> They were clearly eager to be rid of the Godwines, and the Mercians benefited specifically from the Godwines' exile; Ælfgar took control of East Anglia, which Harold had held before, though he was forced to return it after the Godwines' reinstatement.

When Earl Siward died in 1055, his earldom of Northumbria went to Godwine's son Tostig, which Ælfgar likely protested strongly enough to be exiled himself.<sup>46</sup> Ælfgar presumably wanted the large earldom, and the king's choice to promote Tostig instead was probably due to Edith's influence, since Tostig appears to have been her favorite brother based on the *Vita Ædwardi*.<sup>47</sup> The power bloc of Mercia and Northumbria had been able to hold the Godwines off to some degree in the past when they stood together.<sup>48</sup> With Tostig ruling Northumbria, however, the Mercians were completely outflanked by the Godwines, leading Ælfgar to look to Gruffudd and the Welsh. This was the kind of situation in which the Mercians and the northern Welsh looked to each other for support when outside forces threatened either of them.

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<sup>44</sup> Barlow, *The Godwins*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> G. P. Cubbin, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 6: MS D* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 70; Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 118.

<sup>46</sup> Baxter, "MS C," 1197; Ian W. Walker, *Harold: The Last Anglo-Saxon King* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 76–77.

<sup>47</sup> Barlow, *The Godwins*, 57.

<sup>48</sup> Baxter, "MS C," 1195.

The rivalry between Wessex and Mercia not only affected English politics. King Edward was raised in Normandy, and he thus promoted the interests of Normans in England—even before William the Conqueror invaded in 1066. English noble peers apparently hated these Normans, such as Earl Ralph of Herefordshire and Archbishop Robert of Jumièges. Regarding the exile of the Godwines, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* seems to implicate Leofric and Siward at first, but after the Godwines had made their return, all blame was laid on the French, “*þe ær unlage rærdon & undom demdom & unræd ræddon into ðissum earde...* [who had promoted injustices and passed unjust judgements and given bad counsel in the country...]”<sup>49</sup> From the very beginning, the *Vita Ædwardi* places all blame on the French, especially on Robert.<sup>50</sup> In hindsight, it seems as if the French were the ultimate villains in the story of the English before 1066, but the primary sources are not so clear. The antipathy toward the Normans in England during Edward’s time was strong, but not strong enough to unify English factional rivalries. Both the West Saxon and Mercian noble houses disliked the French, but at the time, their quarrels between themselves ended up eclipsing this other threat in their actions if not in their words. And since the Godwines were the larger and more powerful English faction, they continually pushed the Mercians to seek allies elsewhere. There was no chance Mercia would turn to the French or Normans, so their old relationship with northern Wales was re-kindled.

With the dangerous situation for Ælfgar in England, he needed an ally, but why should that ally have been Gruffudd. What was there about Gruffudd and his situation in Wales that made him such an appealing friend to Ælfgar? The preceding history of Cambro-Mercian alliance recommended him, but there had to have been a specific, tangible benefit to working together, as there has always been in the past. Gruffudd’s status as one of the most powerful Welsh monarchs made him a more powerful player in Britain than English historians have previously acknowledged. Gruffudd offered Ælfgar a way out of his exiles in 1055 and 1058 that would have been impossible otherwise, and Ælfgar was able to aid Gruffudd in finishing his conquest of South-Wales. And lastly, each of them was able to stand for the other when the Godwines would have easily crushed either, had they stood alone.

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<sup>49</sup> Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 5: MS C* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 114; the text of MS D is very much the same; Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 124.

<sup>50</sup> Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 20–21.

Gruffudd was from the northern Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd, the only son of his father, Llywelyn (though he had two younger half-brothers, Bleddyn and Rhiwallon, from his mother). Very little is known about his early life beyond the highly fanciful and probably apocryphal stories of Walter Map.<sup>51</sup> The only modern biography of Gruffudd is *The Last King of Wales* by Sean and Michael Davies. According to the Davies brothers, Gruffudd's early years were likely exceptionally brutal, even by early medieval standards.<sup>52</sup> They quote Map's account of Gruffudd maiming or killing anyone he found who could rival him in strength, claiming that his goal was to "blunt the horns of Wales" to keep himself safe.<sup>53</sup> After Iago, the king of Gwynedd, was killed in 1039, Gruffudd took over from him. The Davies brothers suggest that the circumstances line up too neatly for Gruffudd to be innocent of Iago's blood.<sup>54</sup> However, the *Brut y Tywysogyon* only says:

*Ac yna y delis y Kenedloed Veuruc ap Hwel. Ac y llas Iago, vrenhin Gwyned. Ac yn y le ynteu y gwled-ychawd Gruffud ap Llywelyn ap Seissyll; a hwnw o'e dechreu hyt y diwed a ymlidyawd y Saesson a'r Kenedloed ereill ac a'e lladawd ac a'e diuaawd ac o luosogrwyd o ymladeu a'e goruu.*

[And then the Gentiles captured Meurig ap Hywel. And Iago, king of Gwynedd, was slain. And in his place ruled Gruffudd ap Llywelyn ap Seissyll; and he, from his beginning to the end, pursued the Saxons and the other Gentiles and slaughtered and destroyed them, and defeated them in a great number of battles.]<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 23–25.

<sup>52</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium/Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, C. N. L. Brooke, and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 191–193, quoted in Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 30–31.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Jones, ed. and trans., *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), 22–23. Note that the wording is very similar in Thomas Jones, ed. and trans., *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS 20 Version* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1952), 13.

It is notable that the “Gentiles” (*Kenedloed*—the GPC gives “Norsemen” as another possible translation for this word<sup>56</sup>) are mentioned immediately prior to Iago’s death, possibly implicating them. The same word is used again when describing Gruffudd’s enemies, which makes it seem unlikely that Gruffudd killed Iago.<sup>57</sup> However, whether or not Gruffudd was involved in Iago’s death, there is no question that from his new position of power, Gruffudd began a series of conquests that would make him the formidable ally Mercia and Ælfgar needed.

Within the year 1039, Gruffudd took control of Gwynedd and Powys, and managed to inflict terrible losses on the English at the Battle of Rhyd-y-groes—the first time Gruffudd’s actions are mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>58</sup> This is significant in that it implies that Gruffudd was out of sight and mind to the English, so to speak, during his early years, which was likely an advantage to him. Unfortunately, the exact location of Rhyd-y-groes is not known definitively, but may have been near Upton-on-Severn in Worcestershire, or possibly in Buttington (the Davies brothers prefer the latter).<sup>59</sup> Wherever the battle was, it was a disaster for the English that they still remembered thirteen years later when Gruffudd and Ælfgar raided Herefordshire together.<sup>60</sup> Following the success of Rhyd-y-groes, Gruffudd began the long and bloody struggle to conquer the southern kingdom of Deheubarth, which was secure by 1049.<sup>61</sup> Then in 1052, he launched another raid against the English at Leominster in Earl Ralph’s dominion of Herefordshire. This event is not mentioned in the *Brut*, but the C and D Chronicles record the attack as being devastating and killing many Englishmen and Frenchmen, and John of Worcester gives very much the same information in his account.<sup>62</sup> The exact motivation for the attack is unclear,

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<sup>56</sup> *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. “cenedl, ceneddl,” accessed Oct 31, 2024, <https://www.geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>.

<sup>57</sup> As stated earlier, the *Brut* was written down long after the events it recorded, and therefore any argument hinging on its exact wording must be taken with according caution. Nonetheless, this issue is well within the normal expectation for historians of the early medieval period, and does not render the argument completely worthless.

<sup>58</sup> Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 105.

<sup>59</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 122.

<sup>61</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Cubbin, MS D, 71; Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 122; Darlington et al., *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 566–567. On a slightly humorous note, returning to the issue of the English disliking the French more than each other, the English are described

unless it was purely for the spoils or to gain attention. Perhaps Gruffudd felt that it was time to show the English who he was and what he was capable of.

During these events, Ælfgar would probably have noticed Gruffudd's comings and goings. His ruthlessness to obtain power in his own country and fearlessness of the English would have appealed to Ælfgar, who witnessed the Godwines and their ambitions threatening his interests. Kari Maund has suggested that Ælfgar likely communicated with Gruffudd before the former's exile in 1055.<sup>63</sup> This may be true, though there is no evidence of Gruffudd having any direct contact with Mercia prior to Rhyd-y-groes, especially since one of the victims of that raid was Edwin, Earl Leofric's brother and Ælfgar's uncle. If Gruffudd and Ælfgar were in discussions to forge an alliance, it would have been during the phase of Gruffudd's conquests, as he was growing more and more powerful; likely after Rhyd-y-groes.

Whether or not Gruffudd and Ælfgar planned an alliance before 1055, they only began cooperating openly when the Godwines and the king exiled Ælfgar. Regarding the events leading up to the exile, the different versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have different things to say. The C Chronicle says, "*Ða ðæræfter binnan lyttlan fyrste wæs witena gemot on Lundune, & man geutlagode þa Ælfgar eorl Leofrices sunu eorles butan ælcan gylte...* [Then after that within a short space there was a council at London and Earl Ælfgar, son of Earl Leofric, was outlawed without any guilt...]"<sup>64</sup> D is similar, but says he was exiled "*forneh butan gylte...* [almost without guilt...]"<sup>65</sup> E says:

*[U]tlagode mann Ælfgar eorl, forðon him man wearp on þet he wæs þes cynges swica & ealra landleoda, & he þæs geanwyrde wes ætforan eallum þam mannum þe þær gegaderode wæron, þeah him þet word ofscute his unnþances. & se cyng geaf þone earldom Tostige Godwines sunu eorles, ðe Siward eorl ær ahte.*

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in the D Chronicle as "*engliscra godra manna* [good Englishmen]" while the French are left as the adjective-less "*frenciscum* [Frenchmen]."

<sup>63</sup> K. L. Maund, "The Welsh Alliances of Earl Ælfgar of Mercia and His Family in the Mid-Eleventh Century," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1988*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell & Brewer, 1988), 185.

<sup>64</sup> O'Keefe, *MS C*, 115; Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 130.

<sup>65</sup> Cubbin, *MS D*, 74; translation my own.



[Ælfgar was outlawed because he was charged with being a traitor to the king and to all the people of the country. And he admitted this before all the people who were there, though the words escaped him against his will. And the king gave Tosti, son of Earl Godwine, the earldom that Siward had had.]<sup>66</sup>

As stated earlier, the likeliest reason for this accusation of “treason” was Ælfgar’s complaint against Tostig receiving the earldom of Northumbria, though this is difficult to prove.<sup>67</sup> Conspicuously absent from the scene in 1055 is Leofric himself, who was still the earl of Mercia. All accounts are silent on Leofric either supporting or opposing his son’s exile, so we can assume he simply realized he did not have the power to resist the Godwines’ influence any longer, or perhaps he felt that his son’s exile was King Edward’s doing, and therefore he could not resist it.<sup>68</sup> It may have been this lack of support from his own family that was the final straw in pushing Ælfgar to the Welsh.

When Ælfgar came to Gruffudd for aid, there were several things the Welsh king could offer him. The first was the aid of his extensive military. John of Worcester describes Ælfgar’s coming to Gruffudd and their combined armed forces as follows:

*Qui mox Hiberniam petiit, et decem et octo piraticis nauibus adquistis, rediit, et Griffinum regem Walensium adiit, eumque petiuit ut contra regem Eduuardum sibi esset in auxilium. Ille statim de toto regno suo copiosum exercitum congregans, Algaro precepit ut loco constituto sibi et exercitui cum suis copiis occurreret, quibus in unum conuenientibus fines Anglorum depopulaturi, Herefordensem prouinciam intrauerunt.*

[He soon went to Ireland, and returned when he had acquired eighteen pirate ships and approached Gruffydd, king of the Welsh, to request his help against King Edward. Gruffydd at once assembled a large army from his whole realm, and commanded Ælfgar to hurry to meet him and his force with his own troops at the place appointed; having joined forces

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<sup>66</sup> Susan Irvine, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 7: MS E* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 84–85; Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 130.

<sup>67</sup> Maund, “Welsh Alliances,” 181–182.

<sup>68</sup> Walker, *Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 77.

they entered Herefordshire with the intention of laying waste the English borders.]<sup>69</sup>

There are things of note in the passage. Ælfgar was not alone when he came to Gruffudd. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* agrees with John that Ælfgar had a fleet of eighteen Irish pirate ships at his command before coming to Wales—and the *C* *Chronicle* specifies that the eighteen were “*butan his agenan* [apart from his own],” implying that he had English forces at his behest as well.<sup>70</sup> Ælfgar was not utterly helpless, and Gruffudd’s military aid was a boost to an army that he already had. The fact that Ælfgar felt the need to seek out Gruffudd demonstrates that he did not have enough men of his own. The Davies estimate Ælfgar’s force (including the Irish) at over 1,000 men, and Gruffudd’s army as being about 2,500, giving them a combined army of over 3,500 soldiers and numerous ships.<sup>71</sup> Gruffudd’s army would have consisted of his own *teulu* (literally *family*, in this case likely personal household retainers similar to the elite English *huscarls*) and possibly a national levy as well. Considering the distribution of troops, it is not surprising that Gruffudd was the leader of the enterprise, and that he was in command of Ælfgar, as John of Worcester says. There is always the possibility that the Irish pirate fleet could have made Gruffudd nervous, as his past experiences with the Irish had been problematic.<sup>72</sup> This could have contributed to his desire to stay in command, but if so, it also speaks to his trust of Ælfgar, and his willingness to work with whomever Ælfgar had with him. Their coordinated attack on Herefordshire led to the reinstatement of Ælfgar as earl of East Anglia. By this, Gruffudd had sent a strong warning to the Godwines and Edward, that he was willing to use his extensive military force to support Ælfgar.

Possibly of even greater value to Ælfgar than immediate military aid was Gruffudd’s ability to stand as security for him in the future. Following the crisis and resolution of 1055, the power balance in England tipped even further in favor

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<sup>69</sup> Darlington et al., *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 576–577.

<sup>70</sup> O’Keefe, *MS C*, 116; Whitelock et al., *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 130.

<sup>71</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 54–55.

<sup>72</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 37–38. There is a possibility that Gruffudd had been captured by Irish mercenaries and escaped at one point, but this claim was made by sixteenth-century historians whose sourcing is dubious and who must be considered cautiously. Either way, Gruffudd’s rival, Hywel of Deheubarth, *did* go into exile in Ireland and may have had a connection to Hiberno-Norse raids on Gruffudd’s territory.

of the Godwines. In 1057, two more earls died. Leofric of Mercia passed his earldom onto Ælfgar, but to take his new earldom, Ælfgar had to give his former position in East Anglia to Gyrth Godwineson.<sup>73</sup> Ralph also died, and his earldom in the east Midlands was split up by Harold and Leofwine Godwineson. At this point, Ælfgar was the only earl in England who was not a Godwineson, and he needed a strong alliance to avoid being completely hedged in by the powerful family.<sup>74</sup> Gruffudd was just this ally, and to secure the continuity of this alliance, Ælfgar gave Gruffudd his daughter, Edith, in marriage. This may have incensed the Godwines—in particular, Harold, who possibly wanted to marry Edith himself to secure the Mercian house as an ally.<sup>75</sup> Edith of Mercia's marriage to Gruffudd might have been the reason for Ælfgar's second exile in 1058, which Gruffudd also helped him out of in a very similar manner to the first time.<sup>76</sup> As the situation in England deteriorated for Ælfgar, he kept his friendship with Gruffudd secure, since Gruffudd's status as an outsider to English politics made him a safe support base; the Godwines were completely uninterested in working with him.

Gruffudd could offer a lot to Ælfgar - immediate military aid in times of crisis and a long-term support base in the face of continual Godwinist expansion – but what did he and his Welsh kingdom gain from an alliance with Ælfgar? First and foremost, when Ælfgar came to him in 1055, Gruffudd still needed to complete his conquest of Wales. His main rival, Gruffudd ap Rhyderch, was a threat in the south-eastern Welsh kingdom of Gwent, and the *Brut* records that Gruffudd ap Llywelyn finally defeated this southern Gruffudd in a campaign in 1055.<sup>77</sup> Most likely, Ælfgar with his English soldiers and Irish pirates would have participated in this mission.<sup>78</sup> Just as Ælfgar did not have the strength to challenge the Godwines and return to his earldom, Gruffudd could not by himself conquer Gwent and take the kingship of all Wales. It was beneficial for him to enlist the support of Ælfgar so that he could solidify his own strength, and Ælfgar was eager to support Gruffudd's power consolidation, because that would make

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<sup>73</sup> Stephen Baxter, "The Death of Burgheard Son of Ælfgar and Its Context," in *Frankland: The Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Paul Fouracre and David Ganz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 282.

<sup>74</sup> Walker, *Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 83.

<sup>75</sup> F. J. van Kempen, "The Mercian Connection, Harold Godwineson's Ambitions, Diplomacy and Channel-Crossing, 1056–1066," *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 94 (2009): 13.

<sup>76</sup> Walker, *Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 85.

<sup>77</sup> Jones, *Brut y Tywysogyon: Red Book of Hergest*, 24–25.

<sup>78</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 55; Walker, *Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 78.

Gruffudd an even stronger ally for him in the future. This is an excellent example of how the Mercians and the Welsh built each other up as a bulwark against hostile outside forces, like Penda, Cadwallon, and Anarawd before them.

Another reason Gruffudd would have been eager to ally himself with Ælfgar was as insurance to protect his own future interests in a Godwine-dominated Britain. The Godwines were no friends of the Welsh, and Gruffudd knew the dangers that a unified English state could pose to his kingdom. Throughout Anglo-Welsh history, the Welsh were in the most danger of English oppression when the English were unified and not fighting each other. With the Godwines' single-party approach to English politics, such a situation was on the horizon.<sup>79</sup> Gruffudd needed Ælfgar as a member of the old Mercian noble house to form a protective support to keep the Godwines from threatening his newly-unified Welsh kingdom.<sup>80</sup> As long as at least one of the earls in England was ready to lend military support to Gruffudd, the Godwines would have to think twice before attempting to get involved directly.

This strategy worked quite successfully for Gruffudd while Ælfgar was alive, but his fears were realized when the earl died in 1062. Harold and Tostig Godwinson wasted no time after Ælfgar's death in invading Wales and ultimately eliminating the then-unprotected Gruffudd, replacing him with his half-brothers, Bleddyn and Rhiwallon.<sup>81</sup> During Ælfgar's lifetime, he helped protect Gruffudd from Godwinist expansion into Wales, and the fact that Gruffudd fell immediately after Ælfgar's death further proves that Gruffudd's Wales was vulnerable without Ælfgar's help, making the alliance between them crucial.

Ælfgar and Gruffudd were not the last English and Welsh rulers to form an alliance in attempt to resist a hostile regime in England. After William the Conqueror became king of England in 1066, Anglo-Welsh rebellions were a thorn in his side until the end of the eleventh century. Rebellions involved Ælfgar's sons, Edwine and Morcar in 1071 and an Anglo-Welsh marauding force from Hereford in 1087, among others.<sup>82</sup> After Edwine and Morcar—the last nobles of the house of Leofric—were dead, the primary goal of the Norman lords in the Welsh borderlands was to end the rebellions by crushing the Welsh.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Charles-Edwards, "Wales and Mercia," 105.

<sup>80</sup> Davies and Davies, *Last King of Wales*, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Van Kempen, "Mercian Connection, 15; Walker, *Last Anglo-Saxon King*, 88.

<sup>82</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 144–145, 148–149.

<sup>83</sup> Brady, *Writing the Welsh Borderlands*, 153.

Thus, even after Ælfgar and Gruffudd were gone, the tradition of Cambro-Mercian alliance remained a threat to the Norman invaders, proving that such alliances were part of the normal patterns of behavior of Mercia and Wales, and not just singular narratives in unusual circumstances.

Ælfgar and Gruffudd's alliance cannot be studied in a one-dimensional way, in which it is nothing more than the actions of two desperate men in unusually hard circumstances. It had many causes, and none can be ignored. One was the issue of Godwinist hegemony in England and how this was a direct threat to Mercian sovereignty and an indirect threat to Gruffudd's Welsh conquests; there had to be a counter to this influence and an alliance was the best answer. Another was that both men were in positions to offer immediate aid and future insurance to each other, with Ælfgar helping Gruffudd defeat his southern rival, and Gruffudd helping reinstate Ælfgar to his position of earl in 1055. Gruffudd functioned as insurance for Ælfgar in the event of the latter's second exile in 1058, and on the other side, Ælfgar ensured that Gruffudd had an ally in England, discouraging the Godwines from attacking Wales to reduce or cripple Gruffudd's power. And finally (possibly most importantly of all), Ælfgar and Gruffudd were not acting solely in the moment but were part of a long tradition of Cambro-Mercian alliance that dated back hundreds of years and continued past the Norman Conquest of 1066. All these factors together reveal a multi-dimensional dynamic where tradition, ambition, loyalty, and protection came together to create an environment of cooperation and mutual benefit

## **Pirate, Protostrator, Martyr**

*Jonathan Oesterlein*

From 1200 to the last moment before the city walls fell in 1453, to live in Constantinople was to endure constant crisis. Whether it was hostile neighbors enveloping your empire's borders, rebellions from within that destabilized the government, or plague; enduring and surviving crisis was a key characteristic of this city's society. This feature is how many Western historians elect to characterize the declining empire, a steadily shrinking state that, despite the odds, simply refused to die. Even with the new eastern superpower, the Ottoman Empire, pushing the Byzantine defense all the way back to a singular city, Constantinople, they sought to find a way to preserve their Empire. As the threat of siege loomed ever closer, selecting the correct personnel to lead or manage logistics was the difference between victory and defeat.

Among these decisions, arguably the most important was the appointment of the protostrator. This functionary organized and led the defense alongside the emperor himself of the last Byzantine city. And out of all the Byzantine military officers, the Byzantine nobles, and even famous mercenaries from abroad, Emperor Constantine XI chose a minor Genoese noble, and pirate named Giovanni Giustiniani. On the surface, it appears baffling, contradictory even to the emperor's goal of defending the city. But this daring decision proved not to be a mistake. Giustiniani, it turned out, was exceptionally well-suited to the position of protostrator.

This decision leaves us with a few pressing questions. What historical context compelled the Emperor's to choose a pirate for such a vital role? And what do Giustiniani's motivations for accepting the position tell us about the broader events that occurred at the same time? Answering these questions lead us to a broader understanding of how the Fall of Constantinople was not an isolated event, but rather one deeply connected to its own history and the larger world around the Byzantine Empire.

Legal and financial issues related to his vocation had driven Giustiniani to Constantinople where he accepted the position of protostrator. His financial issues stemmed from the state of warfare in mainland Italy at the time. His legal issues were connected to the strangely controversial attacks on ships belonging to nations unfriendly to Genoa. Oddly enough, the Byzantine Emperor selected Giustiniani specifically because he was a Genoese pirate. He needed a leader who had no connections to the Byzantine military. A long history of coups had created distrust between the imperial family and its military. The Emperor sought

someone who was seasoned in naval combat to organize a naval defense of the siege. And the candidate could not have been a Venetian because the emperor preferred not to any further empower an already influential minority within his city. As a supposed Genoese corsair, Giustiniani fit the bill, and he was inclined to accept.

Almost nothing is known about Giustiniani before he went to Constantinople besides that he was a noble-born Genoese mercenary captain. This gives historians a fair bit of information about his motivations just based on historical inference. First, typically first-born nobles did not flock to careers in piracy. They were entitled to the inheritance of their family, so there was typically no need to take on a job such as mercenary captain. While we have no record of Giustiniani having any siblings nor whether he was a first-born child, the fact Giustiniani occupied the role of a mercenary captain tells us it is likely he was either not the first-born son, or an illegitimate son who was trying to make his fortune. Giustiniani's choice of career would have been profitable if it were not for the shifts that occurred concerning war between the Italian city-states.

The landmass that would later become known as Italy was, in the period leading up to the fall of Constantinople comprised of independent city-states that often waged war on each other for control of territory. Since the Italian city-states were often at war, and their preferred manner of fielding soldiers for these wars was contracting mercenaries to do so, mercenary work was a dangerous yet enticing avenue to make money. On the eve of the fall of Constantinople, conflict between Italian city-states was winding down, putting many mercenaries out of work. In addition, city-states were beginning to move away from employing masses of mercenary companies due to behavioral issues, which was becoming apparent by the end of the twelfth century. The Company of the Hook, for instance, were just as prone to acts of banditry and extortion against native Italians as they were to hire themselves out to fight wars.<sup>1</sup> This behavior helped create a shift in Italian city-states towards fielding standing armies of non-mercenary soldiers, leaving Giustiniani and those like him out of work.

As mercenary work began to dry up, Giustiniani had two options. He could either disband his mercenary company that he would have likely already sunk significant capital into or he could start traveling abroad to lands that were

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<sup>1</sup> William Caferro, "Italy and Companies of Adventure," essay, in *Mercenary Companies And The Decline of Siena* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 10–15, 15.

experiencing wars and would pay for mercenaries.<sup>2</sup> Giustiniani reached Constantinople in 1453 at the head of a mercenary company, which implies that financial difficulties with mercenary work in Italy were a contributing factor to his decision to take part in the city's defense.

But being a mercenary was not Giustiniani's only profession, as Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani in his after-action report of the fall of Constantinople referred to him as a corsair<sup>3</sup>. A corsair was an individual who was licensed by a city-state, in this case Genoa, to perform acts of piracy against said state's enemies.<sup>4</sup> Alongside this requirement, the corsair could only target merchant vessels that flew the flag of rival powers to properly mark them during a naval engagement.<sup>5</sup> Corsairs were relatively cheap, yet they inflicted significant damage to enemy city-states. Almost every Italian city-state made liberal use of corsairs throughout periods of conflict.<sup>6</sup> A pirate, in contrast, was an illegal actor who could engage in piracy against anyone whether their city-state of origin maintained peaceful relations or not. Moreover, a pirate could engage in piracy against a city-state's enemies without the express permission of said city-state. We know that the restrictions on corsairs were taken seriously because there was legal infrastructure and even a court system to process and rule on complaints made against corsairs for misconduct, with the punishment for a piracy conviction often being death.<sup>7</sup> These courts would have also been used to prosecute those acting as corsairs without permission, which means that if Giustiniani did not have official permission to act as a corsair, he would have been in legal trouble for piracy. Potentially, his legal troubles motivated him to leave Genoese territory to join the defense of Constantinople.

Giustiniani's reputation as a corsair is backed up by Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani's aforementioned after-action report written about the final siege of

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<sup>2</sup> William Caferro, "John Hawkwood an English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)," 64.

<sup>3</sup> Marios Philippides and Walter K. Hanak, "The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 Historiography, Topography, and Military Studies" (London: Routledge, 2011), 381

<sup>4</sup> Emily Sohmer Tai, "Restitution and the Definition of a Pirate: The Case of Sologrus de Nigro," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19, no. 2 (December 2004): 34–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951896052000336436>, 35-36.

<sup>5</sup> Emily Sohmer Tai, "Piracy and Law in Medieval Genoa: The Consilia of Bartolomeo Bosco," *Medieval Encounters* 9, no. 2–3 (2003): 256–82, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006704323211585>, 260.

<sup>6</sup> Tai, "Piracy and Law", 261.

<sup>7</sup> Tai, "Piracy and Law," 260-261.



Constantinople, which it refers to brave corsairs who were stationed in the Mouth of the Golden Horn, a reference that later historians have declared to most likely be referring to Giustiniani's crew.<sup>8</sup> Life as a corsair would have complimented his role as a mercenary. Being a pirate would have made Giustiniani a non-state actor which, while not always being the case, was also how mercenaries worked at the time. Mercenary companies often turn to banditry against the very people who contracted them, which demonstrates a disregard for the rules of the land.<sup>9</sup>

Giustiniani probably was not a legal corsair but instead a pirate, which would have motivated him to assist Constantinople. We lack any documentation confirming his status as a corsair. The existence of a court system designed to oversee these corsairs would indicate there must have been some written proof of who was a real corsair for the courts to reference, rather than just a spoken agreement. And due to the fragile nature of that type of source it is probably lost to history. The other factor that makes it hard to believe his reputation as a corsair was legitimate was that he was being investigated for attacking merchants' ships from the Ottoman Empire and Ancona, an illegal act which no real corsair would have considered doing.

When Genoa was at war with the central Italian state of Ancona, Giustiniani was across the sea in Chios. This placed him between not only hostile Ottoman ships but also ships from Ancona on one side and Genoa on the other. Giustiniani decided to raid both Ottoman and Anconine mercantile vessels that, by the laws laid out concerning maritime piracy and corsairs, should have been a completely legal move with no cause for concern.<sup>10</sup> The Genoese were at war with Ancona and were hostile to the Ottomans, marking both the types of ships Giustiniani raided as hostile and hypothetically legal to raid. Still a commission was called to investigate his actions, which would have been unlikely if he was a corsair.<sup>11</sup> If none of Giustiniani's actions constituted a breach of conduct, it is reasonable to conclude that the investigation aimed to find out whether he an unlawful pirate.

The investigation was never concluded as Giustiniani died from his wounds sustained at Constantinople. The investigation possibly served as a simple diplomatic measure to placate Ancona and the Ottomans and would not have resulted in any consequences for Giustiniani. However, while we do not

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<sup>8</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 382.

<sup>9</sup> Caferro, "Italy and Companies of Adventure," 15.

<sup>10</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 383.

<sup>11</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 383.

know what the motivations were behind the investigation, we lack sufficient information to conclude that it was merely a diplomatic gesture. First, Giustiniani left for Constantinople before the commission finished its investigation. It is reasonable to assume that those unconcerned with the outcome of an investigation into their conduct do not leave before it is finished. Second, the implication that such an investigation would have been launched to placate hostile nations does not align with Genoese practices nor motives. There would have been no need to placate Ancona as the actions of Giustiniani and his crew were taken while the two city-states were at war. There is no way to interpret the situation as peacetime piracy. And there would have been no need to placate the Ottomans either, because the Genoese had not made peace with the Ottomans.

To understand how Genoa dealt diplomatically with their citizens raiding vessels, we can examine an incident in 1192 when a group of Genoese pirates raided Genoese allies and got away with little consequences. There is a record of a Genoese pirate named Guglielmo Grasso being officially investigated due to their raiding of a Byzantine vessel that was filled with gifts from the Caliph of Egypt for Emperor Isaac II.<sup>12</sup> This was piracy committed against fellow Christians, the Byzantines with which Genoa was at peace when the piracy occurred. It therefore would have been illegal for a corsair to raid. It even caused a diplomatic incident where the Emperor of the Byzantines sent a series of letters firstly demanding reparations, and then informing the Genoese state that he had made the Genoese population of Constantinople pay a deposit of 20,000 hyperpyra, a type of gold coin minted at the time, to be held until reparations were paid for the incident.<sup>1314</sup> Despite the trouble these pirates caused, their supposed disavowal and investigation was nothing more than a diplomatic play to satisfy the emperor and there is no evidence the Genoese state ever put serious effort into prosecuting Grasso. They would even later send a ship to his rescue when he was captured in 1201 and pardon one of his accomplices when he returned to Genoa with some of the stolen goods; though presumably the pardon

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<sup>12</sup> J. K. Fotheringham, "Genoa and the Fourth Crusade," *The English Historical Review* XXV, no. XCVII (January 1910): 26–57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/xxv.xcvii>. 26, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Isac Angelos, "Letter from the Emperor to Genoa Requesting Reparations," 1192, in *Piracy and Reprisal in Byzantine Waters: Resolving a Maritime Conflict between Byzantines and Genoese at the End of the Twelfth Century*, Daphne Penna (Comparative Legal History, January 2, 2017): 36–52.

<sup>14</sup> Isac Angelos, "Letter from the Emperor to Genoa Informing them of the Seizure of Genoese Money," 1193, in *Piracy and Reprisal in Byzantine Waters: Resolving a Maritime Conflict between Byzantines and Genoese at the End of the Twelfth Century*, Daphne Penna (Comparative Legal History, January 2, 2017): 36–52.

was granted because he had gifted the stolen loot to the Genoese government who, unsurprisingly, kept it.<sup>15</sup> While this incident took place in 1192 and much can change in the three centuries between this incident and the acts of Giustiniani, the case study offers an example of how the Genoese state acted regarding complaints of Genoese pirates by a foreign power. It took a severe breach of conduct, attacking a peaceful nation and the endangerment of Genoese interests abroad, to even prompt an investigation to be launched for the sake of diplomacy.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that in Giustiniani's case, where his crime is nowhere near as severe as Grasso's, the investigation into his conduct was not about what he did but rather his lack of authorization to do what he did. Prior to this incident, there is no record of Giustiniani and his crew committing acts of piracy. If this was Giustiniani's first act of piracy, then he was probably in a desperate situation. Giustiniani felt pressured under the circumstances and therefore, without proper authorization, resorted to piracy as a method of contributing to the war effort while also enriching himself. Giustiniani probably left for Constantinople before the investigation concluded to avoid repercussions. Giustiniani's legal troubles concerning his acts of piracy that also acted as a contributing factor for his motivation to sail to Constantinople and take a role in the defense. In that context, Giustiniani is no longer a random pirate who just appeared in Constantinople one day. His history explains how Italian maritime law and the state of war effecting mercenary work effected the last days of a war happening in Byzantium.

But what would have compelled Emperor Constantine XI to have chosen him to lead in the first place? In short, the emperor could not trust his own soldiers. Byzantium already had a long history of popular uprisings and military coups by the time Giustiniani arrived. These uprisings often stemmed from the ambitions of high-ranked Byzantine military officers.<sup>16</sup> There was even a period called the Twenty Years Anarchy, during which dynastic rule was suspended and military officers or other highly positioned Byzantine officials with the military's assistance usurped the throne for themselves before being quickly overthrown themselves. These decades destabilized the Byzantine Empire and hampered its

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<sup>15</sup> Fotheringham, "Genoa and the Fourth Crusade," 29.

<sup>16</sup> Savvas Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries in Byzantium in The Period ca. 1290-1305 as Viewed By The Sources," *Byzantion* 79 (2009): 208–230.

imperial power.<sup>17</sup> This history, alongside a perceived lackluster performance from the Byzantine military, had created distrust between the emperor and his military officers. From the thirteenth century onward, the emperor heavily relied on foreign mercenaries in his army. Mercenaries rebelled less often compared to native born military officers and in the thirteenth century mercenary companies became increasingly professional.<sup>18</sup> On average, mercenaries were better educated on military matters, had more knowledge about modern military technology, and their companies were better organized compared to the native-born military.<sup>19</sup> Being both a foreign born and an educated mercenary captain would have made Giustiniani immediately more qualified than any Byzantine military officer to lead the defense of Constantinople. But that could also be said for any of the other mercenary captains present at the siege, as there were a multitude of them. What made Giustiniani more qualified than they were?

The siege organizers would have had to prepare for an assault on two fronts.<sup>20</sup> There was the land assault to consider but also an attack from the sea. There was serious potential for the Ottoman navy to render all the land preparations useless if they managed to break through the chain that guarded their entry into the Golden Horn harbor, at which point they could have then landed troops directly inside the city. These actions would bypass all supplies and men spent fortifying the walls against a land invasion. Emperor Constantine XI would have had to choose a leader who had naval warfare experience to organize a defense of the harbor. Giustiniani's previous vocation as a pirate and his battle experience at sea would have made him an attractive candidate for the position. The fact that Giustiniani had raided Ottoman ships in the past may have also given him an edge in the competition.<sup>21</sup> Giustiniani's military commission also drew from precedent. In the past, Byzantine Emperors had hired sufficiently troublesome pirates to augment their navy. Charges of piracy against Giustiniani could have strengthened his case instead of hindering it.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, Giustiniani's knowledge of naval warfare was the strongest contributing factor in his appointment to lead the defense of Constantinople. Additionally, the Emperor

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<sup>17</sup> Romilly Jenkins, "Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries, A. D. 610-1071," (Random House, 1966), 56.

<sup>18</sup> Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries," 214

<sup>19</sup> Kyriakidis, "The Employment of Large Groups of Mercenaries," 209-210

<sup>20</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 102.

<sup>21</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 383.

<sup>22</sup> J. K. Fotheringham, "Genoa and the Fourth Crusade," *The English Historical Review* XXV, no. XCVII (January 1910): 26-57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/xxv.xcvii.32>.

did not need to worry about the turbulent political climate from within, if a Genoese veteran took charge of the city's defenses.

Another issue that would have loomed large in Emperor Constantine XI's mind is the memory of the Fourth Crusade and the increased presence of Venetians that came with it. In 1204, this crusade saw a primarily Venetian funded crusader force with smaller forces from other city-states present such as Genoa ransack Constantinople and throw the Byzantine royal family out of the seat of imperial power, their own capitol city. It took twenty years before Emperor Michael VIII managed to retake it and reincorporate it back into the Byzantine Empire in 1261.<sup>23</sup> After the reconquest, the Venetians retained a large amount of power in the city primarily through the influence of the Venetian civilian population inside Constantinople. The Venetian citizens were influential enough that they managed to halt a tax meant to collect money to fund the defense of the city simply by threatening to leave. Later, historians state that a Venetian exodus would have financially crippled the city.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the already robust Venetian population, and quite possibly because of it, the vast majority of the mercenaries that arrived to defend the city were Venetian.<sup>25</sup> Venice, much like Genoa, was not shy about using corsairs so while it is unclear how many of the Venetians present were corsairs, there probably would have been quite a few during the fall of Constantinople. These Venetians had a lot of interest in defending the city, motivation to keep its citizens safe, and likely a few of them had as much experience as Giustiniani. And yet the emperor did not employ a Venetian to defend the city. Why not?

The emperor had to consider that, while mercenaries did not rebel as often as native-born officers, they still could rebel. What likely did not help these fears was the memory of the Fourth Crusade legitimizing concern that the Venetians could attempt to overthrow imperial power. Due to the historical precedent and the idea the emperor was probably familiar with the tensions in his own city, it is reasonable to assume these factors influenced his decision. If he had decided to place a Venetian into power and he won the siege, a large portion of the emperor's fighting force and a good portion of the citizenry of his city could easily launch a coup with a legitimate claim to the throne. By that same logic, the emperor would not have wanted to choose someone who was from a

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<sup>23</sup> Filip van Tricht, "The Latin Renovatio of Byzantium: The Empire of Constantinople," (1204-1228) (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 61-88.

<sup>24</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 362-263.

<sup>25</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 197

city-state that had friendly relations with Venice, as that only gave them one degree of separation from the initial concern. Recruiting Giustiniani would solve the emperor's problem, given the poor relations between Venice and Genoa.

The harsh conditions a city experienced under siege cultivated and brought factionalism to the surface, especially the rivalry between the Venetians and the Genoese. In Constantinople factions solidified leading up to the new conflict, Byzantine loyalists, neutral factions and Ottoman supporters all occupied the same city.<sup>26</sup> There were also religious, national, and ethnic factions that were anywhere between neutral and overtly hostile with each other.<sup>27</sup> Among such hostile groups were the Venetians and the Genoese, who despised each other, mostly because their city-states had been at war with each other on and off for centuries. Their opinions towards each other were not made better by the siege, as the civilians from either side took turns bitterly accusing each other of treason, faithlessness, and other serious accusations for the entirety of the battle.<sup>28</sup> We have evidence this behavior extended to the Venetian and Genoese mercenaries as well due to the written accounts of a Venetian minor noble named Nicolò Barbaro who was present during the siege.

In Barbaro's text, Giustiniani is referred to in the Venetian form of his name being Zuan Zustignan; which is possibly a reference to the branch of the Giustiniani family related to a much larger Venetian family of the same name.<sup>29</sup> The text described the lead-up to the siege with documentation of who was arriving to assist in battle and how many men and ships they brought with them, a detailed description of the siege itself, and what amounts to an after-action report where executions and hostage released by the Ottomans are listed. It served as one of the earliest and most accurate primary sources concerning the fall of Constantinople.

For the purposes of this paper, the biases of the Barbaro text are most important. It is unclear what in the record is Barbaro's eyewitness account and

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<sup>26</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 381, 386.

<sup>27</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 381.

<sup>28</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 464.

<sup>29</sup> Chisholm Hugh, "1911 Encyclopædia Britannica/Giustiniani," Wikisource, the free online library, November 28, 2016, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911\\_Encyclop%C3%A6dia\\_Britannica/Giustiniani](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Giustiniani), para 1.

what he heard from another person and elected to include after the fact.<sup>30</sup> The record was published after Barbaro's death making it almost impossible to know how long after the Fall of Constantinople, he was still adding details.<sup>31</sup> Although, due to his position as a minor Venetian noble, there are some things we can infer. The record's likely intended readership was Venetians. It is reasonable to assume that he would not have included details that would have made him look bad to other Venetians. Some of the embellishments are logical, such as how Barbaro elevated his fellow Venetian defenders and drew attention to their bravery.<sup>32</sup> This embellishment shows he tried to please a Venetian audience and likely would not have juxtaposed that by placing it alongside things a Venetian would find distasteful. But there are also portions of unveiled prejudice openly displayed in the record towards the Jewish people whom he labels as without empathy and the Greeks and Genoese who are depicted as cowards.<sup>33</sup> Barbaro went to great lengths to specifically characterize Giovanni Giustiniani as a coward with his retelling of the final day of the siege. In this retelling, he claims that Giustiniani lost his nerve and fled, spreading a false rumor that the Ottomans had breached the wall as he went to purposefully cause a rout.<sup>34</sup> This makes Barbaro's diary the only firsthand account that puts forward such a claim. As other firsthand sources all claim that Giustiniani routed due to an injury instead of cowardice, and none back up the claim that Giustiniani ran through the streets lying about the Ottomans to bruise the morale of the defenders.<sup>35</sup> There was also the fact that Giustiniani died from his wounds, a fact that rather solidly resolved the question about whether he was injured or not. While the claim is verifiably false and would have been provably false days after the siege, Barbaro elected to keep it in his record.

This indicates that the point of the record was to slander Giustiniani specifically. And as Giustiniani was from Genoa and Barbaro is from Venice, the reason for this slander is obvious. Its inclusion also indicates that this would not have been a controversial thing to claim to a Venetian audience despite it not

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<sup>30</sup> Nicolò Barbaro, "The Siege of Constantinople in 1453, According to Nicolò Barbaro," *De Re Militari*, August 23, 2016, <https://deremilitari.org/2016/08/the-siege-of-constantinople-in-1453-according-to-nicolo-barbaro/>, para 23.

<sup>31</sup> Maarten Halff, "Nicolò Barbaro and the Lists of Venetian Noblemen in His Account of the Siege of Constantinople," *Archivo Veneto*, 22, 2021, 5–28, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Halff, "Nicolò Barbaro and the Lists of Venetian Noblemen," 24.

<sup>33</sup> Barbaro "The Siege of Constantinople," para 12.

<sup>34</sup> Barbaro "The Siege of Constantinople," para 73.

<sup>35</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 526-531.

being true, possibly indicating that this was not just purely an invention of Barbaro but rather a more commonly spread story among the Venetian defenders of the city of Constantinople. What further supports this theory of this being a claim made by the broader community of Venetian mercenaries instead of one of them is that the claim was later indirectly referenced by a Greek member of Mehmet II's court who was appointed after the siege.<sup>36</sup> Such an action surely would not have been possible if only Barbaro had made this claim in an unpublished manuscript. And it is logical to assume that these accusations did not suddenly appear at the conclusion of the battle but rather are indicative of long form conflict between the two groups of mercenaries through the siege much in the same way we can see the civilians were engaging with each other. Given the context of how bitter this rivalry was, the emperor likely chose Giustiniani specifically to capitalize on this conflict in an effort to subvert Venetian power.

Constantine selected Giustiniani to lead the city's defense, a Genoese man unlikely to support the Venetians in a potential coup. Giustiniani was also less likely to grant Venetians access to higher roles under his command, which might have complicated things unnecessarily. There was also the chance that placing Giustiniani there instead of a Venetian would not make him a figurehead for a Venetian coup after the battle could surface and rally people to rebellion. Historically, Byzantine coups required a strong leader to form an army large enough to overthrow the emperor.<sup>37</sup> By blocking the chance for a Venetian to become that rallying figure, Emperor Constantine XI would have theoretically preemptively averted a coup.

If Giustiniani elected to launch his own coup, it would have worked in the emperor's favor. Most of the mercenaries in Constantinople were Venetians and without their support any coup would be much easier to contain and suppress. There is even the possibility that the Venetians might have assisted the emperor's loyalist forces in putting down a Genoese coup. The Genoese civilian sector was also much smaller and less influential than the Venetians which would inherently make any rebellion launched by Giustiniani less supported and easier to put down.<sup>38</sup>

The emperor may have also chosen Giustiniani because of the entry point to the Constantinopolitan tower in the city. The Constantinopolitan tower housed

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<sup>36</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 533.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Sumner, "Philippicus, Anastasius II and Theodosius III," *Roman and Byzantine Studies* 17 (1976): 287-91, 287-289.

<sup>38</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 381.



the mechanism that controlled whether the massive chain that stretched across the mouth of the Golden Horn was raised or lowered.<sup>39</sup> As previously discussed, it ensured that the Ottoman navy did not get into the Golden Horn during the siege, and it was largely this chain that prevented their entry. Getting close enough to cut through it or otherwise blast it apart would have meant getting in range of the defender's naval assets that would have surely attempted to sink whichever Ottoman ship tried it. It was also well fortified enough that attempting to ram a ship through it would have just resulted in the captain tearing his own ship in half horizontally. With it being such a useful deterrent against the Ottoman Navy and essential to the naval defender's strategy, any event where the chain was lowered could have proved disastrous for the city's defenders. And the Constantinopolitan tower was within Genoese territory that had declared itself as a neutral faction during the siege. This neutrality extended to the point where they were actively trading with both the defenders and the Ottomans.<sup>40</sup> And with tensions being as high as they were between the Venetians and the Genoese, the Venetians could not gain access to that section of the city. That meant the Constantinopolitan tower, and by extension the chain, was entirely under control of the neutral Genoese.

