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Ego postulo
inspirationem tua
O Dea Clio
LETTER FROM THE MANAGING EDITORS

After a grueling, yet sensational year, we are pleased to present the twenty-sixth edition of Ex Post Facto. Our journal is indebted to countless people who have directly or indirectly made and perpetuated this journal year after year. We would like to thank all of our influential professors, our families, peers, friends, and the historians whose works we have build upon. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Eva Sheppard Wolf for her undying inspiration and Sheri Kennedy for always keeping that flame lit beneath us.

Of course, we must also thank all of our sagacious editors, and our erudite authors and submitters, without whom this journal would not have been possible. We are honored to keep the tradition of history alive and hope that this journal may outlive the ages!

“WE ARE NOT MAKERS OF HISTORY. WE ARE MADE BY HISTORY.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
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Towards a Historiography of the 1973 Nationalization of Chilean Copper

Graduate Winner of the Joseph Mullins Prize in History

Javier L. Etchegaray

Introduction

Salvador Allende’s term as president of Chile during 1970-1973 has fostered an extensive corpus of historical works. The Nationalization of copper in 1971 was an important event during the Allende administration representative of the political, economic, and social environment of Chile during this period. With the wealth of written sources dedicated to this event; books, opinion pieces, articles, historical works, polemics, and memoirs, there is however very little historiographical analysis on it. The objective of this article is to present two lines of inquiry that will help to understand the different existing positions in historical writings about the Nationalization from 1971 to the present day. Thus, a further understanding of the main historiographical debates about the topic will be reached.

Historically, copper served as a vital resource for Chile. Due to the large quantity of reserves the country possesses, their accessibility, and the existence of high-grade deposits, the copper industry formed the most important sector in the country’s economy. In the early 20th century, the issue of the administration of the copper industry began to acquire increasing importance in the Chilean public opinion. Key aspects that stimulated this discussion were the collapse of the national saltpeter industry, economic underdevelopment, the economic potential of the copper industry, and most importantly, the preponderance of foreign capital in the copper industry. The largest owners of copper reserves in Chile were United States companies, primarily the Braden Copper Company, the Anaconda Copper Company,

1. In this study, Nationalization in capitals refers to the 1971 nationalization of Chilean copper whereas nationalization, in lower case, refers to the general act of nationalizing an industry or company.
and the Kennecott Corporation. The question of the administration of the copper industry continued to gain importance in the Chilean public and political discussion until in 1955, the government of President Jorge Ibáñez del Campo enacted the “Ley del Nuevo Trato”\(^2\). This was the first in a series of directives enacted during the next 20 years by successive administrations aimed at regulating taxation and defining the level of state participation in the industry. The overall trend during the years 1955-1971 shifted towards greater state control of the industry through a series of acquisitions of US company shares. The culmination of these efforts arrived with the election of President Salvador Allende in 1970, who included the total nationalization of the “Gran Minería”\(^3\) copper companies in his government program.

Nationalization stood out from the strategies of past governments, especially that of Allende’s predecessor Eduardo Frei Montalva, in that it sought the immediate and total transfer of the main US copper companies to the state. All the member parties of the Popular Unity coalition\(^4\) approved the Nationalization and the project counted with widespread public support. Shortly after his election as president, Salvador Allende began forming a team in charge of drafting a congressional bill in order to carry out the Nationalization through a constitutional reform. Noted jurist and lawyer, Eduardo Novoa Monreal, was in charge of the legal aspects of the bill. A heated parliamentary debate, characteristic of the intense political polarization of the UP era, followed its proposal to Congress. The bill eventually underwent a few modifications that, however, did not alter either its fundamental objectives or mechanism. Despite the bitter discussion in

\[^2\] Translates to “New Contract Law.”

\[^3\] Translates to “Greater Copper Mining Industries”, a Chilean legal statute that designates copper companies that produce over 75,000 tons per year. At the time of the Nationalization, the only companies that held this distinction were US-owned

\[^4\] The Popular Unity (Unidad Popular) was a left-wing political coalition composed of the Communist and Socialist Parties, the smaller Social Democrat and Radical Parties, and the Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU for its Spanish acronym), and formed specifically for the 1970 presidential election. The UP’s platform was based on carrying out significant political, economic, and social reforms that would lead Chile to a socialist transformation via electoral politics. “The fundamental task that the People’s Government has before it is to end with imperialist, monopolistic, and landowner oligarchic domination and begin the construction of socialism in Chile” (Basic Program of the Popular Unity Government)
parliament, the constitutional reform bill regarding the nationalization of the copper *Gran Minería* passed with a unanimous vote on July 11\(^{th}\) 1971. On July 16\(^{th}\) 1971, the official diary published Law N\(^{o}\) 17,450 relating to the new constitutional amendment. During the rest of the Allende presidency, and even after the 1973 coup, the administration of the *Gran Minería* remained entirely in Chilean hands, from extraction to commercialization.

The Nationalization caused a great commotion from its gestation to after its proclamation. Masses of people attended rallies in the street to support it while politicians were busy arguing the logic and effects of it. Many newspapers, magazines, and speeches proclaimed it as a “Second Independence”, alluding to the breaking of ties of international dependence that the Nationalization, they argued, would bring about. The Nationalization eventually unleashed a significant conflict with the U.S. companies in response to the lack of monetary compensation offered by the Chilean government. For the government, the Nationalization represented an essential part of the great transformations that the country had to undergo in its transition to socialism, while for the opposition to the government\(^{5}\), it was an act that stirred up the most diverse reactions: from support to total repudiation. The way the Nationalization has figured in historical studies from 1971 to our day, has been marked by the language and polarization of this period.

**To Talk of Nationalization**

Political polarization in Chile from 1970 to 1973 featured intense friction and widespread antagonism. Political conflict, the 1973 coup, and the subsequent military dictatorship, have all made it nearly impossible to look at the events of the UP period without projecting the subsequent political events onto it. Steve J. Stern mentions that “The crisis of 1973 and the violence of the new order generated a contentious memory question in Chilean life. [...] As a result, the study of memory cannot be disentangled from an account of wider political, economic, and cultural contexts.”\(^{6}\)

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5. The opposition, in 1971, is understood to be as the parties that did not make up the Popular Unity. These are the Christian Democrat Party, the National Party, and the minuscule Radical Democracy party.

Similarly, when writing about the Nationalization, the logic, discourse, and rhetoric of the political polarization of the period becomes evident in writers from across the political spectrum. This way, many studies about the Nationalization have sacrificed quality and thoroughness in defending or attacking this event.

I will argue that three general historiographical trends become evident in writings about the Nationalization from 1971 to the present day. A careful reading of the language that each author uses in relation to lines of study about the Nationalization will allow these general historiographical categorizations. To write favorably or negatively about the Nationalization during the UP period was part of a larger debate at a national level about the direction the country was to take in the near future. After the 1973 coup, the Pinochet dictatorship, the subsequent return to democracy in Chile, and the end-of-century global crisis of Marxism, writing about the Nationalization has changed in meaning and direction. Despite these historical developments, some elements of language and lines of study are present in historical works about the Nationalization across different periods that will allow us to outline three general stages in the writings about the history of the Nationalization in the past four and a half decades.

The first historiographical tendency groups authors generally associated with the center-left and left of the political spectrum who associated with the UP, whether as collaborators or supporters, in direct or indirect ways, starting from 1970 to the present. Regardless of their analysis of the Allende regime, most authors along this line evaluate the Nationalization in net neutral, at worst, or otherwise positive ways. Often highlighted is the popular support it received, the domestic and foreign obstruction towards it, and the symbolic importance it held for the UP. This line can be characterized as “sympathetic”. A second, conservative vision generally critical of the Nationalization is held by many authors of the center and right in Chile and often aligns to a broader political or economic critique of the UP government. Authors subscribing to this line highlight the meager economic benefits of the Nationalization, the lack of compensation for the nationalization of private property, the opposition that existed to it, and its ideological justifications. The years of intense polarization between 1970 and 1973 formed this view and it is still prevalent today. The third line of
study emerges during the dictatorship, especially towards the late 1970s, and takes a revisionist approach. Rather than justifying or condemning the Nationalization, these authors present the Nationalization in a more nuanced way. It contests the sympathetic view by pointing out that government justifications for the Nationalization ran up against shortages of spare parts, lack of national human capital to operate the mines at pre-1971 levels and overall political disorganization and opposition at all levels in the industry. It also contests the conservative approach by highlighting how external situations such as low world copper prices and politically motivated strikes and lockouts hampered production. The revisionist approach has been a refreshing new development for the field in the sense that it looks beyond a mere defense or attack of the Nationalization and seeks to reevaluate its importance and effects. The appearance of this approach has been crucial in dismounting long-held assumptions and common places about this event, and has invigorated the study of this event and the UP period.

In order to discover and understand these three lines of study, a common set of questions that position each author within the historiography of the Nationalization must be asked. The first question refers to whether the author addresses this event as a nationalization or as an expropriation, confiscation, or other synonyms. This refers to the fact that the Nationalization project was carefully designed by the UP to be a legitimate act that followed international conventions on the subject, such as the UN General Assembly Resolution 1803 about “Permanent sovereignty over natural resources”, and was deserving of the name “nationalization”, rather than being a common expropriation. Those who sympathized with and supported the Nationalization generally highlighted this fact while its detractors and critics referred to it as an expropriation and found ways to discredit it through this. Subsequent writings on the Nationalization have echoed many of the same concepts and language drawn out in the debates between 1970 and 1973. The second question asks how each author describes the Nationalization as an act that received almost total national support across the political spectrum, as an event that contributed to the political and social polarization of the time and hardly stirred up consensus, or something in between. Those who were

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7. General Assembly Resolution 1803 (XVII) of December 14, 1962, “Permanent sovereignty over natural resources”
in favor of the Nationalization invoked images of national unity in a time of polarization to defend it, and those who opposed it were quick to dismiss this. A close reading of each author’s account of the dichotomy between the political polarization of the period and the apparent national consensus regarding the Nationalization can inform the reader of a historiographical tendency.

The advantage of focusing on the discourse and rhetoric of the historic writings on the Nationalization is manifold. Following the assertion by part of Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci that “in ‘language’, there is contained a specific conception of the world”, we can read the different historical works on this event or clues about each author’s stance regarding it.8 Even if works that are more recent do not seek to explicitly defend or attack the Nationalization, it was born as a political act, and even in contemporary writing, the language different authors use to explain it entails a political choice at some level. Each author configures their discourse and rhetoric along a specific language that stems from the experience of the UP period. Similarly, each author chooses to highlight certain topics and silence others. It is through this that we can understand what the purpose of each author’s writing is.

The stakes of this exercise make it a necessary and important one. In first place, this paper will show how most works about the Nationalization before the mid-80s were focused on merely attacking or defending the Nationalization, rather than analyze it without a partisan bias. Secondly, it will expose assumptions and common places about the Nationalization that are political in their inception and have hampered a critical study of this event. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it will look into newer ways of writing about the 1970-1973 period in Chile without a precursorist bias. Too often is the history of the UP period seen as an inevitable build up to the 1973 coup. An essential point that this paper will make is that the revisionist approach is necessary in order to be able to study the 1970-1973 period as a discrete unit, and not as a precursor to later historical events.

**Expropriation and Nationalization**

How did authors describe the Nationalization in the immediate

months after its passing? One of the first mentions of the Nationalization as an expropriation appears a few months after the passing of the constitutional reform. Christian Democrat economist and politician Sergio Molina Silva wrote about this in an article published in Mensaje (Message) magazine on October 1971. Mensaje, a Jesuit publication, represented a progressive editorial line and generally sympathized with the government. In his article, Molina warned readers about how thinking that an expropriation of the foreign mining companies would mean the end of national problems was nothing but a mere illusion.\(^9\) This is one many similar messages repeated throughout those years that called for caution and stressed how the Nationalization did not necessarily mean an immediate end to relationships of international dependence. What becomes relevant is that from the very beginning, authors with a progressive political outlook were equating the Nationalization to an expropriation. While he can be seen as sympathetic to the Nationalization, his analysis is skeptical about the outcome of this project.

The 1972 book written by Eduardo Novoa Monreal, La nacionalización chilena del cobre (The Chilean Nationalization of Copper), serves as an invaluable document in order to understand the government position insofar as the development, grounds, political discussion, and the legal mechanism, of the Nationalization. This book portrays the Nationalization as a long feat with origins in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century and that, even though was necessary, had always encountered obstacles of a political character.

Firstly, Novoa describes how parliament members from the center-right and right parties attempted to use the word “expropriation” to deny any sort of novelty in the mechanism of the Nationalization, and eventually equate it to a common expropriation.\(^{10}\) Novoa states that, in the words of Pedro Ibañez, a National Party senator, the term ‘nationalization’ was a malicious “semantic misunderstanding [designed] to dazzle people of limited political culture”.\(^{11}\) It is evident in Novoa’s words that equating


\(^{10}\) Novoa. La nacionalización chilena del cobre, 162.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
the Nationalization to an expropriation was not a caprice of some senators and representatives, but rather a conscious move by the opposition. This characterization appeared to come up in the most diverse discussions in Parliament. When the topic of compensations was discussed, Novoa illustrates how National Party senator Francisco Bulnes, in contrast to the majority in Parliament, argued that nationalization should be governed by the same rules as an expropriation.\textsuperscript{12} This criticism denied the government argument that nationalization was a qualitatively distinct mechanism than expropriation, and furthermore, it maintained that Chile should have fully compensated US companies on Chilean soil, contrary to the argument by which the UP defended the Nationalization. Novoa even tells how Jorge Ovalle, a guest speaker at a Parliament session, attacked the project calling it “more of ‘a war confiscation than an expropriation’”.\textsuperscript{13} Under Novoa’s conception, the use of the word expropriation is a value judgement that the opposition used to undermine the credibility of the Nationalization.

In response to the planned attack that, according to Novoa, the reform project suffered in Parliament, he lays out an unequivocal difference between the concepts of “nationalization” and “expropriation”. In his writings, a nationalization is so (as opposed to an expropriation) because of the general and collective nature that the nationalized assets have for a nation. One of the most important differences between the two is the amount of compensation that either action would require. Novoa highlights that a nationalization would not necessarily require economic compensation due to the essential nature of the nationalized industries.\textsuperscript{14} He admits that if there were to be such a compensation, it must merely be “adequate”, without further explaining what this means in terms of quantities.\textsuperscript{15} The government coalition carefully constructed concept of nationalization according to the previously mentioned semantic considerations and other precedents such as UN declarations about natural resources and national sovereignty. This was in order to carry out a form of nationalization favorable to the UP program.

\textsuperscript{12} Novoa. \textit{La nacionalización chilena del cobre}, 192.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 132.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, 184.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, 197-8.
Said understanding about what the Nationalization was not only influenced its mechanism of action and presentation to the country and the world, but also gave a language and structure to the debates about the Nationalization. The official interpretation of what a Nationalization was acquired importance with the so-called “excess profits” statute. The “excess profits” (Rentabilidades excesivas in Spanish) statute was a consideration included in the legal text of the Nationalization. According to this formula, the Chilean state would have the right to deduct from the total amount of compensation, any amount of profits that the North American companies operating in Chile received that was over the global average of profits for copper companies. The president would be the one to decide said amount. In practice, this statute meant that Chile avoided any sort of payment related to compensations. Furthermore, President Allende decided that United States copper companies actually owed the Chilean state money. The US companies predictably did not pay any compensation towards the Chilean state. Naturally, this disposition generated a large commotion and became one of the most conflictive points of the Nationalization, both in the parliamentary discussion and in the relations with the United States.