Genoese control over the tower was likely a point of anxiety for the Byzantine defense coordinators; a group indifferent to the outcome of the siege controlled an important tool of defense. The potential for that neutrality to flip to a pro-Ottoman attitude as the inconveniences of a siege dragged on remained hypothetical but increasingly concerning. And if that flip occurred the chances of betrayal from within with the Genoese lowering the chain was worth planning for if nothing else. With this genuine risk of all the preparations for the siege being for nothing due to an internal betrayal, it makes sense that steps would have been taken to prevent that. Their options for doing so would have been rather limited as attempting to move the Genoese into another part of the city would have been disastrous and likely caused the exact kind of swap of allegiance-swap they were trying to prevent. In addition, there were so few resources to be spared that bribery was off the table.<sup>41</sup> In the face of these limiting factors, the emperor may have chosen to elevate Giustiniani to lead the defense to placate the Genoese. Having one of their countrymen leading the effort logically could have inspired feelings of loyalty towards the success of the siege. Unfortunately for Emperor Constantine XI, however his effort to bring forth further support from the

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<sup>39</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 464.

<sup>40</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 381.

<sup>41</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 362-363.

Genoese was unsuccessful. While the chain was not lowered until the siege had already been lost and the remaining defenders were attempting to flee, the Genoese did not change their stance and would remain a neutral party until the end.<sup>42</sup>

When selecting a leader that would defend his city from both threats inside and out, Emperor Constantine XI picked Giovanni Giustiniani because of the superiority of mercenary commanders over native-born officers, his knowledge of naval warfare, his identity as a Genoan, and as an attempt to retain control over the city's vital defenses. And Giustiniani, on the run from legal issues concerning his acts of piracy and with a need to build up his fortune with no prospects remaining in Italy, accepted the position. Though he admirably defended the city, it finally fell on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1453, and the Ottoman Empire claimed its prize. And with the fall of Constantinople, so too died Giustiniani, the last protostrator of the Byzantine Empire.

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<sup>42</sup> Philippides, "The Siege and Fall of Constantinople," 464.

## Key's Case and English Identity in the Atlantic World, 1652-1667

Mason McClure

On July 21, 1656, the General Assembly of Virginia found Elizabeth Key, of mixed-race descent, a free woman, thereby upholding the decision of the Northumberland County Court and overturning the 1655 appellate decision the Council of State made. In the County Court, Key argued she was the daughter of a white Englishman, had been versed in the Christian faith, and had been held for nine years over her term of service. The combination of these theories won Elizabeth Key her freedom and defined her as "English."

Yet a mere eleven years later, the common law statutes which had freed Key were reversed. This began with Act XII of December 1662, which held that the freedom status of a child followed that of the mother, effectively curbing patrilineage as an avenue to freedom for mixed-race individuals. In September 1667, the General Assembly curtailed another of Key's legal theories which she used to win her freedom with the advent of Act III. From that moment."<sup>1</sup> These acts restricted who could claim two core tenets of English identity: inheritance by birthright and Protestantism.

Historians of vast early America and of the Atlantic World have long cited Elizabeth Key's case and the acts of 1662 and 1667 to illustrate the fluctuating status of Africans and Afro-Virginians. Yet the context of Key's case has not been properly situated in the turbulent legal landscape of the Atlantic World. For at least half a century, the seemingly sudden restriction and codification of slavery in Virginia has fascinated historians, but that fascination tends to stay within Virginia.<sup>2</sup> The constriction of English identity, however, had

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<sup>1</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*. (New York: R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823), 2: 170, 260.

<sup>2</sup> For seminal texts discussing Act XII of December, 1662, see: Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1968), 80-81.; Alden T. Vaughan gives an account of the 1667 act in: Alden T. Vaughan, "The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (1989): 331-32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4051810>.; For the most detailed accounts of Key's case framed in terms of direct causality with the subsequent acts of 1662 and 1667, see: Warren M. Billings, "The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *The William and Mary*

as much to do with the Restoration as it did with the sentiments of Virginia planters and lawmakers.

In this paper, I argue that the constriction of English identity in the seventeenth century Atlantic World regarding by Key's case and the subsequent. These factors, along with a turbulent political atmosphere amid Cromwellian England and the ensuing Restoration, eventually defined what it meant to be English in the seventeenth century Atlantic World. Following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the number of people who could claim an English identity, thus endowing them the legal rights afforded to English citizens in the Atlantic World, contracted. This constriction of identities has been observed before, but its exact parameters, and how these new identities were on display during the Key case and amidst the legal landscape of Restoration-era Virginia has been

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*Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1973): 467-474, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1918485>.; Warren M. Billings, "The Law of Servants and Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Virginia." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 1 (1991): 45–62.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4249198>.; For a succinct account of the ramifications of the 1662 act, see: Dominik Lasok, "Virginia Bastardy Laws: A Burdensome Heritage," *William & Mary Law Review* 9, no. 2 (1967), 416.

<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmlr/vol9/iss2/8>.; More recent scholarship dealing with the matters at hand include: Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 2012), 95.; For a detailed account of how English Common Law theory guided both Elizabeth Key's arguments and the courts of Virginia's subsequent ruling on them, see: Banks, Taunya Lovell (2008) "Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key's Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialized Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia," *Akron Law Review*: Vol. 41: Iss. 3, Article 5.; and: Holly Brewer, "Creating a Common Law of Slavery for England and its New World Empire," *Law and History Review*, 39, No. 4 (2021): 784, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248021000407>.; And while he may award the Key case an undue amount of influence with regards to the 1662 and 1667 acts, David Lyons' piece on wealth in Virginia is an important contribution to the field as of late: David Lyons, "WEALTH CONCENTRATION, RACIAL SUBORDINATION, AND POLITICAL CORRUPTION." *Nomos* 58 (2017): 226–34. In popular discourses, Key's case has seen attention in: Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (Bold Type Books: 2016), 41.; Although for a better account of the interplay between race, gender, and enslavement in the Atlantic World, one might consult: Misha Ewan, *The Virginia Venture American Colonization and English Society, 1580-1660* (The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022). And: Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Duke University Press, 2021).

overlooked.<sup>3</sup> This new English identity began to anticipate black enslavement and likewise barred a conversion to Christianity as a liberation from slavery. Key's case demonstrates both the confused nature of a new English identity, and the need for it as the emerging planter class of Virginia saw it.

The new definition of "English" was restrictive: an English man or woman could not be a "negro, mulatto, or Indian, Jew, Moor, Mahometan, or other infidel," especially after the Restoration.<sup>4</sup> The codification of "English" came at a time when vast early American slavery began its own codification. This more concrete definition barred people in ambiguous social positions such as Elizabeth Key from claiming equal rights under English and Virginian law a mere eleven years after she had used such laws to win her freedom.

Discussions of the seventeenth-century Atlantic World frequently revolve around a particular subset of what was an interacting and fluid emergence of a modern globalized world. Any mention of enslaved people arriving in Virginia is implicitly a discussion of European navigation acts, multinational privateering marques, global food supply chains, and West African political struggles amidst cultural and economic imperialism. Histories which describe Virginia's slave codes of the 1660s without putting them into conversation with the Restoration, efforts to diversify Virginia's agricultural exports, or broader lawmaking in the Caribbean overlook swaths of historical evidence that describe the scope of the Atlantic World as it would have been understood contemporaneously. Classic scholarship, perhaps ironically, has ample examples of encyclopedic summations of such a world. Winthrop Jordan's benchmark 1968 history *White Over Black* successfully describes how Elizabethan attitudes about Africans in England were not only transplanted to Virginia but changed along with the colonists who brought them there. Jordan argues these attitudes began as a youthful fascination with African customs spearheaded by travel accounts coming from the African continent itself.<sup>5</sup> With regards to classic scholarship concerning the economics of Atlantic World

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<sup>3</sup> Holly Brewer's interactive website "Slavery Law Power" provides useful context regarding how the restoration of Charles II in 1660 might have impacted the subsequent slavery laws in the 1660s. Her observations of how a "hereditary racial status" emerged after in Virginia after the Restoration greatly informed this paper.: Holly Brewer, "Restoration Settlements," Slavery Law and Power, University of Maryland, <https://slaverylawpower.org/chapters/restoration-settlements/>.

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly. "An act concerning Servants and Slaves" (1705). (2020, December 07). In Encyclopedia Virginia. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/primary-documents/an-act-concerning-servants-and-slaves-1705>.

<sup>5</sup> Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*, 22.

enslavement, historian Richard Dunn's work is singular in its contributions in laying the groundwork for historians who consider themselves scholars of vast early America. And while scholars have recently criticized his work for under-representing the prominent role which Christianity played in governing English island colonies, Richard Dunn's *Sugar and Slaves* still provides a foundational history of the economic interactions of the Atlantic World.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the larger Atlantic World Protestant Christianity initially determined a person's status. Put succinctly by historian Katharine Gerbner in reference to Barbados, "The planter elite believed that their status as Protestants was inseparable from their identity as free Englishmen."<sup>7</sup> The same conclusion applies to seventeenth-century as well. The problem of Christian conversion as an avenue towards manumission faced the planters of Barbados six years before their Virginian counterparts, in turn providing legal precedent and a useful framework for Virginia lawmakers.

Elizabeth Key's case brought these issues to the fore for Virginia's lawmakers amidst a turbulent transatlantic sociopolitical environment. By Elizabeth's account, she was the daughter of a white Englishman, Thomas Key, who by age twenty-five had served ten years over her indenture. By all accounts, she was a well-versed Christian and gave a trustworthy account of her faith. The elder Key fathered Elizabeth out of wedlock, and with a "Negro woman," no less, rendering Elizabeth a "Molletto."<sup>8</sup> Thomas Key was fined for this illegitimate union, a tame punishment compared to men like Hugh Davis', who had been publicly whipped and shamed for the crime of "fornication."<sup>9</sup> Because Elizabeth was born illegitimately, she did not automatically inherit her father's status. English common law held that "The husband and wife are one person in law" and

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1972).; For such a criticism of Dunn's work, see: Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Interracial Sexual Relations and Their Consequences: The Case of Elizabeth Key, 1655-1656," in *Major Problems in African-American History, Volume I, From Slavery to Freedom, 1619-1877*, eds. Thomas C. Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 86.

<sup>9</sup> H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676*, (The Colonial Press, Everett Waddey Co. 1924), 479.

“therefore by the Common law of England the issue is free.”<sup>10</sup> These circumstances, however, did not apply to Elizabeth Key. She was born to a free Englishman and a woman bound by servitude, which presumably lent her circumstances to English common law which dictated what was to become of the children of “niefs and villeins.”<sup>11</sup>

At the time of Elizabeth’s birth, no clear laws existed in Virginia governing the status of the illegitimate children of servants. English common law, therefore, guided the thinking of many historians and legal theorists attempting to untangle the legal quagmires of seventeenth-century Virginia.<sup>12</sup> According to Lord Edward Coke’s account of common law statutes, “Some hold that the bastard of a nief shall be a villain” but, “[the] issue by the common... law is a bastard, and consequently, *quasi nullius filius*.”<sup>13</sup> By this theory, Elizabeth Key had no inheritable rights under English common law. Even still, the court considered Elizabeth’s patrilineage to be an important factor when they declared that “by the Comon Law the Child of a Woman slave begott by a freeman ought to bee free.”<sup>14</sup> This might be because the elder Key seems to have accepted Elizabeth as his daughter; Elizabeth was not admitted into the care of the parish, as was customary for children in Virginia to whom *nullius filius* status applied.<sup>15</sup> Because Thomas Key was not a servant and had the means to do so, he was required to care for Elizabeth.<sup>16</sup> Having a white English father was not,

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<sup>10</sup> *Systematic Arrangement of Lord Coke’s First Institute of the Laws of England* (Philadelphia Alexander Towar, 1836), 323.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed account of how English Common Law theory guided both Elizabeth Key’s arguments and the courts of Virginia’s subsequent ruling on them, see: Banks, Taunya Lovell (2008) “Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key’s Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialized Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia,” *Akron Law Review*: Vol. 41: Iss. 3, Article 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Systematic Arrangement of Lord Coke’s First Institute of the Laws of England*, 324.

<sup>14</sup> James Gaylord, “A Report of a Comittee from an Assembly Concerning the freedome of Elizabeth Key,” in *Major Problems in African-American History, Volume I, From Slavery to Freedom, 1619-1877*, eds. Thomas C. Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 87.

<sup>15</sup> Dominik Lasok, *Virginia Bastardy Laws: A Burdensome Heritage*, 9 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 402 (1967), 406-7.

<sup>16</sup> William Waller Hening, *The statutes at large; being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619. Published pursuant to an act of the General assembly of Virginia, passed on the fifth day of February one*

however, Key's only claim to freedom. This apparent discrepancy in the common law ruled in Elizabeth's favor by the Northumberland County Court may have been the grounds by which the executors of the John Mottrom estate appealed.

The constriction of English identity complicated Key's case because of Thomas Key's seemingly sudden death in 1636. She was subsequently indentured to a wealthy member of the Virginia Council, Col. Humphrey Higginson, for a term of nine years. After which, Key was to be a free woman, aged fifteen. Prior to Thomas Key's death, Higginson was named Elizabeth's godfather, a title which would have bound him to caring for Key as if she were his own daughter. Creating a godfather-goddaughter relationship for Elizabeth was therefore Thomas Key's efforts<sup>17</sup> to wed her to the community network of Virginia. As part of the terms of Key's indenture, if Higginson were to return to England at any point, she was to come with him. Likely sometime after 1654 when he was granted 2000 acres of land.<sup>18</sup> Instead of taking Elizabeth with him to England, however, Higginson transferred Key's indenture to Col. John Mottram. This was not unusual, as it was common for servants and slaves to have more than one master for a litany of reasons if the terms of service were respected. In an apparent disregard for the terms agreed to with the senior Key, however, either Higginson himself or Higginson by virtue of Elizabeth's transfer to John held her in bondage for twice the period of her specified indenture.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Key arranged for Elizabeth to be freed at age fifteen. Instead, her godfather transferred her indenture when she was to be freed to a man whom he had likely met while serving in the legislative body of Virginia.<sup>20</sup>

Col. John seems to have not held Elizabeth in the high~~005700B~~ While the exact date of Col. John, the Virginia County records show that he was granted

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*thousand eight hundred and eight* (Printed by and for Samuel Pleasants, junior, printer to the commonwealth, 1809), 165.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 2012), 95.

<sup>18</sup> William Armstrong Crozier, *Virginia County Records* (Genealogical Pub. Co., 1905), 73.

<sup>19</sup> Gaylord, "A Report of a Committee from an Assembly Concerning the freedome of Elizabeth Key," 87.

<sup>20</sup> This possibility is raised by Taunya Lovell Banks in: Banks, Taunya Lovell (2008) "Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key's Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialized Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia," *Akron Law Review*: Vol. 41: Iss. 3, Article 5., 823. Available at: <http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/akronlawreview/vol41/iss3/5>.



1000 acres of land in Northumberland County in 1653, among the first settlers to expand into this territory.<sup>[08]</sup> John Mottram ambitiously sought to settle territory essentially uninhabited by the English, a conquest for which he would require ample labor.<sup>[08]</sup> If we accept that Mottram arrived in Northumberland County in 1653 and died in 1655, then Elizabeth Key's service to Col. John Mottram was rather brief, and it was likely her. Mottram was likely aware since their terms in the colonial legislature overlapped."<sup>21</sup>

Key's challenge for English identity began when she sued the overseers of John Mottram's estate following his death in 1655. They held that she was a part of the estate and should remain in bondage. It was agreed that the witness testimonies provided at the Northumberland County Court did indeed certify that Thomas Key was Elizabeth's father. An eighty-year-old woman named Elizabeth Newman articulated the strongest bit of evidence to support this claim: Thomas Key had been fined for impregnating a black servant. Newman was not the only witness to affirm that Elizabeth was the daughter of Thomas Key. Mr. Nicholas Jumew, a man "aged 53 yeares or thereabouts" recollected that he had "heard a flying report at Yorke that Elizabeth a Negro Servant to the Estate of Col. John Mottram deceased was the Childe of Mr. Kaye." According to Jumew, Thomas Key denied that Elizabeth was his daughter. He contended that, "a Turke of Capt. Mathewes was Father to the Girle," and not himself.<sup>22</sup> If Jumew's testimony is to be believed, then Thomas Key's denial is informative on two conflicting fronts. First, the fact that he did so after being fined for impregnating Elizabeth's mother implies an effort to absolve himself of any attachment to his daughter. However, Thomas Key's purported denial of fathering Elizabeth does not align with his efforts to tie Elizabeth to the colony by arranging for Humphrey Higginson, a wealthy planter, to be her godfather and to "use her as well as if shee were his own Child."<sup>23</sup> Jumew's was the only testimony to make this claim, and it therefore should be set aside in determining Thomas Key's attachments to his daughter.

The testimonies at Key's appeal largely supported her claims to English identity, as it was understood at this time. While the written arrangement between Humphrey Higginson and Thomas Key designating Higginson as Elizabeth's godfather has been lost, it appears to have been present at Key's appeal. The

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<sup>21</sup> Taunya Lovell Banks, *Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key's Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialized Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia*, 823.

<sup>22</sup> "Interracial Sexual Relations and Their Consequences: The Case of Elizabeth Key, 1655-1656," 86.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

General Assembly's report noted that Higginson failed to uphold the terms he agreed to with Thomas Key regarding Elizabeth's indenture. The mode by which the terms of Key's indenture to Higginson are presented suggests a consensus of their validity not provided by witness testimony alone. By the terms of Elizabeth Key's indenture, Higginson was required to "use [Elizabeth] more Respectfully then a Comon servant or slave" and if he "had gone for England within nine yeares hee was bound to carry her with him and pay her passage and not to dispose of her to any other."<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth's indenture to Higginson should have concluded in 1645, yet he transferred her indenture to John Mottrom perhaps as late as 1654. This was a clear violation not only of Key's indenture, but of the customs of Virginia and English common law regarding the treatment of indentured servants.<sup>25</sup> Higginson's breach of his agreement with Thomas Key seems to be the deciding factor in her freedom, not who her father had been. The paternity issue may have been important, but not a salient enough condition to free her. Elizabeth found her freedom in her illegal sale to Col. John Mottrom as "shee hath served longer than Shee ought to have done."<sup>26</sup>

Humphrey Higginson's ill treatment of Elizabeth is that he was less than willing to treat her as his own daughter as Thomas Key had requested. This ill treatment indicates that she was increasingly excluded from English identity. Higginson was "among the wealthiest and most influential settlers in the colony during the 1640s," and a member of the governor's council, a position typically only held by wealthy men who could don a royal connection.<sup>27</sup> There are no surviving records of Elizabeth's time or experiences while indentured to Higginson, but what Higginson did not do indicates that he was willing gatekeep admittance to the world of English identity her father seems to have organized for her to enter. Higginson did not respect Key's terms of indenture which stipulated that she remain with him for nine years. Comparatively few accounts exist of white English servants held over their allotted time of service. Those who were or were used for a purpose other than that which they agreed to tended to

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<sup>24</sup> Gaylord, "A Report of a Committee from an Assembly Concerning the freedom of Elizabeth Key," 87.

<sup>25</sup> In the March session of 1642/3, the Virginia Assembly dictated that "for prevention of future controversies of the like nature, that such servants as shall be imported haveing no in lentre or covenants either men or women if they be above twenty year old to serve fowre year, if they shall be above twelve and vnder twenty to serve five years, And if under twelve to serve seaven years."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>27</sup> Taunya Lovell Banks, *Dangerous Woman: Elizabeth Key's Freedom Suit - Subjecthood and Racialized Identity in Seventeenth Century Colonial Virginia*, 22.

successfully sue for their freedom.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Higginson did not take Elizabeth with him to England. This barred her from joining English society, and thus barred her from adopting an English identity, in the most literal sense. Had Elizabeth gone with Higginson to England, she could have eventually been freed and maintained her relationship with him as her godfather, therefore linking them together both legally and socially.

Elizabeth's family was far from accepting of her as a legitimate member, let alone as English. John Key, a white son of Thomas Key's, referred to Elizabeth with derision as "Black bess" in court.<sup>29</sup> A woman identified as Mrs. Speke rebuked John Key when she said, "Sirra you must call her Sister for shee is your Sister," to which the younger Key obliged.<sup>30</sup> John Key's insult brings to the fore an important aspect of the complicated nature of Elizabeth's relationship with her father. John seems to have rejected Elizabeth as his sister because she did not fit the mold of an English woman. Whether the deciding factor in his rejection was Elizabeth's skin color, her servant status, the fact they did not share a mother, or a combination of these factors is unclear. Mrs. Speke's defense of Elizabeth demonstrates that at least some colonists did see Elizabeth, and presumably others in similar situations, as English enough. Thus, the confusion regarding identity and race in Virginia, and the Atlantic World writ large, diffused into all strata of early American society.

Key's final claim to English identity was her Christian status. While only codified into law in some jurisdictions, it was at the very least a long-standing legal practice in the Anglophone world that a Christian was prohibited from enslaving another Christian.<sup>31</sup> The nuances of Elizabeth Key's case alone demonstrate that this idea was malleable in practice. A Christian identity sometimes had to be proven. Elizabeth's claim that she bore Christian status was an effort to assert that she ought to be considered English, as to be a non-Christian was to not be an English subject.<sup>32</sup> How heavily the fact that Elizabeth

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<sup>28</sup> McIlwaine, *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622–1632, 1670–1676*, 465.

<sup>29</sup> "Interracial Sexual Relations and Their Consequences: The Case of Elizabeth Key, 1655-1656," 86.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Holly Brewer, "Creating a Common Law of Slavery for England and its New World Empire," *Law and History Review*, 39, No. 4 (2021): 784, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248021000407>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

could “give a very good account of her fayth” or “hath bin long since Christened” mattered relative to her other legal theories is not entirely clear, although it seems to have been a greater factor in Key’s appeal than in the County Court’s decision. The County Court was primarily concerned with proving who Key’s father had been, implying that whether she was Christian or not was contingent upon this fact.<sup>33</sup>

The successful combination of Key’s legal theories which resulted in her eventual freedom were soon made inaccessible to others who were born to mothers either in servitude or those who wished to convert to Protestantism. Elizabeth’s legal arguments imply a deep knowledge on her behalf of the complicated interplay between race, slavery, and Protestantism in parliamentary Virginia, and how relevant these factors were in both English custom and common law. Key found her freedom because she successfully claimed an English identity -- her father was a white Englishman who had baptized her. And she had connections to English society by her godfather, even if he did not value such a connection. To assert that a case like hers could only have occurred during Virginia’s period of relative self-governance between 1652 and 1660 would be to state the obvious. However, the acts passed after the Restoration of Charles II reflect a different set of priorities than that of parliamentary Virginia.

Scholars differ on the primacy of Elizabeth Key’s legal theories and why exactly the Virginia Assembly might have passed the 1662 and 1667 acts when they did. Historian Warren M. Billings has produced perhaps the most impressive and expansive corpus of work on seventeenth-century Virginia over the last fifty years. Billings often commends William Berkeley for his efforts to expand the Virginian economy as it related to the tobacco trade and his subsequent opposition to the Navigation Act of 1651, but he also studied the case of Elizabeth Key.<sup>34</sup> Of the 1662 law, Billings argues that “statute was an attempt to formulate a practical method of defining the status of mulattoes, but the law also

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<sup>33</sup> Gaylord, “A Report of a Committee from an Assembly Concerning the freedome of Elizabeth Key,” 87.

<sup>34</sup> Warren M. Billings, “Sir William Berkeley and the Diversification of the Virginia Economy,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (1996): 433-454, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4249602>.

carried a deeper intent: it sought to keep the races separate.”<sup>35</sup> Billings reasoned correctly that the law sought to foster a division between races once he puts this in conversation with the portion of the 1662 law which doubled the fines upon whites who had intercourse with blacks. Billings overemphasizes, however, the convictions against interracial unions held by the General Assembly. When one considers these relative to the Assembly’s disdain for essentially any union which occurred out of wedlock, it becomes clear that the lawmakers of Virginia found any such union to be abhorrent, regardless of the skin color of the participants.<sup>36</sup>

Settlers and lawmakers alike both felt and expressed strong anti-African sentiments, as they were prominent throughout the seventeenth century. Yet the myriad social and legal infelicities legislated upon prior to the formal codification of slavery in Virginia pertained to African and English people alike. The first decade after the return of the monarchy accelerated both the codification of slavery relative to parliamentary rule and further restricted what were viewed as immoral or shameful activities, namely illicit sexual unions, in Virginia.

After the restoration of Charles II, the English government implemented a spate of acts constricting English identity. In the 1660s, the General Assembly was deeply concerned with what they viewed as moral degeneration at home. While acts which directly targeted Africans are the most germane to this study, the tide of restrictions passed governing unions and marriages were aimed at all illicit unions. The upkeep of a proper, Christian family was integral to maintaining an English identity under the monarchy both prior to the English Civil War and after the Restoration. And, fiscally, the 1662 act seems to have been a response to an overburdening of the parish regarding childcare and the concerns of planters over lost labor due to pregnancy. In March of 1661/2, the General Assembly passed an act “Against secrett marriage” which forbade ministers from legitimizing “the contract of marriage between any servants

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<sup>35</sup> Warren M. Billings, “The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1973): 467-474, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1918485>.

<sup>36</sup> For cases documenting the punishments of white servants who engaged in illicit sexual activities like “whoredom,” “Fornication,” and becoming “great with child” outside of marriage, see: McIlwaine, *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1622–1632, 1670–1676*, 117, 155, 475.

unless he <sup>37</sup> from both their masters a certificate that it is done with their consent.”<sup>38</sup> During what was perhaps the same session, the Assembly passed an act “Against ffornication,” where offenders “upon prooffe thereof by confession or evidence shall pay each... five hundred pounds of tobacco fine... to the use of the parish or parishes they dwell in.” Further, should the crime result in a female servant “haveing a bastard,” she “shall serve two <sup>38</sup> after her time by indenture is expired or pay two thousand pounds of tobacco to her master” to make up for her lost labor.<sup>39</sup>

The 1662 act which declared that “Negro womens children to serve according to the condition of the mother” had far deeper implications than Billings’ argument implies.<sup>40</sup> In writing that the two laws in question, those of 1662 and 1667, “were deliberately calculated to undercut the meager rights of black laborers by denying them access to the courts,” Billings does not address the larger refining of English identity these acts work to restrict.<sup>41</sup> Birthright, and the prospects of inheritance intrinsic to it, was seen as an institution to protect and conserve after the Restoration, not as one that could be penetrated by those of mixed ancestry such as Elizabeth Key. The inactions of Humphrey Higginson in bringing her to England and treating her as his own reveal as much. We cannot know for certain why Higginson did not accept Key as his own, but it seems plausible that he would have respected his arrangement with the elder Key should he have godfathered over someone with a less ambiguous English identity. To solidify such an identity, Charles Stuart’s return to the monarchy in 1660 saw English institutions which had gone during Virginia’s eight years of

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<sup>37</sup> William Walter Hening, *The statutes at large; being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619. Published pursuant to an act of the General assembly of Virginia, passed on the fifth day of February one thousand eight hundred and eight* (Printed by and for Samuel Pleasants, junior, printer to the commonwealth, 1809), 114.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Warren M. Billings, “The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” 473.

parliamentarian influence restored. To the delight of ministers, planters, and Governor William Berkeley alike, Charles II restored the Church of England.<sup>42</sup>

Parliamentary rule in Virginia, which essentially amounted to eight years of self-governance, upset what had been a transplanted English identity by making it far more permeable. Prior to the Restoration, those born into servitude in the colony could escape such conditions and amass considerable property, effectively rising from the servant to planter class.<sup>43</sup> In the 1660s, the planter class of Virginia, who either had connections to or were members of the General Assembly, started to resist this social mobility. Charles II's restoration curbed social mobility amongst those bearing African traits. It appears the 1662 and 1667 acts thus worked in concert to define English identity in Virginia. Those born into bondage were held in such a condition for life, and those seeking to claim an English identity through baptism were denied. Despite these denials, laws still encouraged enslavers to evangelize to the enslaved. This preserved the economic bottlenecking planter class's Christian identity without allowing Africans to enter it. These acts therefore concentrated both wealth and English identity into the hands of a select few. In essence, only the children of women married to white Englishmen could inherit wealth and an English status, or identity, in Virginia.

There exists a blatant policy shift with regards to English identity in Virginia under parliamentarian influence and Virginia after the Restoration of 1660. Compared to before or after the period of 1652 to 1660, few laws were passed curtailing the rights of servants, Africans, or mixed-race individuals. Parliamentarian era Virginia statutes, especially those from 1654 through 1656, were more concerned with quelling the looming threat seemingly posed by Indians and diversifying Virginia's agricultural economy rather than redefining

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<sup>42</sup> Fincham, Kenneth and Taylor, Stephen. "9. The Restoration of the Church of England, 1660–1662: Ordination, Re-ordination and Conformity" In *The Nature of the English Revolution Revisited: Essays in Honour of John Morrill* edited by Stephen C Taylor, Grant Tapsell, Blair Worden, Ethan H. Shagan, Grant Tapsell, J.C. Davis, John D. Walter, John Spurr, Kenneth Fincham, Philip Baker, Rachel Foxley, Stephen C Taylor, Tim Harris and Tim Wales, 197-232. Boydell and Brewer: Boydell and Brewer, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782041276-012>.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Goldsmith, "Anthony Johnson, A Former Slave, Claims His Slave Property, 1655," in *Major Problems in African-American History, Volume I, From Slavery to Freedom, 1619-1877*, eds. Thomas C. Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 86.

servitude. Legislation of this variety implicitly dealt with servitude, but they lacked the restrictive nature of those passed after 1660. Solving what might be labeled by the General Assembly as the “Indian problem” required an “Act Concerning Imploying Indians with Guns,” which dictated that “noe person shall dare to imploy Indian servants with gunns” unless there was a pertinent reason authorized by the Governor.<sup>44</sup>

Virginia’s period of self-governance witnessed comparatively few acts which restricted English identity when compared to the years following Charles II’s restoration. Instead, Parliamentary Virginia issued deregulatory statutes which denounced the “divers inconveniences are like to ensue by reason of the act for marketts and regulateing of trade” and held that merchants “shall be lookt vpon as benefactors to the publique,” by repealing a 1649 act.<sup>45</sup> Some deregulations passed under Charles I were upheld while others were upended. Those which favored free trade and allowed for trade with the Dutch were upheld, and more of this kind were passed.<sup>46</sup> Efforts to diversify Virginian agricultural exports resulted at least in part in a 1656 mandate “Concerning Planting of Mulberry Trees.” Falling tobacco prices forced Virginia’s assembly and planters to look for a new cash crop. They decided that “silke will be the most profitable comoditie for the countrey” if enough mulberry trees, ten per planter by their lights, were to be planted by December of 1658.<sup>47</sup>

Still, Parliamentary Virginia was far from a post-racial utopia. Among the only acts passed under parliamentary influence in Virginia which addressed servants came in March of 1657/8 and dictated that first time runaways “shall be liable to make satisfaction... at the end of their times by indenture... [by serving] double the time of service so neglected.” Those who offended a second time were to be branded with the letter “R” on their shoulders and serve “double their time of service neglected... and in some cases more if the court shall think fitt.”<sup>48</sup> In the same session of the Assembly, it was decided “How long Servants without Indentures shall Serve” upon entry into the colony without a specified term.

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<sup>44</sup> William Waller Hening, *The statutes at large; being a collection of all the laws of Virginia, from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619. Published pursuant to an act of the General assembly of Virginia, passed on the fifth day of February one thousand eight hundred and eight* (Bartow, 1823), 391.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 397.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 463; *Ibid*, 469.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 420.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 440.



Neither act mentions or distinguishes different circumstances for servants contingent upon race or ancestry. If the 1662 and 1667 acts were indeed reactions to Key's case and others like it, then the concerns these acts addressed belong squarely on the shoulders of Virginia's governance under Charles II. Conserving English identity and distinguishing between those who could and could not claim it was a distinctively monarchical concern.

Punishments for runaway servants differed in at least one case under Charles II's father. A man identified as "a negro named John Punch" was sentenced to serve *durante vita* after running away, whereas his co-conspirators' punishments were far more in line with the 1657/8 act -- the dutchman and "Scotchman" had to serve an additional year.<sup>49</sup> Why Punch served for the rest of his life is the subject of a historiographical debate which extends beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that Virginia under Cromwell blurred racial and ethnic lines regarding punishing runaway servants. Further, the so-called "runaway problem" never subsided and was a concern for any regime in Virginia. Between 1661 and 1670, no less than ten acts addressing runaways passed the assembly.<sup>50</sup> The differences between these acts, aside from who passed them, is how they were practiced. Those under the monarchy, both of Charles I and II, tended to curtail the rights of Africans specifically, while those from 1652 to 1660 did not. The former seems to have upheld the status quo prior to the English Civil War.<sup>51</sup> Under Cromwell, Virginians were to "have and Enjoy such freedom and Priviledges as belong to the free born people of England" so long as they acknowledged Cromwell as Lord Protector. While she still had to argue her way towards it, this English identity was attainable for people like Elizabeth Key who had valid connections to English society. The curtailing and

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<sup>49</sup> McIlwaine, *Minutes of the Council and General court of colonial Virginia, 1622–1632, 1670–1676*, 466.

<sup>50</sup> Winthrop Jordan, 107.

<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting that my argument is in no way endorsing the idea that Virginia under parliamentary influence was a post-racial utopia. After all, Elizabeth Key was held to be a slave after the executors of John Mottrom's estate appealed the Northumberland County Court's decision, and I am on record saying that she seems to have been freed primarily because she could compile a trifecta of winning legal theories. These raised just enough ambiguity in her case that the General Court had no choice but to uphold the County Court's decision. All this is to say that if Key had been seen as white, it is unlikely she would have had to endure these legal battles -- race, or at least a seventeenth century understanding of it, was still a factor in parliamentary Virginia. An English identity as gauged by the monarchy, however, was not.

refining of rights and privileges resumed after the Restoration in 1660, marring Restoration era Virginia with a uniquely restrictive brand of law that moved closer to that which was present in the British Caribbean.

In December 1662, the General Assembly passed the most noteworthy restriction of English identity. Act XII held that “Negro womens children [are] to serve according to the condition of the mother.”<sup>52</sup> The act was a reversal of the English common law doctrine, *partus sequitur partem*, which held that the status of the father would be inherited by his offspring. Fathers in Virginia no longer had to acknowledge their bastards as Kings in England continued to, as was the case with Charles II and the Duke of Monmouth. What was to become of “Children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or ffree” had apparently been a matter of controversy in Virginia, implied by the preface “Whereas some doubts have arisen.”<sup>53</sup> It is likely that those with the most immediate connections to the Assembly, the planter class of Virginia, would voice these doubts. Whereas on the Caribbean plantations and in the later Antebellum period the sexual assault of enslaved women amounted to an open secret amongst planters and citizens, the 1662 act disincentivized it by imposing greater fines upon those who had intercourse with women bearing African ancestry.

To assert that Elizabeth Key’s case was the deciding factor in the 1662 act seems presumptuous simply because it is unlikely that the full breadth of freedom suits has survived. It is more likely that there were many freedom suits like Key’s, like Fernando’s in 1667, which prompted planters to petition for a reversal of the common law. The 1662 act only addressed one factor in Key’s claims to an English identity: her English father. Curbing another, perhaps more important qualification was done five years later. The 1667 “act declaring that baptism of slaves doth not exempt them from bondage,” also addressed some looming questions on the minds of planters.<sup>54</sup> These concerns seem to stem from a hesitation to evangelize to one’s enslaved workforce because of the prospect that this might manumit them. Undoubtedly the most famous case of an enslaved person suing for their freedom solely on account of their ostensibly Christian faith is that of Fernando’s in August of 1667.<sup>55</sup> And while the proximity of

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<sup>52</sup> Hening, *The Statutes at large*, 170.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Hening, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Billings, “The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” 468.

Fernando's case to the September 1667 act implied direct causality, the same assumption regarding the number of cases unknown to us applies equally well here as it does to the 1662 act.

As the historical record currently exists, Fernando's case is a last gasp for mixed-race individuals seeking English identity in the 1660s. Fernando, as he is identified in the Norfolk County Order book, brought his case before the lower Norfolk County court a mere month before his possible avenue towards freedom was closed.<sup>56</sup> Before the court, he claimed that he had served several years prior in England, where he had been baptized. Fernando argued that he was therefore entitled to the same rights as an Englishman and likewise serve the same amount of time as one. The court felt differently and rejected his claims, likely because the documentation of his conversion had been authored "in Portugell or some other language which the Court could not understand."<sup>57</sup> Whether Fernando's papers were written in Portuguese or Spanish, the court likely surmised that he was Catholic, which would have endeared him to zero favors from the Protestant members of the General Assembly. These facets of Fernando's self were contrary to the English identity being fostered in the colony, and so he, unlike Key, was barred from claiming it.

The Atlantic World of the seventeenth century was a melting pot of fluctuating and sometimes contradicting laws, statutes and religious doctrine. Parliamentary Virginia might have enjoyed approximately eight years of relative self-governance after their submission to parliamentary rule in 1652 and before the Restoration in 1660, but it was never freed from transatlantic influence during that period. For people in similar legal situations as Elizabeth Key, the ambiguous and amorphous nature of something like English identity could be exploited. Her case remains the classic example of the changing atmosphere of race, slavery, Christianity and who was worthy of manumission by successfully claiming an English identity. While there is no direct order from England to Virginia instructing its lawmakers to purposefully restrict the rights of Africans and Afro-Virginians to preserve English identity and aristocracy in the Atlantic World, the effects of the acts passed by the General Assembly after the Restoration of Charles II did just that.

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<sup>56</sup> Randolph M. McLaughlin, *The Birth of a Nation: A Study of Slavery in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, 16 Hastings Race & Poverty L.J. 1 (2019). Available at: [https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings\\_race\\_poverty\\_law\\_journal/vol16/iss1/2](https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_race_poverty_law_journal/vol16/iss1/2).

<sup>57</sup> Billings, "The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," 468.

## Boundless Love: Edward Carpenter and the Normalization of Same-Sex Love

Rileigh Van Duyne

In most historical studies, the LGBTQ+ community is scarcely represented, and studies on the British Empire in the nineteenth century are no exception. The late nineteenth century is important to LGBTQ+ history, as many historians attribute the earliest steps of LGBTQ+ activism in Europe to this period. In recent decades, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights have become less taboo and more common, especially in regions such as Western Europe, North America, and South America. As of March of 2025, 38 countries have legalized marriage equality. In January 2025, both Liechtenstein and Thailand legalized same-sex marriage.<sup>1</sup> The fight for LGBTQ+ rights and societal acceptance, however, is not a new cause. In the late nineteenth century, activists including Edward Carpenter engaged in pioneering work in support of gay rights. Carpenter's work in particular exposes how gay rights activists of this time navigated the social and legal restrictions that plagued same-sex relationships in Victorian England and the British Empire. More importantly, Carpenter's story reveals how nuanced and hypocritical early gay rights activism could be, showing that these individuals deserve to be criticized despite the progress they made.

As a homosexual man in the late nineteenth century, Edward Carpenter navigated numerous barriers to sexual freedom and intimacy. Laws prohibiting "sodomy" and "buggery" made it difficult to engage in same-sex relationships without facing prosecution. As a result, many homosexual men chose to explore the British empire in search of acceptance and sexual freedom. This "migration" was not confined to England and can also be observed in other European nations with empires, such as Germany and the Netherlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Carpenter, like other educated and upper-class homosexual men at the time, also ventured to the edges of empire, including India and Sri Lanka, which is historically known as Ceylon. His journey east helped to shape his views on empire and sexuality, which inspired multiple written works including *From Adams Peak to Elephanta*, *Intermediate Sex: A*

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<sup>1</sup> "Marriage Equality Around the World," Human Rights Campaign, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>.

<sup>2</sup> Laurie Marhoefer, *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 49.

*Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, and *Homogenic Love, and its Place in a Free Society*. These works echo Carpenter's perception of the relationships between empire, orientalism, sexuality, and masculinity, all of which are important themes because they show how the British portrayed and restricted same-sex relationships. These factors impacted the lives of homosexual men and made it more difficult to live within an empire determined to restrict their sexual freedoms.

In some of his popular works, Carpenter framed his views as an anti-imperialist. His journey and experiences in Southern Asia influenced many of his beliefs surrounding the empire. Speaking out against empire was common, and many contemporaries shared similar sentiments. Yet Carpenter's identity as a gay man complicates his anti-imperialist sentiments. While he opposed the oppressive nature of the British Empire, he depended on certain aspects of it to develop his ideas regarding sexuality. Earlier works romanticized Southern India as a haven for sexual freedom and intimacy, which inspired Carpenter's journey to the region.<sup>3</sup> This journey was only possible because of Carpenter's privileged socioeconomic class in the empire and the region's colonized status. Carpenter's sexual identity mixed with his imperial travels gave him a unique perspective on the oppressive nature of the British Empire.

Still, Carpenter participated in British imperialism despite his disdain for the empire and its control of certain aspects of British life, including his own sexuality. European empires of the past inspired Carpenter's calls for sexual freedom and the normalization of same-sex love. He drew on researchers who relied on empires as examples that they used to prove that homosexuality was common around the world. At the same time, restrictions that criminalized his sexuality within England drove Edward Carpenter to view the empire differently and ultimately propelled him to fight against it through social change and gay rights activism.

In recent decades, historians have used the story of Carpenter to debate social and cultural issues in nineteenth-century European history. Of the numerous discussions, Orientalism and the impact that legal restrictions had on same-sex relationships are among the most popular topics. During his journey to South Asia in 1890, Carpenter engaged with foreign aspects of the empire, and

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<sup>3</sup> Parminder Kaur Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism: Edward Carpenter's Journey to the East," in *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, ed. Tony Brown (London: Routledge, 1990), 159.

modern scholars have criticized the work he produced.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, Carpenter discussed restrictions on same-sex love in works such as *Homogenic Love*, which has gained attention from historians researching how same-sex relationships existed at the turn of the century.

In Parminder Kaur Bakshi's "Homosexuality and Orientalism: Edward Carpenter's Journey to the East," Bakshi discusses Orientalism, colonialism, and Edward Carpenter's place in the empire as a homosexual man. She attributes his interest in the East—which led to Carpenter visiting India and Ceylon—to his upbringing and education. Throughout her work, Bakshi draws connections between Carpenter's journey and his homosexuality, using this relationship to contextualize how he interacted with Indians. Carpenter's sexuality impacted his perception of the "Orient" and allowed him to identify with those the empire labeled as "the Other." Bakshi argues that, although Carpenter may have spent time distancing himself from England while in India, he is still guilty of sexual colonialism.<sup>5</sup> As she observed through her research, Carpenter regularly used derogatory colonial language to describe Indians. Bakshi's work sheds light on Carpenter's homosexual and Orientalist subtext in select works. As an Indian historian of race and gender, Bakshi also provides valuable perspective into how Carpenter interacted with the empire. She grew up in post-colonial India, which has allowed her to approach this research with a more nuanced understanding of Orientalism and empire. Her perspective aligns with the broader argument of this paper, showing that while Carpenter resisted Empire, he participated in and benefited from imperial control of India.

Many historians have used norms surrounding masculinity and male homosexuality to understand the context behind Carpenter's more famous works. In *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*, Sean Brady showcases how Carpenter approached his own masculinity and how his sexual preferences influenced his identity.<sup>6</sup> Brady argues that public negative perceptions of male homosexuality were worse in continental Europe than in Britain. He claims that Britons privately resisted male homosexuality, refusing to discuss it all together. They believed that discussion on this topic would give credibility to the existence of homosexuals.<sup>7</sup> To support this claim, Brady draws

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<sup>4</sup> Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism," 161.

<sup>5</sup> Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism," 174.

<sup>6</sup> Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 158.

<sup>7</sup> Brady, *Masculinity*, 157.

on how the press largely ignored Carpenter's *Homogenic Love* and *The Intermediate Sex* following their publication in 1906.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Brady references Bakshi's research while examining how Edward Carpenter's homosexuality reacted to and impacted his views on masculinity. He agrees with Bakshi, stating that Carpenter did participate in sexual colonialism and that traveling to India further inspired him to "live more openly as a lover of men."<sup>9</sup> Similar to Bakshi, Brady analyzes Carpenter critically, which isn't common in many secondary sources on Carpenter. Many works on Carpenter revere him as a pioneer of homosexual rights and rarely analyze his faults and participation in the British empire. Like Brady and Bakshi, my research views Carpenter critically and acknowledges that his methods were sometimes hypocritical. While he was vocal about his dislike of the empire, he used it to further his activism.

In "The Construction of Homosexuality," author Jeffrey Weeks explores how homosexuality was morally and scientifically constructed in late-nineteenth-century Britain. He argues that the regulation of sexuality had an extreme impact on the homosexual community, thus setting up the conditions for them to form one, distinct identity. Edward Carpenter is also discussed, albeit briefly, in this chapter, with Weeks using him and his colleagues/associates as examples of a group with shared homosexual identity. While discussing defined identities, Weeks admits that not all homosexual encounters were "defined," meaning that not all men participating in homosexual acts considered themselves homosexual.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Weeks also argues that many homosexuals were able to evade prosecution due to anonymity and ambiguity. He states that in places like cities, where the population is large and overwhelming, homosexuals were able to form subcultures hidden from the public.<sup>11</sup>

Brady's analysis of same-sex restrictions differs greatly from Weeks'. Where Weeks argues that restrictions had a large impact on the social perception of homosexuals, Brady believes that the majority of Britain did not care. He admits that there was an influence on the attitudes surrounding same-sex love, but ultimately concludes that restrictions did little to impact the legal prosecution of homosexuals.<sup>12</sup> However, Brady critiques Weeks' research as too focused on a specific subset of white, wealthy gay men like Carpenter, which has distorted

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<sup>8</sup> Brady, *Masculinity*, 161.

<sup>9</sup> Brady, *Masculinity*, 198.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, Fourth Edition (New York: Routledge, 2018), 118.