Novoa was not the only one who defended the separation between a nationalization and expropriation. Philosopher José Echeverría was cited by Novoa as an influence in resolving the issue of compensations. In his 1972 article, Enriquecimiento injusto y nacionalización (Unjust Enrichment and Nationalization), Echeverría poses a similar argument to that of Novoa. For him, a nationalization is different from an expropriation because of its public and national interest. As a result of this, the different amounts of compensation that each require are justified. It is interesting to note that Echeverría does not completely separate the concept of expropriation from that of nationalization. In a passage in his article, he refers to the Nationalization as a “bigger expropriation”.16 Under his conception, a nationalization is not equal to the concept of an expropriation, but both are closely related. Although Echeverría’s closeness to the UP administration puts him in the sympathetic camp, it is interesting to note how even for an author aligning with the official position, there is the possibility of judging the Nationalization as an expropriation.

16. Echeverría. Enriquecimiento injusto y nacionalización, 44.
Not only Chilean authors participated in this debate. George Ingram, a US economic and political analyst, served as part of a group of academics from the United States who researched the copper industry in Chile during the 1970s. At the time of his research, he was a senior staff member for the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. In 1974, he analyzed how “expropriation”, in his words, was a tactic used by Latin-American governments in order to gain popular support. In his study, Ingram uses nationalization and expropriation interchangeably. Given his credentials, open support for the Nationalization was out of the question. His writings on the Nationalization exhibit little engagement with the political language of the period in Chile and can be seen as an early example of the revisionist approach.

As the temporal distance with the Popular Government increased, writings about the Nationalization, for the most part, employed a markedly less partisan language and radical tone. Within the restricted academic context of the military regime, the 1985 book *Chile y el Mundo 1970-1973* (Chile and the World: 1970-1973) by historian Joaquín Fermandois, contains a quality analysis about the Nationalization. For the author, the “expropriation of copper”, as he calls it, represented the core of the government program of the Popular Unity. This study generally refers to the Nationalization as an expropriation. The study is also notable for being the first work that mentions the rhetoric differences put forward by Novoa and Echeverría regarding to the difference between a nationalization and an expropriation. As part of his conclusion, Fermandois invites the reader to see the Nationalization and the subsequent legal battle as a show of forces between “a small state that carries out a confiscatory expropriation (as was the case of copper), and a powerful multinational corporation”. This is an early example of the revisionist approach in the Chilean academic context. However, Fermandois was still using a language that echoed conservative critiques to the Nationalization.

Are current analyses exclusively revisionist or do earlier positions

on the topic persist? The 1997 study by US academic Joanna Swanger, “Defending the Nation’s Interest: Chilean Miners and the Copper Nationalization”, included in the book *Workers’ Control in Latin America 1930-1979* represents an example of the sympathetic position in the post-Allende period. Like George Ingram, physical and cultural distance from Chile conditions Swanger’s narrative. In addition to this, her study also adds a longer temporal distance. Even so, it is interesting how Swanger does not mention the word expropriation in any part of her text. This study is part of a book that analyzes the history of labor movements in Latin America, especially the topic of workers control. Self-defined as a historical study from the bottom up, there is a comment in the introduction on how the authors of the book (Swanger included) do not consider themselves Marxist historians but they nonetheless acknowledge the important influence that this school of historical thought has had in their work. This way, and with an example removed from the Chilean academic and political environment, it is all the more obvious that this semantic choice necessarily entails a political position. United States authors, just like Chilean authors, seem to use the word nationalization in direct relation to their support of the UP government and the Nationalization itself. Swanger’s essay represents a recent sympathetic perspective written outside of Chile.

A recent conservative study that refers to the Nationalization is the book *Salvador Allende, el fracaso de una ilusión* (Salvador Allende, the Failure of an Illusion). In its pages are accurate descriptions of the Nationalization interspersed with polemical statements. He states in a passage, “No one, or almost no one, was opposed to an act of robbery”. Although the book uses the terms “nationalization” and “expropriation” equally, other polemical statements by the author place him as an opponent of the Nationalization. “It is correct to characterize the Nationalization as scandalous”, he states, echoing the language of political disunity.

Two works by Fermandois, the 2009 *Historia política del cobre* (Political History of Copper, in collaboration with Jimena Bustos and María
José Schneuer), and the 2013 *La revolución inconclusa* (The Unfinished Revolution), contain the most current studies about the Nationalization. The former mentions the concept of expropriation mainly in reference to the debate that this concept provoked during the period. In one passage, the author asks himself if the unanimity for the reform was due to the “[...] triumph of the semantics of the nationalization, the conviction that the expropriation practically with no compensation [...] was a politically and economically sound path?”

Fermandois’s study is important because it identifies that the Nationalization and its justification necessarily implies a choice in terms of rhetoric and semantics. In *La revolución inconclusa*, the use of the word expropriation is much more selective. Fermandois only mentions an “expropriation” in the context of the constitutional reform project already having been passed and the controversy of the compensations to be paid to the US companies already underway. In this specific work, the Nationalization is not an expropriation in its conception; it becomes so only after the controversy about the compensations, “grotesque” in the words of the author, is unleashed. Fermandois’s recent work represents a maturing of the revisionist position in that it uses the terms nationalization and expropriation not in respect to the judgement that the author has of the event but in relation to how different authors and political ideologies used these terms in the past.

The eloquence of the words written defending the Nationalization from the moniker of “expropriation”, and those who do not see any major distinction between both, speak for themselves. This debate is useful in characterizing the historiographical line of each author. It is important to note a temporal progression related to the use of these words. In a first period, most authors exclusively use either nationalization or expropriation. As time passed, those authors who were politically committed to the Nationalization became far less in number, so that it is ever easier to use these terms interchangeably. This is not to suggest a sort of direct correlation between the use of a certain word and the position of each author in a historiographical tendency. It is evident though that just as the Nationalization was carefully constructed and justified rhetorically against the accusation of a confiscatory or illegal move by the team that wrote the

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constitutional reform project, the authors that have talked about it also make a conscious choice in the words they use to describe this event. It is only with the appearance of the revisionist position that these terms become an object of analysis rather than a value judgement. This is one of the reasons that makes the revisionist approach valuable for the study of this topic.

**Consensus and Conflict**

On July 11th 1971, the constitutional reform project regarding the nationalization of the *Gran Minería del Cobre* was unanimously passed by a joint session of both chambers of Congress. Taking into account the polarized political environment that the country was living and the radical nature of the project, this fact becomes particularly interesting. Because of this, sympathetic authors and historians have tried to present the Nationalization as an exceptional moment of political unity during that period that stood outside of the polarized political environment of the time. The conservative line proposes that the so-called consensus on the project never existed or was nothing more than a strategic political position. The revisionist view sees the conflictive and contested nature of politics in this period vividly portrayed in the Nationalization. Works on the Nationalization reveal an underlying tension between the large support it received throughout the nation in contrast to the partisan struggle occurring at all levels of political life at the time. The way each author elaborates on this will serve us to understand their respective line of study.

The right-wing *Sepa* magazine published an article the week after the Nationalization was passed that foreshadowed dark predictions and inserted it within a bleak reality. “The first months of Marxist-imperialist administration have been disastrous [...] If the current rhythm of disorganization, anarchy, and politicization is kept up in the mineral industry, now Chilean owned, copper will be Chile’s death shroud”, stated the magazine, hardly concealing its hostility to the Nationalization. In August of that year, the Christian Democrat politician Genaro Arriagada, in an article for *Mensaje* magazine, stated that in a Parliament where agreements of any magnitude between the government and the opposition were rarely reached, the Nationalization

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“counted with a practically absolute national consensus.”²⁵ In November, Eduardo Novoa Monreal wrote in an article for Mensaje magazine that the Nationalization was a historic rectification of erroneous policies by earlier governments.²⁶ For Novoa Monreal, the Nationalization signified that “the legislative approval to the constitutional reform was unanimous, which in Chile, where the opposition, still the most rabidly anti-Marxist, counts with important strength, means an unprecedented concordance between the most dissimilar political groups and parties.”²⁷ By the end of 1971, the Nationalization was a main element of the Chilean political discussion and to talk about the national consensus around it was a political act.

Authors of the conservative position generally presented negative judgments about the Nationalization that downplayed the existence of any sort of political consensus and highlighted the level of disunity in the political arena. In change, those of the sympathetic vision tended to emphasize national unity and consensus in order to explain the passing of the Nationalization, and highlighted the opposition’s obstructionism and opportunism. In 1972, conservative politician and journalist Arturo Fontaine pointed out how the Nationalization was received by the public in a rather cold and indifferent manner due to the natural and political tragedies Chile had suffered in an essay titled Revolución en papel sellado (The Stamped Paper Revolution).²⁸ His point about natural tragedies is correct because on July 8th, 1971, just three days before the official passing of the Nationalization, a violent earthquake struck the central coast of the country. To mention a political tragedy is a partisan statement, however. In the same study, Fontaine argues that the Nationalization did not respond solely to a desire for national independence, but that it was at the same time an undercover Marxist plan designed to “cut the ties of Chilean politics with alleged inspirations or aid by part of foreign capital invested in the country”.²⁹ During 1971, Fontaine was also the subdirector of the
conservative newspaper *El Mercurio*, Chile’s most widely read and a strong bastion of government opposition during the UP period. His conservative tendency is clear from the language he uses in his study.

Eduardo Novoa Monreal dedicated several lines to the issue of the parliamentary debate about the reform project and the level consensus that existed around it. For him, the unanimity in the voting session in Congress did not correspond to an unanimity in the minds of the members of Parliament. He describes the congressional discussion as wrought by political conflict. Firstly, he narrates how the Christian Democrat Party (DC in its Spanish abbreviation) was uncompromising in its commitment to keep certain clauses from the copper agreements passed during the Frei administration, even if this meant stalling the nationalization project and incurring in higher economic costs. UP legislators yielded to the DC since they had a majority in both houses, Novoa argues. He is eloquent in describing this, saying that the DC would take advantage of all circumstances that could present them with a favorable political opportunity.30 “The gravity that the Christian Democrat pretension to maintain the contracts and agreements struck between the Frei administration and the North American companies”, he says, “produced a veritable undeclared war” in Parliament.31 When referring to the actions of what he calls the Right in Parliament32, Novoa spares no words, speaking of a zigzagging attitude were they came up with the most vicious attacks on the project, in his words, only to end up supporting it.33 How does Novoa interpret the vote of the Right in support of the Nationalization? He states, “This could be understood, perhaps, as the National Party finally convincing itself that their detraction to the project was unfounded”.34 This explanation has two interesting elements. First, it has a hint of condescension: he believes the Right finally realized that they were wrong all along. Second, it assumes a widespread national support to Nationalization. In his view, the Right’s opposition was but a marginal

31. Ibid., 146.
32. Novoa understands the “Right” as a synonym of the National Party.
34. Ibid., 139.
position that eventually corrected itself, something that places him squarely in the sympathetic camp.

In 1974, George Ingram maintained that in Chile there existed an almost total unanimity in favor of the Nationalization, but that at the same time, said action was not able to unite the country under the banner of the UP.\textsuperscript{35} US academic Theodore Moran, in contrast, presents an unorthodox reasoning for the supposed consensus. In his 1977 book, \textit{Multinational Corporations and the Politics of Dependence}, he states that the Chilean Right and sectors of the DC, due to their hostility towards the Alliance for Progress and its insistence on the Agrarian Reform, fostered a growing discontent with the actions of United States multinational companies in Chile.\textsuperscript{36} US support for some of President Frei’s progressive policies between 1966 and 1970 was certainly a point of contention acknowledged by other authors.\textsuperscript{37} Both are revisionist studies in that they try to reconcile the political disunity of the time with its relatively easy passing in Congress without entering into partisan polemics about the desirability of the Nationalization.

Joaquín Fermandois’ book, \textit{Chile y el Mundo: 1970-1973}, published in 1985, is an indispensable tool to understand the dichotomy between consensus and conflict that was present in the Nationalization. Within its pages, it provides a plausible explanation for the issue of an opposition that supported such a radical project by analyzing the individual motivations of each party. Fermandois comments how the DC possessed a “progressive self-consciousness” at the time that prevented them from opposing a project that enjoyed a high level of popular support.\textsuperscript{38} The National Party, in contrast, supported the project “essentially moved to avoid placing themselves in the public stake of ‘submission to imperialism’, in a stronger manner than the Christian Democrats.”\textsuperscript{39} It is interesting to compare the motivations that Fermandois assigns to each party with those that Novoa

\textsuperscript{35} Ingram. \textit{Expropriation of U.S. Property in South America}, 319.

\textsuperscript{36} Moran. \textit{Multinational Corporations and the Politics of Dependence}, 199.

\textsuperscript{37} Fermandois. \textit{Chile y el Mundo}, 407-9.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid}.  

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Monreal suggested in 1972. Novoa Monreal’s account describes both parties as being extremely obstructionist in the parliament discussion, and support for Nationalization is qualified only as opportunist. In Fermandois’s account, however, pragmatism, rather than opportunism, guides the opposition’s support to the Nationalization. His revisionist tendency is clear in that he tries to analyze the level of consensus regarding this issue without entering into discussions about hidden motives and opportunism.

This work is also important because it is the first one where Fermandois outlines a particular theory about the supposed consensus in relation to the Nationalization. The first iteration of this conjecture states that the opposition generally accepted the Nationalization as something inevitable and instead of adopting a position that would result to be dangerous to its public image, it accepted the government proposals, as inflammatory as they could result to be. Fermandois states that by supporting the Nationalization, the opposition intended to leave the inevitable conflict that was to arise with the United States mining corporations in hands of the government.40 This explanation is extremely important since it is the first one that is capable of reconciling the existing conflict between the both parts with the apparent consensus that the Nationalization reached in Parliament. Fermandois states, “It was neither as calculated [the attitude of the opposition] so as to lead the Government into a trap, nor as ‘patriotic’ as the apparent unanimity and subsequent support in the legal battle against the companies would lead to believe”.41

An article written by Fermandois that same year delves into this thesis arguing that the opposition responded to the pragmatic attitude of the UP during the Parliamentary discussion with a likewise pragmatic and slightly opportunist attitude.42 Contrary to many of the heated ideological struggles in Parliament throughout the UP years, Fermandois’ revision argues that realpolitik guided the issue of Nationalization and was responsible for the surprising unanimity in the voting session.

The passing of time did not necessarily entail the complete disappearance of a partisan language like the one of the 1970-1973 period.