<sup>11</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> Brady, *Masculinity*, 86.

many of his findings.<sup>13</sup> Overall, Brady believes that Carpenter's issues with public acceptance could be attributed mainly to social difficulties resulting from being a man who loved men, not a society that actively hunted and prosecuted homosexuals.<sup>14</sup>

In discussing the current conversations regarding Carpenter, homosexual restrictions, and the British Empire, it is also valuable to know how homosexual men from other European nations viewed empires. In *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Students, and the Empire of Queer Love*, Laurie Marhoefer explores Magnus Hirschfield's life to understand how and why white homosexuals acted as if sexuality and race were not related. Hirschfield, a homosexual sexologist from Germany, traveled around the world in the early 1930s, four decades after Edward Carpenter journeyed to South Asia.<sup>15</sup> Despite the gap between the two men's experiences, there are glaring similarities between them. Using his experience with colonized peoples to support his claims, Hirschfield argued that homosexuality was common in "primitive" people around the world.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Hirschfield's experiences in Southern and Eastern Asia developed into contempt for empires and the oppression they inflicted on colonized land, much of which was based on his experience with sexual restrictions in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Marhoefer's analysis of homosexuality in European empires contributes to and supports Bakshi's arguments regarding homosexual orientalism. As Marhoefer describes, "the empire was romantic, erotic."<sup>18</sup> European men such as Richard Khant, a friend of Hirschfield's, traveled beyond continental Europe to pursue sexual relationships. Like Carpenter and his acquaintances, these men romanticized "the Orient" and engaged in Orientalism. However, Marhoefer suggests that restrictions on same-sex love, both social and lawful, were a driving force for many of these men.<sup>19</sup> Marhoefer's analysis of empire is useful to understand the relationship between empire and homosexuality, especially if applied to Edward Carpenter and his experience with homosexuality and the British empire. Hirschfield shows that gay men across Europe's global empires called for the normalization of homosexuality due to the similar experiences gay

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<sup>13</sup> Brady, *Masculinity*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Brady, *Masculinity*, 201.

<sup>15</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 46.

<sup>17</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 49.



men had in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Carpenter fits into this argument well, as he argued similar points based on his homosexual experience in the empire.

Bakshi, Marhoefer, and Brady all show that sexual colonialism was prevalent among wealthy homosexual Europeans, while Weeks demonstrates how the British Empire morally and scientifically constructed homosexuality. Carpenter and Hirshfield ventured outside of Europe to explore the empire many others had romanticized, often using their findings to resist the legal and social restrictions Britain and Germany placed on sexuality. Additionally, Carpenter used his experience in India—which was only possible due to the British empire's influence in the region—to shape and refine his anti-imperialist ideas. Reading Carpenter's work alongside this historiography reveals the paradoxical nature of Carpenter's work in India and Ceylon, which supported certain functions of the empire while resisting others. This paradox is not confined to Carpenter's anti-imperialist works and can also be observed in his theories on gender and sexuality.

### **Restrictions on Same-Sex Love**

In 1895, the century's largest homosexual scandal brought a new wave of attention to same-sex activity in Britain and had a tremendous impact on the perception of same-sex relationships. Authorities arrested and convicted Oscar Wilde, a celebrity playwright, in what was later known as the Wilde Trials.<sup>20</sup> This arrest, and others like it, were possible due to the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which placed restrictions on same-sex activity and allowed offenders to be charged with time in prison or two years of hard labor. The Labouchere Amendment was not the first piece of legislation to criminalize same-sex actions in the British empire. Restrictions on homosexuality in the British empire have a long history, with the first acts of many appearing as early as the fourteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Aside from its explicit purpose of criminalizing homosexuality, this legislation also shaped the public's perception of same-sex relationships.

To understand the British Empire's desire to restrict same-sex relationships, one must first understand the origins of these negative attitudes. Believing homosexual individuals were morally corrupt, the Christian church long-opposed homosexuality and any acts related to same-sex relationships. This

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<sup>20</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 109.

<sup>21</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society*, 104.

hostility had effects across Europe, with many western nations, such as Britain and Germany, developing taboos against homosexuality. Weeks observes that this taboo is most common among Christian societies. Non-western countries in the nineteenth century were well accustomed to same-sex interactions. In many areas, including colonized areas like India and parts of Africa, forms of these interactions were built into their sexual mores.<sup>22</sup> Without the influence of Christianity, many societies continued to accept homosexuality as they had for centuries.

In British law, “buggery” and “sodomy” are the most common words used when restricting homosexuality. Both words were used as umbrella terms for any sexual acts that Christianity deemed “against nature,” and British law echoed this sentiment as early as the fourteenth century. The first legislation to criminalize sexual acts in Britain was the Act of 1533. Enacted by King Henry VIII, this act stated that all acts of “buggery” were against nature and thus punishable by death.<sup>23</sup> The Act of 1533 was directed at “buggery” in every type of relationship, both heterosexual and homosexual. While it may not have targeted homosexuals specifically, it was a restriction on sexual freedom and set a precedent for sexual restrictions going forward. Formally, the Act of 1533 was in effect until 1861 when the Offences Against the Person Act removed the death penalty as a punishment for “buggery” and replaced it with lengthy prison sentences.<sup>24</sup> Although the 1861 Act may seem like a small improvement, in the coming decades support for further restrictions on homosexuality increased in Britain.

The 1885 Labouchere Amendment was among the first legislation to directly name and target same-sex relationships in England. It was an amendment to the Criminal Law Act, which aimed to protect girls and women by suppressing prostitution in Britain. Section 11 was proposed in 1885 by Henry Labouchere, an English politician, writer, and member of parliament for North Hampton. The section famously referred to as the Labouchere Amendment of 1885, targeted homosexual relationships, stating:

Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission of any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be

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<sup>22</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 104.

<sup>24</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 107.

liable at the discretion of the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years with or without hard labour.<sup>25</sup>

This act only applied to the United Kingdom, not the larger British Empire, but was nevertheless important for two reasons. First, it explicitly named male homosexual relationships. The preceding acts restricting sexual freedom affected homosexuals, but they did not label them within the legislation. In addition to restricting acts homosexuals may engage in, it also places restrictions on a *type* of person. Secondly and more importantly, the Labouchere Amendment reaffirmed that same-sex relations were abnormal and immoral, thus warranting criminalization. This amendment may have “lightened” the punishment for certain sexual acts, but by targeting homosexuals, same-sex relationships were made more difficult and dangerous to engage in. Homosexual men were forced to explore new avenues of sexual fulfillment as a result.

## India and Ceylon

In 1890, Edward Carpenter journeyed to India and Ceylon, two well-established colonies within the British empire. In light of the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, many British homosexual men were drawn to continental Europe and to European colonies—both intellectually and physically—in search of acceptance of their sexual desires.<sup>26</sup> Carpenter’s travels to the region highlight a unique relationship between homosexuality, empire, and Orientalism. Orientalism is how European empires represent “the Orient” within their cultures and is typically maintained by social institutions, academic or scientific work, and imagery.<sup>27</sup> In literature, many English writers took a special interest in “oriental” literature and philosophy. They often romanticized it, using “Oriental” works to inspire or support works of their own.<sup>28</sup> Homosexual writers especially participated in Orientalism because they identified with “the Orient.” Like them, “the Orient” was seen as ‘the other’ and restricted by the larger British empire.

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<sup>25</sup> “1885 Labouchere Amendment,” UK Parliament, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/1885-labouchere-amendment/#main-content>.

<sup>26</sup> Bakshi, “Homosexuality and Orientalism,” 152.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1979), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Bakshi, “Homosexuality and Orientalism,” 155.

Southern Asian philosophy, theology, and literature attracted Carpenter.<sup>29</sup> In *My Days and Dreams*, Carpenter's revealed that his interest in Indian philosophy was inspired by his father, who was extremely interested in understanding *Nirvana*, a term common in Buddhism.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as a member of the Indian Civil Service, Carpenter's brother provided him with another connection to India.<sup>31</sup> Ponnambalam Arunachalam, a college friend from Ceylon who encouraged him to read a translated version of a Hindu spiritual text titled *Bhagavad Gita*, increased Carpenter's fascination with South Asian texts. The ideas presented on love and friendship resonated with Carpenter. In *Days and Dreams*, he writes: "It gave me the needed cue, and concentrated my work on the Eastern tradition."<sup>32</sup> In addition to introducing Carpenter to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arunachalam also invited Carpenter to Ceylon in 1890, thus prompting Carpenter to physically engage with the empire.<sup>33</sup>

Carpenter's journey to India was unique because he strayed from heavily westernized areas. "Adventurers" to India and Ceylon typically stayed at popular tourist sites. There, Europeans like Hirschfield explored westernized areas and were surrounded by Anglo-Indian and Indian elites. As a result, many left the region with a distorted view of Indian culture.<sup>34</sup> In *Adam's Peak to Elephanta*, which is about Carpenter's time in South Asia, Carpenter criticized people who traveled in this way, claiming that they were "a shade worse off instead of better" because their experience was like traveling to Britain rather than India.<sup>35</sup> To diversify his India journey, Carpenter traveled to the temple of Chidambaram. During this visit, he noted that he did not see another Englishman in the city of 30,000.<sup>36</sup>

His journey to India had a monumental impact on Carpenter's stance on imperialism. In chapter 15 of *From Adams Peak to Elephanta*, titled "The Anglo-Indian and the Oyster," Carpenter described his thoughts on imperialism based

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1916), 142.

<sup>30</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism," 156.

<sup>32</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 251.

<sup>33</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Carpenter, *From Adams Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Limited, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1892), 268-269.

<sup>36</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 221.

on his observations in India. He argued that Europe and South Asia were too different to share the same capitalist values. By forcing westernization, Carpenter believed that Europe's consumerist values would corrupt India, making it more materialistic.<sup>37</sup> This criticism was based on Carpenter's affinity for Eastern philosophy and, although he does not explicitly state it, his desire to preserve sexual norms in India. In a letter to Charles Oates, Carpenter wrote about the Indian men he had visited. He compared the visitations to those he had engaged in continental Europe, where he was able to chase sexual fulfillment more freely.<sup>38</sup> While much of Carpenter's anti-imperialism comes from his socialist beliefs, his homosexuality, and experience with oppression no doubt also contributed to his thoughts on empire.

Carpenter's opinion on westernization and its effect on love are further illustrated in "Narayan: A Tale of Indian Life." This short story follows Narayan and Ganesh, two friends living in India who venture into the westernized city of Bombay in search of employment and success. The two love each other and are determined to be together, which is shown by Ganesh's willingness to follow Narayan into the city despite his discomfort with city life.<sup>39</sup> Both boys find jobs at a cotton mill, but after a few weeks, they begin to question why they are making so many garments for such a low price when the surrounding villages make their own, higher quality, garments. The two realize city life is too overwhelming and ultimately plan to return to their village. However, before they can leave the city, Ganesh is killed while tending to a machine.<sup>40</sup> Narayan is forced to return to their village alone and struggles with the loss of his friend. The story ends in tragedy, painting a bitter picture of industry and love.

Though fictional, this story provides a window into Carpenter's thoughts on westernization and its effects on love. Narayan and Ganesh's relationship, though mostly referred to as friends or companions, is clear in its homosexual subtext. In describing their commitment to one another, Carpenter writes: "For the hearts of the two were joined together in a bond of habitual companionship, and it hardly occurred to either of them to do anything without the other."<sup>41</sup> Their love is never described as romantic, but it is formed by their camaraderie.

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<sup>37</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 265.

<sup>38</sup> Bakshi, "Homosexuality and Orientalism," 161.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Carpenter, "Narayan: A Tale of Indian Life," In *Sketches from Life in Town and Country, and some Verses* (London: George Allen & Sons, 1908), 57.

<sup>40</sup> Carpenter, "Narayan," 73-79.

<sup>41</sup> Carpenter, "Narayan," 57.

Such deep comradeship was not often accepted by the British empire, as shown by Carpenter's repeated use of the phrase in works like *Homogenic Love*.

Narayan and Ganesh's love formed within their village, which was separated from Bombay by a mountain and untouched by European influence.<sup>42</sup> Aside from its literal interpretation, their love represents traditional Indian life, culture, social structure, and religion. As shown in *From Adams Peak to Elephanta*, Carpenter loathed colonialism because he saw it as a threat to the more traditional ways of Indian life, including the norms surrounding same-sex relationships. He used stigmatizing language like "corrupt" and "overrun" to describe Europe's influence in South Asia. Although he does not use the same language in "Narayan," he depicted a pillar of Indian life—love—being corrupted by Europe.<sup>43</sup> In this story, Carpenter shows how Ganesh's death and Narayan's loss are the tragic result of colonization and western-style capitalism. It reinforced the author's fears that empire will change India for the worse and restrict people's ability to love freely.

Carpenter's anti-imperialist perspective influences both works, but it is important to note that Carpenter reflected European stereotypes in his writing. Carpenter used pejorative terms and language throughout *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta*. He commonly referred to Indians as "oysters," a word Carpenter himself created. He coined the term after Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Carpenter's college friend, noted Carpenter's indiscriminate use of the term "native" to describe Indians, Tamils, and other South Asians. Arunachalam likened it to how one would refer to a group of oysters and after, Carpenter decided to use it in place of "native."<sup>44</sup> This term is used throughout the text, including in titles like "The Anglo-Indian and the Oyster." He also utilized the term "coolies," a word commonly used by Englishmen to refer to Indian laborers.<sup>45</sup>

Carpenter also used similar derogatory language when explaining South Asian labor and work culture. For example, he called Indian workers "lazy" and "sluggish" while discussing work ethic.<sup>46</sup> Also interesting is the infantilization of

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<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, "Narayan," 50.

<sup>43</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 339.

<sup>44</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 37. In a revised version of *From Adams Peak to Elephanta*, published in 1903, Carpenter omitted the term "oyster" and similar racist words and replaced it with Indian. This shows that Carpenter, later in life, was aware of hypocrisy and changed his works to reflect growth.

<sup>45</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 255.

Indian people that can be viewed in his text. In *Adams Peak*, Carpenter featured letters from his friend “Ajax” and agreed that the Indian laborers are like children.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Carpenter regularly compared Indian men to European women when describing their temperament and behavior. When discussing natives, Carpenter wrote, “their feminine and sensitive natures...rather seek the shelter of dependence.”<sup>48</sup> Carpenter’s criticisms of Indian labor reflect European values of work and, remarkably, masculinity. Despite being an anti-imperialist, Carpenter’s choice of racist language shows that he engaged in empire and colonial thinking. He reinforced certain colonial stereotypes to oppose the British empire, displaying a paradoxical type of activism that resisted and replicated imperialism at the same time.

### **Masculinity and ‘The Intermediate Sex’**

A deeper analysis of Carpenter’s language regarding Indians reveals a fascinating framework of how Carpenter viewed masculinity in the empire. European society had strict gender norms, which shaped how Britain approached and enforced same-sex restrictions. The late nineteenth century also saw a rise in sexology, with key figures such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs developing congenital theories of homosexuality.<sup>49</sup> These figures and their works inspired many of Carpenter’s arguments surrounding masculinity and homosexuality, which appeared in works including *Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men* and *My Days and Dreams*. In these books, Carpenter analyzed how masculinity and femininity existed within the British empire. He addressed the gender norms in domestic and sexual spheres, which reveals how masculinity was constructed in nineteenth century British empire.

Conservative British norms surrounding masculinity and femininity were extremely common in the British empire. In introducing his argument in *Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter revealed that men and women were thought of as two distinct and mostly separate groups.<sup>50</sup> Men are strong, logical, and precise, whereas women are sensitive, gentle, and talkative.<sup>51</sup> At this time, labor was commonly divided by gender, with “woman’s work” including textiles and

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<sup>47</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 84.

<sup>48</sup> Carpenter, *Adams Peak*, 57.

<sup>49</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 110.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Carpenter, “The Intermediate Sex,” in *Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (New York and London: Mitchell Kennerly, 1921), 17.

<sup>51</sup> Carpenter, “The Intermediate Sex,” 26.

housework, and men's work including labor and other activities outside of the house. Gender norms, especially those concerning the division of labor, were often intertwined with homosexuality.

In chapter nine of *My Days and Dreams*, Carpenter's autobiography, he recalls his domestic life with George Merrill, whom he met immediately after his trip to India.<sup>52</sup> The two shared a romantic and sexual relationship that lasted the rest of their lives. After they moved into their Millthorpe home together, Carpenter's friends expressed concerns based on common gender norms. Carpenter wrote: "They drew sad pictures of the walls of my cottage hanging with cobwebs, and of the master unfed and neglected while his assistant amused himself elsewhere." Although both men could care for their home, Carpenter's friends believed that neither man could do domestic work because it was typically done by women.<sup>53</sup> To a degree, Carpenter also believed that housework was "women's work." He claimed that Merrill "had a genius for housework" and was likely better at it than most women.<sup>54</sup> Both Carpenter and his friends held a similar view of "women's work," which shows how widespread the gender norms and the division of labor were in the British empire. The above example also displays that these norms could be, at best, problematic for homosexuals in same-sex relationships.

The relationship between gender norms, male masculinity, and homosexuality is clearest when studying the theories developed to explain same-sex attraction. Few were interested in explaining the scientific existence of homosexuality until the mid-nineteenth century. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs was among the first to attempt to identify and explain the existence of homosexuality. Ulrichs developed the theory of urnings in the 1860s, about three decades before Carpenter began publishing work regarding homosexuals and "The Intermediate Sex." Ulrichs' theories applied specifically to those who did not fit into the conventional "male" and "female" gender norms at the time. It stated that an additional class existed between men and women. Individuals that belong to this class may be biologically male or female, but their mental and emotional presentation may be that of the opposite sex. According to Ulrichs, homosexual men were attracted to and formed relationships with other men because they were a woman's soul in a man's body. Ulrichs called the individuals of this class

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<sup>52</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 159.

<sup>53</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 161.

<sup>54</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 161.



“Urnings.”<sup>55</sup> Ulrichs’ work was influential across Europe. Notable figures such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels engaged with the theory, but it was most influential on Carpenter.<sup>56</sup> Neither Carpenter nor Ulrichs used specific terms relating to the transgender umbrella. Based on their work alone, it appears they lumped transgenderism into the homosexual label, likely because both defied conventional gender norms of the time.

Originally published in 1908, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* is a collection of four essays covering a myriad of topics including gender norms, the construction of homosexuality, and homosexuality’s place within society. In the first chapter, titled “The Intermediate Sex,” Carpenter described his theory of “The Intermediate Sex.” Like Ulrichs, Carpenter argued that men and women are not two separate classes, but rather two ends of one class: the human race.<sup>57</sup> Carpenter built on Ulrichs’ work by suggesting that homosexuality is a wide spectrum and argued that those who belong to the intermediate sex are diverse in their presentation and behaviors.

As shown by this work, Carpenter thought of sexuality as a spectrum, much like modern LGBTQ+ activists do today. However, Carpenter’s spectrum is determined almost entirely by the presence—or lack thereof—of an individual’s masculine traits. Men who belonged to the “extreme type” were “effeminate,” and emotional, and supposedly enjoyed more feminine activities such as needlework.<sup>58</sup> Alternatively, the “normal type” of intermediate men were still masculine in mind while also being an appropriate level of sensitive and loving.<sup>59</sup> Carpenter’s use of the words “extreme” and “normal” are interesting in this context, as they provide insight into how the public viewed homosexuals and same-sex relationships. Carpenter believed that those who disagreed with same-sex love did so based on the public actions of a few extreme individuals. He warned the public against judging all homosexuals based on the actions of the “extreme types” as those would only distort their view of same-sex love.<sup>60</sup> Instead, he argued that people should look at the class to understand that “the intermediate sex” was not that different from most of society.

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<sup>55</sup> Carpenter, “Intermediate Sex,” 19.

<sup>56</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Carpenter, “Intermediate Sex,” 17.

<sup>58</sup> Carpenter, “Intermediate Sex,” 29.

<sup>59</sup> Carpenter, “Intermediate Sex,” 31.

<sup>60</sup> Carpenter, “Intermediate Sex,” 31.

The British empire placed a lot of value on traditional male masculinity. It projected strength, seriousness, and aggressiveness, which is necessary for maintaining and expanding an empire. In regions like Bengal, European masculinity was used as a tool to project power over the “effeminate Bengali.” In an 1892 essay titled “The Place of Bengalis in Politics,” Sir Lepel Griffin, an Anglo-Indian official, claimed that Bengali men were inherently more feminine than Anglo-Indians and Europeans. Femininity in Bengali men was considered “unnatural” by Europeans and thus provided justification for oppression and colonization.<sup>61</sup> This dynamic depended largely on the “masculine Englishman,” who, because of his masculinity, was stronger and braver than those he had power over.

“Intermediate men” being less masculine threatened the image Britain wanted to portray, which likely contributed to the restrictions on male homosexuality. The Labouchere Amendment stated that any man who engaged in gross indecency with another man could be charged with a misdemeanor; it did not include women. The law rarely targeted women who were seen as more masculine, even in the “extreme” sense.<sup>62</sup> This is likely because of how masculinity and femininity were perceived in the British empire. Masculinity was more desirable, regardless of sex, whereas the absence of masculinity or the presence of femininity in men was undesirable. “Intermediate men,” as Carpenter described them, were inherently more feminine than gender norms allowed, which is likely part of the reason restrictions were placed on same-sex actions in the late nineteenth century.

Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex* reveals more of Carpenter’s paradoxical activism. He resisted the restrictions Britain placed on same-sex actions by calling for the normalization of homosexuality. In doing so, he resisted the empire while also operating within the framework it had established. Carpenter upheld the belief that there were “unnatural” types of men and women, many of which were categorized as such based on their masculinity—or lack thereof. In this way, his work again replicated the empire’s norms.

While “Intermediate Sex” did not directly address empire and the effects of empire, Carpenter’s theories hinged on masculinity and gender norms encouraged and enforced by the empire. The Labouchere Amendment is among

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<sup>61</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>62</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 122.

the most blatant restrictions on homosexuality, and it targeted men who interact with masculinity differently than other men. Carpenter believed that these different interactions were, for the most part, natural and encouraged the public to accept them as such, but the British Empire nevertheless shaped his ideas.

## The Construction of Love

Carpenter argued that love between men is normal, as displayed by historical literature, and should be promoted, not restricted by social perception or law. Written shortly after Oscar Wilde's arrest and the Wilde Trials, Carpenter's *Homogenic Love* is one of his most controversial and passionate non-fiction works. He wrote this pamphlet alongside three other works, each of which discussed the relationship between the sexes. Due to the controversial subject matter, *Homogenic Love* was published for private circulation and only in 1921 saw public audiences after it was edited and published as the third chapter in *The Intermediate Sex*. The other three works written alongside *Homogenic Love* were later combined to form *Love's Coming of Age*, published in 1902.<sup>63</sup> Carpenter used the term "homogenic" to describe same-sex love. He preferred this word to homosexual because he believed the latter was too scientific and did not accurately portray same-sex love. The term homogeneous comes from the Greek root *homos*, which means "same" and *genos* which means "sex."<sup>64</sup> In *Homogenic Love*, Carpenter argued that same-sex love was not only normal and common but an unchangeable part of human nature. To do so, he redefined what love should mean in the British empire and, so his work reveals, how love was perceived in the nineteenth century.

To understand how Carpenter defined homogenic love, one must first understand how Carpenter defined love itself. Carpenter argued that love was more than physical attraction and included deep, emotional intimacy with another person. Everyone felt and desired love, as Carpenter saw it, regardless to whom they were attracted.<sup>65</sup> Carpenter's determination to define love in this way reveals that British society in the nineteenth century thought differently of homosexual love unions. The public believed homosexual relationships were based entirely

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<sup>63</sup> Carpenter, *Days and Dreams*, 196. Upon hearing of *Homogenic Love*'s existence, Carpenter's publisher cancelled their agreement which forced Carpenter to find a new publisher for *Loves Coming of Age* and *Towards Democracy*.

<sup>64</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love, and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society Limited, Printers, 59, Tib Street, 1894), 4.

<sup>65</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 34.

on sexual intimacy and ignored emotional intimacy completely, which is different from how many European societies view love today.

Many believed that sex was the defining characteristic of homosexual unions, a fact that Carpenter attributed to the Hebraic and Christian traditions. British society at this time also placed value on reproduction, which impacted the public's perception of homosexuals. Carpenter disagreed with those who used homosexual's inability to reproduce to prove that those unions were unnatural. According to Carpenter, unions do not need to be—and are not formed—with the intention of reproduction. Physical and emotional intimacy are the true foundations of a union and are just as valuable as reproduction.<sup>66</sup> Homosexuals, then, were able to engage in other aspects of love and Carpenter argued they should not be viewed as immoral or unnatural. If given the chance to express themselves freely, homosexuals would be able to exist with the majority because they desire the same thing as everyone else: love.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to redefining love, Carpenter argued that homogenic love should be normalized across the British Empire. As ancient Greek and Roman literature demonstrated, which fascinated Carpenter, homosexuals had previously existed within strong European empires without offending or endangering society.<sup>68</sup> Carpenter discussed this history more extensively for two reasons. First, he argued it revealed that homosexuals were not a new phenomenon. By citing homosexuals in ancient civilizations, the medieval period, and the Renaissance, Carpenter showed that homosexuality had a clear presence in European history. Secondly, citing historical sources proved that homogenic love could be normalized within the British Empire. To further prove that homogenic love existed and could be normalized, Carpenter referenced British colonies. He stated that comradeship and homogenic love were present “even among savage races lower down than these in the scale of evolution.”<sup>69</sup> Other gay rights activists like Hirschfield made similar observations to demonstrate how common homosexuality was, but Carpenter's use of racist language is noteworthy for other reasons.<sup>70</sup> By describing colonized peoples in this way, Carpenter is once again engaging in empire. Including relationships beyond Europe allowed Carpenter to argue that homogenic love is not confined to history and has its

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<sup>66</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 34.

<sup>67</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 46.

place in the modern world. By indicating that same-sex love is natural, Carpenter effectively implies that any restrictions of homogenic love are unnatural. Empire, according to Carpenter, is unnatural.

Throughout the pamphlet, Carpenter addressed scientific homophobia and its effect on society's perception of homosexuality. In the first section, Carpenter discussed scientific studies that opposed homosexuality and claimed that a malformation of some kind caused it. Carpenter disagreed, stating that the evidence proving a congenital association with homosexuality was either insufficient or nonexistent.<sup>71</sup> Carpenter references similar scientific claims throughout the pamphlet and reveals that scientific homophobia was prominent in nineteenth-century Britain and, to a degree, was affecting public perception of same-sex love.

Scientific homophobia was common in European empires, which Hirschfield's analysis of how society reacted to homosexuality demonstrates. According to Hirschfield, there were generally three phases to society's reaction to homosexuality. The first phase was the most "primitive." In this phase, homosexuality was accepted and may have its role in religious functions. The opposition gaining power over homosexuality and placing restrictions on it characterized the second phase, which made same-sex relationships more difficult to pursue. Lastly, scientific homophobia rose in the third phase and used evidence to distort society's view of homosexuals.<sup>72</sup> Based on this theory and Carpenter's continuous reference to scientific studies when defending homosexuality, Britain was in the third phase of the Hirschfield model. In this stage, scientific studies contributed to the formation of homosexual taboos and negatively shaped public opinion of homogenic love.

Carpenter strongly opposed all types of restrictions on homosexuality, both social and legislative. He viewed the 1885 Labouchere Amendment as an invasion of private morals and individual freedoms. In *Homogenic Love*, Carpenter argued that restrictions on same-sex actions and love were not just unjust but also ineffective. Just as science could not prove that homosexuality is "morbid," the law could barely prove that an individual is engaging in the actions it is attempting to prosecute. Carpenter stated that the Amendment was "a shadow over even the simplest and most natural expressions of an attachment which may...be of the greatest value in national life."<sup>73</sup> Love, Carpenter

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<sup>71</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Marhoefer, *Racism*, 47-48.

<sup>73</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 50.

undoubtedly believed is one of the purest forms of connection, and no restriction, whether it be social or legislative, can truly eliminate homosexual desire from an individual. Even if desire was a choice, Carpenter still did not believe that the government had the right to enforce restrictions, as this violated individual autonomy. To him, the only way to eliminate social discomfort surrounding homogenic love is to recognize it and allow for the “extreme types” to develop their desire into a more “acceptable” expression.<sup>74</sup>

*Homogenic Love* may have been published for private circulation, but it was directed at individuals opposing same-sex love as well as the entire British Empire. Carpenter vehemently opposed the empire and the oppression it brought, not just for the South Asians described in *From Adams Peak to Elephanta*, but for homosexual men living and existing within the British Empire. In raising awareness of this oppression, Carpenter fought against colonialism. This document and its sentiments called for the normalization of homogenic love within the empire, which went against centuries of restrictions designed to turn the public against homosexuals based on morality and scientific “evidence.”

## Conclusion

In studying Carpenter and his many works, historians can better understand how homosexual men lived in the nineteenth century. Carpenter’s life, along with the experiences of other gay men are detailed extensively within Carpenter’s poetry, storytelling, and activist materials. Many homosexual men were forced, not always by the law, but by societal pressures, to ignore their sexual desire and settle for a socially acceptable, unfulfilling heterosexual relationship.<sup>75</sup> Carpenter was rare in his ability to pursue a homosexual relationship despite the legislative and societal restrictions in place to deny him that life. His work reflects these privileges, revealing how the early LBGTQ+ rights movement had its roots in European imperialism.

Carpenter’s fascination with and journey to India and Ceylon is important in understanding how homosexual men engaged with empire and Orientalism. Homosexual men across Europe engaged with Orientalist texts that romanticized South Asia, allowing them to view the region as a haven for homosexual desire. Furthermore, sexual orientalism also allowed European men to relate the oppression of their identity to that experienced by “the Orient.”

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<sup>74</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 21.

Carpenter's works describing India are like other Orientalist texts, as they also romanticize Indian life, love, and culture. "Narayan" specifically displays how European writers used "Oriental" love to present South Asian life before European colonization as desirable. Yet Carpenter's use of derogatory and racist language throughout these works reveals that Carpenter engaged with the empire despite his anti-imperialist views. The empire consumed much of Carpenter's life, which was reflected in his work on imperialism and homosexuality.

British law, combined with Ulrichs' work and Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* outlines the undeniable relationship between masculinity and homosexuality. Masculinity had incredible value in the British Empire. It conveyed strength and any deviance from traditional gender and masculinity norms was undesirable. Carpenter and Ulrichs, however, both tied masculinity to an individual's homosexuality. The presence of masculinity, or lack thereof, was believed to determine which "type" of homosexual an individual was. Carpenter labeled both men more feminine and women with more masculine features as "extreme". Additionally, the Labouchere Amendment only targeted men, which shows that the British Empire also tied masculinity to homosexuality. Observing this relationship clarifies the restrictions on homosexuality in the United Kingdom, and demonstrates how early LGBTQ+ activists used the British Empire for their own benefit.

Yet the ideas presented in *Homogenic Love* are not unlike those presented by modern LGBTQ+ activists. The phrase "love is love" has been popularized in recent decades as LGBTQ+ activists argue that love, regardless of gender or sex, is natural and beautiful. Carpenter argued the same. Furthermore, modern activists commonly describe love and sexuality as a spectrum. In *Homogenic Love* and "The Intermediate Sex," Carpenter did the same. Although his ideas were rooted in conventional gender norms and masculinity, he suggested that the desire for homogenic love was a spectrum, with some "extreme" individuals experiencing homosexual desire more strongly than other "normal" types. While Carpenter's idea of the LGBTQ+ spectrum is different from the modern definition, the similarities between both are clear and show how Carpenter's ideas have gained influence from the late nineteenth century to now.

By studying these factors, one can understand new forms of imperial resistance, particularly resistance from British homosexuals. Carpenter resisted the empire in various ways. The Labouchere Amendment, scientific "reasoning," and social perception of homosexuals all contributed to restrictions on sexual freedom within England. These restrictions contributed to Edward Carpenter's

interest in “the Orient,” as he turned to “Oriental” literature for acceptance of his sexuality. His experience with sexual oppression and being “the other” in Europe, along with the perceived consequences of westernization on love and culture were partially responsible for his anti-imperialist perspective. Carpenter’s anti-imperialism and anger with the oppression he faced can be found in his works that addressed the British Empire. “The Intermediate Sex” criticized the empire’s continued enforcement of masculine norms, while *Homogenic Love* pleaded for the normalization of same-sex love. Carpenter’s activism for gay rights is an example of homosexual imperial resistance, even if he was also engaged in colonialist thinking and tropes. It is still possible to read *Homogenic Love* as Carpenter’s call for end to the oppression of homosexuality, both for those under forceful colonial rule and for those who were born to experience desire differently from the majority.



## **A New Perspective on the Cause of the Civil War: An Offspring of Abolitionism and Revisionism**

*Noah Ramos*

Historians have long debated what factors led to the American Civil War. In recent years, Abolitionism and Revisionism have served as the most common explanation for the origins of the conflict between the North and South. Which of these ideas is correct, and which of these ideas should be taught in schools has been a subject of heated debate. The evidence suggests, however, we should take a more nuanced approach. While neo-abolitionists have persuasively argued that slavery was a core cause of the conflict, neo-revisionists have demonstrated the role politicians played in inciting conflict. With both views in mind, the evidence points to a sort of middle ground. Zealous individuals and slavery both stand as the central causes of the Civil War.

Slavery played a critical role in the conflict between the North and South. Despite this, many Revisionists downplay the role of slavery. As Avery Craven wrote, “The move for an independent South... did not arise from permanent physical and social conditions. It sprang rather from temporary emotional factors cultivated both without and within the section. Men fought because they had come to fear and hate—because they had at last accepted a distorted picture of both themselves and the people in other sections.”<sup>1</sup> Craven overlooks sectional differences between North and South, and argues instead that the zealous abolitionists and fire-eaters cast out bait into the water, and people from North and South took hold.

Claims made by Revisionists like Craven and James Randall, however, run counter to the contemporary view of the conflict. “The sectional strife, arising chiefly from the unfortunate contest about slavery, has culminated, and the result is a civil war between the north and the south,”<sup>2</sup> noted the Reverend Abraham Essick, living in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Essick’s view was not just held by a few, but a widely accepted one. In a quotation noted by the scholar

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<sup>1</sup> Avery O. Craven, “The Repressible Conflict,” in Craven, *An Historian and the Civil War*, University of Chicago Press, 1964, in Michael Perman, *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin County, Pennsylvania, Diary of Reverend Abraham Essick, April 30, 1861, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, University of Virginia Library. <https://valley.newamericanhistory.org/diaries/FD1005>

Bruce Levine: “‘Everybody knew (as a Georgian reminded his neighbors...) that ‘slavery,’ and ‘aggressions upon it by the North, apprehensions for its safety in the South,’ was the ‘cause of Secession’ and that ‘all other questions were subordinate to it’”<sup>3</sup>

Many of the very people who fought in the Civil War viewed the war to be primarily over the issue of slavery. Regardless of what the politicians pushed, it is common men who fought and died in the conflict. Without them, there would have been no army, and without an army there would have been no war. Other views existed during the time of the Civil War as well. Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas and President James Buchanan, for example, argued that sectional conflict was unnecessary and “gotten up” by agitators. Yet the fact that a large number of people on both sides understood the conflict as one over slavery undermines the revisionist narrative that it was the politicians who manufactured the conflict. As Kenneth Stampp writes: “A Plausible analysis of antebellum politics and of the options that were reasonably open to that generation must begin with the assumption that an antislavery movement would exist in the northern states. That such a movement did exist was hardly the unfortunate result of some perverse historical accident, such as the emergence of a William Lloyd Garrison,”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the state secession conventions also viewed slavery as essential to the sectional differences in the United States. Of the five states that issued secession declarations, all of them mentioned slavery as a primary issue, and some mentioned it quite frequently. Battlefields.org analyzed these documents, and found that in the Georgia and Texas declarations, over 50% of the words were devoted to the issue of slavery. Mississippi had an even larger percentage, coming in at a shocking 73 percent.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Craven, Frank Owsley downplays the effect of slavery as well. Owsley it a step further: “[Slavery] was no essential part of the agrarian civilization of the South—though the Southerners under attack assumed that it

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Levine, “Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War,” (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 244.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” in Stampp, *The Imperiled Union*, pp. 220-26, 227, 230-32, 234, 237-45. In Perman, Michael. *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 117.

<sup>5</sup> Pierce, John. “The Reasons for Secession: A Documentary Study.” American Battlefield Trust, December 9, 2013. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/reasons-secession>.

was. Without slavery the economic and social life of the South would not have been radically different.” In his article Owsley argues that even 65 years after the Civil War, the South was still largely agrarian.<sup>6</sup> The South may have remained agrarian even after the Civil War and Reconstruction, but that does not negate the importance of slavery in and of itself. The connection between economic interests and slavery in the South has been well understood. As Kenneth Stampp demonstrates, “James H. Hammond of South Carolina was being coldly realistic when he posed his well-known rhetorical question: ‘[Were] ever any people, civilized or savage, persuaded by arguments, human or divine, to surrender, voluntarily, two billion dollars?’”<sup>7</sup> Stampp shows that it was not irrational for Southerners to believe that slavery was essential to their economy, and to their personal livelihoods.

Many moderate Revisionists seem to support the notion that slavery caused sectional divides. These more moderate Revisionists do not disregard slavery as an issue in the way classical revisionists like Randall and Craven did. Rather, they see slavery as insufficient on its own to have caused conflict, and view it rather as rhetorical ammunition which Northern and Southern (but mostly Northern) politicians used against each other on the political battlefield.<sup>8</sup> This, they claim, truly created sectional strife, and therefore also caused the Civil War. Edward Ayers makes an argument along these lines:

“Another approach to understanding the complex interplay between slavery and the forms of emergent modernity might be found closer to the ground, in a detailed comparison of two places which shared virtually everything except slavery...The difference slavery made is widely recognized to be profound and yet study after study has shown that slavery did little to create differences between North and South in voting patterns,

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<sup>6</sup> Frank L. Owsley, “The Irrepressible Conflict” from *I’LL TAKE MY STAND* by Twelve Southerners, in Perman, Michael. *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” in Stampp, *The Imperiled Union*, pp. 220-26, 227, 230-32, 234, 237-45. In Michael Perman, *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 125-126.

<sup>8</sup> Yael A. Sternhell “Revisionism Reinvented? The Antiwar Turn in Civil War Scholarship.” Essay In *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, 3:239–56, (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 249.

wealth distributions, occupation levels, and other measurable indices.”<sup>9</sup>

Ayers is persuasive on wealth distribution and occupational levels, as that does not seem to be where the key sectional differences laid. On the surface, his claim regarding voting patterns is also intriguing. Indeed, no connection between slaveholding and votes for immediate secession has been found.<sup>10</sup> Yet this does not mean very much, since Republicans, the anti-slavery party, did not win a single state south of the Mason-Dixon line. Lincoln did not even try to campaign in many of these states because he knew it was futile, and therefore in many southern states, Lincoln got no votes at all.<sup>11</sup> There was no reason for this other than the issue of slavery, which was widely acknowledged by contemporary voices to be the core of the secession crises.<sup>12</sup> To say therefore that slavery had no effect on voting patterns is nearsighted.

Ayers acknowledges this issue, as he points out that “[In Franklin County, Pennsylvania] Lincoln's victory was connected unmistakably to a geography of black residence. With the exception of one township, every precinct that went for Lincoln by more than 59 percent was a place where blacks lived in relatively large numbers.”<sup>13</sup> Slavery, or lack thereof, clearly influenced voting patterns, in both North and South, which would suggest that the

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<sup>9</sup> Edward L. Ayers and William G. Thomas, “The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities,” *The Differences Slavery Made* -- Thomas and Ayers -- American Historical Review, accessed September 10, 2024, [http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/xslt/servlet/XSLTServlet?xml=%2Fxml\\_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&xsl=%2Fxml\\_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&section=text&area=argument&piece=summary&list=summary&item=summary\\_overview](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/xslt/servlet/XSLTServlet?xml=%2Fxml_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&xsl=%2Fxml_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&section=text&area=argument&piece=summary&list=summary&item=summary_overview).

<sup>10</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), xx.

<sup>11</sup> Christian McWhirter, “Was Lincoln ‘removed’ from Southern Presidential Ballots?,” Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, January 26, 2024, <https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/Blog/Posts/181/Abraham-Lincoln/2024/1/Was-Lincoln-removed-from-Southern-presidential-ballots/blog-post/>.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Levine, “Half Slave and Half Free,” 247.

<sup>13</sup> Edward L. Ayers and William G. Thomas, “The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities,” *The Differences Slavery Made* -- Thomas and Ayers -- American Historical Review, accessed September 10, 2024, [http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/xslt/servlet/XSLTServlet?xml=%2Fxml\\_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&xsl=%2Fxml\\_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&section=text&area=argument&piece=summary&list=summary&item=summary\\_overview](http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/xslt/servlet/XSLTServlet?xml=%2Fxml_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&xsl=%2Fxml_docs%2Ffahr%2Farticle.xml&section=text&area=argument&piece=summary&list=summary&item=summary_overview).

Northerners and Southerners were innately different and not just manipulated by politicians.

Ultimately, the difference slavery made is most clearly found in the distinct cultural differences between North and South. When discussing the differences between Franklin and Augusta County, two counties that lay in the same valley separated only by the Mason-Dixon line, Ayers argued the following: “The traveler would notice a fundamental difference between the northern and southern parts of the Valley, however marked by the place where the Mason-Dixon Line crossed... Slavery shaped everything it touched. Farms arrayed themselves differently on the landscape... towns took different shapes. People understood themselves differently... too, calculating their interests... in ways their neighbors across the border could not understand or accept.”<sup>14</sup>

Some neo-revisionists de-emphasize the debate about politicians versus slavery altogether. Yael Sternhell references and critiques many examples of neo-revisionist writers:

“[In Amanda Foreman’s work] Secretary of State William H. Seward is a drunk angling to start a second war with England for no good reason. Abraham Lincoln, Edwin Stanton, and especially Charles Sumner are clumsy politicians, consumed by Washington machinations. The Union comes across as an aggressive, Anglophobic and vindictive empire, obsessed with fighting enemies that are sometimes real but often imagined.”<sup>15</sup>

Not even African Americans escaped this neo-revisionist cynicism. Citing Jim Downs’ “Sick from Freedom” Sternhell argues that, “Physical illness is not a side note to the glories of liberation from slavery; it is front and center... The black people in Downs’s book are not fighting for freedom but dying painful and miserable deaths from a host of diseases brought on by the

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<sup>14</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Yael A. Sternhell “Revisionism Reinvented?” 244-245, citing Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010), 699, 440.

natural environment and by institutional failings on all levels.”<sup>16</sup>

In these examples, the neo-revisionists have tried to dispell the neo-abolitionist narrative of the war being a rational, good, war over freeing slaves. As a result, however, they have become selective and have chosen only the most brutal narratives of the Civil War, to the exclusion of the rest. This argument is unconvincing for the rationality behind the war, furthermore, arguing whether the freeing of four million slaves was worth the death toll is a philosophical debate, rather than a historical one. The attempts by neo-revisionists to reconstruct the civil war as a dreadful waste of human life come from activist motivations, rather than historical ones, and thereby overlook slavery as one of the wars crucial factors and causes. This conclusion leads me to the following question: was it rational for the South to secede? Within the revisionist view, the politicians, fire-eaters, and abolitionists stirred up the war. From that viewpoint, both secession and the war must have been irrational.

The question of rationality is complicated for several reasons, most prominently due to the fact Southerners had no reason to fear immediate emancipation, but every reason to fear gradual emancipation. Lincoln and the Republican Party claimed they would not seek to abolish slavery where it already existed. In his First Inaugural, Lincoln said, “Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States, that by the accession of a Republican Administration, their property, and their peace, and personal security, are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension.” Lincoln and the abolitionists understood they did not have the constitutional power to do this either, nor did Lincoln have an army capable of subduing the South and enforcing abolition, even if he had wanted to do so.<sup>17</sup> That power was the product of the war, and not its cause.

Considering that Lincoln swore he would not remove the institution where it existed, this raises the question why the South cared so much about the institution and about Lincoln's election. Stamp argues racism in the South was key. “Given the almost universal conviction, heavily stressed in the proslavery

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<sup>16</sup> Sternhell, “Revisionism Reinvented?” 246, citing Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 6.

<sup>17</sup> James Oakes, “When Everybody Knew,” in *Beyond Freedom: Disrupting the History of Emancipation*, David W. Blight and Jim Downs eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 106.

argument, that blacks were not only physically but intellectually and emotionally different from and inferior to whites, and that assimilation would be a racial disaster, slavery had great significance as a system of control. Slavery was—so went the conventional wisdom—the only way to maintain the supremacy of the white race.”<sup>18</sup>

The Staunton Vindicator, from Augusta County, Virginia, perfectly captures the sentiment behind Stamp’s argument. “With six hundred thousand Negroes amongst us, denied all outlet, and rendered worthless and uncontrollable... not only their whole value as property would be annihilated, but Virginia herself, ere long, would cease to be a house for the decent, industrious white man.”<sup>19</sup> Besides the racial implications, and obvious economic importance of the institution to slaveholders, other historians and abolitionists such as Bruce Levine have argued that slavery also had a significant economic importance to non-slave holders. “Many nonslaveholding farmers...were (and felt) economically dependent upon slavery’s survival. They enjoyed the patronage of neighboring planters, who occasionally rented slaves to them; employed their sons as overseers; and lent them money, ginned their cotton, or transported their crops to market on favorable terms.”<sup>20</sup> The South could not allow Lincoln to win because Lincoln’s election would mean the end of the expansion of slavery, the end of slavery’s expansion would eventually translate into the death of the institution, which in turn would end the Southern social order and the very fabric of Southern life. The cotton kingdom would be laid to waste, their means of production vanished, and their feeling of racial superiority would no longer be legally institutionalized.

Furthermore, the South saw slavery as not just essential to their livelihood, but as their right, protected by the Constitution, and, by extension, they viewed abolitionism as a violation of that right. South Carolina stated this

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<sup>18</sup> Kenneth M. Stamp, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” in Stamp, *The Imperiled Union*, pp. 220-26, 227, 230-32, 234, 237-45. In Michael Perman, *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 126.

<sup>19</sup> Augusta County, Virginia, Staunton Vindicator “The Alternative--North or South.” (Column 3) April 12, 1861, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, University of Virginia Library.

<https://valley.newamericanhistory.org/newspapers/staunton-vindicator/1861/04/12#page-02>

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Levine, “Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War,” (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 247.

very clearly in their secession document. “Those [Union] States have assumed the right of deciding upon the propriety of our domestic institutions; and have denied the rights of property established in fifteen of the States and recognized by the Constitution; they have denounced as sinful the institution of slavery.”<sup>21</sup> Even though Lincoln claimed he would not end slavery where it existed, they viewed the end of slavery in states to come as a violation of this right, and perhaps they did not believe Lincoln in his claim to not touch slavery in the South at all.

While slavery was a primary cause of the conflict, revisionists such as William Gienapp made good arguments that zealots too played an important part in stirring up sectional strife.<sup>22</sup> Here traditionally, abolitionists would have to strike this down in any way possible, to minimize any risk to their case that slavery was the overwhelming cause of the conflict. And while it is a central factor causing the Civil War, it was not the only factor. War is complicated and can have many factors both tangible and intangible. To suggest that the Civil War must be either caused by fanatics or slavery is to create a false dichotomy. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that both slavery and the zealot minority shared in causing the Civil War. As the scholar James Randall wrote: “The notion that you must have war when you have cultural variation, or economic competition, or sectional difference is an unhistorical misconception which it is stupid in historians to promote.”<sup>23</sup>

A great example of this magnification of sectional issues can be seen in the caning of Charles Sumner. “Republicans used the Sumner assault and the incidents in Kansas to support their basic contention that the South... had united in a design to stamp out all liberties of Northern white men. This became one of

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<sup>21</sup> State of South Carolina, “Confederate States of America - Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union” 1860, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/csa\\_scarsec.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_scarsec.asp)

<sup>22</sup> William E. Gienapp, “The Crime Against Sumner: The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 25 No. 3 September 1979, pp. 218-245, in Michael Perman, *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1998), 47.

<sup>23</sup> Randall, James G., “The Blundering Generation,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXVII (June, 1940), 3-28, in Michael Perman, *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 53.



the most important and pervasive themes in the Republican campaign of 1856.”<sup>24</sup> For his part, Gienapp details how successful this move was for the Republicans and argues that it was of “critical importance transforming the struggling Republican Party into a major political force.”<sup>25</sup> And while condemned by some of the South, he was praised by many others. Some even sent him canes to replace the one he broke.<sup>26</sup>

Another example of this so-called “fanaticism” was made apparent by John Brown, who used violence to capture Harpers Ferry and incite a slave insurrection in the South, which only affirmed the claims of the fire-eaters. The violence in Kansas, the Senate, and at Harpers Ferry were all examples of zealots pursuing their political goals. Politicians fueled the fire and polarized the United States to gain support for their own parties and organizations at the cost of national unity. In this matter, the revisionists have a point. As revisionists point out, there were many other slave societies in the world that did not need a civil war to resolve the matter.<sup>27</sup> As the Southern idea of themselves became more connected with and grounded with slavery, and the more people questioned the morality of slavery, the fiercer their defense of the institution became out of fear of losing their way of life.

Slavery was very much a sectional issue, not one simply manufactured by politicians. It was an essential part of how the Southern economy functioned at the time, and in the mind of the Southerner it was crucial to preserving their way of life. The abolitionist and Free Soil movements stood in contrast to these Southern ideals. This natural tension ultimately boiled over into conflict. Zealots and fanatics of both sides further polarized the nation, culminating in the Civil War.

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<sup>24</sup> William E. Gienapp, “The Crime Against Sumner: The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 25 No. 3 September 1979, pp. 218-245, in Michael Perman, *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1998), 47.

<sup>25</sup> Gienapp, “The Crime Against Sumner,” 218-245, In Perman, “Major Problems,” 52.

<sup>26</sup> Gienapp, “The Crime Against Sumner,” 218-245, In Perman, “Major Problems,” 43.

<sup>27</sup> Randall, James G., “The Blundering Generation,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXVII (June, 1940), 3-28, in Michael Perman, *The Coming of the American Civil War*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 53

## **The Other Victims: Polish Catholics in the Holocaust**

*Joey Lebar*

In August 1939, Adolf Hitler delivered a speech which laid out the plans and intentions of the invasion of Poland, which was to be carried out a week later. In the speech, he stated, “Accordingly, I have placed my death-hand formation in readiness-for the present only in the East-with orders for them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space that we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”<sup>1</sup> Millions of Polish civilians from all backgrounds would feel the wrath of the Nazis firsthand during the initial invasion in September 1939. Within a month, Poland had surrendered. The Nazis committed widespread war crimes against civilians and waged a cultural war against the people of Poland following Hitler’s orders.

In addition to the horrific atrocities committed against the Jewish people of Poland and Eastern Europe, the Nazis also targeted the Polish Catholic Clergy. During the invasion, thousands of Polish Catholics were targeted, arrested, imprisoned, or executed by the Nazis. The Polish Catholic Church as an institution was also a major target for the Nazis during their invasion of Poland and throughout the war in Eastern Europe. The Catholic Church was and still is well-rooted and integral to Polish culture throughout history. During the invasion, mass arrests and executions were carried out against the Polish clergy to stop any potential resistance and destroy Polish culture. As part of the effort to destroy Poland, many members of the clergy who were not executed were arrested and sent to Dachau, the first concentration camp opened in Germany for, intended initially for political prisoners. Here, many would suffer and die alongside the many other victim groups of the Holocaust.

These attacks on ethnic Poles and Polish Catholics are often under-recognized, despite happening alongside many of the horrific atrocities of the Holocaust against Jewish people of Eastern Europe, and especially in Poland. When looking at the Holocaust in Poland, the focus is often on Polish Jews and Roma, while the atrocities and enslavement of ethnic Poles, Ukrainians,

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<sup>1</sup> “Adolf Hitler, *Obersalzberg Speech*, 22 August 1939,” Internet Modern History Sourcebook, last modified May 2024, <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/mod/hitler-obersalzberg.asp>

Belorussians and other Slavic groups is discussed much less frequently. The atrocities and persecution of especially the Catholic Church in Poland is not well-known nor deeply studied. There are nevertheless a number of historians who have written about and studied this or similar topics in specific areas. Richard Lukas has examined the overall Holocaust and war in Poland and the atrocities committed against the people of Poland.<sup>2</sup> Robert Gellately and Tadeusz Piotrowski likewise demonstrate that the Nazis committed a cultural serial genocide against the people of Poland.<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Huener, meanwhile, shows how the Nazis targeted the Catholic Church throughout the occupation.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, Paul Berben discusses the imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp of Polish clergy.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the existing historiography discusses the planned use of Poland for German living space, and the destruction of Polish culture, as well as space for the genocide of the Jews of Europe. A new and developing discussion has emerged that focuses on answering why the Catholic Church in Poland was so heavily targeted and persecuted alongside Jewish and other cultural institutions, especially in Eastern Europe. Many historians are now studying and asking; why were Polish Catholic clergy treated worse, and persecuted so heavily throughout the Holocaust?

This research paper examines the historical events of the invasion of Poland during the early stages of the second World War, and the persecution of members of the Polish Catholic church throughout the occupation. Through the perspective of the many priests who were arrested and imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp, as well as liberators who rescued people from this camp, one can see how Polish Catholics were specifically targeted for imprisonment and how their treatment reflects the wider goals of the Nazis. This paper will argue

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<sup>2</sup> Richard C Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986)

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gellately, "The Third Reich, The Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide" in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in the Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation: The Reichsgau Wartheland, 1939-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Paul Berben, *Dachau: The Official History*, (London: The Norfolk Press, 1975), 138-157,

that the Nazis efforts to destroy and demoralize the church was an attempt to eliminate Polish culture, the first major step of a larger, colonial genocide of Poles and Eastern Europeans in general.

The full wrath of the Nazi army was felt first by the people of Poland in September 1939. The invasion and subsequent occupation and annexation of Poland was brutal and intense. Civilians were targeted, executed, and even killed as collateral in the aggressive invasion tactic that would be known as *Blitzkrieg*. Together with the Soviets, both nations effectively partitioned Poland in separate, but brutal occupations. On the Nazi side in Eastern Poland, there was little regard for life during the invasion, and it became clear that not only were the Nazis planning on taking over Poland, but they were also planning on destroying the Polish nationality. This was a widely held belief among not only high-ranking leaders of the Wehrmacht and the SS, but also among Polish Jews, and many who survived the war. Many believed that non-Jewish Poles, including Catholics, would be exterminated as well.<sup>6</sup> The Nazis first killed civilians in massacres, and official doctrines called specifically for the executions and imprisonments of Polish political and cultural leaders. This policy was quickly implemented at the beginning of the invasion. They wanted to target the Polish “elites,” which broadly included doctors, teachers, landowners, and anyone with cultural significance or any sort of political or social power.<sup>7</sup> These attacks also included members of the Polish Catholic clergy. During the first few months of the invasion, hundreds of priests were executed in the annexed territories of Poland.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the mass killings, many of them were arrested or imprisoned.

Among the many clergy who were rounded up and arrested, some who survived the Holocaust have given testimonies. In 1939 and following as arrest, the Nazis sent Stanley Dabrowski, a newly ordained Polish priest, to the Dachau concentration camp. When his church was raided in Eastern Poland, Dabrowski was arrested on site and sent to Dachau where he faced torture and abuse, which he described as “worse than any other group apart from the Jews.” He describes how upon arrival to Dachau, the Polish priests were imprisoned separately from the rest of the prisoners and that they faced not only abuse, starvation and torture but many were executed by guards and even other prisoners. He says that of the nearly 400 clergy members arrested from his diocese, only around one hundred

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<sup>6</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation*, 86.

survived the imprisonment.<sup>9</sup> This was not uncommon in Poland, especially as the war continued. A series of mass arrests of Polish clergy were undertaken in German annexed and occupied Poland, and by late 1941, nearly all had been imprisoned in Dachau.<sup>10</sup>

To cover up their efforts and attempt to remain on seemingly good terms with the Catholic Church, the Nazi occupiers allowed churches to “remain open” for a few hours each day. However, due to the mass arrests of the clergy, raids of churches and executions of church members, many of these churches were unable to stay open and were effectively shut down in Poland. Hitler had originally called for the “liquidation” of the Polish clergy (specifically in annexed Poland), and while this was not achieved directly, indirectly the church had effectively been destroyed in Poland as almost all churches were forced to close, according to a Vatican report.<sup>11</sup>

Strong anti-Polish sentiment among the Nazi officials drove these policies. The Polish corridor, separating German lands in two, motivated Nazi hatred of ethnic Poles, and German disdain for Poles in general.<sup>12</sup> He considered their blood to be tainted and impure and believed they could not be a part of the future Aryan, racially pure Reich. To reunify ethnic Germans and purify the race, Poles needed to be eliminated. The targeting of Polish culture, demoralization and destruction of the Polish nationality was a part of this larger vision. As stated before, the original plans included the liquidation of the entire church, wreaking havoc, and destroying the Polish people. As the scholar Tadeusz Piotrowski writes: “During the German military occupation [...] entire towns and villages were completely destroyed. By the end of 1939, over 40,000 people<sup>13</sup> The number of Poles killed during this early phase was comparable to the number of Jews killed. According to historian Richard Lukas, Polish people were even<sup>14</sup> They were considered political enemies of Germany, and no one was safe, especially the “Polish elite.” As Jonathan Huener writes:

Nazi efforts to demoralize and destroy Polish culture, such as the church, were part of a larger, racially motivated anti-Polish sentiment

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley Dabrowski, Interview by Jerome M. Hudziek, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, RG-50.249.0001, 20 April 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation*, 98.

<sup>12</sup> Gwiazda, *The Nazi Racial War*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, 34.

and continued throughout the war. Even after the initial Others, especially clergy, would end up at Dachau and face starvation, torture, and death.<sup>15</sup>

Following the invasion of Poland, deportations of civilians, church and political officials were widespread. This was the beginning stages of the GPO in action. The newly formed Polish government in exile fled to France, and later London to help promote and continue the Polish resistance to Nazi occupation throughout the war. Those who were not arrested or executed in the first years of the invasion were deported, and many found refuge in France and, later, Great Britain. Polish people, and particularly Polish Catholics, were persecuted outside of Poland as well. In the early stages of the war, Father Francis Ciegelka was a Polish Catholic priest, as head of the Polish Catholic mission in France. Ciegelka secretly assisted the Polish underground resistance, illegally broadcasting sermons to Poles in occupied Poland.<sup>16</sup> His goal was to keep the faith of the Polish people, the culture alive, and the resistance going. Father Ciegelka is an example of how the Polish church played an important role in the underground resistance, both in and outside of occupied Poland. In 1940 and after the fall of France, his resistance activities got him arrested in Paris. He described himself as a “great enemy of Nazis” after describing them as Anti-Christian and helping them resist occupation.<sup>17</sup> Father Ciegelka details his transfer to several different prisons where he was beaten, starved and abused before being sent to Dachau in 1942. He explains how in Dachau, he and fellow Polish Catholics had to worship and practice their faith in secret. Unlike German Christians who were incarcerated in the camp, they could not access a chapel or even pray.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, he was still able to find and help other people in secret with their religious issues and served as a sort of “underground” priest for other prisoners in the camp.

His devotion to Christianity helped him and many others get through their time in Dachau. His experiences not only illustrate Nazi hatred for Polish Catholics but also reflects how important Catholicism was to many Polish people during the Holocaust. This also points to the fear among the Nazis of the role the Church would play in resistance to occupation. Both inside and outside of

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<sup>15</sup> Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Cegielka, Francis Antoni, Interview by Linda G. Kuzmack, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, RG-50.030.0052, 2 October 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Antoni Cegielka, Interview, 2 October 1990

<sup>18</sup> Francis Antoni Cegielka, Interview, 2 October 1990

Poland, the Catholic Church needed to be silenced and oppressed to stop any potential resistance, and Father Cegielka's experience is evidence that the Church would play that role. Other priests had attempted to resist German occupation. Huener details how Walenty Dymek gave illegal sermons, heard confessions, and provided religious escape while under house arrest. He also gathered information for the Polish underground.<sup>19</sup> Once the churches closed and priests were imprisoned, the resistance in Poland began to die down.<sup>20</sup> The Catholic church and its clergy provided ample resources and even morale to people both in occupied Poland and in the camps. Moreover, they helped drive the resistance to German occupation throughout the war and helped many get through their time in concentration camps.

Most of the Polish Catholic prisoners were imprisoned in Dachau, in southern Germany. Dachau was a concentration camp intended originally for political prisoners, and many Polish Catholic priests were sent to and died there. Both Francis Cegielka and Stanley Dabrowski were imprisoned there among many other Catholic priests, many of whom would die of starvation or be executed. Priests were held separately and treated much differently than many of the rest of the prisoners. Polish clergy were described as having the worst conditions. Stanley Dabrowski demonstrates how priests were "tricked" into crossing a line by guards, giving them an excuse to be executed.<sup>21</sup> Polish priests in Dachau were starved, neglected, and forced to live in terrible conditions alongside the Jews. In the camp, healthy priests were even experimented on, many of whom died, while others were exterminated in industrial gas chambers posing as showers.<sup>22</sup> Religious activity was forbidden and despite this, as Cegielka described, many practiced their faith in secret. When Dachau was liberated in 1945, the liberators saw the terrible conditions and the mass murders of its inhabitants, clergy included. Charles Froug was a medical officer who helped liberate Dachau near the end of World War II. Froug discusses his group moving into the city of Rosenheim, Germany and the noticeable, unmistakable smell that was described as a fertilizer factory by the locals.<sup>23</sup> They followed the smell several miles until they reached Dachau, a concentration camp. Upon reaching the camp, he describes seeing a wide variety of prisoners, including

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<sup>19</sup> Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation*, 254.

<sup>20</sup> Huener, *The Polish Catholic Church Under German Occupation*, 253.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley Dabrowski, Interview, 20 April 1982

<sup>22</sup> Berben, *Dachau*, 148-149.

<sup>23</sup> Froug, Charles, Interview by Renate Frydman, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, RG-50.035.01.0001 12 May 1987.

Jews as well as political prisoners including Catholic clergy. According to Froug, he discovered piles of bodies and recognized the strong smell of burning flesh. When he arrived at the camp and liberated the prisoners, he noticed how “not one person weighed over 70 lbs. They were emaciated and crying, and the only outlook they had on their entire life was being burned in the furnaces of the crematorium in the back of the camp.”<sup>24</sup> Froug gives a unique outsider perspective on what the camp looked like to him and his military group from the United States. He describes a wide variety of prisoners in Dachau, suffering, and hundreds of people dead and many more on their way there, and the pungent smell of burnt, dead flesh coming from the crematorium in the camp.<sup>25</sup> In addition to this, he painted a picture of indiscriminate killings of all prisoners, as when they gave the bodies a proper burial, “there was no way to tell who was Jewish, who was Catholic, and who was Lutheran.”<sup>26</sup> Froug’s account is evidence of the indiscriminate killing and terrible treatment of all prisoners, including Catholics. Many of the priests who were liberated described how many of their peers ended up dying, either by execution or neglect, abuse or starvation.

The persecution of the Catholic Church in Poland during the Holocaust should be more recognized and considered alongside the terrible atrocities and genocide of other minority groups in Europe. A significant number of Polish clergy and devout Polish Catholics were killed or imprisoned in the Holocaust and treated nearly the same as the other groups in the genocide. Overall, much of the persecution and treatment of Polish Catholics was part of a campaign to demoralize and destroy Polish culture and eventually their nationality. The Catholic Church was especially targeted as it was, and remains to this day, a central, integral part of the identity of Polish people. By destroying the church in Poland, Polish people would lose a major part of their culture. As the mass killings and arrests of Poles as well as the Nazi racial beliefs demonstrate, there was a planned genocide of Polish people during the Nazi occupation of Poland in the Second World War.

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Froug, Interview, 12 May 1987

<sup>25</sup> Charles Froug, Interview, 12 May 1987

<sup>26</sup> Charles Froug, Interview, 12 May 1987



## **Sociobiology: The Scientifically Political Answer to How Societies Survive**

*Bryce Harris*

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Hong Xiuquan, a participant in the major civil service examinations during the Qing dynasty, led a major revolt that took the lives of over 20 million Chinese citizens. Hong claimed that he was sent to Earth to reform China from its Manchurian rulers. He also proclaimed himself the son of God and younger brother to Jesus. Although many have viewed Hong, like religious zealots across time, as theologically misguided and even heretical, God and gods have been used by cultures for thousands of years to justify the actions of civilizations. God, for example, was used as justification for the crusades in the Middle East as it was the destiny of Christians to take back the holy land of Jerusalem. During the age of imperialism, Europeans claimed that they were on a mission to bring God to conquered territories. Even in the Cold War, the United States often used Christianity to support western superiority over the atheist Soviet Union. God apparently has a long history of choosing sides in human struggles throughout time. But what happens to a society increasingly disillusioned by religious justification? How does such a society determine strength if God does not pick and choose? A proposed answer to this was sociobiology, the study of genetically passed down behaviors that were thought to determine cultural traits.

In the 1970s, American biologist Edward O. Wilson suggested answers to these questions in his bestselling books *Sociobiology: A New Synthesis* (1975) and *On Human Nature* (1978). Wilson sought to apply new discoveries of DNA structure to his theory that genes inherently determine human nature. In this, he believed he was building on Charles Darwin's world renowned, earth-shattering book from 1859, *On the Origin of Species*. Wilson argued that the survival of the fittest, in which the species with the greatest physical fitness and ability to produce offspring thrives, also works at the genetic level. Darwin theorized that the physical traits of organisms are passed down through generations if those traits were conducive to producing off-spring. But Wilson went a step further, stating that the non-physical traits of humans such as behavior and culture are also determined by the passing down of strong genes. In Wilson's *On Human Nature*, he stated that some of his motivation for asserting his biological thesis was that the transcendental goals given by God had to be replaced by something inward, more specifically our genetic history.<sup>1</sup> If genes were the new answer to

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<sup>1</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Harvard University Press, 1978), 4.

the strength and motivation of society, genes within the most powerful people must be the answer to why they hold such high social status.

Many leftwing scholars criticized Wilson's idea of sociobiology, even though it made a huge impact as a trendy explanation for a host of social phenomena. Critics like Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin argued that Wilson simply wanted to undo the progressive movements of the 1960s, especially the Civil Rights Movement. Sociobiology was a convenient explanation for an unfair status quo. If Wilson's theories were correct, inequality was not a result of oppression by the powerful, but rather the consequences of the genes of the downtrodden. In this view, sociobiology is an unjust and opportunistic pseudo-science that simply seeks to rationalize and even spread inequality.

Left-wing criticism of Wilson and sociobiology, however, opens another historical question: were any left-wing scholars and critics open-minded and creative enough to use the methods put forth by Wilson to further progressive goals? In the immediate aftermath of Wilson's books, the answer to this question is no. What historical sources show, however, is that, once the original debate subsided, some on the left did indeed adopt sociobiology to a variety of their causes, such as feminism and the sexual revolution. This then leads to another historical question, one that informs this research: What is it about sociobiology that has made it so appealing to people from a variety of political perspectives?

When looking back on the sociobiology debate of the 1970s and 1980s, the true reason both scientists and political thinkers from the left and right clung on to this scientific ideology was what it implied about how societies should behave. Prominent thought before Darwin's discovery of natural selection was that God created mankind and that humans were therefore part of some divine purpose. Following 1859, however, it became evident that there could be some sort of alternative origin of the human species in which they developed from a common ancestor and improved in genetic fitness due to the increase in offspring. With Wilson's assertions in 1975, social behaviors were lumped into Darwin's theory as also being a determining factor in genetic fitness. Genes that help decide behavior either lived on or they died out, showing that the behaviors that are most beneficial to societies will strengthen them. God was thought to be within genes, as now genes justified the actions of human beings. The right of the political spectrum argued that traditional behaviors led to success while leftwingers argued that more progressive actions will further strengthen society. It also helps that some of the critics of sociobiology claim it is an untestable

theory for humans, meaning it could almost be applied to anything. The reason sociobiology was so appealing to political actors is that it suggested that genetically beneficial behaviors influenced the actions of strong societies. To analyze this further, this paper will analyze Darwinism, Edward O. Wilson's works and the conservative and liberal adoption of sociobiology.

Before taking on the actual sociobiology debate itself, it is beneficial to analyze where this argument fits in with the limited historiography on sociobiology. Even though the focus of this paper is the sociobiological debate of the 1970s and 1980s within the United States and Europe, a lot of historians argue that the concept of sociobiology existed long before Wilson's *Sociobiology*. This line of thinking was meant to rationalize sociobiological thought as though people had used it for centuries. Wilson proposed his ideas not long after the Civil Rights Movement, so him implying that social inequalities are just a fact of nature would eventually cause major backlash. Michael Boyles and Rick Tilman agreed with this notion and wrote on the comparison between Edward O. Wilson and Thorstein Veblen, an economist and sociologist who wrote on sociobiological concepts. In Boyles and Tilman's journal entry, "Thorstein Veblen, Edward O. Wilson, and Sociobiology: An Interpretation," they discussed how Veblen suggested that populations benefit from large gene pools along with weaker genes not dying out because they may become a stronger characteristic in society later on.<sup>2</sup> Suggesting that there is a hierarchy at all is a cause for alarm, as the implication that there will always be weaker and stronger people in society is a precursor for Wilson's later work. Boyles and Tilman suggest that the lack of a reaction to Veblen was more subdued due to his work not alienating a certain demographic. Wilson made statements in his own book that attacked Marxists, radical environmentalists, and extreme behaviorists because human nature will not allow the creation of utopian societies if those societies have freedoms taken away.<sup>3</sup> Another historian, Jean-Baptiste Grodwohl argued something very similar in which she discusses how sociobiology had been studied for decades with figures such as Nico Timbergen, who studied animal behaviors in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> Wilson was stated to have received significant influence from ethologist John Crook, who wrote a review on the social

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Boyles and Rick Tilman, "Thorstein Veblen, Edward O. Wilson, and Sociobiology: An Interpretation," *Journal of Economic Issues* 27 (1993): 1198.

<sup>3</sup> Boyles and Tilman, "Thorstein Veblen, Edward O. Wilson, and Sociobiology," 1198.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Baptiste Grodwohl, "Animal Behavior, Population Biology, and the New Synthesis," *Journal of the History of Biology* 52 (2019): 606.

behaviors of animals.<sup>5</sup> Some historians have argued, like these two, that sociobiology has been around for a long time, and many seek to use it to rationalize social phenomena.

Following this thesis on sociobiology's long existence, some historians believe that sociobiology has a lot to offer us in terms of understanding behaviors. One of those historians was John Alcock in his book *The Triumph of Sociobiology*, in which he argues that sociobiology as a discipline has a lot to offer. Alcock affirmed that evolutionary theory is not at all controversial for biologists in the twenty-first century. Yet Wilson was harshly criticized during his time for making an ideologically based approach towards human behavior.<sup>6</sup> Alcock characterized fellow scientists like Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin as Marxist or semi-Marxist, which is important to his argument as it supposedly led to them being unreceptive to sociobiology as the notion of a concrete human nature existing went against the perfectibility of institutions due to ideological prescriptions.<sup>7</sup>

While Alcock may have had a more conservative view on the matter, Finnish historian Antti Lepisto argued that biologists used sociobiology for progressive purposes not long after Wilson's publications in the 1970's. In his journal article "Revisiting the Left-Wing Response to Sociobiology: The Case of Finland in a European Context," he stated that left-leaning scientists argued that the true nature of human beings was altruistic in the face of crises such as the Cold War. Some scientists cited that primates did not exhibit aggressive behavior towards one another. Lepisto concluded that human beings, in their close relation to primates, should be almost the same if they come from the same common ancestor.<sup>8</sup> Both Alcock and Lepisto seem to be on two different sides of the spectrum, with each picking out different ideas from sociobiology and placing it in their world view. Sociobiology was a new scientific and sociological discipline which allowed it to be bent in all directions in terms of applying it to a certain ideology.

Sociobiology was, and remains, mostly a political talking point rather than a factor in human behavior. While there may be some ideas put forth that determine how people behave, some scientific historians believe that

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<sup>5</sup> Grodwohl, "Animal Behavior," 610.

<sup>6</sup> John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Antti Lepisto, "Revisiting the Left Wing Response to Sociobiology: The Case of Finland in a European Context," *Journal of the History of Sociobiology* 48 (2015): 120.

sociobiology is mostly a justification for personal ideals. Neil Jumonville in his article, “The Cultural Politics of the Sociobiology Debate,” argues that sociobiology was a debate about multiculturalism rather than a left versus right conflict.<sup>9</sup> Jumonville claims Wilson was somewhat progressive in some areas such as race relations, but he also made comments in *Sociobiology* that were traditional in nature such as males being aggressive and socially dominant.<sup>10</sup> In this view, Wilson was a politically confused figure, which would explain his appeal to both sides of the political spectrum.

The idea of sociobiology as a useful political tool echoes how some applied social Darwinism to human societies. Richard Hofstadter in his book *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (1944) wrote on this phenomenon and, although this book was written three decades before *Sociobiology*, it details how Social Darwinism was used by several disciplines like history, anthropology, and sociologists.<sup>11</sup> Social Darwinism had a special place in the United States after the Civil War due to a political mood of conservatism. The country sought a sense of normalness with the massive political issues that occurred in the antebellum period (1812-1861). Conservatives used Social Darwinism to “reconcile the hardships their fellows to some of the hardships of life and to prevail upon them not to support hasty and ill-considered reforms.”<sup>12</sup> Hofstadter’s argument sounded like those that criticized sociobiology, although he was writing on Social Darwinism, because it defended the social hierarchy and warned against reform as it disrupts nature. His argument was not that Darwinism is false, but instead he argues that the social implications were wrong. From here, one can draw a direct line between social Darwinism and sociobiology, as both could have empirical aspects but do not work when you apply them to sociology.

The research indicates a blend of the two theses as to why people were able to use sociobiology to further their agendas: sociobiology was both an underdeveloped concept that could explain widespread phenomena and its usefulness as simply a political tool. What all these scholars overlook, however, is that sociobiology is a justification for how a society ought to live. For example, referring to Lepisto, he argued that human societies survive best when altruistic behaviors are exhibited within a society, such as when people protested nuclear

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<sup>9</sup> Neil Jumonville, “The Cultural Politics of the Sociobiology Debate,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 35 (2002): 570.

<sup>10</sup> Jumonville, “The Cultural Politics of the Sociobiology Debate,” 579-580.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 5.

war during the Euromissile Crisis in 1983. Compare this to Jumonville, who states that the left has a significant focus on multiculturalism as the key to a great society, echoing the Civil Rights Movement. Boyles had hints of Jumonville's argument in his work as he stated that Thorstein Veblen believed in having a large gene pool with a lot of diversity to promote survivability. All theories point to the strength of a society originating from sociobiology.

To conduct an in-depth analysis of the sociobiologist phenomenon in relation to the strength of society, we must first consider its origins. Although the research primarily took place during the 1970s and 1980s, the main inspiration of sociobiology is Darwinism. When Charles Darwin explained natural selection to the masses, he was met with a large amount of controversy. Most historians note the religious adaptation and backlash that occurred following Darwin's work, such as by Louis Agassiz who took both attitudes and combined them to state that there is change that occurs in organisms. This change had nothing to do with chance and everything to do with God simply rethinking his designs.<sup>13</sup> Although religious in nature, American historian John Fiske stated that natural selection is "in one respect intensely Calvinistic; it elects one and damns the other ninety-nine."<sup>14</sup>

Looking at this Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* is important to understanding sociobiology in the twentieth century as many of the historians previously discussed mention Darwinism and its relation to Wilson. Many drew the link between the two because of the natural selection references in both Darwin's and Wilson's work, despite Wilson focusing on social behaviors rather than physical characteristics. *On Human Nature* supports this as Wilson discusses the function of the human brain is promoting "the survival and multiplication of the genes that direct its assembly."<sup>15</sup> Wilson connected genealogically motivated behavior to natural selection by suggesting that strong societies usually use the supposed "stronger" behaviors, which drew a direct line to Darwin even if their theses are a century apart.

The clearest connection between Darwin and Wilson lies in Darwin's definition for the "struggle of existence." Hofstadter even mentions this as an important aspect of Social Darwinism because of nature being able to "provide

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<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *The Ideas that Made America* (Oxford University Press: 2019), 78.

<sup>14</sup> Ratner-Rosenhagen, *The Ideas that Made America*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 2.

that the best competitors in a competitive situation would win.”<sup>16</sup> Not mentioned by Hofstadter, however, was that Darwin realized in his work that organisms do not survive alone, hence taking away the idea of an individual struggle. Collective genetic success, according to Darwin, is the “dependence of one being on another, and not only including the life of the individual, but the success of leaving progeny (offspring).”<sup>17</sup> Darwin used the example of the mistletoe to demonstrate this, as it relies on other organisms to survive. The struggle for existence is not exactly shared by the mistletoe and the trees, as if too many parasites infect the trees, they die.<sup>18</sup> But, when several mistletoes exist on the same branch, they struggle for existence together.<sup>19</sup> Darwin placed survival in a community sense, beyond the individual and working with others in the surrounding area which implies that survival is a societal mission. What this means is that human beings alone cannot survive, but larger communities of people can. In the hypothetical situation that Darwin proposed, the mistletoe feeds off the trees, but also birds feed from the mistletoe on the trees. The actions of these organisms establish hierarchy like Wilson would later argue. If the birds did not eat the mistletoe, they would either starve or find another source of energy. In *Sociobiology*, Wilson cited the work of a Swedish geneticist, Gunnar Dahlberg, in which he concluded that if a single gene appeared in upper class individuals, it tends to be concentrated in that social class.<sup>20</sup> Actions by the wealthy and successful are prompted by genes that help with maintaining social status, therefore giving justification for an unequal, socio-economic hierarchy. In Dahlberg’s book that Wilson references, *Mathematical Methods for Population Genetics* (1947), he suggested that an “isolate thus corresponds to the lower class, which is deprived of talents which work their way up.”<sup>21</sup> This means that the lower-class in all societies have genes that cause them to exhibit behaviors that do not result in upward social mobility. Views like these garnered Wilson much criticism from the left-wing scientists. As a review of Darwin demonstrates, these ideas can be drawn from Darwinian thinking.

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<sup>16</sup> Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (New American Library: 1859), 62.

<sup>18</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Harvard University Press: 1975), 554.

<sup>21</sup> Gunnar Dahlberg, *Mathematical Methods for Population Genetics* (State Institute of Human Genetics: 1947), 139.

Reinforcing social inequality is clearly something that can be drawn from the original research done by Darwin and those that came after him like Dahlberg. But the example provided is also just among different species. Stating the hierarchy of trees, mistletoes, and birds is fine until you consider that they are different organisms with different needs to succeed in the struggle of existence. Darwin, not realizing his words' impact on the sociobiology debate of the late twentieth century, also had an answer for this. Darwin asserted that organisms of the same origin typically struggle more with each other than with species of a different origin.<sup>22</sup> When invasive species, even if they are similar organisms, are placed "in a new country with new competitors, the conditions of its life will change."<sup>23</sup> Darwin clarifies this with an example of a certain breed of swallow dominating in the United States over another, showing a new set of conditions that the weaker swallow must adapt to due to its inferred inferiority.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that instead of competition occurring between species, there is an implied domination of one set of species over another. Wilson used this idea to justify why some individuals have better social positions within our society, as they are simply dominating those that cannot equal them even though they are part of the same origin. In addition, this connects to the work of Boyles and Tilman in which they reference the belief that weak genes never truly die but are instead dormant until they can arise again.<sup>25</sup> Society determined what behaviors are considered strong or weak, which paves the way for future political actors to determine what is a socially strong behavior and who gets to be leaders within a society like the invasive swallows.

*Origin of Species* is what would eventually lead to Wilson's *Sociobiology: A New Synthesis* and the modifications to its principles both on the right and left. When Wilson published this work in 1975, he only focused on human behavior in one chapter, "Man: From Sociobiology to Sociology." This leant some credence to the historians who suggest that Wilson really had not meant to cause such an uproar. One could argue that he simply included human behavior to make his argument more well-rounded. Upon reading this chapter, however, Wilson wished to conclude his book with a clear vision on how behavior is genealogically based and how it greatly impacted human societies. In a section in which Wilson analyzed the structure of human societies, he discussed how human social organization is very flexible. He argued that the environment

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<sup>22</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 73.

<sup>23</sup> Darwin, *On the Origins of Species*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Boyles and Tilman, "Thorstein Veblen, Edward O. Wilson, and Sociobiology," 1198.



most likely caused the wide variance of cultures, but there are some genotypic factors that determine behaviors in a society.<sup>26</sup> Wilson cited the Kung Bushmen in Africa as a prime example, stating that the best men are typically entrepreneurs whereas there are those that don't make it in their society due to a plethora of reasons.<sup>27</sup> Something about the human genes, suggested Wilson, allowed people to fit perfectly into certain hierarchical roles.<sup>28</sup> Even in unjust societies, genes somehow make people complicit to their established hierarchies. Wilson brought up the slave society of Jamaica to state how a place so unjust could exist for two hundred years.<sup>29</sup> Equally questionable was his use of the Ik in Uganda, in which he argued how this society made a switch to agricultural cultivation rather than pursuing hunter-gatherer norms. In describing the Ik, he discussed how there is no nuclear family, lack of direction for children, uselessness in marriage, and death was seen as a way of relief or amusement.<sup>30</sup> When reading this, conservative scientists and political advocates would jump on the chance to discuss such an assertion. If genes are adaptive and allow people to sink into their roles, then society must allow for the strongest possible outcome for the community.

The sources demonstrate that Wilson contained both conservative and leftist world views. Take, for example, Wilson's belief that the nuclear family is the cornerstone of nearly all human societies. The nuclear family, consisting of two married adults and at least one child, is considered by most to be the most basic social organization along with being one of the most universal. Anthropologists, however, widened the modern perception of families as the idea that all families must be nuclear is a Western form of ethnocentrism. While describing the nuclear family, Wilson stated that the men in both an American industrial city and hunter-gatherer groups in the Australian desert forge for game or in the equivalent of bargaining or money.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, women and children are expected to remain in the "residential area," presumably so women can nurture the children. Wilson also mentioned that polygamy, or the practice of marrying multiple wives, is also demonstrated by most men, and even asserting in *On Human Nature* that men were moderately polygamous.<sup>32</sup> According to

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<sup>26</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 550.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 549.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 549.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 549.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 549-550.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 553.

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 554.

Wilson's work, he believed in traditional gender roles backed by "empirical" evidence. By stating that the nuclear family itself is the cornerstone of a great society, and thereby revealing his ethnocentric views, he suggested this is how human beings should live, and that gender roles were natural as well.

Wilson also made remarks that appealed to progressives. The clearest of them all was the presence of a "gay gene". During the Clinton administration, American geneticist Dean Hamer would later adopt Wilson's gay gene concept in his own research controversy of having gay men in the military that would eventually result in the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in 1993. Wilson argued in *Sociobiology* that the gay gene could be a beneficial aspect of societies as, in primitive societies, gay men could play the role of hunters and domestic caregivers.<sup>33</sup> The argument suggested that a different sexuality is not morally reprehensible as it is biologically sound and supported a strong society. The main thing to keep in mind with these two examples, the nuclear family and gay gene, is that both ideals are meant to be behaviors that support a healthy society. Each behavior supports a certain ideology, one that originally supported sociobiology, conservatives, and the other that originally opposed it, open-minded progressives.

As a result of its implications, *Sociobiology* was a very controversial work in its time. His work implied that women were socially inferior to men and that the poorer population within the Kung bushmen in Africa, an example used by Wilson, easily fall into poverty due to their adaptive genes. The outcry against Wilson was deafening. Alcock describes one scene in which a woman poured a pitcher of cold water on to Wilson as he addressed American Association for the Advancement of Science at Harvard.<sup>34</sup> One of Wilson's other works, *On Human Nature* published in 1978, was a direct response to the criticism levied at him during the original release of *Sociobiology*. Although only one chapter out of the first book was dedicated to human behavior, it was by far the area that received the most attention and criticism. In the 2004 edition of *On Human Nature*, Wilson recognized that his work came after the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement, along with American democracy "proving its mettle" which could be hinting at the presidential election between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford in 1976, the year after sociobiology came out.<sup>35</sup> In the usual Wilson fashion, he also

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<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 555.

<sup>34</sup> Alcock, *Triumph of Sociobiology*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, Preface.

complained that these events caused extremism, increased political correctness, and made Marxism acceptable in the eyes of the public.<sup>36</sup>

One of the most popular issues referenced in this debate was the idea that humans were innately aggressive. As Wilson referenced in the preface of the 2004 edition of the book, he mentioned a violent conflict like Vietnam occurring close to the publication of *Sociobiology*. The proposition that human beings are aggressive was troublesome, as it in turn implied that war is natural during a time in which the United States was previously involved in four major wars: World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Wilson's defined this innateness as "the measurable probability that a trait will develop in a certain set of environments."<sup>37</sup> He described how many societies categorized as pacifist, mentioning the Kung and Semai people, were once violent tribes with high homicide rates until changes came in such as a central government to control them.<sup>38</sup> Essentially, the new environment brought upon by a central government, meaning more control on the population, has some sort of effect on the adaptive genes Wilson mentioned in *Sociobiology*. This is a very Hobbesian view of human behavior, as the Enlightenment era thinker Thomas Hobbes believed the purpose of government was to provide security from innately violent mobs. Regardless, Wilson provides another answer for what behaviors promote a better society which in this case is accepting control of a central government. Wilson provides an example of the Semai tribesmen, who apparently fought for the British with the goal of repelling Communist guerillas in the region Malaya. Taken out of their peaceful environment, the Semai allegedly experienced a "blood drunkenness" after their kin were killed in which they, in response, killed and looted in mass.<sup>39</sup> This may be an overblown observation because human societies have enacted vengeance on other societies for centuries. Additionally, Wilson does not detail the impact that the British themselves had on the Semai and, instead, pinned the trait of violent aggression on them. Yet the way Wilson framed made it seem as if there was a biological reason for the Semai violence which leads to his aggression thesis.

The aggression thesis proposed by Wilson has huge implications as it states that things such as wars were inevitable due to human nature. War itself is expanded upon further in this book, as he claims that ethnocentrism causes

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<sup>36</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, Preface.

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 99.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 100.

warlike policy. Wilson defines ethnocentrism as “exaggerated allegiance of individuals to their kin and fellow tribesmen.”<sup>40</sup> In his chapter about altruism, Wilson suggested that altruism, or the self-less concern for others, has evolved through human kinship as people will sacrifice themselves for those that carry on similar genes.<sup>41</sup> When connecting Wilson’s definitions of ethnocentrism and suggestions about altruism, he assumed that kinship relations causes ethnocentrism. Historians like Antti Lepisto even made this connection in his discussion on the use of sociobiology in Finland, in which he stated that Wilson made claims that ethnocentrism was most likely biologically based.<sup>42</sup> Charles Darwin suggested that species from the same origin tend to struggle against each other rather than with other species, typically with one section of a species dominating the other with little competition. This lends to Wilson’s theory and reaffirms conservative beliefs of an unjust social hierarchy.

Wilson never declared himself a conservative, but clearly his new field suggested hierarchies in the modern world and that to fight against them was pointless. Reaffirming gender roles, the importance of the nuclear family, and even the aggression thesis led to eventual conservative adoption of his ideas in the late 1970s. The antagonism that was also found in his work toward Marxists also gained the attention of conservative minds during the late Cold War, especially in the United States where Wilson resided. Many of the ideas proposed in sociobiology were traced to conservative texts, even if they do not directly mention sociobiology. Sociobiology is the justification for conservative thought for a stronger society through certain social behaviors.

The behaviors described in sociobiology were very much able to be aligned with conservative thought in the 1970s and 1980s. One defender of sociobiology was Daniel G. Freedman, a former American psychologist and professor in comparative human development at the University of Chicago. In 1979, he published *Human Sociobiology: A Holistic Approach* which sought to define sociobiology and reaffirm its teachings in the face of left-wing criticism. A section of the book that drew significant attention was the chapter titled “Biology or Culture,” which is very reminiscent of Wilson’s final chapter of *Sociobiology* as Freedman claimed it is the most controversial of the entire book. In this chapter, he wanted to settle the nature or nurture debate of human behavior by stating that the genetic and learned behaviors are glued together and

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<sup>40</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 110.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 153.

<sup>42</sup> Lepisto, “Revisiting the Left-Wing Response to Sociobiology,” 102.

cannot be separated.<sup>43</sup> Freedman analyzed the differences in ethnically different groups of newborns, primarily Chinese and Caucasian. He found that Caucasian babies displayed more annoyance and complaint to machinations from testers, whereas Chinese babies were more indifferent and adaptable.<sup>44</sup> This is then furthered by him comparing the culture and art of Asia and Europe, where a Chinese jade horse is made with a more “calm quality” rather than the agitation of the Roman terra-cotta horse.<sup>45</sup> He also characterized the behavior traits of African Americans, Natives of the Navajo Nation, and the Japanese newborns. Freedman’s thesis was not progressive in nature as he discredited race as a social construct in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement. Suggesting that behaviors are determined by the genes within an ethnic group lends to the hierarchy arguments of Wilson and goes against the progressive push for multiculturalism as mentioned by Jumonville in the “Cultural Politics of the Sociobiology Debate.” Issues faced by ethnic groups, under this view, are not due to systematic inequality but instead their culture and behavior, which supported a conservative viewpoint.

In addition to scientists like Freedman, there have been political writers that pointed out the inability for left-leaning beliefs like Marxism to exist in the natural world, even if the work does not mention sociobiology. A journal article in 1987 by Evan Simpson titled “Moral Conservatism”, for example, details a form of conservative culture in the twentieth century. This type of conservatism is referenced in the title of the article. As seen in *Sociobiology* and *On Human Nature*, morality and ethics was something that Wilson believed is biologically based, as altruism demonstrates. Wilson comments on this more in another article, “The Ethical Implications of Human Sociobiology,” in which he claimed that biological structures are innate guides to emotion and that we must accept our genetic history.<sup>46</sup> Returning to the notion of moral conservatism, Simpson argued it was based on four principles: honor the integrity of communities, pluralism, pessimism about utopian ideas by Marxists but optimistic on the persistence of conflict in society, and opposition to abstract morality.<sup>47</sup> Focusing on this idea of anti-Marxism, Simpson stated that the rule of any dominant class

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel G. Freedman, *Human Sociobiology: A Holistic Approach* (The Free Press: 1979), 144.

<sup>44</sup> Freedman, *Human Sociobiology*, 146.

<sup>45</sup> Freedman, *Human Sociobiology*, 153.

<sup>46</sup> Edward O. Wilson, “The Ethical Implications of Sociobiology,” *The Hastings Center Report* 10 (1980): 29.

<sup>47</sup> Evan Simpson, “Moral Conservatism,” *The Review of Politics* 49 (1987): 30.

of the past was unstable and doomed to fail as groups constantly competed with one another for supremacy.<sup>48</sup> The social order was always challenged, in which case Marxism would not allow for this due to the belief that all institutions can be perfected through ideological prescription and hold against continuous conflict.<sup>49</sup> The class conflict of Marx is a one-time occurrence meant to overthrow capitalist structures, whereas the perfect society embraces conflict due to the evolutionary changes in social behavior that occur over time.

The supposed scientific evidence of patriarchy also justified the conservative acceptance of sociobiology. Wilson, as stated prior, argued that women are typically expected to stay at home and nurture children. In *On Human Nature*, Wilson detailed that males benefit from aggression, haste, and fickleness whereas women benefit from being coy and waiting for men with the best genes or those with a prominent social standing like the entrepreneurial men within the Kung tribe.<sup>50</sup> In another bold assumption, Wilson detailed that the anatomy of women and men divided labor, with women being better at activities furthest away from hunting and aggression.<sup>51</sup> Traditional gender norms are what leads to a great society, according to Wilson, despite the changing times.

If sociobiology was so appealing to conservatives, how did it also appeal to progressives? Wilson borrowed the most conservative portions of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, primarily those associated with the notion of a natural hierarchy and created a science that justified the norms the left fought against in the 1960s such as racial discrimination and war. The left-wing critics did not indicate any sort of reconciliation at this time, primarily with the work of Richard Lewontin and Stephen Gould. Lewontin, in his criticisms, believed that sociobiology is untestable along with justifying four major isms that could have a negative effect on society at large: neo-social Darwinism, biological determinism, biological reductionism, and vulgar adaptationism.<sup>52</sup> For Gould, his two major criticisms were the lack of evidence in terms of biological influences of behavior and that it did not quite fit just-so stories, meaning that they don't adequately explain how things are.<sup>53</sup> Sociobiology had dethroned God

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<sup>48</sup> Simpson, "Moral Conservatism," 34.

<sup>49</sup> Alcock, *Triumph of Sociobiology*, 20.

<sup>50</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 125.