40. Fermandois. Chile y el Mundo, 413-4.

41. Ibid.

42. Fermandois. Ideología y pragmatismo en la política exterior chilena durante la crisis del sistema político, 173.
The book *La transformación del estado: la experiencia de la Unidad Popular* (The Transformation of the State: The Popular Unity Experience), written by Alejandro Rojas in 1987 is configured under a discourse reminiscent of the Popular Unity period. This publication states that the UP was certain of the support of their own members in Parliament and those of the DC in support of the Nationalization. He writes that the National Party had no intention of appearing antipatriotic in a parliamentary debate that, according to Rojas, was resolved before it had even begun.\(^{43}\) This allowed the Nationalization to be carried out with such a degree of legitimacy that the “conspirators against Allende”, which Rojas says were already in action since the beginning of his period, found themselves with their hands tied for a long while.\(^{44}\) The memoirs of communist politician Orlando Millas, MP and minister during the UP period, published in 1997, also echo the partisan language of the UP era. In an astute observation respecting the consensus/conflict dichotomy, he states, “It is repeated, and is the accepted version, that the Nationalization had counted with the unanimous vote of the Parliament. The truth, however, differs completely from this idyllic image. There was a tough and long political and parliamentary battle”.\(^{45}\) His analysis sees the parliamentary discussion as a power struggle between the UP and the DC, a struggle where the National Party played a marginal role by constantly opposing and obstructing the initiative.\(^{46}\) In his view, the National Party, whose votes ended up being worthless, took a turn and supported the DC in their vote in favor of the project. This was with the intention of appearing closer to the DC and thus avoiding future political agreements between them and the UP.\(^{47}\) The words Millas uses in his analysis depict the survival of the language of that time period. He observes how the National Party had already been “taken overboard by fascist elements”, branding it as opportunistic and calling their representatives unscrupulous.\(^{48}\) Both Rojas and Millas can be seen as part of

\(^{43}\) Rojas. *La transformación del estado*, 136.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Millas. *Memorias*, 78.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 80-1.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
the sympathetic approach in a recent time period.

The two latest works by Fermandois that are relevant to the study of the Nationalization of copper add to his original 1985 considerations. In his *Historia política del cobre* he continues to emphasize that the opposition chose not to confront the UP in a field where it wouldn’t be able to triumph. He adds that the critiques of the opposition to the project were always indirect and relevant only to marginal aspects of it. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of this work is Fermandois’ observation that “The nationalization of June 1971 was the conclusion of a race towards the hegemony of a language that interpreted the place of countries such as Chile in the international economy in a ‘structuralist’ or ‘dependent’ manner”.

Indeed, the political language of the 1970s in Chile was the basis to describe, defend, analyze, and criticize the Nationalization. The persistence of many elements of the language of that period in recent writings about the Nationalization suggests continuities in historiographical lines when talking about it.

In *La revolución inconclusa*, Fermandois adds to his already mentioned thesis that “save for a few economists or business owners, few or none in Chile were in disagreement with the idea of the nationalization”. Those who had objections to the project, however, could not find reasons to condemn Nationalization as a whole, only addressing marginal issues related to it. When Fermandois writes about the UP discourse relating to economic liberation and popular participation that the Nationalization implied, he states that that it “was inseparable from the language of Marxism.” While he highlights the importance of the rhetoric and language of the Nationalization in the period, he also states that there is no evidence that the Nationalization affected in the electorate’s support or opposition to the UP. This represents a maturing of Fermandois’ revision. His study focuses on re-evaluating the actual influence that the Nationalization and its rhetoric had on the political support that the UP received, while at the same time presenting a nuanced

50. *Ibid.*, 120.
vision of the consensus that this event had in the country.

The Nationalization of copper is an exceptional event for a variety of reasons. It was one of the few occasions during the UP government where the governing coalition and the opposition came together for a project. At the time that it was passed, there existed a widespread conviction at a national level that something had to be done in respects to the question of copper administration. These particularities have led diverse authors to try to explain the Nationalization in regards to the amount of consensus that the Nationalization generated. Earlier writings on the Nationalization generally present partisan debates with noticeable ideological biases. Recent revisionist writings present a more nuanced view about the consensus that the Nationalization stirred up and focus instead on the rhetoric that characterized this event.

**Conclusion**

The different rhetoric strategies used to analyze, defend, attack, and judge the Nationalization often times closely align with political positions. Starting with the first partisan analyses, the present study concludes with the historical studies of Fermandois that are significant revisions to earlier lines of thought. It becomes clear that, *grosso modo*, there exist two stages in the writings about the Nationalization. The first one, between 1970 and 1973 corresponds to the struggle between two political options that appeared as possible for Chile during that period: radicalism or reaction, Marxism or liberalism. The language used to describe the Nationalization during this period is generally totalizing and partisan. Authors describe Nationalization either as a unanimous and liberating action, or as an economically disastrous and quasi-illegal move. The abrupt end of the UP project ended with the possibilities for the language of Marxism to reach a hegemonic position, but it did not signify the end of the discussion. The second period of historiography about the Nationalization leaves behind the heated polemical language that was characteristic of the 1970-1973 period, but is nonetheless highly influenced by the language and rhetoric of the UP era as a whole. During the first era, the sympathetic and conservative approaches were by far the most common. After the UP era, a revisionist critique of these approaches appeared, influenced however by the memory and politics of the
UP period and the military dictatorship.

The UP period is inseparable from the language it created. Writings about the different political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of the era echo the language and political debates of the period. However, it becomes clear that a revision of earlier forms of writing about this period is necessary in order to produce high quality analyses. In this sense, there will always be fertile ground for historical revisionism of the UP years. The pervasiveness of political conflict in all spheres of Chilean society during the time make it possible to understand the historiography of the Nationalization of copper as inserted within the general struggles of the period. Historians have found it useful to read the conflict and polarization of the period into the historiography of the different lines of study relating to the UP period. However, the most useful analyses about this topic are the ones that stay away from a partisan debate on the issue. The revisionist approach has turned out to be a refreshing and invigorating development in the field. With a clearer understanding on what has been written about the Nationalization, and how this has been written about, future authors will be able to study this topic through new and innovative lenses.
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“Citizens of California: A Senator lies dead in our midst. He is wrapped in a bloody shroud, and we to whom his toils and cares were given are about to bear him to the place appointed for all the living.” With these words, Colonel Edward D. Baker addressed the crowd who came to hear him speak in San Francisco on September 18, 1859. His speech was the final stage of a saga that climaxed several days before when a United States Senator was struck down in a duel against the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court. But the bullet that took David Broderick’s life also represented the moment in which a man became a myth. Baker’s words placed the memory of his friend into a greater context as not just a politician who served the people, but as a politician who belonged to the people. The imagery of Baker’s words was clear; Broderick’s body and memory now belonged to the people of California to carry forward.

Almost immediately after his death from the wound he received, if not from the very moment that Chief Justice David Terry’s bullet entered his chest, the story of David Broderick evolved from a political disagreement into political mythology. While the chain of events that led to the fateful duel itself were widely reported by the local San Francisco press, deeper understanding of what Broderick stood for remained clouded, and a narrative was constructed in which the California Senator became an anti-slavery martyr. But was Broderick really an anti-slavery martyr? Looking at his legislative actions, his Senate speeches, and the eulogies of his Congressional colleagues, such a claim is brought into doubt. Instead one finds that Broderick’s opposition to slavery originated in his beliefs in

free-labor and popular sovereignty. When his stance against the expansion of slavery was combined with the manner in which he died, however, the memory of David Broderick provided the perfect image for Republican Party leaders to use in the 1860 presidential election.

In the nearly one hundred and sixty years since his death, several attempts have been made by historians to develop an understanding of the man that David Broderick was. One such attempt was made by Jeremiah Lynch in his 1911 book, *A Senator of the Fifties: David C. Broderick of California*. Looking back at the histories and reminiscences that were published in the previous fifty years by California historians, Lynch sets out to correct what he felt was the faulty telling of early San Francisco history. Basing his account on surviving documents and interviews with people who had known Broderick, he comes to the conclusion that his political life in California can be seen through the lens of the greater North and South political divide that was deepening in national politics during the 1850s. Broderick, as a New York raised politician, represented the ideals and politics of Northerners, including a belief in anti-slavery. As such, every interaction he had and challenge he faced came from Southern, pro-slavery politicians. However, Lynch focuses his analysis primarily on Broderick’s political campaigns and interactions, choosing to only gloss over his legislative works.