<sup>51</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Harmon R. Holcomb III, "The Modern Synthesis and Lewontin's Critique of Sociobiology," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 10 (1988): 318.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, "Sociobiology: The Art of Storytelling," *The New Scientist*, 1978, 532.

to make selection the “ultimate reality”<sup>54</sup> and the determining factor in superior behaviors. This vagueness of the discipline, however due to the made it so appealing to all people, regardless of political affiliation. Sociobiology leaned towards a conservative base, as evident in the work of Wilson, Freedman, and Simpson. Yet there were some progressive thinkers that hoped to use sociobiology for their own goals.

Some have used sociobiology to advance feminism too, despite the supposed biological strength of specific, defined gender roles. A.T. Nuyen, in her 1985 journal article “Sociobiology, Morality, and Feminism” pointed out how anti-feminists clung to sociobiology quite easily as they found “an old weapon sharpened and used it to attack the equality of the sexes.”<sup>55</sup> Wilson argued in his work that women are genetically inferior and that there needed to be rigid gender norms. Nuyen established feminism as a moral doctrine rather than an empirical one. Sociobiology merely tells us what we are, not how we should behave.<sup>56</sup> Nuyen pointed out that we have genetic biases and that we can overcome them with the simple tool of human reason.<sup>57</sup> Suggesting that sociobiology allows for people to go against human nature seemingly contradicts Wilson, as he seemed adamant that behavior is hardwired in human genetics. Wilson, however, agreed with Nuyen, in his article “The Ethical Implications of Sociobiology,” that we cannot obey all genetic motivators like aggression and that we can choose to reinforce positive ones through culture to change basic human nature.<sup>58</sup> Nuyen leverages Wilson's ideas to demonstrate how feminism is a right that goes beyond human nature. Nuyen suggested that the support of feminism is a strong behavior for a strong society if allowed to flourish.

If equality of the sexes is a key aspect to a strong society, what about the warlike behaviors that are innately with human beings? Aggression, as Wilson theorized, is a genetic trait of human beings that is usually displayed in war due to ethnocentrism. With the Vietnam War ending only a couple years before *Sociobiology* was published, this was a very bleak assumption to make as future wars would be seen as inevitable. In the 1987 work of Joshua Goldstein from the University of Southern California titled “The Emperor’s New Genes” wrote about an argument amongst two sociobiologists who suggested that human-

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<sup>54</sup> Gould, “Sociobiology: The Art of Storytelling,” 530.

<sup>55</sup> A.T. Nuyen, “Sociobiology, Morality, and Feminism,” *Human Studies* 8 (1985): 177.

<sup>56</sup> Nuyen, “Sociobiology, Morality, and Feminism,” 178.

<sup>57</sup> Nuyen, “Sociobiology, Morality, and Feminism,” 178.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, *The Ethical Implications of Sociobiology*, 29.

beings are innately aggressive. The idea that war is as natural as breathing and eating, however, was absurd to Goldstein, as human beings are more collaborative than aggressive. Goldstein argued that human beings tend to be altruistic because “in humans, cooperation and altruism have been at a much higher selective premium than any other primate.”<sup>59</sup> Wilson himself suggested that he agreed with this as well because if other organisms like “hamadryas baboons had nuclear weapons, they would destroy the world in a week.”<sup>60</sup> Human advancement is based on peaceful behaviors, once again proving how progressive behaviors can create a strong society.

The last major progressive adoption of sociobiology was by Dean Hamer. In 1993, the Clinton administration was tackling the issue whether gay men could serve in the military. In response to this, geneticist Dean Hamer wanted to prove that sexuality was not a moral issue, because it naturally occurred at birth. Hamer hypothesized that it mostly was a result of the supposed “gay gene,” which many gay activists supported because it proved that homosexuality was a natural occurrence. Hamer expanded on this later in his “Evidence of a Biological Influence in Male Homosexuality” within the journal *The Scientific American*. In his thesis, Hamer argued that the hypothalamus was the key to this as certain cell groups were different between straight and gay men.<sup>61</sup> He noted that the main reason for this mission was to dispel the myths about gay and lesbian individuals.<sup>62</sup> Wilson’s *Sociobiology* supported this, as it was suggested that the possible “gay gene” is a more superior gene than originally believed, along with the notion that gay men were quite beneficial to societies due to helping with caregiving and hunting.<sup>63</sup>

The recent history of sociobiology still has multiple implications for us today. The idea of genes influencing behavior is massive, as it suggests that there are certain ways for societies to behave to be considered strong. This was analyzed through Darwin’s ideas, Wilson’s works, and different ideals picked up by the right and the left. Some may believe that the sociobiology debate is over, but we are far from it. Take, for example, the idea that different ethnic groups exhibit different behaviors. In 2024, Republican President-Elect Donald Trump,

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<sup>59</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, “The Emperor’s New Genes: Sociobiology and War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 31 (1987): 36.

<sup>60</sup> Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 104.

<sup>61</sup> Dean Hamer, “Evidence of a Biological Influence in Male Homosexuality,” *The Scientific American* 270 (1994): 46.

<sup>62</sup> Hamer, “Evidence of a Biological Influence in Male Homosexuality,” 47.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 555.



suggested in a radio interview that immigrants commit crimes because it is “in their genes.”<sup>64</sup> Like Freedman attributing behaviors to ethnic groups, the president-elect of the United States did. Although Trump is not a scientist, he still planted ideas like this in the minds of the general and academic population of the United States and reviving the controversial debates of sociobiology.

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<sup>64</sup> “Trump on Immigrants: ‘We got a lot of bad genes in our country right now’,” available from <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/10/07/trump-immigrants-crime-00182702>; accessed 9 December 2024

## **A Champion for the Future: Michael Harrington's Contributions to the Contemporary American Left**

*Jason Pluister*

On a spring afternoon in 1966, American Leftist Michael Harrington participated in a debate on the television show *The Firing Line*. His opponent, William Buckley Jr., was a longtime political rival who, despite their differences, Harrington had come to respect. During this debate, the two men argued over a variety of issues, such as poverty, the effectiveness of labor unions, and the role of socialism in the United States. Harrington held the debate on socialism particularly close to his heart, as he was emerging as America's leading socialist figure during the 1960s. While Harrington fought for the inclusion of socialist ideas within the American political system, critics such as Buckley frequently challenged the impact of Harrington's efforts. In this debate, Buckley humorously quipped that being the leading socialist within America was nothing particularly noteworthy, and that it was akin to, "being the tallest building in Kansas."<sup>1</sup> Despite the remarks from some of his opponents, such as the one made by Buckley, Harrington remained a steadfast champion of socialism and its future within America for the rest of his life.

As a prominent American socialist of the mid-twentieth century, Harrington has garnered significant attention from scholars. His influence has been studied in a variety of ways, from analyses of his pivotal book, *The Other America*, which brought widespread attention to the country's poverty epidemic, to discussions of his role as a potential bridge between the Old and New Left. Harrington's influence on the contemporary American Left, however, is still overlooked.

Michael Harrington continues to shape the politics of the current American Left. One of the most notable is the recent resurgence of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), an organization of which he was a co-founder. Furthermore, the American Left has witnessed newfound success in the elections of democratic socialists, such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Harrington's "Left wing of the possible" informed these political thinkers. Harrington also inspired Bhaskar Sunkara, a prominent leftist thinker. He has introduced Harrington's ideas to a new generation of activists and

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<sup>1</sup>Buckley, William F. "Poverty: Hopeful or Hopeless?" *Firing Line*, *Firing Line Broadcast Records*, April 04, 1966, posted January 24, 2017, by Hoover Institution Library, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WpGtTVqaqk>.

thinkers by advocating for the gradual integration of socialist principles into the American mainstream.

Michael Harrington's impact must be understood through history of the American Left. One interpretation of the birth of the American Left is that it began in radicalism. For example, historian Michael Kazin argues that, in 1829, several authors, including Frances Wright and Thomas Skidmore, published a series of radical pamphlets. Each of these publications denounced the existing American order and called for the liberation of humanity.<sup>2</sup> While tracing the origins of the American Left to the early 19th century helps to emphasize the spirit of enacting widespread systematic change that has long energized the movement, it overlooks Marxism as an ideology of influence. The scholar Andrew Hartman, argues that, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the American Left widely adopted the Marxist principles, as activists began recognizing capitalism's perceived inherent flaws, how these flaws perpetuated inequality, and how Marxism was the best approach to solving those issues.<sup>3</sup>

Harrington's origins were not radical. On a cold February afternoon in 1928, Edward "Michael" Harrington was born to a Catholic family in the heart of St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>4</sup> Being an only child, Harrington quickly found school to be a place to socialize with others and to refine his budding intellect. Starting high school at the age of twelve, his age did not discourage him.<sup>5</sup> An active student, he participated in the debate club and edited the school newspaper. Upon entering Holy Cross College, Harrington continued his rigorous academic undertakings. He began to write extensively in college, including works of poetry, fiction, and essays. Even from his literary endeavors as a young man, it was evident that Harrington had a gift for writing, which would foreshadow his later success as an author. During his time in college and despite his active

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (Random House, 2011), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hartman, "Against the Liberal Tradition: An Intellectual History of the American Left." In *American Labyrinth: Intellectual History for Complicated Times*, ed. Andrew Hartman and Raymond Haberski (Cornell University Press, 2018), 133-34.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (PublicAffairs, 2000), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Gary Dorrien. "Michael Harrington and the 'Left Wing of the Possible'" *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 2 (2010): 258-59.

undergraduate career, however, he never became associated with socialism or the American Left.<sup>6</sup>

Upon graduating, Harrington's parents pressed him to make something out of his impressive intellectual capabilities and eventually convinced him to attend law school at Yale University. While he found the initial coursework interesting, he quickly realized that law was not his passion and dropped out after one year. While there is a slight possibility that Harrington discovered his belief in socialism during his time at Yale, this is unlikely. Not a single classmate at Yale could recall Harrington being a socialist, and he only dedicated a single sentence to his time there in his autobiography *The Long-Distance Runner*.<sup>7</sup> Instead, a job he took in 1949 is what began to shift his thinking. Working for the Pupil Welfare Department, which was a branch that dealt with St. Louis public schools, Harrington recalled a fateful encounter: "One rainy day I went into an old, decaying building. The cooking smells and the stench from the broken, stopped-up toilets and the murmurous cranky sound of the people were a revelation. It was my moment on the road to Damascus".<sup>8</sup> This encounter proved to be a catalyst, as it not only awakened his social consciousness, but also set him on a path towards questioning and ultimately rejecting the perceived entrenched structures of inequality found in American society. This ideological shift would later define his contributions to the American Left. Harrington's commitment toward socialism was solidified in 1952, when he met Bogdan Denitch, an energetic member of the Young People's Socialist League (YSPL). Denitch spotted Harrington at a picket line and encouraged him to join the organization. After brief consideration, Harrington agreed to join YSPL. His decision to join the YSPL marked more than just a change in affiliation. It signified the beginning of a lifelong commitment to challenge social norms through socialism.<sup>9</sup>

Harrington came of age in the American Left at a peculiar time, between two defining phases of the tradition that Harrington helped bridge. Specifically, when tracing the history of the American Left, there are two critical movements which stood out amongst the rest. The first of these is that of the Old Left. While generationally and ideologically diverse, it generally can be said that the Old Left

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<sup>6</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> For comments made about Harrington at Yale, see Dorrien, "Left Wing of the Possible", 2-3. For the remarks in his autobiography, see Michael Harrington, *The Long-Distance Runner* (Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Harrington, *Fragments of the Century* (Saturday Review Press, 1973), 66.

<sup>9</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 101-103.

began sometime soon after the end of World War I.<sup>10</sup> One organization which linked many on the Old Left together was the Communist Party USA (CPUSA). Given the apparent failure of capitalism with the Great Depression of the 1930s, many intellectuals of the Old Left recognized the strengths of the party and its potential to overthrow the existing order. While by no means were all members of the Old Left communists, many drew inspiration from the Soviet Union and sought to adapt some of its principles to the American context.<sup>11</sup> While the link between the Old Left and the CPUSA may have been strong, the most defining feature of the Old Left was their connection to Marxism. They typically held a strong economic understanding of American society and rooted that understanding in the words of Karl Marx. While later generations of the Left would view Marx through a more humanitarian lens, those of the Old Left tended to view Marxism as a science which was predictive.<sup>12</sup> This was an idea in which Harrington firmly believed.

In the early 1960s, the New Left, the second crucial movement of the American Left, quickly overtook that of the Old.<sup>13</sup> Drawing a comparison among the two, New Leftists generally shifted their focus to a broader coalition of ideas than that of the Old Left, particularly regarding Marxism. Living in a more prosperous America than that of their parents, New Leftists often did not hold a belief in the birth of “a new world from the ashes of the old.”<sup>14</sup> The inevitability of socialism, and eventually communism, was not a certainty in their minds. This subsequently altered the agenda of the movement, as a focus on economic revolution took the back seat to what they believed to be seemingly more relevant goals. In practice, this change manifested itself in two key areas: foreign policy and identity politics.

While the Old Left focused much more on the politics of the Soviet Union, those in the New Left viewed the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War to be abhorrent. Not only did they believe the war to be an imperialistic effort from a profit-seeking nation to expand its dominion across the globe. The war also counterrevolutionary, as the masses of Vietnam were supposedly engaged in overturning the rule of the corrupted Vietnamese elite.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (W.W. Norton, 1992), 147.

<sup>11</sup> Diggins, *Rise and Fall of the American Left*, 150-52.

<sup>12</sup> Diggins, *Rise and Fall of the American Left*, 200.

<sup>13</sup> Diggins, *Rise and Fall*, 222.

<sup>14</sup> Kazin, *American Dreamers*, 214.

<sup>15</sup> Kazin, *American Dreamers*, 230.

Identity politics was another theme that the New Left embraced. While economic concerns still echoed amongst New Leftists, they tended to tighten their focus to social issues such as race, feminism, and gay rights.<sup>16</sup> Some historians, such as Hartman, have therefore argued that the New Left largely abandoned the key anticapitalistic principles of the American Leftist tradition.<sup>17</sup> While this may have been the case, one cannot fully understand these movements without recognizing that the Old and New Left were not entirely separate entities. The Old Left did influence the New Left, as they provided guidance and advice for the younger generation.<sup>18</sup> One such figure who attempted to bridge the gap between these two movements was Michael Harrington.

In recent years, historians have demonstrated how Harrington served as a liaison between the two groups. Maurice Isserman's *The Other American* provides the most comprehensive analysis of the life of Harrington in the historiography. Isserman argues that Harrington had meager success in bridging the divide between the two movements, despite having been perhaps the best possible candidate for the job. In 1960 and during the rise of the New Left, Harrington, at the age of thirty-two, was still rather young. Though still older than most in the movement, who were typically in their late teens and early twenties, he often viewed himself as a big brother to the movement, rather than an ancient patriarch.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, while many of those on the Old Left preferred to ignore the New Left, Harrington championed the idea that genuine radicalism was a set of skills that could be learned. Especially early in the movement, Harrington was eager to act as a guide for the New Leftists.<sup>20</sup> In this effort, he did find some early success. Emerging leaders of the New Left held high praise for Harrington, citing his charisma and understanding of New Leftist ideals as two of the reasons why he was "one of three radical leaders over the age of thirty" who had captured the respect of the New Leftist movement.<sup>21</sup> Historian Robert A. Gorman, whose book *Michael Harrington: Speaking American* also explored the intellectual's life in detail, agrees with Isserman's assessment.

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<sup>16</sup> For examples on race and feminism, see Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 132, 157. For examples relating to gay rights, see Kazin, *American Dreamers*, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Hartman, "Against the Liberal Tradition," 143.

<sup>18</sup> Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 221-22.

<sup>20</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 222.

<sup>21</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 226.

Harrington originally held great relations with the leaders of the New Left and was in a prime position to influence the movement.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of the nature of their original relationship, however, tensions between the two soon emerged. In 1962, New Leftists struggled with how wanted to balance their radical ideas while simultaneously managing to appeal to mainstream Americans. Students for a Democratic Society, the largest organization of the New Left at the time, met in Port Huron, Michigan, where they created a manifesto that declared their shared political ideas as a movement. Historians widely agree that it was here that Harrington lost his influence over the American Left. He attended the initial debates over the direction of the manifesto. As the scholar Van Gosse argues, the Port Huron meeting deeply disturbed Harrington.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, the young radicals of the New Left were, at least in Harrington's eyes, far too critical of labor movements. Additionally, Harrington viewed the bureaucratic collectivist nature of the Soviet Union to be a closed question: the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union was not something with which the American Left should align itself.<sup>24</sup> The young radicals viewed the Soviet Union in a more positive light, and Harrington responded rather critically. In fact, Gorman mentions that the New Left viewed Harrington's remarks—described as “hysterical” and “anti-communist mud-slinging”—as being so damaging that they continued to strain his relations with New Leftist leaders, even fifteen years after the event.<sup>25</sup> While his powerful rhetorical skills still proved influential to certain members of the New Left after the events at Port Huron, his potential to serve as a bridge between the two groups was lost in just those few days.<sup>26</sup>

Despite never realizing his full potential to influence the New Left, Harrington nonetheless found alternative ways to contribute to the American Left and debates nationwide. By far the most cited example of this influence can be found his first published book, *The Other America*.<sup>27</sup> Here, Harrington outlined two key points. First, despite the perceived existence of an affluent society within America, widespread poverty still existed. Second, Harrington argued that there

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<sup>22</sup> Robert A. Gorman, *Michael Harrington: Speaking American* (Routledge, 1995), XVI-XVII.

<sup>23</sup> Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 69.

<sup>24</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 236-37.

<sup>25</sup> Gorman, *Speaking American*, XXI.

<sup>26</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 242.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: 1962).

existed a culture of poverty within the nation. Therefore, it was unreasonable to merely assume that a rapidly expanding economy would solve the issues of the poor.<sup>28</sup> Harrington's book quickly became a bestseller. Isserman argues it was largely responsible for inspiring Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty campaign.<sup>29</sup> While this book proved to be Harrington's most influential work in terms of enacting changes to public policy, it did not have quite the same intellectual impact for the American Left. Harrington later regretted he did not mention the term socialism at all within the book's pages.<sup>30</sup> While this negated Harrington's ability to spread more radical Leftist ideas to the American populous, the overwhelming popularity of the book did offer Harrington some ability to influence the direction of the Left. Specifically, even after his ties with many New Leftists were cut in the wake of the events of Port Huron, poverty was still an issue in the United States. As such, New Leftists who had read his book still asked him to give lectures at their colleges, which allowed Harrington to spread his ideas, at least to some extent.<sup>31</sup>

While Harrington's intellectual contributions during his lifetime have been examined, there has been little analysis of how his ideas shaped the American Left of today.<sup>32</sup> The lack of recent scholarship relating to Harrington is particularly striking given that one of his most enduring contributions, the founding of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has played a pivotal role in shaping today's American Left. In 1982, a merger of two relatively small socialist organizations occurred, which resulted in the creation of DSA. Michael Harrington oversaw this merger and is credited with being one of the founding members of the organization, as well as its first president.<sup>33</sup> Harrington was incredibly proud of DSA and even saw it as a way to atone for his actions at Port Huron.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of Harrington's feelings toward the group, the influence of

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<sup>28</sup> Harrington, *The Other America*, 158-59.

<sup>29</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, vii-viii.

<sup>30</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 196.

<sup>31</sup> Isserman, *The Other American*, 244.

<sup>32</sup> *The Other American* was published in 2000 and therefore precedes the more recent developments on the political Left. *Speaking American* was published in 1995. For the purpose of this paper, the contemporary American Left relates to the resurgence of popularity within the movement beginning around 2015.

<sup>33</sup> The formation of DSA was a result of the merge between the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM). Both organizations had origins in the early 1970s. For more on this merger, see Isserman, *The Other American*, 349-51.

<sup>34</sup> Harrington, *The Long-Distance Runner*, 66.



DSA was often historically felt within the American Left, but only to a certain extent. The organization never amassed greater than 10,000 members at any point between its founding and the early 2010s. However, beginning in the year 2015, things began to change with the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders, a self-avowed democratic socialist. This led to thousands of new members joining the organization, with a rejuvenated commitment to socialism. It was not until late 2017, though, that DSA exploded in popularity. Largely due to fears over Donald Trump's presidential election, over thirteen thousand new members joined the cause, leaving the group at over twenty-five thousand members by the end of the year. This moment marked an important milestone in the history of the American Left: DSA was now the largest socialist organization in the country since the fall of the Communist Party USA in 1956.<sup>35</sup> Though DSA membership has begun to slightly drop in recent years, it remains the largest organization within the contemporary American Left, sitting at over fifty thousand members as of 2025.<sup>36</sup> Harrington's personal journey into socialism still directly inspires some new members to join the movement.<sup>37</sup>

Harrington's experiences with division and infighting on the Left also inspired his vision for the DSA. Throughout the history of the American Left, sectarianism has plagued the movement. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Harrington repeatedly witnessed these divisions.<sup>38</sup> It is likely that it was through these experiences that Harrington came to his conclusion that the sectarianism had been the largest reason the American Left had experienced such immense organizational problems throughout its history.<sup>39</sup> To remedy this issue, Harrington sought to create an organization that brought people together, despite having potential variations in their ideology.<sup>40</sup> Upon founding DSA, Harrington

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<sup>35</sup> For a history of DSA, see "A History of Democratic Socialists of America 1971-2017," Democratic Socialists of America, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://www.dsausa.org/about-us/history/>.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Dai, "State of DSA Part One: Welcome to DSA" *The Democratic Left*, February 27, 2025, <https://democraticleft.dsausa.org/2025/02/27/state-of-dsa-part-one-welcome-to-dsa/>.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua B. Freeman, "DSA Today: Interviews with Activists in the Democratic Socialists of America," *New Labor Forum* 28, no. 2 (2019): 18. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26675612>.

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed account of Harrington's experiences within these groups, as well as a brief history of sectarianism within the American Left, see Isserman, *The Other American*, 109-19.

<sup>39</sup> Harrington, *Socialism*, 253.

<sup>40</sup> Gorman, *Speaking American*, 9.

envisioned that the organization would be a place to bring together a “multi-tendency group,” that served the needs of a large portion of the American Left.<sup>41</sup>

Harrington also championed the idea that democracy and socialism were not separate but rather mutually supportive. He believed that democratic socialism was the primary initiative that would bring justice and freedom.<sup>42</sup> To support his argument, Harrington largely relied on a particular interpretation of Karl Marx. Specifically, Harrington contended that Marx held a firm belief in the democratic character of socialism.<sup>43</sup> Because these two entities could not be separated from one another, the most ideal form of socialism in America was therefore that of democratic socialism. Harrington believed in this idea throughout his lifetime, and this belief has continued to play an important role in the functioning of DSA today. The most apparent example of this are the DSA’s current initiative surrounding the promotion of the idea of democratic socialism. DSA contends that capitalism results in inherent inequalities, while also claiming to condemn the authoritarian visions of socialism which have existed throughout history.<sup>44</sup> This line of thinking falls directly in line with Harrington’s writings.

An integral aspect of democratic socialism involves working within the political system to achieve change, which is an approach that Harrington consistently advocated throughout his life. Though a rather conditional strategy, Harrington believed that a third party in America would have an almost impossible time achieving major success in electing members to the presidency or Congress. As he put it, “what the nation needs is not just a new party of conscience and ideas, but a new party that can win as well”.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, if the American Left wanted to exert some form of influence over the country, Harrington argued that they needed to work within the confines of the Democratic Party and change its goals over time. What this represented was, as he put it, a “Left wing of the possible”. This included advocating policy changes, such as the redistribution of wealth and the expansion of public ownership.<sup>46</sup> While these policy decisions did not represent a complete socialist revolution, much as Harrington would have wanted, they improved the lives of real

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<sup>41</sup> Dorrien, “Left Wing of the Possible,” 268-69.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Harrington, *Socialism: Past and Future*, (Arcade Publishing, 1989), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Harrington, *Socialism*, (Saturday Review Press, 1972), 37.

<sup>44</sup> “What is Democratic Socialism?,” Democratic Socialists of America, Accessed November 13, 2024, <https://www.dsausa.org/about-us/what-is-democratic-socialism/>.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Harrington, “Radical Strategy: Don’t Form a Fourth Party; Form a New First Party,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970, 128.

<sup>46</sup> Gorman, *Speaking American*, 141-42.

Americans under capitalism. Harrington recognized the conciliatory nature of this approach, but he ultimately found it to be the best way for socialists to change the United States. DSA has employed a similar strategy to Harrington, shaping much of its recent efforts around it.

Current leaders of DSA take a similar approach to Harrington's belief in working within the Democratic party. They recognize the fact that the majority of those who join DSA do so because of the political campaigns of democratic socialists, which brought about publicity to the movement. Additionally, they believe that an attempt to create a socialist third party within the country would not only destroy DSA as an organization, but the larger American Left as a whole.<sup>47</sup> DSA finds working within the Democratic Party a means to influence its policy decisions to become more socialist, and losing this base would severely hinder the movement. This is completely in line with the ideas of Harrington, who argued the same nearly forty years earlier.

Many of those within DSA also hold the viewpoint that working within the political system is crucial to the organization's success. One of these members is Cea Weaver, a community group staffer who is a member of the New York chapter. When asked about the role that electoral activity played in the organization, Weaver responded, "I think that it's really critical that we get better at it, because I'm not necessarily an electoral person. I see its value for our organization, and I believe it a critical tactic to bringing us towards the future."<sup>48</sup> While Weaver professed her belief in the importance of working within the electoral system, she did share a similar feeling of apprehension that Harrington did. Specifically, she believed that was a tactic that should be employed by DSA, and not the ultimate goal.<sup>49</sup> Another DSA member who shares the views of Harrington was Anthony Rogers-Wright, who belongs to the Seattle chapter. While he does not believe that DSA has the ability to completely turn the Democratic Party to the Left, it does play the vital role of agitator within the party. This involves members of DSA working within the Democratic Party to move it to the Left and sway its policies to be more socialist in nature.<sup>50</sup> While the previous two members fully acknowledged the power of Harrington's ideas, Allie Cohn, a member of the Knoxville, Tennessee chapter, seemed to be slightly

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<sup>47</sup> Kate Aronoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin, *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style* (The New Press: 2020), 301.

<sup>48</sup> Freeman, "Interviews with Activists," 22.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

more conflicted. Cohn agreed that Leftist candidates would prove to be beneficial in swaying the Democratic Party at a larger scale, but she also contended that local levels would be less influential. This is because, at local levels, a single candidate seldom wields enough power to shift any form of legislation.<sup>51</sup> Regardless, this line of thinking falls in line with Harrington's vision. The DSA may never gain the political traction to fully sway the Democratic Party, but their politics of agitation still results in incremental shifts toward progressive policies. This mode of politics, in turn, amplifies socialist principles within mainstream discourse and create opportunities for DSA, and therefore the American Left as a whole, to challenge the status quo.

The campaign work which DSA has been involved in helps to further highlight Harrington's intellectual contributions to the group. This has occurred at both the local and national levels. In terms of the local level, DSA supported the election of numerous chapter members and independent political figures. In 2023, six DSA members were endorsed to run for local elections. Importantly, none of these members ran on an explicitly socialist platform.<sup>52</sup> For example, Dan Totten ran for the Cambridge City Council in Boston not as an independent member of the American Left, but rather as a Democrat. While supporting more progressive policy reforms, such as raising the minimum wage and promoting universal afterschool care, Totten did not explicitly run as a socialist.<sup>53</sup> This captures the essence of what Harrington believed was the future for the American Left: creating a space within the Democratic Party from which the Left could influence politics.

Harrington's idea of the American Left operating within larger political parties becomes evident in the dynamics of contemporary Democratic politics and the Left's relation to it. Specifically, Leftists have found it difficult to balance ideological purity with the need to appeal to the broader Democratic electorate. Leftist leaders have made concessions on their views, which in turn has given the Left more of an ability to influence politics within the Democratic Party. It also reflects, however, how the movement has perhaps lost sight of the Marxist principles on which it was founded. Mainstream Leftist have begun to largely shy away from making Marxist arguments, reflecting a departure from one of the movement's original ideological commitments.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> "Endorsement: Six for Boston DSA," DSA National Electoral Commission, accessed November 14, 2024, <https://electoral.dsausa.org/endorsement-six-for-boston-dsa/>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

This trend has continued at the national level. In 2020, DSA endorsed the campaign of member Cori Bush, who went on to win a seat in the House of Representatives. In 2023, she gave a speech to DSA members which helped to illustrate her political ideology. She stated that she was tired of the oppressive status quo brought about by capitalism. Her goal was to bring about change, and she believed that the best way to do that was through electoral work: “We need everybody’s support as we organize and legislate in Congress for an agenda that puts people first. We need more voices in Congress. We need more voices in our state legislatures. We need more voices in our city councils.”<sup>54</sup> Once again, Harrington’s ideas about working within the Democratic Party are apparent here. Bush’s campaign was more socialist in nature than that of Dan Totten, yet she still did not run on an explicitly Marxist platform.

While Bush represents a DSA member who has worked within Harrington’s framework at the national level, an even more prominent figure has been Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, commonly referred to by the acronym AOC. Since her election to the House of Representatives in 2019, AOC has fought for progressive policies such as the Green New Deal and Medicare For All. Additionally, she has recognized the importance of creating a left wing of the possible. In an interview with the *Democratic Left*, a DSA publication, AOC stated that there would be work to do outside of electoralism. She still found, however, that working within the political system was the movement’s best current option. As she described it: “In the best-case scenario, we get incredible new members of Congress, or we win these open seats,” and even in the result of a loss, “we get almost a radical change in the agenda of the incumbent that is presently there. And so in many ways, it’s a win-win in getting that internal traction, that is necessary.”<sup>55</sup> AOC has acted as an agitator within the Democratic Party, calling for more progressive policies and attempting to move the party to the Left. Her thinking can be best summarized by the fact that she is not as concerned with keeping a Democratic majority in the short term. Rather, she is far more concerned about shaping the agenda of the party in the long run.<sup>56</sup> Harrington championed a similar strategy throughout his intellectual life, looking

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<sup>54</sup> “Cori Bush, ” Love Must Be at the Center of Our Work as a Movement,” *The Jacobin*, June 29, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2023/06/cori-bush-dsa-squad-socialism-love-justice-racism/>.

<sup>55</sup> Don McIntosh, “Talking Socialism | Catching up with AOC,” *Democratic Left*, January 26, 2021, <https://democraticleft.dsausa.org/issues/spring-2021/>.

<sup>56</sup> Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez : A Biography* (Greenwood Biographies, 2020), 154.

to incorporate socialist influence within the Democratic Party, and this strategy has found a youthful new embodiment in AOC. To be sure, DSA's political strategy to some extent reflects the intrinsic biases of political figures: politicians such as Bush and AOC will inherently express the importance of political engagement. These politicians, however, have all chosen to work within the framework of the Democratic Party, and they represent how Harringtonian ideas and sensibilities are more alive today than ever.

Out of every Leftist candidate from the past several decades, none has been as significant as Bernie Sanders. Amassing historic success in the 2016 Democratic Primaries, Sanders, running as a democratic socialist, won 23 states. Throughout his campaign and like AOC and Harrington, Sanders emphasized the need to create a left wing of the possible. One strategy which he employed that helped him to do this was his recognition of the importance of nomenclature. Specifically, he understood that some of his more progressive ideas would find little support within the government. Consequently, Sanders chose to drop the term socialist from his ticket and instead went under the umbrella of the Democratic Party.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Sanders held a firm belief that he would be able to not only win within the Democratic Party but help to influence a more progressive agenda.<sup>58</sup> In doing so, Sanders provided a means for the American Left to influence national politics. This is evident through many of his policy stances, such as Medicare for All, as well as addressing wealth and income inequality.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it is evident that Sanders has, as Harrington recommended over forty years prior, worked within the constraints of the Democratic Party.

Despite his widespread influence working within the idea of the Left wing of the possible, Sanders has an otherwise less obvious connection to Harrington than other candidates. For instance, he has never been a member of DSA. It is true that Sanders has often promoted similar policy decisions and ideological arguments as the organization, and the group has endorsed him multiple times.<sup>60</sup> However, Sanders could perhaps better be labeled as a social democrat, rather than a democratic socialist. The distinction lies primarily in the

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<sup>57</sup> Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, "Changes in the Nomenclature of the American Left," *Journal of American Studies* 44, no. 1 (2010): 98.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Tasini, *The Essential: Bernie Sanders and His Vision for America* (Thomson-Shore, 2015), x-xi.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> "Past Endorsements," DSA National Electoral Commission, accessed November 14, 2024, <https://electoral.dsausa.org/our-campaigns/past-endorsements/>.

fact that democratic socialists, such as Harrington, subscribed to the idea that socialism needed to be achieved following a democratic framework. In other words, working within the system to achieve change was necessary. However, Harrington's ultimate desire for America was for socialism to eventually replace capitalism. While Sanders has repeatedly emphasized important progressive changes, his primary initiative is not to bring about the fall of capitalism. Rather, he desires to simply create a government that, "works for all and not just the few."<sup>61</sup> His approach represents a diluted version of the ideas of Harrington. Bernie illustrates Harrington's left wing of the possible, though whilst having seemingly different end goals. Nevertheless, Harrington held a firm belief in working within the Democratic Party to achieve Leftist gains, and politicians such as Sanders reflect how his ideas are still relevant today. This has shaped both DSA and major political figures on the Left but does not represent Harrington's only contribution to the movement.

A review of DSA's structure and their policies clearly demonstrates the enduring influence of Harrington's anti-sectarian ideals. The current DSA constitution focuses largely on inclusivity. In reference to who can join the organization, the wording is left purposefully vague: "Membership shall be open to every person who subscribes to the principles of the organization".<sup>62</sup> These principles relate to changing the status quo and creating a more humane social order, which helps to include more potential members, as the language is not particularly exclusionary. While examining DSA's constitution provides an overview of the general organization's feelings, analyzing the comments of specific members is also critical. One of these members, Allie Cohn, admitted in an interview that DSA did not have a specific vision of socialism which each member shared. Rather, the organization represented a big tent.<sup>63</sup> In a similar vein, Cea Weaver argued that, moving forward, the DSA needed to become even more diverse as an organization.<sup>64</sup> This would allow for more ideas to enter the group and shape how it grows in the future. These ideas all reflect Harrington's idea of fighting against sectarian impulses. This will allow the Left to expand its influence to an even further degree in the future.

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<sup>61</sup> Sam Frizell, "Here's How Bernie Sanders Explained Democratic Socialism," *TIME*, February 20, 2019, <https://time.com/4121126/bernie-sanders-democratic-socialism/>.

<sup>62</sup> "DSA Constitution & Bylaws," Democratic Socialists of America, accessed November 15, 2022, <https://www.dsausa.org/about-us/constitution/>.

<sup>63</sup> Freeman, "Interviews with Activists," 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Outside of DSA, Harrington's ideas have remained relevant and still find a way to continually influence the American Left, though not as strongly. This is most evident when analyzing the thoughts of Bhaskar Sunkara, the founder of the highly influential *Jacobin* magazine. *Jacobin* is a leading voice within the contemporary American Left, having over seventy-five thousand subscribers, as well as over three million monthly readers.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the ideas and arguments presented within this magazine play a critical role in influencing the direction of the movement. Sunkara, who actively edits and contributes to the magazine, has mentioned on numerous occasions that Harrington's ideas have shaped his way of thinking. In an interview with DSA, Sunkara stated that he drew heavy inspiration from Harrington's belief in fighting against sectarianism. Paraphrasing Harrington, Sunkara argued that those on the Left had to balance fighting against sectarianism while also maintaining some ideological purity. He then went on to say that this is something that has inspired the way in which he has managed *Jacobin*. The magazine served as a big tent which sought to incorporate a variety of perspectives.<sup>66</sup> Another way in which Harrington has inspired Sunkara is through the idea of being, as Harrington put it, a long-distance runner for socialism.<sup>67</sup> Instead of attempting to bring about socialism through a rapid and violent revolution, Sunkara has acknowledged that this is not the best way to spread the ideology.<sup>68</sup> Rather, it is through a more gradual struggle that the movement will expand. Finally, Sunkara has taken some inspiration from Harrington's left wing of the possible, though to a limited degree. In an interview with the *Boston Review*, Sunkara reflected on Harrington's pragmatic approach to engaging with the Democratic Party, stating, "I don't want to fetishize working within or without. It depends on the situation".<sup>69</sup> Sunkara posited that working within the Democratic Party was at times viable and that one of the goals of *Jacobin* was to promote radical ideas to liberals in a more digestible manner.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "About," *Jacobin*, accessed November 16, 2024, <https://jacobin.com/about>.

<sup>66</sup> Don McIntosh, "Talking Socialism | Interviewing *Jacobin*'s Bhaskar Sunkara," *Democratic Left*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.dsausa.org/democratic-left/sunkara/>.

<sup>67</sup> For a more detailed explanation of how he arrived at this metaphor, see Harrington, *The Long-Distance Runner*, 1-11.

<sup>68</sup> McIntosh, "Talking Socialism."

<sup>69</sup> Jake Blumgart, "The Next Left," *Boston Review*, December 28, 2012, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/jake-blumgart-next-left-interview-bhaskar-sunkara/>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



Sunkara, however, has also criticized this strategy. In an interview with the *New Left Review*, Sunkara expressed his political differences with Harrington. Specifically, Sunkara believed that Harrington was too willing to work within the confines of the Democratic Party, as he was typically comfortable with making too many concessions on his ideas.<sup>71</sup> One of these was the importance of taking a Marxist political approach. Sunkara has clearly explained that one of the primary initiatives of *Jacobin* is to acknowledge the importance of Marxism in relation to the American Left. In his mind, the Left has compromised on far too many of their ideas, and he has sought to ensure that Marxism remains a key component to the Left's ideology.<sup>72</sup> To achieve this goal, Sunkara has repeatedly attempted to keep Marxism at the forefront of the magazine's agenda. While Harrington also recognized the importance of Marxism, he was more willing to work within the Democratic Party to achieve change, even if this meant disregarding Marxist policies. Sunkara has been less convinced by the power of electoralism, specifically within the Democratic Party. While he has conceded that elections are important, he does not believe that they are equivalent to holding power within the country.<sup>73</sup> This is because, even after winning an election, socialists often do not have the ability to enact their policies. Therefore, Sunkara believes in a more active approach to promoting Leftist ideals, mainly through street protests and strike actions.<sup>74</sup> Sunkara reasons that the American Left cannot find much power within the constraints of the Democratic Party. The reason that socialists, even when winning office, do not hold much power is because they must run on a platform that inherently dilutes their ideas. Therefore, the ultimate solution for the American Left would be creating a third party where they can share their ideas as they are.<sup>75</sup> While this may take some time, Sunkara believes that this is the effort which American Leftists should focus their attention towards.

After the events of Port Huron, Michael Harrington recognized that he had effectively ruined his chances at bridging the gap between the Old and New Left. By founding the DSA, however, he hoped that this would provide a means for him to create a new bridge: towards a future Left.<sup>76</sup> As this paper has

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<sup>71</sup> Bhaskar Sunkara, "Project Jacobin," *New Left Review* 90, no. 6 (2014): 35.

<sup>72</sup> Blumgart, "The Next Left."

<sup>73</sup> Bhaskar Sunkara, *The Socialist Manifesto: The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality* (Basic Books, 2019), 218.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 232-33.

<sup>76</sup> Harrington, *Long-Distance Runner*, 66.

demonstrated, Harrington's influence has been profound, leaving a lasting impact on the movement as it exists today. The DSA has soared to a record number of members in recent years. Within that organization, his intellectual contributions continue to inspire the direction of the movement, such as working within a Left wing of the possible, as well as fighting against sectarianism. Furthermore, democratic socialists such as Cori Bush and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez continue to work within the framework of the Democratic Party to move it towards the Left. These politicians represent how we currently live in a "Harringtonian" moment, one in which his ideas are perhaps even more relevant than when he first envisioned them. Therefore, Harrington continues to leave a lasting impression on the various movements within the American Left. These examples reflect Harrington's legacy as both a catalyst and benchmark for contemporary Leftist strategies. Critically, it also demonstrates how his vision for the Left continues to shape the ongoing debate over the balance between pragmatic electoral politics and maintaining ideological purity.

## Told through the Magazine: How Lesbian Periodicals of the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Shaped Lesbian Culture

Peder Sevig

After moving to Los Angeles in 1945, a young woman named Lisa Ben began work as a secretary at a prestigious movie studio called RKO Studios.<sup>1</sup> At her job, she had a private office, a typewriter and lots of free time, which she used to create the first ever lesbian (or gay, for that matter) magazine, which she called *Vice Versa*. Without access to a copy machine, Ben had to type the copies of her magazine by hand using carbon paper to speed up the process a bit. She would make twelve total copies of each issue and hoped that the copies would be passed around members in her local lesbian community. Ben saw the magazine as a way to make friends in the lesbian community, which was concentrated in lesbian bars at the time. She would hand out copies of the magazine at the If Club, one of the most popular spots for lesbian nightlife in Los Angeles.

The style, structure and content of *Vice Versa* were starkly different from a typical newspaper or magazine. First, it did not cover lesbian news, (there would not be much to cover anyway), but included editorials, reviews, poems, and short stories. Second, it had no bylines, pictures, advertisements, or any other elements of a typical magazine. The magazine was simply typewritten text preceded only by a table of contents.<sup>2</sup> Yet this magazine written by a single lesbian woman was the first of thousands of gay and lesbian periodicals, newspapers, and magazines.<sup>3</sup> It would be almost a decade before two magazines from gay men, *ONE* and *Mattachine Review*, and one magazine for lesbians, *The Ladder*, emerged.

Starting with an analysis of how *Vice Versa* served as a foundation for future gay and lesbian publications across the country during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, this paper will add crucial connections between ideas expressed in lesbian magazines and the shifts, changes and rise in lesbian activism throughout the country. Magazines like *The Ladder* and *Lesbian Connections* expanded on

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Ben, an anagram of “lesbian,” is the pseudonym she used to conceal her identity years after the end of *Vice Versa*, when she wrote for *The Ladder*. Neither her real name nor her pseudonym ever appeared in *Vice Versa*. Alisa Klinger, “Writing Civil Rights: The Political Aspirations of Lesbian Activist-Writers” in *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America* (Beacon Press, 1996), 65; and Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: the rise of gay and lesbian press in America*, (Faber and Faber, 1995), 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, XI.

the example set by Ben and can now definitively indicate lesbian culture and its changes over the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Stylistic, editorial, and leadership changes across all lesbian magazines, ranging from the end of the 1940s to today clearly articulate a shift to more radical forms of expression and more willingness to be publicly lesbian. However, because lesbian publications often contained many forms of lesbian expression, they show how lesbians differed, from radical to conservative, open to expressing their sexuality to keeping it within the community, and from heavily political to moderately quiet. These ranges of opinion on how lesbian publications should be used ranged both within and across the most popular publications. Lesbian publications did not just serve as a reflection of lesbian culture but played a key role in shaping it. Through their community building techniques, lesbian magazines were also essential for lesbian communities' safety and for navigating the hostile environment that American society and its legal system created from them. A shift towards activism in one of the most notable and widespread magazines, *The Ladder*, in 1963 precedes the rise in militant lesbian activism by a couple of years.

Much of the scholarship on lesbian publications exists only in journal articles and chapters of books, which connect the publications to the lesbian feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and other lesbian art and media. The earliest lesbian publication which had only 9 issues in 1946-7, *Vice Versa*, is analyzed numerous times by historians as the foundation of lesbian and gay press. *The Ladder*, a much larger periodical that ran from 1956-73, is also studied more frequently. Aside from *Vice Versa* most research has been done on larger lesbian publications, which often had national presence. Less research has been done on smaller, more local publications due to their limited availability or supposed lack of significance. For example, in one of the few books on lesbian and gay press, Rodger Streitmatter acknowledges that due to the considerable number of publications across the country, he must give credence to only a few representative examples to give readers an introduction to the understudied form of alternative press. Clearly, much more research must be done to encompass lesbian publications of the mid to late-20<sup>th</sup> century of all forms and intentions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, IX-XIV; Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (Penguin Books, 1992), 159-214; Klinger, "Writing Civil Rights"; Cameron Blevins and Annalise Heinz, "Separated but far from alone: Forging Lesbian Networks in the 1970s-1980s," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 3, (2024): 417-444, 2024-10-27, <https://online.ucpress.edu/phr/article/93/3/417/202692>; Elyse Vigiletti, "Normalizing the

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20th centuries, many western societies defined lesbians as deviants. Male and female homosexuality were both seen by the medical community, (and consequently the rest of society), as a form of insanity, feeble-mindedness, or both. One popular idea was that homosexual men had a “feminine brain,” and were therefore inferior. But this created a dilemma when considering homosexual women who would therefore have a masculine brain superior to other women and even other men. Of course, to minimize the social threat of lesbians existing in society, the medical community simply considered lesbian women to be insane.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the WWII, when American culture was dominated by the idea of “normalcy,” the contempt for lesbians was heightened. Not only was lesbianism a sickness in need of a cure, but it was also threatening for its connection to feminism which anyone, feminists included, saw as a threat to normalcy. Psychoanalysts scrambled for a cure for lesbianism which, of course, was never found.<sup>6</sup> McCarthyism led to the “lavender scare,” which saw thousands of homosexual government employees fired for sexual inversion and because they were considered vulnerable to blackmail. This meant that both lesbians and gay men risked persecution because of personal prejudices rather than national policy.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, many transformed more closed off public spaces into refuges for their community. For example, lesbian bars were essential for developing communities of lesbians who desired both friendship and companionship. They were the only place where lesbians could freely express their sexuality. Outside of bars, lesbians would have to conceal their identity, even from those they

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“Variant” in *The Ladder*, America’s Second Lesbian Magazine, 1956-1963,” *Frontiers: a Journal of Women’s Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 1: 2015): 47-71, 2024-10-27, <https://research.ebsco.com/c/4xjy4h/viewer/pdf/l6exbwnc2j>; Kate Litterer, “‘The Third Sex is Here to Stay’: Rhetorical Reconstructions of Lesbian Identity in *Vice Versa*,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 22 no. 2 (April 1, 2018): 204-19, 2024-10-27, <https://research.ebsco.com/c/4xjy4h/viewer/pdf/dhp356lyqr>; Heather Murray, “Free for All Lesbians: Lesbian Cultural Production and Consumption in the United States during the 1970s.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (2007): 251–75, 2024-10-27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30114234>.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Gibson, “The Masculine Degenerate: American Doctors’ Portrayal of Lesbian Intellect, 1880-1949,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9, no.4 (1998): 78-81, 2024-11-8, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0147>.