What Lynch leaves out was picked up in detail many years later in 1969 when David Williams published his Broderick biography entitled *David C. Broderick: A Political Portrait*. While also covering his life and campaigns, the majority of Williams’s book is focused on analyzing Broderick’s political legislation and maneuvering. In doing so, he argues that Broderick was an anti-slavery crusader, as demonstrated by his battles against pro-slavery legislation at both the state and national levels. In approaching his book, Williams, like Lynch before him, believes that previous works have been inaccurate and he thus considers himself to be

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3. For an example, see Lynch, *Senator of the Fifties*, 78-79.
correcting the myths that had evolved as a result of those inaccuracies.\textsuperscript{4}

In 1994, Arthur Quinn shifted the discussion away from Broderick individually and realized that understanding him required also understanding his chief political rival, William Gwin. In his book, \textit{The Rivals: William Gwin, David Broderick, and the Birth of California}, Quinn takes a more narrative approach to telling the story and focuses on how the Broderick-Gwin political rivalry directly symbolized the national rivalry between Northern and Southern states and politicians. With so many people from all over the United States coming to California during the Gold Rush and bringing their respective regional differences with them, the debates that occurred in Sacramento directly mirrored the debates that occurred in Washington, DC. For Quinn, the battle between Broderick, the anti-slavery Northerner, and Gwin, the pro-slavery Southerner, directly foreshadowed the events of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{5} However, Quinn occasionally loses himself in his narrative and will gloss over some aspects of the history in favor of his storytelling.

Taking the work of previous authors into consideration, this paper intends to downplay the importance of Broderick’s views on slavery. Instead it places a greater emphasis on his beliefs in free labor and popular sovereignty. Furthermore, while his actions during his lifetime are important in establishing the groundwork from which to build an argument, this paper more heavily emphasizes the story of Broderick as it evolved after his death. To achieve all of these ends, this paper is divided into three parts. Part one establishes Broderick’s thoughts on slavery by focusing on his legislative actions and speeches in both the California State Legislature and the United States Senate. Part two shifts focus to the initial period after his death to examine the remarks and tributes offered by fellow legislators to demonstrate that his stance on slavery was, at the time, of minor importance to his perceived legacy. Part three concludes with how prominent Republicans took hold of Broderick’s memory during the 1860 presidential election to shape an image of him that readily fit into their


campaign against the Democratic Party.

**Slavery, Anti-Slavery, or Popular Sovereignty?**

In his early life, David Broderick was not someone who was expected to become a prominent name in California history. The son of a stonemason, he grew up on the streets of New York City after he lost both his parents and brother at a young age. In his youth, he briefly worked as a stonemason, like his father before him, before finding respect as one of the city’s leading volunteer firemen. Developing an interest in politics, he served as customhouse inspector and later a delegate to the 1846 convention that wrote a new city charter. He was also an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for the House of Representatives in 1846. With the coming of the Gold Rush, he left for California and reportedly promised several friends that “I shall never return to you, except as a Senator of the United States.”

Establishing himself prominently in San Francisco, he was elected to the California State Senate as a Democrat in 1850 and became engaged in a lengthy rivalry with the established Democratic politicians of the state, many of whom had come from the South and were collectively known as the Chivalry. This rivalry and his quick rise to prominence transformed the nature of California politics, as political party ceased being the main point of distinction and instead politicians became known as either pro-Broderick or anti-Broderick. In 1856, he fulfilled his promise to his New York friends when he was elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate. Shortly after arriving in Washington DC in 1857, he became a fierce critic of President James Buchanan over a dispute on political patronage and continued to make enemies among Southern Democratic politicians. This continuing conflict with Southern political leaders reached its ultimate climax in 1859 when he was challenged to a duel by California Supreme Court Chief Justice David Terry over public comments in which Broderick had questioned Terry’s honesty, and on September 13, Terry mortally wounded Broderick near

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Lake Merced in San Francisco.

In the story that evolved after his death, Broderick was depicted as a believer in anti-slavery, and this point must be addressed first. Certainly, given all of his political actions concerning slavery, it can be safely said that he was indeed opposed to it. During his time in the California State Senate, Broderick challenged attempts by Chivalry politicians to enact pro-slavery legislation. One such example was an attempt to pass a law that barred “Free Negroes and Persons of Color” from entering the state. A personal goal of California Governor Peter Burnett, Broderick repeatedly used political maneuvering to block the Senate from voting on the act. Having come up near the adjournment period of the legislature, these actions threatened to delay other legislation and forced the Senate to drop the bill in order to pass other laws. In 1852, Broderick launched another campaign of political maneuvering to defeat a proposal for a California Fugitive Slave Act. According to newspaper reports of the battle, several attempted amendments to the law were proposed and, at times, proceedings nearly grew violent. In one particular exchange involving Broderick himself, the debate broke down into insults as Senators attempted to prevail by painting their opponents as supporters of the most extreme sides of the slavery debate, with accusations of “abolitionism, chivalry, northern men with southern principles, and other torchwords, were thrown at each other, kindling quite a furious fire.” The debate lasted so long that at one point Senators resorted to smuggling in food, and the Lieutenant Governor’s “patience was exhausted, and he left the chair.” Despite Broderick’s efforts, the Fugitive Slave Act eventually passed.

While California provided one backdrop for his battle against

7. For an expanded biography of David Broderick, see Lynch, Senator of the Fifties and Williams, Political Portrait.


10. “Legislative Intelligence.”
slavery, it was Broderick’s fight at the national level against the Lecompton Constitution that made him nationally known. The debate centered on the admission of Kansas into the Union and whether it would be a free or a slave state. Pro-slavery supporters had held a constitutional convention in Lecompton, Kansas that produced a constitution that allowed for slavery, largely due to anti-slavery advocates boycotting the convention entirely. Despite the majority anti-slavery population of Kansas and the questionable legality of the convention, the constitution was still endorsed by President Buchanan. While most of the Democrats in the Senate fell in line with the President, Senators Stephen Douglas, Charles Stuart, and David Broderick refused to follow.\textsuperscript{11} In what was his very first speech on the Senate floor in December 1857, Broderick declared his support for the anti-slavery population of Kansas, going so far as to accuse the President of attempting to start a war, and admitting he would have supported the people of Kansas “if they had taken the delegates to the Lecompton Convention and flogged them, or cut their ears off and driven them out of the country.”\textsuperscript{12} Ultimately, Broderick promised that he would continue his opposition if the constitution ever reached the Senate for approval; he kept that promise just three months later.

For evidence of Broderick’s disdain for slavery, one just has to look at what he had to say about the Lecompton Constitution. In a speech delivered on the Senate floor on March 22, 1858, Broderick declared that “Slavery is old, decrepit [sic], and consumptive. Freedom is young, strong, and vigorous.”\textsuperscript{13} The terms he used to compare slavery to freedom cannot be more opposed in meaning to each other. In describing slavery as consumptive, he indicated a realization that the slave system was terminally ill and dying. He then turned his focus to the most important product of slave labor: cotton. Comparing California gold mining to cotton production, Broderick challenged the South

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when he declared “the single free State of California exports the product for which cotton is raised, to an amount of more than one half in value of the whole exports of the slave States. Cotton king! No sir. Gold is king.”\textsuperscript{14} Besides attacking the profitability of slave produced cotton, the real emphasis of his point was to focus on the contrast between “free” California and the “slave” South; with California and freedom far out-producing slavery. But while he opposed slavery, Broderick indicated within this same speech that this opposition was not necessarily for the benefit of slaves.