<sup>6</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, (Penguin Books, 1992), 134-7.

<sup>7</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 141.

suspected to be lesbian as well.<sup>8</sup> At a time when the American idea of normalcy and McCarthyism made it dangerous to be caught as a lesbian, the bars were a safe haven. However, they still were not completely safe as lesbian bars were subject to police raids, and lesbians seen leaving the bars were subject to harassment and sexual violence. Bars would often have strict rules against dancing too close or would have plans in place in case there was ever a police raid.<sup>9</sup>

The first instance of a lesbian magazine was an incredibly small, personal venture by one woman who had no other goal than to find her own community of lesbians. In 1946, Lisa Ben, a 25-year-old secretary living in Los Angeles, knew that she was lesbian but was not very fond of the lesbian bar scene or the drinking that came with it. Ben was rightfully fearful of bar raids, where she could be arrested, publicly outed, and shamed in local newspapers for attending. Lesbians could also be stalked, harassed, or raped as they left these bars. **Even though Ben did not enjoy the bars and feared for her safety, it is still important to discuss the significance of the lesbian bar scene. Bars were essential for anyone who identified as lesbian or gay. Ben was unlike most of her lesbian and gay peers. Most were willing to accept the risks that came with their presence at lesbian bars. Ben was an outsider in this sense.** With the extra time she had at her secretary job, she would type up *Vice Versa* which, unbeknownst to her, would be the foremother of lesbian publications. Even though Ben did not like the lesbian bar scene, she knew this was her one way into the lesbian community, but she stayed sober for fear that she could be arrested.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout issues of *Vice Versa*, Ben encourages her readers to challenge the popular medical notion that lesbians were sick or mentally ill. For example, Ben embraces the term “The Third Sex,” which was a popular term used to describe same-sex attraction at the time. The term, rooted in sexology, was given to those whose gender expression and sexuality was outside of what was considered “normal” at the time, thus the need for a “third sex.”<sup>11</sup> Instead of discarding the term, Ben embraces it saying “the third sex is here to stay,” encouraging her audience to do the same. In the article titled “Here to Stay,” Ben also offers encouragement that even the increase in negative press and psychiatric perspective on homosexuality demonstrates that lesbians are on the

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<sup>8</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 161-3.

<sup>9</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 2-4.

<sup>11</sup> Litterer, “Rhetorical Reconstructions,” 213-4, 217.

way from moving from the periphery into the mainstream. She believes there will be a time "when gay folk will be accepted as a part of regular society," and that magazines like hers will "take their rightful place on the newsstand beside other publications."<sup>12</sup>

In her introduction to the first issue, and thus *Vice Versa* as a whole, Lisa Ben dances around using the word lesbian. Despite her "radical" view that lesbians should be widely accepted in American society, she was wise enough to know that including what was considered at the time to be lewd language could jeopardize her safety and could end with her being legally persecuted by opposition. Ben meticulously addresses her local lesbian audience. The magazine is for "those of us who will never quite be able to adapt ourselves to the iron-bound rules of convention," she writes, and should only be circulated amongst "those who, it is felt, will genuinely enjoy this magazine."<sup>13</sup> Quotations like this are scattered throughout most of her writing, it is clear she wants to make herself clear to her audience without saying anything that could be used against anyone who has access to *Vice Versa*.

Much like how lesbians defy the "iron-bound rules of convention" in society, Ben defied the conventional rules of journalism. Ben uses informal tone and language in her writing, that often reads more like modern-day blog posts rather than a newspaper or magazine. Ben would often speak directly to her audience, making pleas with them to submit work to her "whatchama-column," her open forum section, but to "puh-leeze keep it 'just between us girls.'"<sup>14</sup> In the October edition of *Vice Versa*, Ben describes the magical "atmos-fear" of Halloween when everyone else takes on a different character whereas lesbians "must masquerade the other three hundred and sixty-four days of the year."<sup>15</sup> The informal-ness and occasional humor of her writing reflects Ben's intentions with

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<sup>12</sup> Edith Eyde, "Here to Stay," *Vice Versa* 1, no. 4, (September 1947): 4-5, [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/lti/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity|bibliographic\\_detail|s3232379](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/lti/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_detail|s3232379).

<sup>13</sup> Edith Eyde, "In Explanation," *Vice Versa* 1, no. 1, (June 1947): 1-2, [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity|bibliographic\\_details|3232373?account\\_id=11578&usage\\_group\\_id=103194](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_details|3232373?account_id=11578&usage_group_id=103194).

<sup>14</sup> Edith Eyde, "Just Between us Girls," *Vice Versa* 1, no. 2, (July, 1947): 2, [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity|bibliographic\\_details|3232375?account\\_id=11578&usage\\_group\\_id=103194](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_details|3232375?account_id=11578&usage_group_id=103194).

<sup>15</sup> Edith Eyde, "The Hallowe'en Spirit," *Vice Versa* 1, no. 5, (October 1947): 1, [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity|bibliographic\\_details|3232381?account\\_id=11578&usage\\_group\\_id=103194](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_details|3232381?account_id=11578&usage_group_id=103194).

the magazine. She was not politically engaged, and she did not use the magazine as a political tool for advancing the position of lesbians. She simply used it as a tool to communicate with her own lesbian community and find her place in it, (as well as an excuse to be busy at work). However, this did not stop the rave reviews from coming in, suggesting that it was indeed helping readers find hope in the lesbian community and their place in wider society.<sup>16</sup>

One quote from the November 1947 edition of the "whatchama-column" shows that what Ben had hoped to achieve with *Vice Versa* was working, after receiving letters that lesbians felt the magazine had given them the community they had longed for:

This is precisely the feeling that I would like to impart through this publication—a feeling of camaraderie—that even though readers may never actually become acquainted with one another, they will find a sort of spiritual communion through this little magazine, which is written by and for those of our inclinations. As long as I know that my friends enjoy reading *Vice Versa*, I shall try and keep on publishing it for as long as circumstances permit.<sup>17</sup>

Though she never dreamed that *Vice Versa* would reach national relevance and create a national lesbian community, those that followed and mimicked many of the elements of *Vice Versa* would. Eight years after the end of *Vice Versa* in 1955, *The Ladder* emerged upstate in San Francisco from the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), an organization of and for lesbians created by four lesbian couples.<sup>18</sup> *The Ladder* would achieve nationally what *Vice Versa* had achieved locally, by its first anniversary it had more than four hundred subscribers.<sup>19</sup>

Before *The Ladder*'s first issue in 1955, two gay magazines existed: *ONE* and *The Mattachine Review*. These magazines, from Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively, were extremely important as the first two widely distributed gay publications.<sup>20</sup> But the magazines and the organizations they

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<sup>16</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 4, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Edith Eyde, "Whatchama-column," *Vice Versa* 1, no. 6, (November 1947): 12, [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity|bibliographic\\_details|3232383?account\\_id=11578&usage\\_group\\_id=103194](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_details|3232383?account_id=11578&usage_group_id=103194).

<sup>18</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Vigiletti, "Normalizing the 'Variant,'" 1.

<sup>20</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 17-21.



came from lacked in that they did not represent, discuss or advocate for the rights of lesbian women.<sup>21</sup> Because the anxiety around being outed as a lesbian or even associated with them with heightened in a decade dominated by McCarthyism, Del Martin and the DOB were careful to make sure what they were doing was within the bounds of legality. After their first issue, the DOB received feedback that many of those who received the initial issue were concerned about receiving such a magazine.<sup>22</sup> This prompted the editors of *The Ladder* to include a section titled "Your Name is Safe!" to reduce the anxieties of their readers and encourage continued support of the magazine. In it, Ann Ferguson reminds readers that the constitution guarantees the freedom of press which protects both the rights of the DOB and the reader.<sup>23</sup> Ferguson also explains that the DOB has received legal counsel and that a recent court decision, *U.S. v. Rumely*, protects the rights of a publisher to refuse to release the names of subscribers. Within the statement is a quote that points to the aims of the organization, "Daughters of Bilitis... is an organization solely dedicated to education and research with reference primarily to the Lesbian and secondarily to the entire subject of sexual variancy... we are not a political organization, nor are we affiliated in any way with any group ether of the past or present."<sup>24</sup> In the years following, *The Ladder* would delicately discuss the topic of and the issues surrounding lesbianism, a strategy that would seem contradictory to readers of the time and scholars to their proposed mission.<sup>25</sup>

One of the issues most prominently discussed in the early years of *The Ladder* is how lesbians can navigate the world around them, focusing on how lesbians can exist under the radar until accepted as a part of greater society. The DOB mission statement, appearing on the front page of each edition, established that the DOB seeks to educate "the variant," and to help her "make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic and economic implications" while

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<sup>21</sup> Del Martin, "President's Message," *The Ladder* 1, no. 1, (October 1956): 7-8, <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1003347879>.

<sup>22</sup> D. Griffin, "The President's Message," *The Ladder* 1, no. 2, (November 1956): 2-3, <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1003347880>.

<sup>23</sup> Ironically, Ann Ferguson was a pseudonym for Phyllis Lyon. Lyon ditched the pseudonym in the in the following issue, noting the irony of using a pseudonym while writing about how readers of *The Ladder*, could trust that their names were safe. Phyllis Lyon, "Ann Ferguson is Dead!" *The Ladder* 1, no. 4 (January 1957): 7, <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1003347883>.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Ferguson, "Your Name is Safe!" *The Ladder* 1, no. 2, (November 1956): 10-12.

<sup>25</sup> Vigiletti, "Normalizing the 'Variant,'" 47-8.

also “advocating a mode of behaviour and dress acceptable to society.”<sup>26</sup> *The Ladder* was not a magazine that promoted any sort of activism and it is clear that the contributors wished to take a more conservative approach to about and for lesbians.<sup>27</sup> This is likely a combination of the authors own conservative views as well as anxiety around their material being considered obscene and therefore illegal.

Early on, in the second issue of *The Ladder*, then president D. Griffin proclaims that in order for the lesbian to accepted into society, she must be a “woman first, butch or femme second” and must dress appropriately to fit the mold of what society considered “normal.” The message is reiterated in the organization's mission statement, which is included on the first page of each issue of *The Ladder*.<sup>28</sup> The 50s were a time when working class lesbian culture was dominated by the idea that there were butch and femme lesbians, who typically took on masculine and feminine roles, respectively. Since there were few examples of a model for lesbian relationship, lesbians typically tried to fit it within what did exist, the heterosexual relationship. This element of lesbian culture was especially prevalent in lesbian bar culture, where it was not uncommon that a lesbian would be shunned or even kicked out of a lesbian bar if she did not clearly fit into one of the two roles.<sup>29</sup> Yet, butch women would act out their roles as the male counterpart of the lesbian relationship outside of the lesbian bar, especially when it came to dress. The bar was often the only place a butch woman could dress “right.”<sup>30</sup> However, *The Ladder* still saw it important to remind lesbians to present as women in public. Though criticized for it later, by readers in the early sixties and some scholars, helping lesbians fit into heteronormative society reflected the emphasis on normality of the era. Some readers responded with positivity to what seems like harmful rhetoric today, especially those in more rural areas without access to the lesbian communities often found in large cities.<sup>31</sup>

*The Ladder* underwent a major shift in 1963 after the DOB appointed Barbara Gittings as editor. Firstly, Gittings made a **linguistically** subtle but

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<sup>26</sup> Daughters of Bilitis, “Daughters of Bilitis—Purpose,” *The Ladder* 1, no.1 (October 1956): 4.

<sup>27</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> D. Griffin, “President’s Message,” 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 167-9.

<sup>30</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 161-2.

<sup>31</sup> Vigiletti, “Normalizing the ‘Variant,’” 61.

**drastically** important change, adding *A Lesbian Review* to the title of the magazine. Now titled *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review*, the magazine has officially proclaimed itself a lesbian magazine after years of never explicitly stating it was aimed at lesbians.<sup>32</sup> Gittings would go on to become a prominent figure in Lesbian and Gay liberation movement, co-founding the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and organizing the first gay civil rights picket line in Washington D.C. Gittings was considered much more radical than Lyon and Martin and moved *The Ladder* away from the idea that lesbians should conform to the rest of society and embrace their femininity.<sup>33</sup> Just a few years after old Lyon and Martin editorship focused on lesbians dressing "proper," Gittings' editorship allowed for an article in the November 1964 issue of *The Ladder* to proclaim, "pants are proper!"<sup>34</sup>

Gittings was consumed with studying and researching lesbian materials. She founded the New York City Chapter of DOB in 1958. Despite living in Philadelphia, she was obsessed enough to hitchhike her way to NYC for weekly meetings.<sup>35</sup> Her dedication to the cause of lesbian activism is reflected in how she shifted the scope of both lesbian and gay press towards militancy during her editorship. Not only did *The Ladder* begin to encourage its readers to look outward and demand equal rights, but new gay magazines *Homosexual Citizen* and *Drum* overtook *One* and *Mattachine Review* taking the same approach as Gittings.<sup>36</sup>

One of the biggest changes Gittings made to *The Ladder* was including the voices of regular lesbians over "experts." She argued that "the true experts on homosexuality—then as well as now—are homosexuals. As editor of *The Ladder*, I set out to show that we could speak perfectly well for ourselves, thank you very much."<sup>37</sup> The statement may seem rather obvious today but was rather extreme after the many years of focus across lesbian and gay media on the

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<sup>32</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 54-5.

<sup>33</sup> Orleck, *Rethinking Women's Activism*, 174-9.

<sup>34</sup> Melanie, "Focus on Fashion," *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review* 9, no. 2, (November 1964): 16-7,

[https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The\\_Ladder/1964\\_Ladder\\_Vol09\\_No02\\_Nov.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The_Ladder/1964_Ladder_Vol09_No02_Nov.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 53-4.

<sup>37</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 56.

“expert” voices of psychologist, psychiatrists and ministers.<sup>38</sup> One such voice was that of Ernestine Eckstein, a black lesbian and member of the NYC chapter of DOB. In the lengthy interview, included in its entirety, eight pages long, Eckstein discusses her experience as both a black woman and a lesbian, plus the intersectionality of both identities. Involved herself in the Civil Rights Movement, she encourages the homophile movement to follow suit in their methods of activism.<sup>39</sup> Eckstein declares, “I feel that homosexuals have to become visible and to assert themselves politically. Once homosexuals do this, society will give more and more... Any movement needs a certain number of courageous people, there’s no getting around it. They have to come out on behalf of the cause and accept whatever consequences come.”<sup>40</sup> The decision to interview Eckstein and subsequently include the interview in its entirety in this issue of *The Ladder* had two purposes for Gittings. Gittings wished to showcase lesbians living successful and open lives to encourage readers of *The Ladder*. This was not the only example of such an interview. But Gittings also wanted to motivate readers to abandon the notion that conformity was best for them and instead begin to demand equal rights. The sentiment displayed by Eckstein in her interview reflected that of Gittings.<sup>41</sup>

A year prior, seven men and three women, including Gittings, orchestrated the first march for equal rights of homosexuals in May 1965 at the White House. The march was the first in a series of six across major different government buildings across the east coast. In October, the group returned to the White House, this time with sixty picketers.<sup>42</sup> The marches offered one of the first opportunities for *The Ladder* to cover a news story. In two consecutive issues, first in July-August then September 1965, *The Ladder* ran stories about the different picketing events. The first story covered the picket line at the Civil Service Commission Building in Washington D.C. and included messages

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<sup>38</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 56.

<sup>39</sup> The term “homophile movement,” was used during the 1950s and 1960s to collectively describe all gay and lesbian organizations and activism. Though no longer used to describe LGBTQ+ activism, the term is still used by historians to describe it during this period.

<sup>40</sup> Ernestine Eckstein, “Interview with Ernestine,” interview by Kay Tobin and Barbara Gittings, *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review* 10, no. 9, (June 1966): 9, [https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The\\_Ladder/1966\\_Ladder\\_Vol10\\_No09\\_Jun.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The_Ladder/1966_Ladder_Vol10_No09_Jun.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 51-6.

<sup>42</sup> Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 62.

written on the sign of the picketers, such as “The American Way: Employment Based upon Competence, Ability, Training--not Upon Private Life,” and “Fair Employment Applies to Homosexuals, Too.” The second story most notably contains direct quotes from onlookers and picketers themselves. The story focused on the picket line at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on July fourth. Surprisingly, the reactions included from bystanders were equally as positive as they were negative. One policeman said, “Hey that’s a good looking group. I’m surprised.” Another man said, “That’s an impressive looking picket line.”<sup>43</sup> On top of simply informing readers of the marches, these stories served as a rallying cry for militancy in the homophile movement.

What the stories lacked was evidence that the marches had any sort of impact. However, that would change in October 1965 after a story in that month’s issues revealed that Secretary of State Dean Rusk was questioned on August 27<sup>th</sup> on the impending picket line which was to take place the next day. Despite giving a typical politician answer, reiterating the current policy of firing any employee suspected of homosexuality, the story proved that the picketing was garnering national attention slowly but surely. Consequently, the march the following day was covered by numerous news stations, including CBS, the French News Agency, and the Washington Post.<sup>44</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s are well known for their numerous protests and social movements, most notably of course, the civil rights movement. For the LGBT movement, the Stonewall uprising marks an important shift towards militancy and national recognition. Though the six nights of rebellion against police in Greenwich Village are known to many as the beginning of the gay rights movement, the events at Stonewall were not the first of its kind. Several other notable police raids of gay and lesbian bars and consequent rebellions are

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<sup>43</sup> “Homosexuals Picket in Nation’s Capital,” *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review* 9, no. 10-11 (July-August 1965): 23-25, 2024-12-9, [https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The\\_Ladder/1965\\_Ladder\\_Vol09\\_No10-11\\_Jul-Aug.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The_Ladder/1965_Ladder_Vol09_No10-11_Jul-Aug.pdf); and Kay Tobin, “Picketing: The Impact and The Issues,” *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review* 9, no 12 (September 1965): 4-8, 2024-12-9, [https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The\\_Ladder/1965\\_Ladder\\_Vol09\\_No12\\_Sept.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The_Ladder/1965_Ladder_Vol09_No12_Sept.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> “Rusk Probed on Picketing,” *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review* 10, no. 1, (October 1965): 18, 2024-12-9, [https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The\\_Ladder/1965\\_Ladder\\_Vol10\\_No01\\_Oct.pdf](https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/sfbagals/The_Ladder/1965_Ladder_Vol10_No01_Oct.pdf); and Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 63-4.

known, beginning with the Pepper Hill Club Raid in 1955 in Baltimore.<sup>45</sup> Of course, Stonewall still marks an important moment in LGBT history and represents a time when the community's activism was ready to "come out," to the society.

The 1970s was a decade that that marked shift from conformity towards militancy for lesbian activism. Not unique to their experience in the rest of society, Lesbians were excluded from the National Organization for Women (NOW), the most prominent feminist organization of the time. Founder and then-president Betty Friedman rejected the inclusion of lesbians and lesbian issues in NOW, scared that inclusion of such would jeopardize the integrity of the organization leading the way for feminist causes. However, it became clear that her viewpoint did not represent many of those in her organization when many lesbian members left NOW in protest after the firing of the NOW newsletter's editor, a lesbian author named Rita Mae Brown. Many of these women went on to form a group called the *Lavender Menace*, including Brown. The group infiltrated NOW's Second Congress to Unite Women, taking it over shortly after it began. They interrupted the first speaker by turning off the lights of the junior high auditorium they were in, running up to the front of the audience and revealing their purple *Lavender Menace* t-shirts after the lights came back on. The Congress had now been taken over by the radical lesbians and transformed from completely leaving lesbian issues off the agenda, to becoming a "coming-out party for radical lesbian feminism."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "1969: The Stonewall Uprising," Library of Congress, accessed December 7, 2024, <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/stonewall-era>.

<sup>46</sup> Orleck, *Rethinking Women's Activism*, 164-5.

## Speaking Out: Violence Against Women in the Media and Workplace in the 1970s through Working Women United and Women Against Violence Against Women

Nick Tallon

What does it feel like to be a controversial figure? What happens when you become a public figure involved in an issue that has only been whispered about? I can only speak for myself. I've been there--and it's rough. When I came forward and started to fight against sexual harassment, I was alone. Even though I found a group of wonderful women who were willing to support me in this issue, especially the two women who were my witnesses, I was still alone.<sup>1</sup>

In 1975, Carmita Wood's wrote these words to highlight ongoing sexual harassment at Cornell University and to highlight her experiences from a court case that eventually came to define activism against sexual violence. After coverage by media like *The New York Times*, the case popularized the term "sexual harassment" on a national level and led to the first public discussion of "sexual harassment" by the feminist group Working Women United (WWU).<sup>2</sup> Wood's experiences emphasized the need for legal recognition and workplace policies to address sexual harassment and contribute to the development of protections for women in the workplace. Sexual harassment and violence against women were not new issues for the women's rights movement/ Wood's case, however, brought more attention to the struggles women faced in the workplace, media, and the judicial system. This transition to a new discourse of women's rights signaled a fundamental shift in how women's experiences are understood.

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<sup>1</sup> Carmita Wood is a key activist in the movement against workplace sexual harassment, whose experiences helped bring attention to the issue in the 1970s. After facing sexual harassment at her job at Cornell University and suffering health consequences, Wood resigned and sought unemployment benefits, which were denied. Carmita Wood, "Woman Alone," *Labor Pains*, 1, no. 1 (August 1975), p. 5. Included in *How Did Diverse Activists in the Second Wave of the Women's Movement Shape Emerging Public Policy on Sexual Harassment?*, by Carrie N. Baker. (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005), Accessed November 10, 2024, <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000685377>.

<sup>2</sup> WWU defined sexual harassment as "the treatment of women workers as sexual objects." Pamela Hewitt Loy, Lea P. Stewart, "The Extent and Effects of the Sexual Harassment of Working Women," *Sociological Focus* 17, no. 1 (1984): 31–43, Accessed November 10, 2024. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20831305>; Later known as Working Women Institute or Working Women United Institute after 1978.

Instead of seeing sexual harassment and violence as isolated, individual incidents, or private matters, the new discourse reframes them as systemic issues embedded in our social, legal, and workplace structures. It marks the move from a narrow and individualized view of women's suffering to a structural framework that could be open to reform.

In the 1970s, women's activism against violence gained momentum through grassroots organizations that challenged entrenched norms of sexual harassment and violence. Groups like Working Women United and Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) were at the forefront, organizing to confront workplace harassment, sexist portrayals in media, and injustices within the judicial system. WWU emerged from the experience of Carmita Wood and demanded protections for women at work.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, WAVAW protested the media's normalization of violence, most notably targeting the Rolling Stones' *Black and Blue* album campaign, which featured controversial ads depicting a bound and bruised woman. WAVAW's protests highlighted how such imagery glamorized violence and objectified women, pushing industries to reconsider female representation. Together, these groups laid critical groundwork for a broader cultural reckoning, pushing for systemic changes that continue to influence the fight for women's rights and safety.

The 1970s marked a transformative period in the movement against violence toward women in the American workplace and media, as grassroots organizations such as Working Women United and Women Against Violence Against Women took bold steps to challenge pervasive systems of harassment, abuse, and objectification in the workplace, media, and society. These groups emerged to confront longstanding practices that condoned and normalized violence against women, often relying on direct action, public protest, and strategic messaging to illuminate issues of gender-based violence that were largely ignored or trivialized in the broader culture. WWU played a crucial role in defining "sexual harassment," a term that not only gave language to a previously unnamed experience but also provided the framework for protections against workplace harassment.<sup>4</sup> This conceptual shift, catalyzed by the

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Weber, "The Depressingly Long History of Sexual Harassment Turning Points," *The Week*, November 27, 2017. Accessed November 10, 2024. <https://theweek.com/articles/738873/depressingly-long-history-sexual-harassment-turning-points>.

<sup>4</sup> Document 6D: "Why Working Women United," *Labor Pains*, 1, no. 1 (August 1975), p. 3. Included in *How Did Diverse Activists in the Second Wave of the Women's Movement*



experience of Carmita Wood and her struggle to secure workplace justice, marked the beginning of a movement to hold institutions accountable for the safety and dignity of women in professional environments.

The activism of Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Working Women United (WWU) reveals how grassroots organizing directly confronted systemic misogyny by linking media representation to real-world violence and transforming workplace harassment into a legal and cultural battleground. WAVAW's objections to films like *Snuff* and the Rolling Stones' *Black and Blue* album exposed how media industries commodified violence against women. Their campaigns, which were documented in protest posters criticizing racist marketing taglines and images of bound women, made the public face the normalization of gendered violence. WWU weaponized personal testimony to redefine workplace abuse in their 1975 Speak Out event. The phrase "sexual harassment" became a unifying concept which was documented in transcripts by women like Wood and Connie Korbel who detailed relentless harassment. This language shift, articulated in WWU's *Labor Pains* newsletter, reframed isolated incidents as systemic discrimination, enabling legal challenges and policy demands. Together, these actions illustrate how activists dismantled patriarchal invisibility. WAVAW disrupted media complicity in violence, while WWU transformed silenced grievances into collective power, laying the foundation for modern movements like #MeToo. Their protests and rhetoric did not merely "highlight" issues. They redefined violence against women as a structural crisis demanding institutional accountability.

Scholarship on women's activism through the 1970s has recognized the need to address violence against women to mobilize against gender-based oppression and systemic violence. Until feminist historian Susan Brownmiller wrote *Against Our Will* in 1975, historians shied away from addressing violence against women and the patriarchy. Brownmiller<sup>5</sup> As scholarship has grown on the history of second wave feminism, historians have addressed the misconceptions of the second wave as being dominated by heterosexual, white,

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*Shape Emerging Public Policy on Sexual Harassment?*, by Carrie N. Baker, (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005), Accessed December 9, 2024, <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000674634>

<sup>5</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.

middle-class women. That initial focus <sup>6</sup><sub>[OBJ]</sub><sup>7</sup><sub>[OBJ]</sub><sup>8</sup><sub>[OBJ]</sub>. Thus, the analysis was broadened and served to promote a more inclusive view of violence against women across racial, sexual, and socioeconomic divides.

Violence against women has been suppressed throughout history while key grassroots organizations come in to fill the gaps left by mass media that continuously pushed down women and supported patriarchal views of women as they spoke out against the violence and sexual harassment against them. Grassroots organizing of protests to the exploitation of women in the media to fight patriarchal norms in mass media and the power dynamics that left women like Carmita Wood turning to alternative forms of organization for justice when the judicial system failed her. The movement was built on women all sharing in a unified cause to fight for equal treatment in the workplace, media, and society rallying behind leaders that recognized the need for changes to society for women to get equal treatment in all facets of their lives.

Women's activism in the 1970s arose during a period of intense social and political change, which the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, anti-war protests, and the sexual revolution of the 1960s had fueled. The second wave of feminism gained momentum, focusing on issues like reproductive rights,

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<sup>6</sup> For examples of scholars in the twenty first century, check, Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (1st ed., pp. xv–xv), Duke University Press; Sara Evans, “Women’s Liberation: Seeing the Revolution Clearly.” *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015); Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women’s Activism*, Second edition, New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022; Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Kirsten Swinth, *Feminism’s Forgotten Fight: The Unfinished Struggle for Work and Family*, Harvard University Press.

<sup>7</sup> The term “grassroots” refers to activism that originates within communities directly affected by an issue, rather than being orchestrated by established institutions or political elites. A grassroots movement focuses on underrepresented voices, highlights unity across socioeconomic barriers, and identifies cultural norms as the primary drivers of violence.

<sup>8</sup> For examples of scholarship in the twenty first century on violence against women, check, Carrie N. Baker, *The Women’s Movement Against Sexual Harassment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); and Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (1st ed.), Alfred A. Knopf.

workplace equality, and legal protections against discrimination. This era saw a growing number of women entering the workforce and higher education. Yet they continued to face systemic inequalities, sexual harassment, and limited legal protections against gender-based violence. The 1970s also exposed widespread media portrayals that objectified women and glamorized violence, reflecting and reinforcing the patriarchal norms of the time. The "glass ceiling" became a metaphor for the invisible barriers that prevented women from advancing to higher-level positions in the workforce despite growing numbers of women entering professional roles. Women encountered systemic discrimination, with limited access to promotions, leadership opportunities, and equitable pay.

Men often dominated workplace cultures, particularly in management roles. Sexual harassment was widespread, with little legal recourse available, creating an environment which inhibited women's career growth. Studies on the sexual harassment of women in the workplace found that it was deeper than a problem of sexuality but a result of the power dynamics keeping men in power over vulnerable women citing "seventy-nine percent of the harassers had the power to fire or promote the women they harassed."<sup>9</sup> Activists and feminist groups in this era worked to challenge these barriers, advocating for policies and cultural changes to pave the way for greater workplace gender equity.

### **The Case of Carmita Wood**

It felt good to be able to stand up and say, 'Damn it, that's enough! I'm a human being and I will no longer tolerate these indignities.' I hope that, because of my action, there will be some men who will give it a second thought before they pat or pinch a female employee. Maybe women, too, will realize that they don't have to put up with unwanted advances at work.<sup>10</sup>

The Case of Carmita Wood in 1975 began resulting from Wood's denial for unemployment benefits by The New York State Unemployment Service. They denied her claim citing her reasons for leaving the job were too "personal and non-compelling."<sup>11</sup> The case served as a catalyst for early activism against

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<sup>9</sup> Loy, "Sexual Harassment of Working Women," 31.

<sup>10</sup> Wood, "Woman Alone," 1.

<sup>11</sup> Lin Farley, Susan Meyer, Karen Sauvigné, Document 4: "Working Women Join to Fight Sexual Exploitation," Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 3 April 1975, 1.

workplace sexual harassment. Wood, an administrative assistant at Cornell University, experienced repeated unwanted sexual advances from a male supervisor. The psychological stress and physical symptoms resulting from this harassment ultimately led her to resign from her position. When Wood sought unemployment benefits on the grounds of workplace-induced illness, however, her claim was denied, as her case fell outside the legal framework for unemployment eligibility at the time. This denial exposed a gap in workplace protections and underscored the lack of language to describe her experience.

During a Speak Out event organized in 1975 by Carmita Wood and the feminist collective, Working Women United, the role of creating a unifying term played in activism against violence against women and sexual harassment cannot be understated. Farley's description of making connections between different cases of women being exploited and harassed at their jobs to start a movement shows just how impactful the creation of a unifying term was to women's activism against workplace harassment. By defining these acts as "sexual harassment," the movement reframed unwanted sexual advances in professional settings as harmful and dehumanizing, rather than benign or inconsequential.

Lin Farley described the moment she began using the phrase:

At first, it felt as if the term had the potential to change everything. Working women immediately took up the phrase, which finally captured the sexual coercion they were experiencing daily. No longer did they have to explain to their friends and family that 'he hit on me and

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Included in *How Did Diverse Activists in the Second Wave of the Women's Movement Shape Emerging Public Policy on Sexual Harassment?*, by Carrie N. Baker.

(Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005). Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000677068>.

<sup>12</sup> Weber, "The Depressingly Long History of Sexual Harassment Turning Points,"

<sup>13</sup> *Document 5: Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment of Women at Work, transcript, Ithaca, New York, 4 May 1975, Karen Sauvigné Papers, Brooklyn, New York, Private Collection. 68 pp.* Included in *How Did Diverse Activists in the Second Wave of the Women's Movement Shape Emerging Public Policy on Sexual Harassment?*, by Carrie N. Baker. (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005). Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000681729>.

wouldn't take no for an answer, so I had to quit.' What he did had a name.<sup>14</sup>

Women had come together in solidarity of their experiences in the workplace and realized the power they had by unifying their stories to create change. As Farley explained, they "understood that they weren't alone, that millions of working women shared their experience."<sup>15</sup> Millions of working women became united in their experiences that had been dismissed and normalized as regular parts of working as a woman. Naming this behavior as harassment allowed activists to highlight these systemic abuses, press for accountability, and argue that eliminating harassment benefits workplaces broadly by creating safer, more equal environments. For Wood, the creation of the term inspired her to fight against the New York State Unemployment Service that denied her claim. This harassment was so normalized that women did not think twice until the term had been created and spoke out about their experiences in the workplace. Activist Connie Korbelt stated at the Speak Out, "I can't remember now as I think back, ever having had a job without sexual harassment."<sup>16</sup>

## **Working Women United**

Working Women United (WWU) was a pioneering feminist organization founded in 1975 in Ithaca, New York, in response to a landmark case of workplace sexual harassment that drew national attention. WWU's major motivations were to give voice to women who had endured workplace harassment and violence, to push for systemic change in how such issues were addressed, and to demand accountability from employers and institutions. To break the stigma around this widespread problem, they arranged the first-ever public speak-out on workplace sexual harassment, where women recounted their tales. By putting sexual harassment into the public eye, the group's action helped pave the way for later legislative and societal changes. WWU promoted the larger women's rights movement and brought attention to the systemic basis of sexism by portraying workplace harassment as a type of gender violence rather than an individual issue. Their efforts laid the groundwork for changing public perceptions and promoting laws that were designed to protect women from

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<sup>14</sup> Lin Farley, "I Coined the Term 'Sexual Harassment.' Corporations Stole It.," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2017. Accessed November 10, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/opinion/sexual-harassment-corporations-steal.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Farley, "I Coined the Term 'Sexual Harassment.' Corporations Stole It."

<sup>16</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 11-12.

discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Many women found themselves unable to leave a job even while facing sexual harassment and WWU brought women together to freely discuss their experiences. Activist Lin Farley highlights the impact that economic status had on being harassed at a job, stating that if “you’re a young woman living at home from a fairly affluent background, you might be able to leave the job you’re on and go to another one and that might be one way of dealing with an intolerable situation. If you come from a different situation that option might not be available to you, so you’re going to have to try and figure out something else that you can do to keep your dignity or whatever.”<sup>17</sup>

Working Women United made it clear in their *Speak Out* to address why many women had stayed at jobs they were being harassed at and fight against the victim-blaming of the woman who could not leave unacceptable job conditions.<sup>18</sup> This blame ignored the economic realities many women faced, including limited job opportunities, financial dependency, and the lack of legal protections against harassment. It also disregarded the social stigma and potential retaliation that could accompany leaving a job, such as being blacklisted in their industries. Farley stated that “I think this has to be said, for a lot of women there are no options. Cooperating is not an option—I mean, the choice not to is simply not there.”<sup>19</sup> Particularly in male-dominated workplaces where such behavior was accepted, these narratives reinforced gendered expectations that women should put up with unacceptable behavior to keep their jobs.

WWU tried to unify all working women by educating women on what it means to be discriminated at work. They emphasized how harassment reduced women to “sexual beings” rather than workers. Their *Labor Pains* newspaper reported that, “We need to understand that sexual harassment is more than repeatedly being touched, propositioned or leered at by a male employer. It is

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<sup>17</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Working Women United (WWU) organized their 1975 *Speak Out on Sexual Harassment* as a platform for women to publicly share firsthand accounts of workplace abuse, a practice previously shrouded in silence. The event, held in Ithaca, New York, invited women like Carmita Wood and Connie Korbel to testify about enduring harassment, refuting victim-blaming narratives that dismissed their inability to leave toxic jobs.

<sup>19</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 4.

being judged as a sexual being rather than solely as a worker.”<sup>20</sup> WWU argued that true equality in the workplace would eradicate women being viewed as a sexual object by men but rather as just a coworker. This narrative from WWU united women by reframing their collective experiences as systemic patterns of workplace discrimination rooted in patriarchal power dynamics.

Farley emphasized the role woman had in these situations as the one who was forced to make the decision either choosing to be ostracized for talking about your experiences or stuck in unacceptable conditions. Women were continually being told that magazines and newspapers liberated them, but nothing fundamentally changed about their situations. Farley spoke about her experience putting up posters for the event: “MS. Magazine is happy to tell us how liberated and free we all are and yet I want to tell you right now that our posters were ripped down in plants all over this town.”<sup>21</sup> Women were tired of being discriminated against and their cries for equality silenced. The Speak Out was designed to start a discussion about the violence woman face in the workplace and society writ large.

WWU succeeded in creating a dialogue to capture as many women as possible, knowing that society would alienate them and diminish their message in any way they could. Farley spoke about the repercussions that came for speaking out about sexual harassment stating, “We’re not that liberated in 1975 and, believe me, when a woman gets up in public and starts talking about that word -- sex-- it makes waves and the temptation is to write that woman off, to say, ‘Wow, she asked for it, blablabla...’”<sup>22</sup> The women who did speak out about their experiences faced stigmas as exaggerating their stories and that they made up their claims for attention or some kind of gain. Any woman who spoke about sex at this time would have been branded as a “whore and bitch” as Farley illustrated in her speech.<sup>23</sup>

The safest way to host the Speak Out event was to keep away any media that would misrepresent speakers. Women were concerned for their reputations and the actions of the people around them if they found out. Activist Connie

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<sup>20</sup> Document 6F: “*Sexual Harassment: The Working Woman’s Dilemma*,” *Labor Pains*, 1, no. 1 (August 1975), pp. 4, 11. Included in *How Did Diverse Activists in the Second Wave of the Women’s Movement Shape Emerging Public Policy on Sexual Harassment?*, by Carrie N. Baker. (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005). Accessed December 9, 2024. <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000678327>.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 6.

Korbel stated, “And I don’t like to have to come home from work at night knowing that I’ve had to work like that all day long and come home to a husband who I know if he knew would kill somebody.”<sup>24</sup> The fear women had of losing their livelihood if they came out with their stories shows just how hard it was for those who did speak out about their experiences and risked their jobs, reputations, and lives to build the movement and stop sexual harassment. While Working Women United focused on eradicating workplace harassment through legal and economic advocacy, Women Against Violence Against Women extended the fight to the cultural realm, together challenging patriarchal violence across both institutional and societal landscapes.

### **Women Against Violence Against Women**

The release of the film *Snuff* using the line “Filmed in South America—Where life is cheap.” sparked headlines around the U.S. and hit the radars of Women Against Violence Against Women. They used the film to organize against its advertising campaign and content of the film, including the racist tagline and the brutal and exploitative portrayal of violence against women to market itself with the name being derived from “snuff films”<sup>25</sup>. The term “snuff films” describes films depicting real homicides and then sold to make a profit.<sup>26</sup> The film did not create the term, but it was popularized during the time of its marketing campaign.

The film exploited the public’s fascination with the Charles Manson 1969 murders, as it was loosely based on that horrific event and being marketed as if a real murder had been filmed for the movie. The film capitalized on shock value and contributed to a disturbing trend of films that sensationalized violence against women for profit. WAVAW called for the film to be pulled from all theaters describing the film’s content as “the mutilation of women for explicit sexual pleasure of men once again connects the strong ties of sex and violence. Women are used as property—to be dismantled and discarded.”<sup>27</sup> While the

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<sup>24</sup> Baker, *Speak-Out on Sexual Harassment*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Women Against Violence Against Women, “Enough ‘Snuff’!” UCLA Library Digital Collections, March 1976. Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz00177hd6>.

<sup>26</sup> “Snuff Film” is defined as a pornographic film that shows an actual murder of one of the performers, as at the end of a sadistic act. “Snuff Film Definition & Meaning,” Dictionary.com.

<sup>27</sup> WAVAW, “Enough ‘Snuff’!”.



killings of the film were fake, films like this fetishized the very real idea of the torture of women.

Simultaneously, WAVAW confronted the media's role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and glamorizing violence against women. In its defining call to action, WAVAW protested the Rolling Stones' *Black and Blue* album, which featured promotional material depicting a bound and bruised woman with the tagline, "I'm 'Black and Blue' from the Rolling Stones—and I love it!" WAVAW condemned this imagery for trivializing and aestheticizing violence against women, calling out how such depictions reinforced patriarchal narratives that both exploited and degraded women's bodies.<sup>28</sup>

By launching protests and raising public awareness, WAVAW directly confronted a powerful record label and a globally renowned band, risking significant backlash in an era when feminist critiques of popular media were often dismissed as overreactions. Their activism extended beyond condemnation. The organization also sought to educate the public about the broader societal implications of these representations. WAVAW connected the dots between media portrayals and real-life systemic inequality, emphasizing how normalized depictions of violence perpetuated a world in which women's suffering was trivialized. The movement against *Black and Blue* reflected the broader struggle for women's rights and safety of the 1970s, which saw a surge of feminist action that aimed to hold artists and filmmakers responsible for their part in promoting sexist views. By using these bold measures, WAVAW also set the stage for future criticisms of the entertainment industry's role in perpetuating violence against women and misogyny.

WAVAW also protested the release of *Dressed to Kill*, a thriller directed by Brian De Palma, due to its portrayal of women and its reliance on graphic violence against female characters. They argued that the movie normalized violence against women and reinforced negative social standards by glamorizing the brutalization of women and promoting misogynistic attitudes. The flyer condemned the film for perpetuating the myths of women being "innate victims" and "Women fantasize about rape".<sup>29</sup> This film was widespread compared to many others boycotted by WAVAW grossing \$30 million in box office.

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<sup>28</sup> Women Against Violence Against Women, "Action Flyer," UCLA Library Digital Collections, Accessed October 11, 2024, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz00178wg0>.

<sup>29</sup> Women Against Violence Against Women, "Flyer Protesting Film 'Dressed to Kill,'" UCLA Library Digital Collections, Accessed December 8, 2024, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0017sqmc>

WAVAW organized public rallies and boycott calls against the film, highlighting how it uses a trans woman as the killer and victimizing the LGBTQ+ community as predatory to women. Despite its harmful depictions of women and the LGBTQ+ community, the movie was one of the highest grossing film of that year. The protests failed to convince the public but permanently marked the film's legacy diminishing its dangerous influence in media despite its large initial success in theaters.

WAVAW made a concerted effort to involve women of all colors and sexual orientations in their demonstrations. While protesting the film *Snuff*, they emphasized the racist comments made against South America for the promotional material of the film.<sup>30</sup> WAVAW attacked the violent image of any woman being shown in media to keep exploitative myths about women out of any forms of media. In their Fact Sheet WAVAW stated: "What WAVAW has demanded is simply that the recording industry demonstrate a parallel sensitivity and corporate social responsibility apropos of women."<sup>31</sup> This openness had a significant impact since it promoted unity among women from various backgrounds. WAVAW's intersectional approach pushed the movement toward a more thorough understanding of gender-based violence by challenging second-wave feminism's largely white, middle-class perspective.

WAVAW used the outrage of media to educate people on how women are exploited in media. While categorized as radical feminists by media covering their protests, WAVAW succeeded in getting the public's attention to the protests by, for instance, showing statistics. In a poster protesting the horror film *Pieces* WAVAW put on the flyer, "60% of married women are beaten by their husbands" and "4,723 women were murdered in the United States in 1982."<sup>32</sup> This negative attention managed to leave a permanent mark on the Rolling Stones a band many believed was too big to take any criticism and film *Dressed to Kill*. This approach to protesting media is very similar to the media campaigns and protests that are popular today. In 2018, the film *Fifty Shades Freed* was subject to the same criticism and protests that WAVAW led. The National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) activists condemned the film for romanticizing

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<sup>30</sup> WAVAW, "Enough 'Snuff'!".

<sup>31</sup> Women Against Violence Against Women, "What is WAVAW? Fact Sheet," UCLA Library Digital Collections, Accessed December 8, 2024, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0017635b>

<sup>32</sup> Women Against Violence Against Women, "Flyer Protesting 'Pieces,'" UCLA Library Digital Collections, Accessed December 8, 2024, <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0017sr0j>

abusive relationships and normalizing coercive control. They started a rally cry for theater boycotts, social media protest campaigns, and educational materials for women in an abusive relationship arguing that *Fifty Shades Freed* romanticized the abuse of women.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the foundational activism against sexual violence, workplace discrimination against women still is prominent today. Sexual harassment has continued to disproportionately impact women in the workplace while male counterparts are less likely to experience harassment in the workplace. A study conducted between 2018 and 2021 found that “Women filed 78.2% of the 27,291 sexual harassment charges received between FY 2018 and FY 2021.” Women continue to face disproportionate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, despite modern movements for women to speak out against the harassment they face in the work force like the MeToo movement in 2017.<sup>34</sup> Modern women’s movements have used social media platforms to become more vocal on issues like sexual harassment and workplace discrimination. At the same time, the viral and accessible nature of social media has led to many concerns from activists about the power these terms still hold. Activist Lin Farley argues that the term she helped coin in 1975 is used differently today. “‘Sexual harassment’ was never meant to be a term that the corporate world would feel comfortable tossing around.”<sup>35</sup> Farley criticizes the use of the term sexual harassment as a term companies can now use to label their training for staff and human resources departments to make them look like safer places for women to work, while not changing the power dynamics that lead to cases of sexual harassment.

The acceptance of these practices creates a vicious loop in which women are either pressured to keep quiet out of fear for repercussions or their concerns are dismissed. Farley describes the temporary jobs many corporations created to curb sexual harassment: “At one point in the 1980s thousands of women found employment in middle management as sexual harassment officers, though this is less common today.”<sup>36</sup> These temporary jobs were inconsequential and were an

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<sup>33</sup> NCOSE, “Fifty Shades of Grey Is Abuse,” NCOSE, December 9, 2021, Accessed March 19, 2025, <https://endsexualexploitation.org/fiftyshadesgrey/>.

<sup>34</sup> Sexual Harassment in Our Nation’s Workplaces, Office of Enterprise Data and Analytics (OEDA) Data Highlight No. 2. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Washington, DC, April 2022, Accessed December 3, 2024. [https://www.eeoc.gov/data/sexual-harassment-our-nations-workplaces#\\_ftn3](https://www.eeoc.gov/data/sexual-harassment-our-nations-workplaces#_ftn3)

<sup>35</sup> Farley, “I Coined the Term ‘Sexual Harassment.’ Corporations Stole It.”

<sup>36</sup> Farley, “I Coined the Term ‘Sexual Harassment.’ Corporations Stole It.”

excuse to supplement a larger cultural change. These jobs were slowly eliminated until most corporations no longer viewed the jobs as vital enough to keep and turned to yearly sexual harassment training to supplement real change in societal values.

Despite decades of awareness and the implementation of sexual harassment prevention programs, the problem of sexual violence persists. According to an article from the *Harvard Business Review*, “40% of women still say that they’ve been sexually harassed at work—a number unchanged since the 1980s.”<sup>37</sup> These initiatives frequently fall short because they prioritize liability protection for corporations over real cultural change. Instead of addressing the deeply rooted problems at the core of workplace harassment, training sessions are usually shallow and intended to mark compliance check boxes. The fact that these programs frequently present harassment as an individual problem rather than a systemic one is one of their primary flaws. An excessive reliance on reporting procedures and punishments arises from this strategy, which alienates staff members and deters them from coming forward. With the popularity of the MeToo movement encouraging women to come forward in 2017, monetary benefits from resolved sexual harassment receipts jumped from \$196 million from 2014-2017 to \$300 million from 2018-2021.<sup>38</sup> By recognizing how workplaces have been complicit in perpetuating harassment and why existing solutions often fall short, we can begin to imagine and implement more effective strategies. Only then can we create professional environments where women are truly valued and protected.

Today, more women can come forward and share their experiences due to media movements that strive to create unity and strength for women to share the harassment they have faced in the workplace. According to the EEOC, “In FY 2018, the EEOC received 7,609 sexual harassment charges compared to 6,696 in FY 2017 – an increase of 13.6%.”<sup>39</sup> Activists like foundational activist Lin Farley state that, while cultural norms have not changed significantly, “Everyone knows how to talk about it now. And before they didn’t.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Frank Dobbin, Alexandra Kalev, “Why Sexual Harassment Programs Backfire,” *Harvard Business Review*, August 27, 2021, Accessed December 8, 2024, <https://hbr.org/2020/05/why-sexual-harassment-programs-backfire>.

<sup>38</sup> Sexual Harassment in Our Nation’s Workplaces. Office of Enterprise Data and Analytics (OEDA) Data Highlight No. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Sexual Harassment in Our Nation’s Workplaces. Office of Enterprise Data and Analytics (OEDA) Data Highlight No. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Farley, “I Coined the Term ‘Sexual Harassment.’ Corporations Stole It.”

Ultimately, the growth of media attention surrounding sexual harassment has supported women sharing their experiences in fighting sexual harassment in the workplace, even as companies have diminished the value the term once held by applying it to every training and human resources department jargon they can. Farley is hopeful that change will still come, stating that “culture changes more slowly than rules. So much work from so many went into those early years for this issue to be recognized. ‘Sexual harassment’ must not lose its teeth now. We cannot permit it to be swallowed up as corporate-friendly legalese.”<sup>41</sup> Feminist activists like Farley, now want to reclaim the power of sexual harassment as a term that defines women’s challenges in the workplace not just a title of a yearly checkbox for companies to mark off. Addressing the issues at the root demands not only policy changes but a commitment to shift cultural narratives that perpetuate the inequality women continue to face.

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<sup>41</sup> Farley, “I Coined the Term ‘Sexual Harassment.’ Corporations Stole It.”

## Hazel Johnson and the Fight for Environmental Justice

Nate Stadler

In the late 1970s, Hazel M. Johnson lived in Chicago's Altgeld Gardens, a public housing complex predominantly occupied by African-American families.<sup>1</sup> Johnson herself was an African-American woman, a wife, and a mother of seven children. After her husband passed away from lung cancer, despite never having smoked, Johnson noticed that her children were also suffering from skin and respiratory issues. She asked her neighbors, and received similar reports. Disturbed by this pattern, she began investigating the environmental conditions of her community. Johnson discovered that over 50 landfills, industrial facilities, and sewage treatment plants encircled Altgeld Gardens, and these all contaminated the air and water.<sup>2</sup> This realization propelled her to found the People for Community Recovery (PCR) in 1979, igniting a grassroots movement that challenged environmental racism and earned her the title "Mother of Environmental Justice." Johnson's activism through PCR exposed systemic environmental racism in Altgeld Gardens and redefined environmental justice by linking grassroots advocacy, civil rights, and public health to address the disproportionate impact of industrial pollution on marginalized communities.

Johnson's work with PCR represents a critical but often overlooked chapter in the history of environmental activism. Despite the growing body of scholarship on environmental justice, the role of grassroots Black women organizers like Johnson has been underrepresented.<sup>3</sup> This study argues that Johnson's leadership at Altgeld Gardens was not only pivotal in addressing local environmental injustices but also exemplified the broader struggle for environmental justice in marginalized communities. Her work demonstrates how

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson's career with PCR is well documented, but it is unknown if she had a career before that. She was likely a stay-at-home mother.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer McAvoy "Lost in the Shuffle." *South Side Weekly*. January 8, 2014. <https://southsideweekly.com/lost-in-the-shuffle/>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Significant events such as the Warren County protests (1982) and Executive Order 12898 (1994) marked turning points in environmental justice awareness. See Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) and Robert D. Bullard, ed., *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005)

African-American women activists combined grassroots organizing with legal and political strategies to challenge environmental racism.

Scholarship on environmental justice has largely focused on the systemic nature of environmental racism and governmental policies that have contributed to these injustices. Historians such as Robert D. Bullard have documented how African-American communities have disproportionately suffered from industrial pollution and weak regulatory oversight. Bullard examines how federal laws such as the Clean Air Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 failed to protect Black communities from environmental hazards.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster have explored legal battles over environmental discrimination, emphasizing the role of policy frameworks in shaping the movement.<sup>5</sup> While these works provide critical insights into the structural causes of environmental racism, they often overlook the localized efforts of activists like Johnson, who engaged in direct community mobilization.

More recent scholarship has started to recognize the role of grassroots activism, but gaps remain. Eileen Maura McGurty has traced the origins of the environmental justice movement, highlighting the shift from “Not In My Back Yard” protests to broader civil rights-based demands for environmental equity, yet she does not examine individual leaders like Johnson in depth.<sup>6</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams, while analyzing Black women’s activism in urban housing movements, does not fully address their role in environmental justice struggles.<sup>7</sup> This study seeks to build on these works by centering Johnson’s activism within the larger historiography of environmental justice. By doing so, it highlights how her leadership at Altgeld Gardens contributed to the national environmental justice movement and challenged both racial and environmental inequalities.

This paper examines how Johnson and PCR mobilized the Altgeld Gardens community against water pollution and environmental hazards during

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<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Cole and Foster, *From the Ground Up*.

<sup>6</sup> Eileen Maura McGurty discusses the evolution of environmental justice movements but lacks a deep dive into figures like Johnson. See McGurty, “From NIMBY to Civil Rights: The Origins of the Environmental Justice Movement,” *Environmental History* 2, no. 3 (1997): 301–23.

<sup>7</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams focuses on Black women’s activism in housing. See Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

the 1980s and 1990s. It explores two key questions: How did Johnson and PCR organize residents to demand environmental accountability? In what ways did Johnson's identity as an African-American woman shape her activism and leadership within the environmental justice movement? By investigating these questions, this study argues that Johnson's activism was a case study in how grassroots environmental justice movements operated within the framework of both civil rights and environmental activism.

Johnson's early life experiences with racial and environmental injustice shaped the activist she would become. Born in 1935 in New Orleans, Louisiana, she grew up in a segregated society where systemic racism dictated every aspect of daily life. The racial inequities in her community were compounded by poor living conditions; like many Black neighborhoods, hers lacked basic resources and was surrounded by polluting industries. These early experiences instilled in Johnson a deep awareness of the connection between race, poverty, and environmental harm, foreshadowing her later work in environmental justice.

In the decades following World War II, industrial expansion in urban areas like Chicago, IL led to significant environmental degradation, particularly in low-income and minority neighborhoods. Altgeld Gardens, constructed in 1945 by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) to provide affordable housing for African-American veterans returning from the war. Due to widespread racial discrimination, many Black veterans were denied housing benefits under the GI Bill and faced exclusion from much of the city's housing market. Altgeld Gardens offered these veterans a community where they could settle and raise families.<sup>8</sup>

Designed as a low-rise complex with two-story row houses across 190 acres, Altgeld Gardens aimed to foster a close-knit, suburban-like community.<sup>9</sup> This layout stood in contrast to the high-rise projects that became common later, offering a more stable environment with shared green spaces and walkable streets.

Altgeld Gardens faced significant socioeconomic challenges from the outset. The community was largely composed of low-income residents, who

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<sup>8</sup> Lou Turner, "Racial Space-Making in Post-War Metropolitan Chicago: History of Black GIs & War Industry Worker at Altgeld Gardens" (ASAALH Conference, Indianapolis, IN, October 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Janet Ami Husunukpe, "Altgeld Gardens," *The Hal Baron Project*, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://halbaronproject.web.illinois.edu/omeka/items/show/43>.



relied on industrial jobs nearby but faced limited economic mobility.<sup>10</sup> While initially equipped with essential services like schools and recreational facilities, over time, many of these resources declined due to neglect and underfunding, compounding the hardships of living in an underserved, heavily industrialized area.

Economic interests consistently took priority over environmental protections, resulting in a high concentration of polluting facilities near residential areas. This neglect reflected a disregard for the health of minority and low-income communities, with Altgeld Gardens and similar neighborhoods shouldering the environmental costs of the city's economic growth. The legacy of pollution from this industrialization continues to affect the area to this day.

Altgeld Gardens became known as the "Toxic Donut" due to the ring of polluting sites that surrounded it.<sup>11</sup> Within a four-mile radius, over 50 facilities—including landfills, sewage treatment plants, and incinerators—were located near the community. Residents faced exposure to hazardous pollutants, such as heavy metals, chemical solvents, and asbestos. This environmental burden exemplified environmental racism, wherein marginalized communities bear a disproportionate share of pollution.

In 1962, Johnson and her family moved to Chicago seeking greater opportunities. They moved into Altgeld Gardens, where Johnson experienced the catalyst for her life of activism. In 1969, Johnson's Husband died from lung cancer. He was a non-smoker, making his cancer diagnosis especially alarming and puzzling. As she grieved her husband's passing, she started to look more closely at the health patterns around her. It was not just her husband; many of her neighbors and friends were suffering from illnesses that she believed were connected to pollution, including asthma, skin conditions, and various types of cancer. This pattern of illness among her community members signaled to Johnson that something was seriously wrong.

Johnson's initial curiosity turned into an urgent need to find answers as she realized that health issues seemed concentrated in her community. These

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<sup>10</sup> To see the racial and economic make up of Altgeld gardens today, see <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Illinois/Chicago/Altgeld-Gardens/Race-and-Ethnicity>.

<sup>11</sup> Quinn Meyers. "Life in the Doughnut" *South Side Weekly*. April 16, 2019. <https://southsideweekly.com/life-in-the-doughnut-future-environmental-justice/> Accessed November 8, 2024.

observations brought her to the uncomfortable realization that Altgeld Gardens was not merely unlucky but might actually be subject to unique environmental risks.<sup>12</sup> The proximity of the community to industrial plants, waste disposal sites, and sewage treatment facilities suggested a troubling correlation, and Johnson began to suspect that these industries were responsible for her community's health crisis.

Johnson educated herself and began conducting her own research into the pollution sources near Altgeld Gardens and their effects on the community. She learned about the chemicals emitted from the factories, the waste dumped into local landfills, and the contaminants in the air and water that her family and neighbors were exposed to daily. Her investigation revealed a striking lack of oversight, with few regulations in place to protect residents from these hazards.<sup>13</sup> As she gathered information, she noticed that Altgeld Gardens was surrounded by polluting facilities in ways that other, wealthier and predominantly white neighborhoods were not.

Despite the severe health and environmental challenges, regulatory oversight remained minimal for decades. Although the Environmental Protection Agency was established in 1970, and environmental legislation such as the Clean Air Act of 1963 and the Clean Water Act of 1972 were passed, enforcement was often weak in marginalized communities.<sup>14</sup> African-American residents faced systemic racism that limited their political power and access to resources needed to combat these issues. The civil rights movement of the 1960s had laid the groundwork for activism against social injustices, but environmental concerns remained on the periphery of mainstream agendas. It was within this context that Johnson recognized the urgent need to address the environmental health crisis affecting her community, leading to the formation of People for Community Recovery and the emergence of environmental justice as a critical aspect of the broader struggle for civil rights.

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<sup>12</sup> Oluwatoyin Olabisi Caldwell "The Environmental Movement and Environmental Justice: Chicago's Altgeld Gardens: A Case Study of Environmental Toxins in a Low-Income Minority Community," 1998. Chicago Public Library, Woodson Regional Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Box 1 Folder 41, People for Community Recovery Archives (Hereafter PCRA)

<sup>13</sup> Public Relations, Fighting Against a Toxic Environment (FATE) Newsletter, 1992. Box 4, Folder 3, PCRA

<sup>14</sup> Susan L. Cutter, "Race, Class and Environmental Justice," *Progress in Human Geography* 19, no. 1 (1995): 111–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259501900111>.

PCR's mission was to create a safe, healthy, and sustainable environment for Altgeld Gardens and other affected low-income communities. Johnson envisioned PCR as a platform for residents to address environmental injustices by advocating for their well-being. From the beginning, she emphasized community involvement, encouraging residents to take ownership of PCR's goals.<sup>15</sup>

Grassroots organizing within Altgeld Gardens was central to PCR's advocacy. Johnson prioritized community empowerment through education and direct action, starting with door-to-door campaigns where volunteers documented health issues like asthma, cancer, and skin conditions.<sup>16</sup> These surveys provided critical evidence linking local illnesses to industrial pollution. Public meetings and workshops further galvanized residents by educating them on pollution sources, health risks, and legal rights.<sup>17</sup> Transcripts show how Johnson used accessible language to demystify environmental issues, fostering solidarity and equipping residents to advocate for change.

Beyond awareness, PCR actively pushed for policy changes. Recognizing the power of data, Johnson lobbied for environmental testing in Altgeld Gardens, collaborating with scientists and legal experts to gather evidence on contamination.<sup>18</sup> These studies—conducted with institutions like the University of Illinois School of Public Health—measured toxins such as lead and asbestos in the air, soil, and water, reinforcing residents' health complaints with scientific credibility.<sup>19</sup>

PCR also encouraged residents to report pollution incidents and health concerns, creating a structured approach to documenting exposure patterns. This grassroots data collection empowered residents and strengthened PCR's advocacy efforts. Expanding beyond Altgeld Gardens, PCR formed alliances

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<sup>15</sup> "A Primer to Environmental Action: A Starting Point for Community Involvement." Box 1, Folder 39, PCRA

<sup>16</sup> Altgeld Gardens Defense Project and Northwestern University, Serious Health Problems Survey. Box 14, Folder 14, PCRA

<sup>17</sup> Riverday Community Meeting, n.d. Box 14, Folder 8, PCRA

<sup>18</sup> Pilar Boozer, "Can One Person Improve a Community," 2001. Box 1, Folder 40, PCRA

<sup>19</sup> Altgeld Gardens Community Health and University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, Survey, 1992-1994. Box 14, Folder 13, PCRA

with groups like Catholic Charities of Chicago and African-American Women for Change to amplify its impact.<sup>20</sup>

Citizen science became a cornerstone of PCR's approach. Johnson championed resident-led monitoring programs, such as asbestos sampling and water testing kits distributed by PCR.<sup>21</sup> Training sessions equipped community members to collect environmental samples and document pollution incidents, making them active participants in the fight for environmental justice. Through these efforts, PCR not only exposed environmental racism but also laid the groundwork for broader policy reforms. Expanding beyond Altgeld Gardens, PCR collaborated with hundreds of other activist groups to strengthen its reach and impact. Johnson built alliances with environmental and civil rights organizations, such as Catholic Charities of Chicago, African-American Women For Change, Chicago Coalition Against Violence Initiative, and many more.<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing the power of media to amplify their cause, Johnson and PCR actively engaged with journalists and filmmakers. Press clippings show how PCR's stories gained traction in local and national outlets, drawing attention to Altgeld Gardens' environmental crisis.<sup>23</sup> Brochures like *Save Your Life from the Toxic Trap* brought the community's struggles to broader audiences, using visual storytelling to illustrate the human cost of environmental racism.<sup>24</sup> This media exposure validated residents' experiences and pressured policymakers to respond to PCR's demands.

Coalition-building was another critical aspect of PCR's success. Johnson formed alliances with organizations like Greenpeace and the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP), leveraging their resources and networks to enhance PCR's advocacy. Documentation which details PCR's participation in the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) highlights Johnson's role in shaping the national

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<sup>20</sup> See Series 8 of People for Community Recovery Archives for a full list <https://www.chipublib.org/fa-people-for-community-recovery-archives/>.

<sup>21</sup> Chicago Youth Center at Altgeld, Asbestos Exposure Survey, 1999. Box 14, Folder 16, PCRA

<sup>22</sup> See Series 8 of People for Community Recovery Archives for a full list <https://www.chipublib.org/fa-people-for-community-recovery-archives/>.

<sup>23</sup> Residents Educated About Lead (REAL), Project Administration Materials, April 1998. Box 14, Folder 1, PCRA

<sup>24</sup> PCR Public Relations, *Save Your Life From the Toxic Trap*, 1987. Box 5, Folder 10, PCRA

environmental justice movement.<sup>25</sup> Through conferences and advisory panels, PCR connected the struggles of Altgeld Gardens to broader systemic issues, reinforcing the links between environmental degradation, race, and poverty.

Under Johnson's leadership, PCR pioneered efforts in environmental justice by using litigation to challenge systemic environmental racism. Legal battles, like those against the CHA, exemplified PCR's fight for accountability. These cases reveal a pattern of institutional neglect and environmental hazards within Altgeld Gardens, targeting decades of pollution and its health impacts on residents.<sup>26</sup> Although resource constraints and opposition from corporate legal teams created hurdles, PCR's persistence highlighted the intersection of race, poverty, and environmental degradation.

Through these legal efforts, PCR sought to establish accountability not only for immediate health crises but also for broader systemic issues. Documentation illustrates CHA's delayed responses to lead abatement mandates, leaving residents vulnerable to prolonged exposure.<sup>27</sup> PCR's legal victories, while incremental, underscored the necessity of sustained community advocacy to overcome institutional inertia. These efforts were essential in forcing dialogues about environmental racism into mainstream discourse.

Johnson's advocacy extended into policymaking, emphasizing the importance of framing environmental racism as a public health crisis. Her communications with governmental agencies often personalized the issue, using vivid accounts of health crises like asthma and cancer among Altgeld Gardens residents.<sup>28</sup> This approach captured policy makers' attention, challenging them to address the human costs of environmental neglect.

Collaborations with legislators and environmental agencies also formed a cornerstone of Johnson's work. For example, her contributions to early drafts of the Chicago Environmental Justice Bill highlight her role in advocating for policy reforms that tackled the overlap of race and environmental hazards.<sup>29</sup> Although sweeping reforms were rare, Johnson's efforts helped pave the way for

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<sup>25</sup> National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), 1994. Box 28, Folder 3, PCRA

<sup>26</sup> People for Community Recovery Archives, Box 3, Folder 16

<sup>27</sup> People for Community Recovery Archives, Box 16, Folder 13

<sup>28</sup> People for Community Recovery Archives, Box 3, Folder 6

<sup>29</sup> Chicago Cumulative Risk Initiative, 1997. Box 21, Folder 10, PCRA

incremental policy changes, which, in turn, created a foundation for future activism.

Johnson demonstrated the power of local activism in achieving tangible environmental gains by organizing community-driven efforts. The removal of hazardous waste near Altgeld Gardens stands as a testament to the effectiveness of grassroots pressure.<sup>30</sup> These cleanups not only improved immediate living conditions but also reinforced the importance of resident-led advocacy in holding polluters accountable. Despite these successes, systemic barriers persisted. Industry resistance and regulatory loopholes often undermined PCR's efforts. Emission reports on Ford Motor Company's Chicago plant exemplify the challenges in balancing economic development with environmental justice.<sup>31</sup> Industrial relocations to other vulnerable communities following cleanups in Altgeld Gardens further emphasized the limitations of localized victories.

Johnson also faced challenges in translating increased awareness into legislative change. Policymakers were often slow to act, constrained by the nascent state of the environmental justice movement during Johnson's early years of advocacy. Community frustrations over the pace of progress highlight the need for long-term strategies to address entrenched systemic issues.<sup>32</sup>

One of the major challenges that Johnson and PCR encountered was institutional neglect. Governmental agencies, particularly environmental protection agencies, frequently failed to address the environmental hazards in Altgeld Gardens and surrounding areas. Johnson's numerous approaches to these agencies to highlight health and pollution concerns were often met with limited or no response. This persistent inaction exemplified a broader pattern of institutional apathy towards marginalized communities, as noted in various internal reports and organizational histories of PCR.<sup>33</sup> Regulatory agencies were slow to investigate and reluctant to intervene, often prioritizing broader urban issues over the environmental injustices affecting low-income, minority neighborhoods.

Another institutional barrier was the opposition from industries that benefited from Chicago's lenient environmental regulations. Many of the

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<sup>30</sup> Waste Management Inc. Landfill Protests, 1988. Box 15, Folder 3, PCRA

<sup>31</sup> Ford Good Neighbor Committee, Emission Reports on Ford Company Chicago, 1993. Box 11, Folder 4, PCRA

<sup>32</sup> REAL, Project Administration Materials, 1995-1998. Box 14, Folder 7, PCRA

<sup>33</sup> PCR Organization Histories, 1987-2006. Box 1, Folder 1, PCRA

companies contributing to the pollution near Altgeld Gardens resisted the changes Johnson and PCR demanded, lobbying against stricter regulations. Documentation of these conflicts can be found in PCR's correspondence and advocacy records, where corporations used their influence to maintain practices that disproportionately harmed Johnson's community.<sup>34</sup> This opposition significantly hindered PCR's progress, forcing Johnson to continually challenge well-funded and organized resistance.

As a Black woman activist in a predominantly white and male-dominated environmental movement, Johnson also faced racial and gender discrimination. This challenge is well-documented in her autobiographical accounts, which reflect her experiences of skepticism and marginalization by policymakers and mainstream environmental groups.<sup>35</sup> Despite these hurdles, Johnson's leadership in the environmental justice movement earned her recognition, such as the President's Environmental and Conservation Challenge Award in 1992, acknowledging her pivotal role in advocating for environmental justice.<sup>36</sup>

PCR's limited financial resources further constrained their efforts. Operating on minimal funding, Johnson and her team struggled to secure steady support, relying on small donations and grants to sustain their work. The organization's financial strain is evident in budget reports and fundraising efforts preserved in PCR's administrative files.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, access to technical expertise posed significant challenges. Conducting environmental tests and interpreting data required scientific and legal resources that PCR often lacked. Johnson's reliance on local volunteers and external partnerships is detailed in project reports and correspondence.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the challenges, PCR's activism led to substantial improvements in the Altgeld Gardens community. One of the most notable accomplishments was advocating for the removal of asbestos, lead paint, and other hazardous materials from residential buildings. Johnson and PCR worked tirelessly to bring attention to these toxic substances, pressuring housing authorities and city officials to undertake cleanup efforts. Their success in removing asbestos and reducing lead exposure marked a crucial victory in improving community health

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<sup>34</sup> Box 2, Folders 1-13, PCRA

<sup>35</sup> Hazel Johnson, *Autobiographies, 1990-2003*. Box 1, Folder 2, PCRA

<sup>36</sup> Hazel Johnson, *President's Environmental and Conservation Challenge Award for Education and Communications to PCR, 1992*. Box 1, Folder 7, PCRA

<sup>37</sup> PCR Financial Budget, Projections and Reports, 1994-1999. Box 7, Folder 1, PCRA

<sup>38</sup> Box 14, Folders 13-14, PCRA

and safety, directly addressing the dangers that had plagued residents for decades.

PCR's work also led to increased health and safety awareness within the Altgeld Gardens community. Through workshops, meetings, and educational campaigns, PCR helped residents recognize the symptoms of pollution-related illnesses, understand potential risks, and learn how to advocate for safer living conditions. This education empowered the community, allowing residents to take a proactive approach to their health and hold polluters accountable.

Johnson's efforts positioned her as a central figure in the environmental justice movement, earning her the title "Mother of Environmental Justice." Her work brought attention to the links between race, poverty, and environmental hazards, shaping the movement's focus on the unique challenges faced by low-income communities of color. By centering Altgeld Gardens in the fight for environmental justice, Johnson emphasized that environmental advocacy must consider social inequalities. Her dedication to grassroots activism and community-led initiatives inspired similar approaches in other marginalized communities, showing that effective environmental advocacy could start at the local level.

PCR's work became a model for other communities facing similar struggles. Johnson's community-based approach, combined with PCR's advocacy and education efforts, demonstrated the power of local organizing in addressing environmental injustice. Other communities across the country began adopting PCR's methods, empowering residents to speak out against environmental harm and pushing policymakers to recognize the importance of environmental justice.

Johnson's trailblazing work eventually garnered national and international recognition. Organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency honored her contributions, acknowledging her significant impact on environmental justice. These accolades validated Johnson's lifelong commitment and the role PCR played in transforming environmental activism. The recognition also helped elevate PCR's profile, bringing more awareness to the issues facing Altgeld Gardens and similar communities.

Johnson's legacy lives on through PCR's continued work even after her passing in 2011. The organization remains active, advocating for environmental justice and promoting health and safety in low-income, minority communities. Johnson's vision and accomplishments have left an enduring mark on



environmental activism, demonstrating the resilience and power of grassroots movements. PCR's ongoing work serves as a testament to Johnson's impact, ensuring her legacy endures in the fight for a more equitable and just environment.

Johnson's advocacy played a crucial role in shaping the definition of environmental racism, spotlighting how environmental issues disproportionately affected communities of color. Through her work with PCR, Johnson highlighted the specific health and social impacts of industrial pollution on Black, low-income neighborhoods like Altgeld Gardens. By focusing on the links between race, poverty, and environmental degradation, she helped shape the understanding that environmental issues were not just about nature but also about social inequality. Her advocacy was among the first to define environmental racism as the systematic placement of toxic waste and polluting industries in communities of color, who then bore the health risks associated with these hazards.

Johnson's work was groundbreaking in bridging civil rights and environmentalism. Before her activism, these areas of advocacy were often considered separate, with the civil rights movement focusing on racial and economic justice, and environmentalism largely addressing conservation and pollution in rural or non-urban areas. Johnson's perspective introduced the understanding that environmental degradation was itself a civil rights issue when it disproportionately affected marginalized communities. By weaving together social justice and environmental protection, she expanded the environmental movement's scope to include the fight for racial and economic equity, helping to form the foundation of the modern environmental justice movement.

One of Johnson's significant contributions to environmental justice was her influence on policy changes at the national level. Her advocacy and public pressure on policymakers contributed to Executive Order 12898, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1994.<sup>39</sup> This landmark order mandated that federal agencies address environmental justice issues by focusing on how their policies and projects might disproportionately impact minority and low-income populations.<sup>40</sup> Executive Order 12898 marked the first time the federal government officially recognized environmental justice as a key factor in policy,

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<sup>39</sup> REAL Project Administration Materials, 1998. Box 14, Folder 5, PCRA

<sup>40</sup> "Executive Order 12898 of February 11, 1994, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations." *Federal Register* <https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf>

and it emphasized the need for equitable treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in environmental protection. The order required agencies to assess the potential environmental and health effects of their actions on vulnerable communities, thus institutionalizing environmental justice as a federal priority.

Johnson's influence extended beyond Executive Order 12898, as she was actively involved in national dialogues on environmental justice. She was invited to speak at conferences, participate in advisory boards, and consult with government officials on strategies to address environmental racism. Her participation brought the voices of grassroots activists to a national stage, ensuring that the lived experiences of affected communities were not overlooked in policy discussions. By contributing her firsthand knowledge and expertise, Johnson influenced the federal government's approach to environmental justice, emphasizing the importance of direct community involvement in addressing and solving environmental problems.

Understanding the importance of educating future generations, Johnson and PCR invested in educational outreach and youth involvement to sustain the momentum of the environmental justice movement. PCR created programs aimed at involving young people in activism, teaching them about the environmental issues facing their community, and empowering them to become advocates for change. Through workshops, community projects, and school presentations, PCR gave youth the knowledge and skills needed to address environmental injustice, fostering a sense of responsibility and agency in young activists. These programs inspired many young people to take up the fight for environmental justice, building a foundation for continued activism in the next generation.

In addition to direct engagement, Johnson and PCR contributed to curriculum development by integrating environmental justice topics into educational materials. Johnson recognized that one of the barriers to widespread understanding of environmental racism was a lack of representation in school curricula, so PCR worked to create resources that could be used in classrooms. By incorporating environmental justice into educational materials, Johnson and PCR helped to broaden students' understanding of environmental issues, showing them that pollution and health hazards were not distributed equally and often impacted marginalized communities more severely. This curriculum development served to expand the movement's reach, helping students across the country understand the social and racial dimensions of environmental issues.

Through her advocacy, policy influence, and educational initiatives, Johnson made lasting contributions to the environmental justice movement. Her

work not only provided a framework for understanding environmental racism but also inspired changes in federal policy, engaged the public, and empowered future generations. Johnson's integration of civil rights and environmentalism set a new course for the environmental movement, and her dedication to community-centered advocacy remains a powerful example of grassroots activism's potential to create meaningful change. Her legacy continues to resonate today, as the environmental justice movement builds on her foundational work to address systemic inequalities and push for a more just and sustainable world.

## Mom the Game is Online, I Can't Pause It: How *Ultima Online* and *WoW* Revolutionized Relationship Dynamics

Max Silkaitis

In 2019, inside Reddit, subreddit, r/WoW (*World of Warcraft*), an anonymous user posted a photo of a Paladin kneeling and captioned it:

“My oldest brother lost his two-year battle against cancer yesterday. I relayed his final goodbye to his guild, and I took the first screenshot before logging him out for the last time. I ask the community to remember the life of Edelweiss, the Paladin.”<sup>1</sup>

This post garnered 66,000 upvotes (likes), and 2,200 comments. A vast majority of MMO players felt connected to ‘Edelweiss’ despite not personally knowing him. Instances like this are common online. One of the most active community-building spaces exists within mass multiplayer online games (MMOs). Players created a space to form and extend relationships. As historians examine 21st-century communities, we must adjust our perceptions and categories of human interaction. No longer does analog interaction through speech or material define our exchanges. We interact through ‘multiple spaces’.<sup>2</sup> MMOs provide a window into how we might examine communication and relationships to foster more inclusive and comprehensive recent history. For example, between 1997 and 2010, the MMOs *Ultima Online* and *World of Warcraft* innovated and created; in-game chat systems, guild networks, and a new virtual medium for social interaction. These instances redefined how we maintained and built relationships during the early 21st century.

Virtual worlds, MMOs, and game studies all connect to provide a wide array of interdisciplinary research; economists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, and several other studies all play a part in this study. Historians have

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous. 2019. *My Older Brother Lost His Two Year Battle with Cancer Yesterday* Reddit Image.

[https://www.reddit.com/r/wow/comments/d9sxvx/my\\_oldest\\_brother\\_lost\\_his\\_two\\_year\\_battle/](https://www.reddit.com/r/wow/comments/d9sxvx/my_oldest_brother_lost_his_two_year_battle/)

<sup>2</sup> Li, Feng, Savvas Papagiannidis, and Michael Bourlakis. 2010. “Living in ‘Multiple Spaces’: Extending Our Socioeconomic Environment through Virtual Worlds.”

*Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (3): 425–46.

<https://doi.org/10.1068/d14708>.

focused largely on the origins of virtual worlds and their applied nature.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, many define the historical perspective as follows:

...at its most basic, historical games studies can be defined as ‘the study of those games that in some way represent the past or relate to discourses about it.’<sup>4</sup>

This kind of analysis applied to MMOs often results in a lack of historical perspectives. Like Downey, many examples of placement history exist, looking for origins and placing these findings in a timeline. More recently MMOs have begun to have a profound impact on archival history; several archival institutions have been working on the preservation of oral history in MMOs.<sup>5</sup> These accounts are where conclusions can be drawn over the dynamics of communication occurring in these spaces. Historians' analysis of other communication-based inventions is where I draw major inspiration in my research on MMOs. I deploy a similar strategy to how historians talk about the impact of the telegraph, these spaces are another evolution in our human communication. MMOs should not be overlooked in a historical sense as their impact is extremely relevant and valuable.<sup>6</sup>

Human beings are at the forefront of the research when examining relationship building and preservation in MMOs. Sociologists' research is essential in identifying the motives of players, their interactions, communication, and social being in MMOs.<sup>7</sup> They have identified the importance of these virtual worlds in building and maintaining social skills necessary for the formation of relationships.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, they have evaluated how these spaces have nurtured

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<sup>3</sup> Downey, Steve. 2014. “History of the (Virtual) Worlds.” *Source: The Journal of Technology Studies*. Vol. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Chapman, Adam, Anna Foka, and Jonathan Westin. 2017. “Introduction: What Is Historical Game Studies?” *Rethinking History*. Routledge. 361, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1256638>.

<sup>5</sup> Howard, Josh. 2015. “The Oral History of MMOs.” *Play the Past*. September 3, 2015. <https://www.playthepast.org/?p=5361>

<sup>6</sup> Bell, Danna. 2017. “Exploring Science and History With the Library of Congress.” [www.loc.gov/collections/samuel-morse-papers/about-](http://www.loc.gov/collections/samuel-morse-papers/about-).

<sup>7</sup> Gonçalves, David et al., 2023. “Social Gaming: A Systematic Review.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 147 (October). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107851>.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolas Ducheneaut and Robert J. Moore. 2005. “More than Just ‘XP’: Learning Social Skills in Massively Multiplayer Online Games.” <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17415650580000035/full/pdf>

a positive relationship with players' social anxieties and overall loneliness.<sup>9</sup> A heavy focus in this field revolves around guilds and their various implication on players' social capital. Several studies identify a positive relationship between guild membership and social interaction.<sup>10</sup> Combining these respective studies gives a foundation and significant evidence for my claim surrounding the importance of MMOs in relationship building.<sup>11</sup> These sociologists contributed greatly to the study; laying the foundation for much of my thinking.

Inside the several disciplines remains a core element of those who are in Game Studies. These researchers investigate various principles inside video games and their respective effects on society and culture. Kücklich looks at virtual worlds through Castronova's lense as 'frontiers,' where governance is cultivated; identifying these virtual worlds as 'social factories.'<sup>12</sup> These 'social factories' are fundamental to understanding how relationships are formed inside MMOs. Li contextualizes MMOs akin to Columbus's discovery of America, he details 'a new discovery' that we are on the brink of; virtual worlds.<sup>13</sup> These claims remain central in identifying the profound impact *Ultima Online* and *World of Warcraft* had on early 2000s relationship building and social interaction.

MMOs are video games that feature a persistent virtual world where thousands of real players interact and coexist simultaneously, engaging in shared experiences, quests, and dynamic social interactions. MMOs' origin dates around the late 1970s when video games called MUDS (Multi-User Dungeons) first hit

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<sup>9</sup> Martončík, Marcel, and Ján Lokša. 2016. "Do World of Warcraft (MMORPG) Players Experience Less Loneliness and Social Anxiety in Online World (Virtual Environment) than in Real World (Offline)?" *Computers in Human Behavior* 56 (March): 127–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.035>.

<sup>10</sup> Zhang, Fan, and David Kaufman. 2016. "Older Adults' Social Interactions in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs)." *Games and Culture* 11 (1–2): 150–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015601757>.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, Dmitri et al., 2006. "From Tree House to Barracks: The Social Life of Guilds in World of Warcraft." *Games and Culture* 1 (4): 338–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412006292616>.

<sup>12</sup> Kücklich, Julian Raul. 2009. "Virtual Worlds and Their Discontents: Precarious Sovereignty, Governmentality, and the Ideology of Play." *Games and Culture* 4 (4): 340–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009343571>.

<sup>13</sup> Li et al., "Living in 'Multiple Spaces.'"

the market.<sup>14</sup> These virtual worlds were often 2D or only text-based single-player games, where players leveled up, killed monsters, and expanded their loot (in-game items). The release of *Ultima Online* in 1997 sprouted the expansion into what is commonly known today as an MMO; the massive virtual world with thousands of players occupying one space at a time. *Ultima Online* is frequently recognized for popularizing the genre; within a short time after launch, *Ultima* had over 100,000 active users.<sup>15</sup> *Ultima*'s commercial successes subsequently gave birth to *Everquest* and *Asheron's Call*, these three games are often seen as the 'big three' of the MMO genre.<sup>16</sup> The 'big three' began an evolution in relationship forming by providing a new platform for social interaction.

The 'big three' MMOs rapidly cultivated a massive player count, partly thanks to the booming video game industry of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The rise of video gaming in society is crucial to understanding how, at this point in history, MMOs transformed relationship building. During the early 1990s, Nintendo's release of the NES gaming system, coupled with the release of the Sony Playstation, brought gaming to the masses. Over 30 million units of the PlayStation were sold, along with 200 million games worldwide.<sup>17</sup> While MMOs were largely PC-based games, the explosion of gaming consoles in everyone's home opened the floodgates of gaming for the masses. Shortly after the console emergence, overall gaming sales began to explode. During 1994, less than 100 million gaming units were sold in the calendar year; by 2002 over 400 million units were sold.<sup>18</sup> The explosion of this industry gave way for the 'big three' MMOs to find a player base, many of whom were fascinated by the idea of virtual worlds and playing with thousands of other people simultaneously. At the turn of the 21st century, MMOs capitalized on the internet, newly upgraded network connections, and the gaming industry boom.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Castronova, Edward. *Synthetic Worlds : The Business and Culture of Online Games*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Raph Koster. 2000. "Raph Koster's Website." March 4, 2000. <https://www.raphkoster.com/gaming/mudtimeline.shtml>.

<sup>16</sup> NeverKnowsBest. 2022. "The History of MMOs (and Where It All Went Wrong)." YouTube. April 9, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHQE0ILci4o>.

<sup>17</sup> Raessens, Joost, and Jeffrey H. Goldstein. 2011. *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. MIT Press, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Norris, Devin. 2021. "A Data Driven Exploration of Video Games — Sales and Scores." Medium. February 9, 2021, Image 5. <https://medium.com/analytics-vidhya/a-data-driven-exploration-of-video-games-sales-and-scores-3c77f1c6573c>

<sup>19</sup> Raessens, *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, 43.

While the ‘big three’ each play a critical part in the history of MMOs’ effect on relationship forming, *Ultima Online* is the standout piece. Developed by Richard Garriott, *Ultima* was set to be a first of its kind, a ‘virtual world.’ In a March 1997 interview, Garriott states:

It is both a game and much more. It could be seen as a social environment- and, indeed, some of our competitors are creating nothing more than elaborate, thematic chat zones where you can also go beat up on each other. But, it was very important to us that *Ultima Online* be a game with a theme, and story, and quest - and then support larger, grander activity... *Ultima Online* will be, I believe, the very first ever, completely virtual world for the mass public to go live out alternate lives in.<sup>20</sup>

Garriott’s vision for *Ultima* was nothing short of spectacular, fortunately for Garriott and society, the game would become a ‘social environment and a virtual world.’ He goes on in the interview to talk about how the separating feature between them and any other game available at the time is social interaction, it is the core piece of *Ultima*.<sup>21</sup> The developer's intention was clear, when he created and released the game it would become a hub for communication; fostering and creating relationships within an MMO.

In late 1997, shortly after its worldwide release, *Ultima* created one of the most crucial pieces for revolutionizing social interaction; in-game chat systems.<sup>22</sup> In-game chat systems are the heart of most MMOs, players utilize the feature for trading goods, teaming up for raids, and generally communicating with one another. In a study conducted on player communication methods, about 73% of participants said they *frequently* used various in-game chat systems, demonstrating how essential this feature is to gameplay and socialization.<sup>23</sup> These chat systems expanded beyond gameplay mechanics, they became vessels for forming friendships and connections; meeting thousands of new people at the click of a button was now possible. For instance, Angel Vick a 36-year-old hotel manager from Florida played *Ultima* as a hobby, her character, Angelstorm, met

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<sup>20</sup> *Next Generation Magazine*. 1997. “Is Richard Garriott Really Building a Better World?,” 1997. <https://archive.org/details/NextGeneration27Mar1997/page/n9/mode/2up>

<sup>21</sup> *Next Generation Magazine*. 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Olivetti, Justin. 2022. “The Game Archaeologist: The Legacy of Ultima Online | Massively Overpowered.” September 11, 2022. <https://massivelyop.com/2022/09/11/the-game-archaeologist-the-legacy-of-ultima-online/>

<sup>23</sup> Zhang, “Older Adults’ Social Interactions...” Table 4, 159.



another character, a Lionheart named James. She described her online relationship going beyond the game, saying she got to know him better than anyone else, they were best friends, who after 5 years from meeting on *Ultima* got married.<sup>24</sup> Examples like this display how MMOs dissolved geographical boundaries, creating virtual environments to foster genuine human connection; and redefining how people created relationships.

These in-game chat systems pioneered by *Ultima*, connected all players; you could talk directly to your guild members or message in the global chat system. This creation leads to an extremely impactful event in the life of a six-year-old boy. John and his mother Carri often played the MMO *Everquest II* together. After John was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Carri took to the community in search of players to help decorate John's island, as that's all he wanted.<sup>25</sup> A guild was created in honor of John's wishes:

A new guild, Lilipad Jungle, was created for the effort: guild chat (text) is seen by everyone in that guild, and many players make a window solely for their guild chat, a useful affordance for coordination...Language, server, and even game had no barriers. Players who didn't speak any English were contributing to the effort."<sup>26</sup>

John unfortunately passed away, but the community still celebrates him on the anniversary of the event. This beautiful event could only have occurred due to in-game chat systems' creation. Researchers, Poor and Skoric, attribute the event's coordination to an in-game technological advance, the chat system. The server-wide ties, outreach, and overall discussion of John's situation were only possible through *Everquest II*'s chat system, which *Ultima* pioneered in the late 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Examples such as this display the real-world effects chat systems had on creating impactful relationships through community efforts.

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<sup>24</sup> LaBarba H. Liane. 2002. "Telephony\_broadband\_nation\_A\_," June. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/213947431?parentSessionId=OVVIIjzmEb%2BTHrdX711EETuUSJaQemQsgGm>

<sup>25</sup> Menon, Vinay. 2012. "Virtual EverQuest 2 Community Makes Dying Boy's Wish Come True." Toronto Star. March 4, 2012. [https://www.thestar.com/life/virtual-everquest-2-community-makes-dying-boy-s-wish-come-true/article\\_ae9f6836-0e5c-5d7a-9c44-3c4a248a6dd6.html](https://www.thestar.com/life/virtual-everquest-2-community-makes-dying-boy-s-wish-come-true/article_ae9f6836-0e5c-5d7a-9c44-3c4a248a6dd6.html)

<sup>26</sup> Poor, Nathaniel, Marko Skoric, and Cliff Lampe. 2022. "Death of a Child, Birth of a Guild: Factors Aiding the Rapid Formation of Online Support Communities." *Information Society* 38 (3): 192.

<sup>27</sup> Poor, "Death of a Child," 193.

November 23rd, 2004 *World of Warcraft* released. The brand-new MMO exploded in popularity. Upon its arrival, *WoW* garnered over 5,000,000 subscribers in only its first year; *WoW* became a cultural sensation overnight.<sup>28</sup> To fully understand *WoW*'s revolutionary relationship forming, one must understand the year 2004. Social media's formation had only just begun; the extent of human interaction during this time was limited to brick-phone texting, calling, emailing, etc. The only means of meeting new people was physically going out to bars, local coffeehouses, or other social environments.<sup>29</sup> The 'big three' while being extremely influential were no powerhouse of social interaction in terms of numbers. The largest of the three *Everquest*, brought in around 450,000 concurrent subscribers at its peak in 2003.<sup>30</sup> While the 'big three' were the origin and a vital piece of a growing social dynamic shift, *WoW* was the quintessential part.

A Reddit post displayed a photo from 2008 showing several young men gathered in a basement, each sitting at their personal computers, awaiting the release of the new *WoW* expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*.<sup>31</sup> Cases like this were unprecedented for the time, MMOs had transcended their virtual spaces, and the relationships created within *WoW* turned into real-world social experiences. *WoW*'s ability to foster online communities with real-world implications revolutionized forming relationships at the time.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the 'need to belong' has been studied for decades, the creation of MMOs such as *WoW*, allowed people to form meaningful relationships within online communities. It provided a space for people to pass the time with others and create a bond within a common interest regardless of distance.<sup>33</sup>

Arguably, MMOs' greatest accomplishment in reshaping interaction was the creation of the guild system. Pioneered by the 'big three' and mastered by *WoW*, player guilds are structured groups collaborating on shared goals, such as

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<sup>28</sup> "Blizzard Just Gave Us a Hint of How Many World of Warcraft Subscribers Remain (and It's Still in the Millions)." 2024. TechSpot. March 26, 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Tonkiss, Fran. 2005. *Space, the City and Social Theory : Social Relations and Urban Forms*. Reprint. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>30</sup> "A New Contract." 2015. EVE News24. 2015. <https://evenews24.com/2015/03/11/a-new-contract/>.

<sup>31</sup> Hatcher04. 2020. *Wraith of Lich King All Nighter- November 2008* Reddit Image. [https://www.reddit.com/r/wow/comments/le12f4/wrath\\_of\\_the\\_lich\\_king\\_midnight\\_launch\\_all/](https://www.reddit.com/r/wow/comments/le12f4/wrath_of_the_lich_king_midnight_launch_all/)

<sup>32</sup> Gonçalves, David et al., "Social Gaming," 6.

<sup>33</sup> Gonçalves, David et al., "Social Gaming," 2.

completing quests and raids. Originally designed to help players complete in-game missions, guilds evolved into a cornerstone of social interaction.<sup>34</sup> Groups or guilds are inherently social, here players develop essential social skills for forming relationships. Ducheneaut describes the phenomenon as:

In summary, grouping in EQOA gives players experience in approaching and meeting strangers. In some ways, virtual worlds are ideal places for learning to meet new people because they are safer than real life and the costs of rejection and losing face seem to be much lower. In this they resemble singles' bars, or pick-up sports games. They also teach how to assemble a well-balanced, efficient team – an important skill in today's workplace.<sup>35</sup>

These guilds create environments for players to form meaningful bonds, while also fostering social skills that can be applied throughout all walks of life. Many types of guilds exist, regardless of the kind, they each cultivate, in their own way, core skills for socialization and interaction that allow for relationships to be created online, or in the real world.