Throughout his career, Broderick’s colleagues continually noted his working class origins, and it was these origins that influenced in him a support for free labor. This was a part of his past that he even felt he needed to address in his speech against the Lecompton Constitution, especially in relation to comments earlier made against working men by Sen. James Hammond of South Carolina: “…I am the son of an artizan [sic] and have been a mechanic…If I were inclined to forget my connection with them, or to deny that I sprung from them, this chamber would not be the place in which I could do either.”\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, he credited his experiences in California, where the Gold Rush brought people of all lifestyles together to work with their hands to find gold, with helping reinforce his free labor beliefs: “I represent a State, sir, where labor is honorable; where the judge has left his bench, the lawyer and doctor their offices, and the clergyman his pulpit, for the purpose of delving in the earth; where no station is so high, and no position so great, that its occupant is not proud to boast that he has labored with his hands.”\textsuperscript{16} Broderick’s attempt to paint labor as an honorable profession was meant to undermine the Southern system of slavery. Instead of being work that was so degraded that only slaves should do it, working on the land, whether it be in agriculture or in mining, was something that could be done with dignity and honor by anyone of any class or status. Absent from his thinking were the millions of slaves who would be freed by the end of slavery. Instead, he was focused on “the free white men” who

\textsuperscript{14} Broderick, \textit{Speech}, 11.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, 13.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, 11.
would benefit as land and labor opportunities opened up across the South.\footnote{17} While opposing slavery was an aspect of Broderick’s political beliefs, there was a caveat by which Broderick was willing to overlook his opposition: popular sovereignty. In the context of the mid-nineteenth century United States, popular sovereignty was the belief that it was the people of a state themselves who should determine whether they would be a free state or a slave state. Turning back to his Lecompton speech, Broderick made his position in favor of popular sovereignty absolutely clear: “I would not oppose the admission of a State with a clause in its constitution tolerating slavery, if I were satisfied that it was the expressed wish of a majority of the people.”\footnote{18} With regards to Lecompton itself, this was exactly the reason for which he made his public stand against President Buchanan, “I cannot, as the Representative of a free people, consent by any act of mine to coerce the people of Kansas to accept a government they abhor.”\footnote{19} Regardless of how he felt about an issue like slavery, the voice of the people was what he paid attention to. Had the Lecompton Constitution been widely supported in Kansas, it is probable that Broderick would not have challenged it as strenuously as he did, and may have even fallen in line with the rest of the Democratic Party in supporting it.

In addition to using popular sovereignty as a basis to accept slavery, the concept also allowed Broderick grounds from which to oppose slavery and provides an explanation for his earlier actions against pro-slavery legislation in California. Under the California State Constitution of 1849, slavery was banned in Section 18 of Article 1: “Neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this State.”\footnote{20} While short in length, this section leaves no doubt as to its intent or possibility of a loophole. As such, it provided Broderick with justification to oppose any pro-slavery legislation using the popular sovereignty argument because it was a clause agreed upon by the delegates

\footnote{17. Broderick, \textit{Speech}, 11.}
\footnote{18. \textit{Ibid.}, 15.}
\footnote{19. \textit{Ibid.}, 14.}
who wrote it and approved by the people of California. This very point was one of his primary arguments against the California Fugitive Slave Act in 1852. It was also part of his argument against Lecompton:

The necessity for some form of government compelled the people of California to frame a constitution which, in obedience to the doctrine of popular sovereignty, was submitted to the people, and adopted with a clause prohibiting slavery. There were but about five hundred votes against the adoption of this constitution. This small opposition did not arise because of the anti-slavery clause, but because many of the people believed that the time had not arrived for the formation of a State government.

Thus, while Broderick was certainly against slavery in principle, his views were more guided by his belief in free labor, and he was open to allowing slavery if the majority of a state’s population wanted it. Calling him an anti-slavery crusader would therefore be inaccurate.

**CREATING A POSTHUMOUS LEGACY**

Following the death of David Broderick, his friends and political colleagues quickly moved to position themselves as being responsible for constructing his political legacy. In doing so, they started a process of heaping excessive amounts of praise upon his memory. Focus was placed on his character and political skills, but largely absent was any discussion about his political leanings or his stance on slavery. If Broderick the anti-slavery martyr was an accurate representation of his politics, it stands to reason that it would be the image his colleagues and friends would have singled out after his death. Instead, it was rarely even touched on. This does not mean that his colleagues did not participate in the creation of a mythical Broderick, however, as their words still constructed a legacy that had the effect of positioning him as one of his country’s greatest political leaders.

Broderick’s legacy starts to be constructed as early as the eulogy given by Colonel Edward Baker during Broderick’s funeral on September 18, 1859. As a Republican, Baker’s goal in the speech was to paint Broderick

21. “Legislative Intelligence.”
as a tragic figure who died standing up against a corrupt government under the control of the Democratic Party. After a brief biography of Broderick’s life, he reached out to public sympathy by highlighting how his opponents had attacked him: “Fellow-citizens, the man who lies before you was your Senator. From the moment of his election, his character has been maligned, his motives attacked, his courage impeached, his patriotism assailed.”

He then turned his attention to President Buchanan and his administration, suggesting that Broderick’s “death was a political necessity, poorly veiled under the guise of a private quarrel” and “was the consequence of intense political hatred.” He further backed up his claims by channeling Broderick himself with his alleged last words: “They have killed me because I was opposed to the extension of slavery and a corrupt Administration.” It was these alleged final words that myth seized upon, and they subsequently became a mainstay in virtually all future works published on Broderick. Interestingly, Baker does not spend any further time discussing slavery or Broderick’s stance on it. Instead, he confines himself only to the Lecompton Constitution and corrupt politics. But what Baker does effectively do in his speech is paint Broderick as a heroic crusader who made a stand against the President of the United States and paid for it with his life.

While Baker’s eulogy glorified Broderick, it was minor in comparison to the series of remarks made in Congress five months later. On February 13, 1860, Senator Henry Haun, a Southern ally and the appointed interim replacement for Broderick, formally announced Broderick’s death to the United States Senate and introduced a resolution calling for all members of Congress to wear a black mourning band on their arm for thirty days

27. Baker himself also became a mythic figure for the United States. Elected to the United States Senate to represent Oregon, he was killed in action early in the Civil War while leading the 71st Pennsylvania Infantry at the Battle of Balls Bluff. Richards, *California Gold Rush*, 233-234.
in his memory. After passing the Senate, the resolutions were then read to the House of Representatives for similar approval. Like all measures placed before Congress, the resolutions were subject to debate and fourteen members, seven from each chamber, spoke. Interestingly, the two houses of Congress went in largely different directions in what they had to say.

The debate that occurred in the Senate is notable for its lack of focus. While most of the speakers did offer praise for Broderick’s character, there was little comment on his political stances or on legislation. Absent is any mention of slavery. Instead, the Senate became distracted by a different topic: public dueling. Haun was the first to introduce dueling into the remarks, claiming Broderick had “fallen in an unfortunate conflict, which was engendered by the use of unguarded expressions by the deceased, personal in their character, toward another distinguished gentleman.” Haun’s words projected an accusatory tone that placed blame for Broderick’s death solely at the feet of Broderick himself. This was followed by Senator Lafayette Foster of Connecticut, who devoted the majority of his remarks to refusing to support the resolutions on the grounds that he could not, in good conscience, honor someone who violated state laws by participating in a public duel.

But Foster’s remarks sparked a surprising response in Broderick’s defense from an unlikely source: Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia. Toombs not only came to the defense of dueling, but also spoke highly of Broderick himself, stating “I found him bold, honorable, truthful, attached to the interests of his country . . . I trusted him as a faithful, an


30. The speakers from the Senate were Henry Haun from California, John Crittenden from Kentucky, William Seward from New York, Lafayette Foster from Connecticut, Solomon Foot from Vermont, Benjamin Wade from Ohio, and Robert Toombs from Georgia. From the House of Representatives were John Burch from California, John Haskin from New York, John Hickman from Pennsylvania, Lansing Stout from Oregon, Anson Burlingame from Massachusetts, Isaac Morris from Illinois, and Daniel Sickles from New York.