Although instances of purely gameplay-related guilds exist, roughly 60% of guild members in *WoW* during 2006 belonged to a 'social guild.' For many players involved in 'smaller-sized' guilds, social interactions were extensions of real-world relationships.<sup>36</sup> Social guilds' ability to cultivate a space for mass social interaction, created a vessel for people to extend and create relationships. In the same way, during the early 2000s, people had interaction and relationship-building within coffeehouses, bars, pubs, and churches; *Ultima* and *WoW*'s guild system created a new space for these social connections to develop.<sup>37</sup> Guilds systems were essential in community formation, without them examples such as Johns would have never existed. Relationships are created and fostered in these social spaces.

The social guild system naturally enabled communication and socialization through its perceived main goal: being social. Another type of guild fostered deep connections revising how humans thought about building relationships; raid guilds. Much like being part of an intramural basketball team—where shared goals, outcomes, and competition foster a sense of

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<sup>34</sup> Williams, Dmitri et al., "From Tree House to Barracks," 341.

<sup>35</sup> Ducheneaut and Moore, "More than Just 'XP,'" 94.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, Dmitri et al., "From Tree House to Barracks," 345.

<sup>37</sup> Fran, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, 67.

belonging—raid guilds created similar bonds as players worked together to complete challenging 25-man raids and missions as part of a team.<sup>38</sup> The similarities between sports and MMOs are not as far as one may think. The drive to constantly repeat a task to excel and get better parallels both MMOs and sports. The mastery of one's character, technologies, and overall game mechanics creates a sense of agency and worth. In basketball, one works on ball-handling, footwork, and shooting ability in order to 'master' the sport. Amid this proficiency and drive for excellence, it fosters relationships and belonging; similarly, forming teams or guilds with like-minded individuals forms impactful relationships.<sup>39</sup> Bonnie Nardi, in her book *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, began her adventure into *WoW* during a class she was teaching on digital technology. When one group did their project on *WoW*, she began to investigate and play for herself. In her findings, specifically in chapter four, she details how her guild and several students, conveyed how mastery of the game drove their bonding with other players.<sup>40</sup> Nardi's findings parallel the everyday clubs and sports we have surrounded ourselves with, a space to cultivate friendships and relationships. *World of Warcraft's* ability to create a new space for community formation during the early 2000s redefined how relationships were built. Traditional settings, such as sports teams, were no longer the sole space for community formation, *WoW* revolutionized how people could interact.

At the turn of the 21st century, many media outlets looked to the newfound explosion of MMOs as a 'problem,' often calling the phenomenon borderline addiction for players.<sup>41</sup> This demonization of gaming within the mainstream media still exists today, yet has very little merit. A study conducted in 2020 found only 1.2% of participants were 'addicted' to video games.<sup>42</sup> In overall quantitative terms, a 2016 study found of those surveyed, the average

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<sup>38</sup> Phipps, Chelsea, Nelson Cooper, Kindal Shores, Richard Williams, and Nancy Mize. 2015. "Examining the Relationship between Intramural Sports Participation and Sense of Community among College Students." *Recreational Sports Journal* 39 (2): 105–20.

<sup>39</sup> Nardi, Bonnie A. "A New Medium." In *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*, 57. University of Michigan Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvndv9nw.8>.

<sup>40</sup> Nardi, Bonnie A. "A New Medium," 57-63

<sup>41</sup> Young, Kimberly. 2009. "Understanding Online Gaming Addiction and Treatment Issues for Adolescents." *American Journal of Family Therapy* 37 (5): 355–72.

<sup>42</sup> André, Frida, Niroshani Broman, Anders Håkansson, and Emma Claesdotter-Knutsson. 2020. "Gaming Addiction, Problematic Gaming and Engaged Gaming – Prevalence and Associated Characteristics." *Addictive Behaviors Reports* 12 (December).

time spent gaming per week was roughly 21 hours, or 3 hours a day.<sup>43</sup> The lack of truly ‘addicted’ MMO players is clear, players gather within *WoW* and *Ultima* the same way one might spend time on a sport or club for school. In these games players build meaningful relationships in an online space, creating a sense of belonging. These interactions helped reduce feelings of loneliness as players bonded over shared interests, enjoying and discussing the game together.<sup>44</sup> For instance, in 2005 a man by the name of Brent Gustafson created a webpage documenting all of his experiences with his friends in *WoW*, through in-game pictures he’d taken, as well as all of his accomplishments, such as various characters and raids completed. Brent’s time spent playing *WoW* was filled with reinforcing friendships and social interaction, contrary to the media’s portrayal of gamers as being ‘lonely and addicted.’<sup>45</sup>

Family relationships are often closely tied to one’s well-being, having a close interpersonal connection with one’s family results in overall better mental health.<sup>46</sup> The guild system revolutionized in the early 2000s, inherently created a sense of family among players. *Ultima Online* founded many of the core guild system principles on its release in 1997, members joined and over time formed newfound ‘families.’ The *Ultima* guild Dark Mystics, founded in 1998, refers to themselves as a ‘family’ guild. Detailing they are a gathering of friends and people, forming a close-knit community.<sup>47</sup> Family dynamics existed in many guilds, MMOs ability to replicate real-world family relationship dynamics and create a medium for them to build and grow during the beginning of the 21st century was crucial in how people bonded during this time.

Ultima Online’s success in fostering an environment to build relationships originates from its ability to create a vibrant social world. This is evident in a 2004 study by Kolo, which found that two-thirds of players logged into the game primarily for social interaction rather than completing missions.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Martončík, Marcel, and Ján Lokša, “Do World of Warcraft (MMORPG) Players...” 130.

<sup>44</sup> Martončík, Marcel, and Ján Lokša, “Do World of Warcraft (MMORPG) Players...” 132.

<sup>45</sup> Brent Gustafson. 2005. “Brent Gustafson.” January 30, 2005. <http://brentgustafson.com/w/Page/WorldOfWarcraft>.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, Patricia A., Hui Liu, and Debra Umberson. 2017. “Family Relationships and Well-Being.” *Innovation in Aging* 1 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igx025>.

<sup>47</sup> “The Dark Mystics.” 1998. <http://www.darkmystics.com/submain.shtml>.

<sup>48</sup> Raessens, Joost, and Jeffrey H. Goldstein. 2011. *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. MIT Press, 13.

Interestingly, the game's creators had a specific goal of fostering socialization; nevertheless, Ultima organically evolved into a social sphere simply through its player base. One key factor in this transformation was the introduction of ICQ, an in-game messaging system. The study revealed that 88% of players used it to communicate with others. Additionally, 40% of players expressed a desire to meet their in-game friends in real life, highlighting the depth of the relationships formed through the game.<sup>49</sup> Ultima's social world created channels like the guild system and in-game messaging, which allowed for relationships to blossom and form as players logged on primarily to socialize with gameplay coming as a background piece.

Although social interaction is often the driving force in building these relationships within guilds, certain hierarchical structure exists within many more 'serious' guilds, that reinforce how relationships form.<sup>50</sup> Once the first stage of *WoW* is completed, players begin 'the end-game,' where many believe the 'true' game starts. Intense raids and various missions make for an extremely complicated, yet rewarding end-game process. Many guilds instilled a political-based hierarchy system to determine who gets what 'loot' after end-game objectives are completed. Here we find an important way in which relationships are created and fostered.<sup>51</sup> The Syndicate guild, created in 1996, formed a hierarchy system when *Ultima Online* was released. They detailed their hierarchy with positions such as Officer, Squad Leader, Guildmaster, and several other smaller roles.<sup>52</sup> These roles created complex relationship dynamics allowing members to build relationships with higher officials in the guild, similar to how we might build hierarchical relationships in work or academic environments. While the student-teacher relationship or worker-manager-boss relationship is much different than our interpersonal relationships, these bonds are still very important.<sup>53</sup> Guild hierarchy systems, like The Syndicate, formed in the early 2000s, allowed for new relationships to form based on motivation and portrayed 'power.'

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<sup>49</sup> Raessens, Joost, and Jeffrey H. Goldstein. 2011. *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. MIT Press, 15-18.

<sup>50</sup> Malone, Krista Lee. 2009. "Dragon Kill Points: The Economics of Power Gamers." *Games and Culture* 4 (3): 297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009339731>.

<sup>51</sup> Malone, Krista Lee, "Dragon Kill Points," 296.

<sup>52</sup> Derugash. 1997. "The Syndicate." 1997. <https://www.llts.org/History.php?p=01Early>.

<sup>53</sup> Reeve, Johnmarshall. 2015. "Giving and Summoning Autonomy Support in Hierarchical Relationships." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 9 (8): 406-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12189>.

Through the end of the late 1990s and into the 21st century, MMOs had completely transformed how people built relationships and connected socially. Guild systems, mastered by *WoW*, allowed for new communities to form within MMOs, creating new spaces for social interaction. Chat systems, pioneered by *Ultima*, revolutionized how and when people could communicate with one another. These MMOs redefined how we analyze the time period, their impact on the formation and preservation of relationships is undeniable. Now in 2024, these phenomena are more present than ever, and the revolution that occurred between 1997 and 2010 will continue; becoming even more essential in how we form relationships. Covid-19 shut down the world and forced billions of people to be confined to their homes. MMOs and the social interaction they foster became the lifeline of many who felt isolated at the time.<sup>54</sup> A study conducted on gaming during COVID-19 revealed, that roughly 71% of players reported a major increase in their gaming time, as well as 58% reported positive impacts on their well-being, such as stress relief, cognitive stimulation, socialization, and reduced anxiety.<sup>55</sup> The relevance of MMOs and their positive social impact on players is unquestionable. The inventions and innovations of *Ultima* and *WoW* during the early 21st century have led the way for MMOs to continue fostering relationships and creating social interaction.

As technology continuously innovates and becomes increasingly integrated in every single aspect of our lives, the foundation *Ultima* and *WoW* created for relationship building will serve as the centerpiece for future social interaction. Several game studies researchers already believe that MMOs' virtual worlds have become integral to everyday society.<sup>56</sup> The belief is MMOs are extending our socioeconomic status into the virtual worlds; where the two are becoming indistinguishable, it is inevitable real-world and virtual will be one entity.<sup>57</sup> Earth cannot continue to satisfy all human's new genuine needs, gaming, and virtual worlds are providing rewards never imagined by the human mind. The introduction of Web 3.0, cryptocurrency, and NFTs, regardless of one's

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<sup>54</sup> Synmbios, Leonardo. 2024. "The Rise of Gaming Nations." *Games and Culture*, August. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120241273428>.

<sup>55</sup> Barr, Matthew, and Alicia Copeland-Stewart. 2022. "Playing Video Games During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Effects on Players' Well-Being." *Games and Culture* 17 (1): 122–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211017036>.

<sup>56</sup> Li, Feng, Savvas Papagiannidis, and Michael Bourlakis, "Living in 'Multiple Spaces,'" 426

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, Edward Heath. 2014. "The Aspatial Economics of Virtual Worlds." *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*. Vol. 7. <http://jvwresearch.org><http://jvwresearch.org>.

opinion of them, will have extreme effects on our society. ‘Play & Earn’ gaming sectors already exist; games, where value is created, and can be turned into ‘real’ income.<sup>58</sup> Genuinely owning a digital item, just like a physical item, is possible due to NFTs, and blockchain technology.<sup>59</sup> The term ‘Gaming Nations’ has risen to detail exclusively online sectors within virtual worlds where people inhabit them, similar to how we occupy and exist within the United States. This phenomenon is only made possible through the innovations which occurred during 1997-2010. Leading researcher Synnbois looks to the formation of guilds and the massive social network within MMOs as essential to ‘Gaming Nations.’<sup>60</sup> The social space created in *Ultima Online* and *World of Warcraft* from 1997-2010 redefined how we think about relationship building. Virtual worlds will continue to expand into Gaming Nations, within these spaces, the foundation laid by pioneering MMOs will continue to reshape how human beings bond.

MMOs' impact on relationship creation and building during this period of time was profound, yet often overlooked by those in academia investigating how human interaction changed during the dot-com boom. There is a consensus among historians that the internet allowed for an expanded and integral piece in relationship creation.<sup>61</sup> As displayed throughout the paper, MMOs such as *WoW* and *Ultima* birthed a new medium for people to interact, carving an essential space that cannot be overlooked. The creation of in-game chat systems revamped how those spending their time online could interact with one another.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, chat systems invented during this time would later become integral pieces in every single video game thereafter. Guild systems revolutionized community formation, fostering a new online space where like-minded individuals could gather and form meaningful relationships based on social and objective similarities.<sup>63</sup> Regardless of one opinion on gaming and online spaces, our society is forever on an exponential path to innovate and integrate technology. The social foundation that *World of Warcraft* and *Ultima Online* laid

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<sup>58</sup> Synnbois, Leonardo. 2024. “The Rise of Gaming Nations.” *Games and Culture*, August, 2-3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120241273428>.

<sup>59</sup> Synnbois, Leonardo, “The Rise of Gaming Nations,” 6.

<sup>60</sup> Synnbois, Leonardo, “The Rise of Gaming Nations,” 2-6.

<sup>61</sup> DiMaggio, Paul, et al. “Social Implications of the Internet.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 27, no. 1, Aug. 2001, pp. 307–336, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.307>.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang, “Older Adults’ Social Interactions...” 159.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, Dmitri et al., “From Tree House to Barracks,” 341.



during the early 2000s forever will have impacted how we form vital relationships and connections.

## “Where Rivers of Blood Flow”: Soviet Media Portrayals of the Cambodian Genocide

Kylie Black

On August 22, 1979, *Izvestia* published an article depicting the Cambodian trial of the “butchers and fanatics,” Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, where they were both found guilty of genocide.<sup>1</sup> In this article, the two were depicted as “pro-Peking,” and the article called attention to alleged “Chinese advisers’ direct participation in carrying out [the] genocide.”<sup>2</sup> Along with the condemnation of China, the article called attention to the death and destruction at the hands of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), and said “the world [had] not seen such crimes since the monstrous atrocities of the Nazi war criminals.”<sup>3</sup>

This is one of many Soviet articles that discussed the Cambodian genocide, painting it as a product of Chinese hegemonism and imperialism, and attempting to shape public thought and opinion by connecting it to the events of the Holocaust. Furthermore, this report on Cambodia was typical of Soviet newspapers, providing insight into how these newspapers functioned in terms of shaping public opinion. As scholars have noted, the Soviet press served as “a window” into politics and foreign policy, thus providing insight into official policies and how the Soviet government wanted the population to understand them.<sup>4</sup> Based on a careful examination of the Soviet reporting on the events in Cambodia from 1975–1979, this article reveals not only a strong revulsion for Pol Pot, but also the large rift between the Soviet Union and China at this time as the Soviet Union attributed Pol Pot’s genocide policy to Chinese influence in Cambodia.<sup>5</sup> Analyzing the discourse that it employed, this article asserts that the

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<sup>1</sup> B. Vasilyev, “On International Subjects: Just Deserts,” *Izvestia*, August 22, 1979, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Vasilyev, “On International Subjects: Just Deserts,” 4.

<sup>3</sup> Vasilyev, “On International Subjects: Just Deserts,” 4.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Axelrod and William Zimmerman, “The Soviet Press on Soviet Foreign Policy: A Usually Reliable Source,” *British Journal of Political Science* 11, no. 2 (1981): 187. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/193582>.

<sup>5</sup> For this project, I am accessing articles from *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Nedelya*, and *Sovetskaya Rossiya* through *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, a publication that during the Cold War translated Soviet newspaper articles into English. As a digest, the publication was selective. That the CDSP selected to translate and publish so many articles on Cambodia indicates the importance of this topic at the time—both to the Soviet Union and to those who compiled the digest. This paper pulls from over sixty articles published between February 1, 1975 and December 1, 1979, although that number does not include all of the

Soviet press aimed to mobilize the populace and unite it against genocidal violence while condemning China and other “imperial” and “hegemonistic” powers in one fell swoop.

To elaborate, Soviet reporting on the Cambodian genocide was framed by the Sino-Soviet split, a consequence of ideological disagreement that arose in the late 1950s when Nikita Khrushchev embarked on de-Stalinization contrary to Chinese communist policy and ideology.<sup>6</sup> Lorenz Lüthi argues that ideological discord between the two countries had been growing prior to Khrushchev’s plan for de-Stalinization and later became the prime factor motivating China to break relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> With the emergence of Vietnam’s post-colonial regime, both the Soviet Union and China wanted a stake in it, and neither were keen on sharing power over it. China viewed the Soviet Union as a potential ideological and physical threat and wanted to prevent its influence from spreading into Vietnam and the other countries in Indochina.<sup>8</sup> While tensions were high prior to the CPK’s reign in Cambodia, China’s support for the CPK and the CPK’s anti-Vietnamese sentiments exacerbated the tension between China and the Soviet Union and officially broke any remaining Sino-Vietnamese relations.<sup>9</sup> However, it is necessary to note that throughout the genocide, China consistently pushed restraint to Pol Pot and the CPK leadership, and urged them to end the violence; the CPK did not listen.<sup>10</sup>

Relations between Cambodia, the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam played a significant role in the events and its portrayal in the media. The Soviet Union had an embassy in Phnom Penh just as Cambodia had one in Moscow; however, given Cambodia’s long history of animosity towards the Vietnamese and the Soviet Union’s alliance with Vietnam established during its war with the United States, there was a sense of hesitancy to develop further relations.<sup>11</sup> That

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articles related to this topic during that timeframe. All transliterations of publication titles align with those used by the CDSP.

<sup>6</sup> Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 46-47.

<sup>7</sup> Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 22; 76.

<sup>9</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, 120-128.

<sup>10</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, 120.

<sup>11</sup> Teng Delux, “Cambodia-Russia Relations,” in *Cambodia’s Foreign Relations in Regional and Global Contexts*, eds. Deth Sok Udom, Sun Suon, Serkan Bulut (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2022), 271-273.

being said, the Soviet Union wanted to help newly independent countries form under a communist umbrella, a goal that extended to the new Cambodian regime.<sup>12</sup> However, Soviet involvement in Vietnam increased tensions between the Soviet Union and China due to China's relationship with Cambodia as well as its desire to eliminate Soviet influence in Indochina and establish firm relationships with the newly-formed countries there.<sup>13</sup> It was China's continuous support of the CPK that led Pol Pot to feel secure enough in his position to start a war with Vietnam at the end of 1977.<sup>14</sup>

Overall, little research has been done on the tensions generated by the Sino-Soviet split in Indochina outside of the United States' war with Vietnam. Nicholas Khoo's *Collateral Damage* looks at the Cambodian genocide as a continuation of the tensions that arose during the Vietnam War, arguing that the genocide marked the point when the Soviet Union and China became physical threats to each other instead of merely ideological ones.<sup>15</sup> As such, Khoo's work examines the implications of the genocide for foreign relationships. How the Cambodian genocide was presented in the Soviet press, and how the Sino-Soviet split shaped that portrayal has entirely escaped scholarly attention.

The Cambodian genocide arose from tensions after the United States' 1969 Operational Menu, leaving the country in political turmoil after repeated bombing of Cambodia in an effort to destroy supply routes to Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after gaining independence from France, the newly formed government under Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown in March of 1970 by military leader Lon Nol.<sup>17</sup> The following five years were defined by a civil war, which ended on

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Anderson, *Public Politics in an Authoritarian State: Making Foreign Policy during the Brezhnev Years* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 178.

<sup>13</sup> Nayan Chanda, "China and Cambodia: In the Mirror of History," *Asia Pacific Review* 9, no. 2 (2002): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1343900022000036043>.

<sup>14</sup> Cheunboran Chanborey, "Cambodia-China Relations: What Do Cambodia's Past Strategic Directions Tell Us?" in *Cambodia's Foreign Relations in Regional and Global Contexts*, eds. Deth Sok Udom, Sun Suon, Serkan Bulut (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2022), 273.

<sup>15</sup> Khoo, *Collateral Damage*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (Basic Books, 2013), 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> John Cox, *To Kill a People: Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 129; Path Kosal, "Introduction: Cambodia's Political History and Foreign Relations, 1945-1998," in *Cambodia's Foreign Relations in Regional and Global*

April 17, 1975, when the resistance group known as the Khmer Rouge, took Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, marking the first day of what would later be known as the Cambodian genocide.<sup>18</sup>

The Khmer Rouge, formally named the Communist Party of Kampuchea, emerged in Cambodia in the early 1950s, and claimed to subscribe to a Marxist-Leninist ideology.<sup>19</sup> Pol Pot, a known communist revolutionary, was the face of the regime. Alongside Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary, Pol Pot was obsessed with the idea of forming a pure Khmer nation, specifically one without Vietnamese people or influence.<sup>20</sup> While the anti-Vietnam and pro-Khmer sentiment was not new in the time of Pol Pot, it was this idea of racial superiority and division that formed the basis for the genocide.<sup>21</sup>

In the three years and eight months the CPK reigned, it was responsible for the death of around two million people, roughly a quarter of the population, through starvation, disease, and execution.<sup>22</sup> As part of its mission to cleanse Cambodia, the CPK began a war on the Vietnamese border at the very end of 1977 to further eliminate what it deemed to be an infestation of an inferior race.<sup>23</sup> China provided weapons and monetary support to the CPK, while Vietnam received support from the Soviet Union. On December 25, 1978, Vietnam

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*Contexts*, eds. Deth Sok Udom, Sun Suon, Serkan Bulut (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2022), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Cox, *To Kill a People*, 131; Path, “Introduction,” 13.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Tyner, *From Rice Fields to Killing Fields: Nature, Life, and Labor under the Khmer Rouge* (Syracuse University Press, 2017), xii; 1-3. The Communist Party of Kampuchea was the formal name of the group, Kampuchea being the name of Cambodia in the Cambodian language. It was Norodom Sihanouk who coined the term “Khmers rouges” to mean “red Khmers” (Khmer meaning Cambodian), a term he used to refer to multiple communist groups during his time in power. In literature, historians will use either of the terms. Here, I will use Communist Party of Kampuchea or CPK.

<sup>20</sup> Cox, *To Kill a People*, 126-129.

<sup>21</sup> Path, “Introduction,” 15; 18; 21; Kry Suyheang and Chy Terith, “Cambodia’s Relations with Vietnam: Prospects and Challenges,” in *Cambodia’s Foreign Relations in Regional and Global Contexts*, eds. Deth Sok Udom, Sun Suon, Serkan Bulut (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2022), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Cox, *To Kill a People*, 121-122.

<sup>23</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Yale University Press, 2008), 357; Path, “Introduction,” 18.

invaded Cambodia, and on January 7, 1979, Vietnam took Phnom Penh, establishing a new government in the ruins of the CPK.<sup>24</sup>

While the Soviet Union did not have a direct role in the Cambodian genocide outside of its support for Vietnam, the language that the Soviet press used to portray and discuss of the genocide offers insights into Soviet perceptions of the crime of genocide, and of relations with countries in East Asia. As scholars have discerned, journalists at the time, under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, saw it as their duty to inform and shape public opinion in response to events happening around the world.<sup>25</sup> Reporting on the events in Cambodia in 1978 and 1979, the Soviet press employed clear and explicit language. Interestingly, this was similar to its depiction of the Holocaust during World War II—an approach that had been intended to mobilize the people against the enemy.<sup>26</sup> Also curious, contrary to the Soviet press, Western media, such as that in the United States, had very limited coverage of Pol Pot and the Cambodian genocide, much as it had of the Holocaust.<sup>27</sup>

Discussion of Cambodia in 1975 began with the Soviet press expressing support for the revolutionaries. In February, an article entitled “The Regime is Falling Apart” depicts the Cambodian people’s struggle for power against the Lon Nol regime, saying the regime has “no political future,” and that the Soviet Union gives their support to the efforts of Cambodia’s revolutionaries in their fight for power.<sup>28</sup> Prior to the CPK’s capture of Phnom Penh in April, the Soviet Union continuously showed support for the Cambodian revolutionaries and congratulated them on their successes.<sup>29</sup> After Phnom Penh was taken by Pol Pot,

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<sup>24</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 463.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Huxtable, “The Life and Death of Brezhnev’s Thaw: Changing Values of Soviet Journalism after Khrushchev, 1964-1968,” in *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange*, eds. Dina Fainberg and Artemy M. Kalinovsky (Lexington Books, 2016), 24.

<sup>26</sup> Corinne Ducey, “The Representation of the Holocaust in the Soviet Press, 1941-45,” *Slavonica* 14, no. 2 (2008): 119-138, <https://doi.org/10.1179/174581408X340708>.

<sup>27</sup> Power, “*A Problem from Hell*,” 109-115; Ducey, “Representation of the Holocaust,” 130-132.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksandr Filippov, “Commentator’s Column: The Regime is Falling Apart,” *Pravda*, February 7, 1975, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Another example of the Soviet Union pledging support for Cambodia is N. Podgorny, published in “To Norodom Sihanouk, Head of State and Chairman of the National United Front of Cambodia,” *Pravda*, March 23, 1975, 1: “The Soviet people are unswervingly

the support from the Soviet Union continued, with the press saying “the peoples of Indochina have displayed an invincible will for independence and freedom and have upset the calculations of the imperialist enslavers and domestic reactionaries.”<sup>30</sup> In the 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, after the CPK’s success in taking Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s liberation was given its own slogan, welcoming them as patriots “who have upheld the freedom and independence of their count[ry].”<sup>31</sup>

At this point in time, there is not a lot of news on movements in Cambodia outside of reporting on the events in Phnom Penh on April 17. The position of the Soviet Union, as newspaper articles show, is largely supportive of what is happening. There are no reports of violence outside of the military encounters that were taking place in the context of the civil war leading up to April 17. In the eyes of the Soviet Union, Cambodia has been liberated from the grips of its colonial past, and is now free to write a new story of socialism as it enters its next chapter.

That sentiment continues into 1976: there were very few mentions of Cambodia, but the Soviet support for Cambodia’s rebuilding its nation continued. The Soviet press congratulates Cambodia on its new constitution and the election held in 1976, applauding the changes being made.<sup>32</sup> When the CPK renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea, the Soviet Union was quick to adopt its new name in the press and media and they “hail[ed] the victory for the people of Democratic Kampuchea in their struggle for the freedom and independence of their country” while continuing to proclaim support and solidarity.<sup>33</sup>

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sympathetic to the Cambodian patriots and firmly support their struggle for the freedom and independence of their homeland.”

<sup>30</sup> Unknown Author, “Editorial-In the Name of Communist Construction and Lasting Peace,” *Pravda*, April 18, 1975, 1-2. Other expressions of support by the Soviet Union can be found in TASS, “Conversation with A.N. Kosygin” *Izvestia*, April 22, 1975, 3 and Aleksandr Serbin, “Commentator’s Column: Firm Foundation,” *Pravda*, April 23, 1975, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Communist Part of the Soviet Union, “The C.P.S.U. Central Committee’s Slogans for the 58<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution,” *Pravda*, October 11, 1975, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Unknown Author, “On New Foundations,” *Pravda*, March 23, 1976, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Unknown Author, “Joint Soviet-Laotian Communiqué,” *Pravda*, May 5, 1976, 4. Despite the official change of name, I will continue to use Cambodia for the sake of consistency.

At the same time, China was being discussed in a negative light. For example, the Soviet press expressed concerns that China was encroaching on the developing nation and corrupting the changes taking place. The Soviet press says China is expressing “hegemonistic aspirations” and that “they claim lands belonging to virtually all states neighboring China,” including Cambodia.<sup>34</sup> While terms like “hegemonism” and “imperial” powers were first used in connection to Cambodia to congratulate the Cambodian people for liberating themselves from “imperialist enslavers” in 1975, the press then applied such labels to China, and argued that China was a threat to the developing countries in Indochina.<sup>35</sup> This denunciation of imperialism and hegemonism is in line with Soviet ideology, namely its principles of anticolonialism and egalitarianism. Therefore, in denouncing the imperialistic and hegemonistic powers the Cambodian people have overcome, Soviet journalists were also furthering the diffusion of communist ideology. While the Soviet press would continue to cite the threat of imperial hegemonic powers, at this point, China only posed a potential threat, as no physical actions had occurred yet.

The message of support for the newly independent Cambodia continues into spring of 1977 with the press saying, “The Soviet Union has always been and remains a supporter of the Khmer people.”<sup>36</sup> Two years of continuous support expressed in its media clearly demonstrated the position of the Soviet government to its citizens, and the world. The Soviet Union already had a vested interest in Cambodia’s neighbor, Vietnam, and was hoping to expand its influence into Cambodia. This appeared to be working, and praise for Cambodia and its revolutionaries continued to be printed, especially after Pol Pot said the revolution in Cambodia had been a communist revolution based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>37</sup> At this point, from the perspective of the Soviet government, the revolutionaries in Cambodia were the Soviet Union’s comrades, and it disseminated this idea to the Soviet people. There was still limited coverage of the events in Cambodia, with the number of articles being published quickly subsiding after the dust settled from the liberation of Phnom Penh in 1975. However, what was being discussed portrayed Cambodia and its new government in an extremely positive light.

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<sup>34</sup> A. Petrov, “Peking’s Hegemonistic Aspirations,” *Pravda*, June 16, 1976, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Pravda*, “Editorial-In the Name of Communist Construction and Lasting Peace,” 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Yu. Yurstev, “Defending Revolutionary Gains,” *Pravda*, April 17, 1977, 5.

<sup>37</sup> TASS, “17<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Founding of Kampuchean Communist Party,” *Pravda*, October 1, 1977, 5.



That being said, the Soviet Union published multiple articles between 1975 and 1977 speaking against genocide, including on the events taking place in Israel and Palestine.<sup>38</sup> Through its discussion of genocide, the Soviet Union also drew attention to the fact that, at this time, the United States had not recognized the United Nations Genocide Convention. One article, for example, stated: “So much for the value, in practice, of the elaborate declarations by American holders of high office on the subject of morality and morals!”<sup>39</sup> Here, the author highlighted the hypocrisy of the United States for not acknowledging the crime of genocide. At the same time, the Soviet Union had not recognized the genocidal events taking place in Cambodia despite the fact that by this point in 1977, deportations had been in effect for almost two years, pushing people out of their former homes and to the outskirts of the country. Furthermore, the systematic withholding of resources from peasants, collectivization, and imprisonments had become normal for the people in Cambodia.<sup>40</sup> It is unknown how much intelligence the Soviet leadership had on this repression, but the violence that accompanied it starkly contrasted positive and optimistic picture that the Soviet press was presenting.

This story changed in January of 1978 as the CPK launched war against Vietnam at the end of 1977. With that aggression against its Vietnamese allies, the Soviet press and government responded in outrage and condemned the violence in Cambodia. Numerous articles were released in 1978 to alert the Soviet public to the violence and unite it against Cambodia. It was revealed that violence against Vietnamese people began as early as May 1975, even if the Soviet Union had not been aware of it at the time.<sup>41</sup> The press depicted the CPK as “executioners out of the Middle Ages” that were “fanning the flames of national enmity” through their actions.<sup>42</sup> Much like how they had portrayed the violence of the Holocaust, Soviet newspapers shared how the *people* of Cambodia were effected and highlighted the “thousands and thousands of civilians who have perished, been maimed or been left homeless” from the

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<sup>38</sup> For example, V. Kudryavtsev, “The Palestine Resistance Movement,” *Izvestia*, April 12, 1975, 4. Discussion of genocide in Israel and Palestine continues past 1975 and throughout the years covered in this essay.

<sup>39</sup> V. Matveyev, “Dictated by Reason: Participants in Belgrade Meeting Discuss Socialist Countries’ Proposals,” *Izvestia*, December 9, 1977, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, 97; 167; 178-9; 207.

<sup>41</sup> M. Ilyinsky, “Events on the Border between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and Kampuchea,” *Izvestia*, January 5, 1978, 5.

<sup>42</sup> TASS, “Nhan Dan on Kampuchea’s Policy,” *Pravda*, January 21, 1978, 5.

CPK's actions.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the press criticized the actions of other global powers saying "if the imperialists and their accomplices would not [have] interfere[d] in the intra-Asian affairs," there would not have been such a conflict.<sup>44</sup> It did not take long for the Soviet press to decry the violence after it was revealed it was being directed, at least in part, towards Vietnam and Vietnamese people.

In June of 1978, the Soviet Union took a different strategy in its depiction of the crimes in Cambodia, namely, highlighting Chinese support for the CPK as well as China's funding and supplying of the regime from the very beginning, thereby aiding the CPK's attack on Vietnam.<sup>45</sup> Soviet newspapers go as far to say that not only was China funding and supporting Cambodia, but that it was China's idea to start the war on the border.<sup>46</sup> By this point in time, relations between the Soviet Union and China had been clearly severed as a result of both vying for influence in the newly formed socialist Vietnam. Now, with another country in Indochina aspiring to build socialist and communist roots, the tension between the two countries was yet again tested. The Soviet press writes of how Cambodia fell victim to China's "great-power hegemonism," and it is the influence of such hegemonism that has resulted in "two and one-half million of Cambodian's seven million inhabitants [perishing] from starvation, disease, and execution" in "a policy of cruel terror."<sup>47</sup> As far as the Soviet press was concerned, Cambodia "serve[d] as an example of what happens to a country that recognizes Chinese hegemonic claims."<sup>48</sup>

By the end of 1978, depictions of the violence in Cambodia became more descriptive. In one article in *Izvestia*, Cambodia was referred to as "'a vast concentration camp,' a 'gigantic prison;'" it was "where rivers of blood flow[ed] and a ruthless and systematic policy of genocide with respect to the country's own people [was] being carried out."<sup>49</sup> That same article continued to talk of the

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<sup>43</sup> M. Domogatskikh, "Peaceful Settlement to Conflict," *Pravda*, February 8, 1978, 4; Ducey, "Representation of the Holocaust."

<sup>44</sup> Vladimir Kudryavtsev, "Dark Spots on the Globe," *Nedelya*, January 23-29, 1978, 5.

<sup>45</sup> M. Georgiyev, "Dangerous Interference," *Pravda*, June 1, 1978, 5.

<sup>46</sup> TASS, "Maoists' Blackmail," *Pravda*, June 11, 1978, 5.

<sup>47</sup> I. Aleksandrov, "In a Militarist Frenzy," *Pravda*, August 5, 1978, 4; TASS, "Following Peking's Recipe," *Pravda*, August 25, 1978, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Mai Podklyuchnikov, "Survey: Internal Week – Hegemonism in Action," *Pravda*, September 10, 1978, 4.

<sup>49</sup> V. Sergin, "Peking's Experiments on Kampuchean Soil," *Izvestia*, November 2, 1978, 4.

“eradication” of Vietnamese people “by disembowelment, by beating them to death with hoes, by hammering nails into the backs of their head and by other cruel means of economizing on bullets.”<sup>50</sup> The manner in which the acts of violence are described, as well as the explicit mention of concentration camps, invokes the memory of the Holocaust and violence from World War II, providing additional emphasis to the horrors and creating parallels to the words of Soviet journalists who had reported on the crimes of Hitler.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, the use of the word “genocide” to describe the actions of the CPK invokes a specific idea of violence, again connected to the Holocaust. By applying the word “genocide,” the Soviet press also gives validity to the experiences of the victims of the Cambodian genocide, something distinctly lacking in Western press.<sup>52</sup> This strategy was not an isolated one; while this was the first time the word “genocide” was used to describe the events in Cambodia, it would be used throughout the remainder of the genocide and in the months after it ended. The parallels to World War II conjured up in that 1978 *Izvestia* article also continued to be employed in the Soviet press, as were references to Cambodia as a concentration camp.<sup>53</sup> However, alongside the depictions of the horrifying events taking place and the CPK’s “dictatorial regime,” the Soviet press still assigned agency and power to the people of Cambodia, and they continued to pledge support to those being affected by the violence.<sup>54</sup>

After January 7, 1979, when Vietnam captured Phnom Penh and put an end to the Cambodian genocide, the Soviet press continued to report on the CPK and share the violence that took place in Cambodia. During this time, it employed a variety of descriptive words to label the CPK that fully encapsulated the violence. For example, in an article sharing the news of Vietnam’s occupation of Phnom Penh, the CPK was described as the “barbaric regime of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.”<sup>55</sup> Along the same lines, just as in 1978, the CPK was referred to as

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<sup>50</sup> Sergin, “Peking’s Experiments on Kampuchean Soil,” 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ducey, “Representation of the Holocaust.”

<sup>52</sup> Power, “*A Problem from Hell*,” 109-115.

<sup>53</sup> Another example is in B. Vasilyev, “Commentary: The Resoluteness of Kampuchean Patriots,” *Izvestia*, December 10, 1978, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Unknown Author, “In Support of the Kampuchean People,” *Pravda*, December 19, 1978, 5.

<sup>55</sup> TASS, “Patriots’ Successes,” *Pravda*, January 7, 1979, 1. Other examples of the use of “barbaric regime of Pol Pot” can be found in U. Berbin, “Rejoinder: On Those Who Concoct and Spread Slander,” *Izvestia*, February 3, 1979, 4; TASS, “Report from Rumanian News Agency,” *Pravda*, August 31, 1979, 5.

the “dictatorial regime of the Pol Pot–Ieng Sary clique.”<sup>56</sup> By far, the most popular way to refer to the CPK was by talking of the “bloody regime of Pol Pot.”<sup>57</sup> While demonstrating the types of language used in the press to depict the violence, these examples also demonstrate a shift to referring to Pol Pot, and sometimes Ieng Sary as well, as the culprits instead of referring to the CPK as a whole. Whereas in 1978 the Soviet press depicted the genocide as a product of Chinese imperialism, in 1979 it started to assign more blame and agency to Pol Pot and the individual leaders of the CPK.

Continuing with the approach of invoking images of and drawing parallels to the Holocaust to engage the public, Soviet newspapers used the same methods to depict the genocide and violence in 1979, as they had in 1978. This meant that Soviet readers would constantly be learning about the “tyrants who pursued a policy of genocide against their own people” and wrought death and destruction everywhere they went.<sup>58</sup> The imagery of concentration camps also stayed consistent, with one article going as far as to depict Cambodia under Pol Pot as “a dismal torture chamber.”<sup>59</sup> On a few occasions, Pol Pot was compared to Hitler, again explicitly linking the Holocaust to the Cambodian genocide for Soviet readers.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> TASS, “The Liberation of Phnom Penh,” *Pravda*, January 8, 1979, 1. Another example is in TASS, “Manifesto of the People’s Revolutionary Council of Kampuchea,” *Pravda*, January 12, 1979, 1 where the CPK is referred to as the “dictatorial fascist regime of the Pol Pot–Ieng Sary clique.”

<sup>57</sup> First seen in M. Slavin, “Rejoinder: ‘Nin’ Sheds a Tear,” *Pravda*, January 28, 1979. Other examples can be found in Statement of the Soviet Government published in “Hands off Socialist Vietnam! – Soviet Government Statement,” *Pravda*, February 19, 1979; Yuly Yakhontov, “International Survey: Throwing off the Mask,” *Pravda*, February 25, 1979, 4; A. Maslennikov, “International Notes: Who Benefits from This,” *Pravda*, June 20, 1979, 5; Igor Lebedev, “Commentator’s Column: Complete Rout,” *Pravda*, July 25, 1979, 5.

<sup>58</sup> TASS, “Joy of Liberation,” 5. Another example of referring to Pol Pot and the leaders of the CPK as tyrants can be found in TASS, “L. I. Brezhnev Receives American Journalists,” *Pravda*, January 10, 1979, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Maslennikov, “International Notes: Who Benefits from This,” 5. Another example of the depiction of concentration camps can be found in TASS, “Liberation of Phnom Penh,” 1.

<sup>60</sup> V. Kudryavtsev, “On International Topics of the Day: Kampuchea’s Second Birth,” *Izvestia*, January 11, 4; Aleksandrov, “Give Peking’s Aggression a Resolute Rebuff,” 4; V. Goncharov, “Commentator’s Opinion: Concerning Borba’s Commentary on Kampuchea,” *Sovetskaya Rossia*, November 22, 1979, 3.

In the year after the capture of Phnom Penh, the Soviet press frequently invoked the word “genocide” in varying degrees when discussing the events in Cambodia. Whether explicitly saying that the events in Cambodia constituted genocide or that genocidal methods were used in the violence, the use of the word clearly demonstrates the perspective of the press, and also the need for redress for the Cambodian people. One article referred to the events in Cambodia as a “mass genocide,” speaking to the size of their impact.<sup>61</sup> Another cast them as “total genocide.”<sup>62</sup> Each time the press declared that a genocide had occurred, it also indicated the lack of action on the part of other world powers, such as the U.S., which had done little or nothing to address the events in Cambodia.<sup>63</sup> To highlight general U.S. inaction, in 1978, the Soviet press even commended a U.S. senator for his outspoken disgust for the CPK and its actions, as well as for the lack of response by his country.<sup>64</sup>

The role of China and its influence in Cambodia continued to be a major point of discussion in 1979. Alongside referring to it as the “bloody regime of Pol Pot,” the Soviet press also dubbed the CPK as China’s “puppet regime” working to do China’s bidding.<sup>65</sup> Some articles referred to the CPK as China’s “stooges” or “henchmen” that “blindly obeyed the directives of Chinese instructors.”<sup>66</sup> The CPK was thus depicted as China’s “weapon,” merely doing as it was told.<sup>67</sup> The press did not forget nor did it forgive China for the role it played in the genocide, and used that to construct China as the enemy in the eyes of the Soviet people. Talk of the evilness and hegemonism persisted in discussions of the threat that China posed.

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<sup>61</sup> O. Anichkin, “The Hypocrisy of Political Speculators,” *Izvestia*, July 6, 1979, 5.

<sup>62</sup> M. Ilyinsky, “Kampuchea’s Friends and Enemies,” *Izvestia*, August 8, 1979, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Other examples of the Soviet press declaring a genocide took place in Cambodia can be found in TASS, “Liberation of Phnom Penh,” 1; TASS, “Joy of Liberation,” 5; Kudryavtsev, “On International Topics of the Day: Kampuchea’s Second Birth,” 4; V. Ardatovsky, “Provocateurs’ Crocodile Tears—The Refugee Problem and Its True Causes,” *Izvestia*, August 5, 1979, 5.

<sup>64</sup> TASS, “Following Peking’s Recipe,” 5.

<sup>65</sup> TASS, “Liberation of Phnom Penh,” 1; TASS, “Joy of Liberation,” *Pravda*, January 9, 1979, 5.

<sup>66</sup> A. Petrov, “Aggressor in the Pillory,” *Pravda*, February 20, 1979, 5; I. Aleksandrov, “Give Peking’s Aggression a Resolute Rebuff,” *Pravda*, February 28, 1979, 4; Lebedev, “Commentator’s Column: Complete Rout,” 5.

<sup>67</sup> I. Aleksandrov, “Concerning China’s Provocations against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” *Pravda*, February 10, 1979, 5.

Furthermore, while Pol Pot was assigned agency for his actions, the Soviet press argued that it was China that “attempted to carry out a barbarous policy of genocide and annihilate an entire people in order to populate another country with their hua chiao.”<sup>68</sup> Soviet newspapers stated that while Pol Pot may have given the orders for the genocide, it was China’s idea and the “Pol Pot clique” was only doing China’s bidding.<sup>69</sup> It was China that “urge[d] the Pol Pot regime to unleash bloody terror” on the Cambodian people.<sup>70</sup> Not only did assigning blame to China further condemn the country before the Soviet population; doing so also suggested that China, too, needed to be prosecuted for the genocide alongside the leaders of the CPK. In fact, the Soviet press would argue that China was *more* responsible for the millions of death than the CPK was for purportedly having urged it to go through with genocide. This demonstrates the tension in the relationship between the Soviet Union and China, and also the lengths that the Soviet Union would go to villainize China in the eyes of its people and the world. Many of the articles that depicted China as the enemy discuss the war China launched in Vietnam in February of 1979. Thus, depicting the genocide served not only to raise the matter of the role of China in Cambodia, but also to argue that China had a tendency towards genocide in Cambodia, and in turn, to create the impression that their comrades in Vietnam could be the next victims.<sup>71</sup>

The newspaper shared at the beginning of this article demonstrates a number of the approaches that the Soviet media used to portray the Cambodian genocide: the labeling of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary as “butchers and fanatics,” the villainization of China and Chinese hegemonism, and the invoking of the Holocaust to build on the memory of World War II and its significance in Soviet society.<sup>72</sup> That particular article also concluded the active discussion of the

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<sup>68</sup> Aleksandr Serbin, “International Survey: A Lesson to the Hegemonists,” *Pravda*, March 18, 1979, 4. “Hua chiao” refers to a Chinese person living in another country while keeping their status as a Chinese citizen.

<sup>69</sup> A. Petrov, “International Notes: The Real Culprits are Playing the Hypocrite,” *Pravda*, June 30, 1979, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ilyinsky, “Kampuchea’s Friends and Enemies,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> While the Soviet Union depicts China as the puppet master behind the Cambodian genocide, there is evidence that China urged hesitancy to Pol Pot in regards to the violence aimed at Vietnamese people. This is, in part, due to China wanting to maintain ties with Vietnam as much as possible. However, by the end of 1978, ties had been fully split between China and Vietnam. For more, see Khoo, *Collateral Damage*.

<sup>72</sup> Vasilyev, “On International Subjects: Just Deserts,” 4.

Cambodian genocide in the Soviet press—though the memory of the genocide and China's involvement in it continue to appear in the following decade.

Regarding the Cambodian genocide, this article had demonstrated, Soviet coverage provides insight into Soviet policy regarding Vietnam, China, newly formed Cambodia, and genocide. For example, Soviet newspapers discussed the genocide in a way that spread distaste for China, positively portrayed Soviet allies in Vietnam, and asserted the moral supremacy of the Soviet Union. That said, initially, the Soviet press, and the Soviet government, demonstrated approval and excitement for the development of the new and peaceful country of Cambodia, following the path of Marxism-Leninism. However, with the attacks on Vietnam and Vietnamese people, it shifted toward condemning the violence in Cambodia through explicit descriptions of it. It is unknown when, and to what extent the Soviet government was aware of the violence; and perhaps if it had more information sooner, such condemnation would have occurred sooner. The fact remains, though, that the Soviet government and press would not stand for violence against their Vietnamese comrades, and, upon learning of that violence, immediately took up a cause against it, while using the events to attempt to solidify public opinion around those deemed as enemies.