32. Under Section 2, Article XI of the 1849 California state constitution, it was illegal for any serving politician in the state to participate in a public duel while holding office. California Secretary of State, “California Constitution.”

33. United States Congress, Remarks, 4-5.
honest, an upright, a fearless Senator.”

Toombs was a Southern politician and would serve as the first Secretary of State of the Confederate government; yet one year before the South seceded from the Union, he praised a man who would be attached to the anti-slavery cause. A plausible explanation for Toombs’ praise, however, may lie in the fact that Broderick died in a duel, which Toombs himself described favorably when he said “I think no man under any circumstances can have a more honorable death than to fall in the vindication of honor.”

Broderick’s death in a duel was certainly something positive for Toombs to acknowledge, regardless of the positions he took on other issues. Were it not for Foster’s remarks against public dueling, Toombs may not have spoken at all.

Despite the impromptu debate on public dueling, Senator William Seward of New York, a Republican and later Secretary of State under President Abraham Lincoln, did offer words of praise which had the apparent goal of placing Broderick among the great political founders of American states. In the words of Seward:

He who shall write its history will find materials copious and fruitful of influence upon the integrity of the American Union and the destiny of the American people. He will altogether fail, however, if he do not succeed in raising Houston, and Rusk, and Broderick to the rank among organizers of our States, which the world has assigned to Winthrop, and Villiers, and Raleigh, and Penn, Baltimore, and Oglethorpe…

He later compares Broderick to Alexander Hamilton, “a statesman, who, though he fell too soon for a nation’s hopes, yet . . . left behind him noble monuments well and completely finished.”

The “noble monument” that Broderick created was the state of California: “…we saw that State rise up before us in just proportions, firm, vigorous, strong, and free, complete in the fullest material and moral sufficiency, and at the same time, loyal and

34. United States Congress, Remarks, 5.

35. This is a question that Williams also ponders, but he does not speculate on a reason for it. Williams, Political Portrait, 250.

36. Quinn, The Rivals, 211, 285


faithful to the Federal Union. The hand that principally shaped it was that of David C. Broderick.\textsuperscript{39} Once again absent from the discussion is any mention of Broderick’s political stances or slavery. While Seward provided the most praiseworthy remarks to come out of the Senate, his words only foreshadowed what would come from the House of Representatives.

The speakers from the House of Representatives were largely made up of Broderick’s friends, and not only were they positive in regards to his character, many crossed entirely into mythmaking. Of all the speakers, none provided a grander example than Isaac Morris. In his speech, Morris demonstrated he had a clear goal to place Broderick upon a pedestal. Comparing his fate to that of Julius Caesar, Morris described Broderick as a hunted “noble martyr who fell victim for his devotion to the great principle of popular liberty, and his love of truth.”\textsuperscript{40} Again, Broderick is portrayed as the victim of a corrupt government who saw that they could not get him to bend to their will. Besides extolling the virtues of his noble life, Morris went further to predict immortality: “Go student of American statesmanship, and look over the bright galaxy of names which adorn the pages of your country’s history; and when you come to that of the stone mason’s son, learn from him how to model your own character.”\textsuperscript{41} He further predicted that visitors to the Senate chamber long into the future would not ask “who fills the chair at present? But, where did Broderick sit?”\textsuperscript{42} What can be deduced here is that Morris was willing to go as far as to say prominent Senators of the past, present, and even future were eclipsed by the statesmanship of David Broderick.

While it can be expected that individual members of Congress would offer praise in their official remarks on the sudden and violent death of one of their colleagues, the excessive amount of it was recognizable even in 1860, and the \textit{New York Times} immediately called them out on it. Of the House, the \textit{Times} felt that “the sole efforts of his eulogists seemed to heap up epithets and phrases of applause” and pointed out that “neither [Henry]

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} United States Congress, \textit{Remarks}, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 15.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 14.
\end{itemize}
Clay, [Daniel] Webster nor [John C.] Calhoun were eulogized so highly when they died.” The editors clearly recognized that these remarks were highly distorted. Most telling was their assessment that Broderick, as a first term Senator with only two years of national service, had received praise worthy of long-serving and prestigious senators. Characterizing him simply as one of the “roughs” who used muscle to intimidate and strong arm to get votes, the Times succinctly declared that “no one has a right to magnify his virtues so as to conceal his faults.” While they did not probe any further or propose an explanation, the editors had easily realized that Broderick was being purposely glorified. In the months that followed, the magnifying of his virtues that the Times warned about only increased as Americans became focused on that year’s presidential election.

**To Be a Republican or a Republican Hero?**

Despite several Republicans being vocal in their eulogies, Broderick himself was cognizant of the fact that his political stance against slavery and the Lecompton Constitution could bring charges of being a Republican himself, and it was something that he tried to avoid. In a state heavily dominated by Southern Democrats, being a Republican in California advocating for abolition was a difficult route to take politically. Thus during the Lecompton Constitution debates, he frequently made statements disavowing membership of that party. In his very first speech in the Senate, Broderick declared “I am not like a great many other gentlemen on this floor, even tainted with Free-Soilism or Republicanism.”

He further felt the need to state, “my most bitter and malignant opponents in the State which I have now the honor in part to represent, belong to the Republican Party.”

In his first appearance on the national stage, this strong disassociation makes it clear how detrimental he felt that being labeled a Republican could

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44. See Richards, *Gold Rush*, 173-175 for a brief account of the lack of success of California Republicans in state politics during this time period.


be to his career. Just his use of the word “taint” expresses the negative connotation he felt it contained. Despite his avoidance of it, accusations of being a Republican were still tossed at him during his lifetime. The *Red Bluff Beacon*, which regularly demonstrated anti-Broderick feelings, went as far as to routinely label him and his political followers as Republicans and charged him with attempting to oppose Democratic Party positions.47

In death, however, Republicans, such as Baker and Seward, were among the first to praise and mythologize him. Had his death occurred at any other time, it would have been unlikely that anything further would have come from it. A northern politician being killed in a duel with a southern politician was nothing new in California history. On September 21, 1858, almost one year before Broderick’s death, State Senator William Ferguson, a close friend and ally of Broderick, was killed in a duel with George P. Johnson.48 Broderick’s death was different in that it brought together three key aspects. First, as has been previously demonstrated, he did have a tendency towards anti-slavery. Second, his death also occurred when tensions between Northern and Southern interests were increasing, and it certainly helped that he was a Northerner who died at the hands of a Southerner. Most importantly, however, it was the fact he was in the midst of a conflict with his own party that provided the spark that allowed for the myth to be constructed. Broderick’s friends wanted revenge. At the same time, Republicans and anti-slavery advocates recognized the political value his image now held and were willing to use it to their own advantage.

Of those Republicans, few went as far as Cincinnati lawyer Walter Sherwin, who in 1860 published his own tribute to Broderick’s memory.49 Claiming that he had been urged to do so by Broderick’s friends, Sherwin wrote an almost entirely fictionalized account depicting the late Senator as an anti-slavery hero who believed in the cause from the time he was an infant. According to Sherwin, the infant Broderick was brought by


his parents to the Senate chamber where the passing of the Missouri Compromise “was the first debate that ever fell upon [his] ear; the first vote in Congress [he] ever witnessed”\(^{50}\) and that it was a promise to his mother to prevent the future expansion of slavery that led him towards anti-slavery. Furthermore, according to Sherwin, this promise continued to be felt throughout Broderick’s later political career and made him one of the few honest men willing to take on a corrupt administration.

While placing Broderick in the anti-slavery camp was one aspect of Sherwin’s goal, another was to portray the Democratic Party and President Buchanan in a negative light. Once again, the alleged last words of Broderick made an appearance in connection to the reasons for his death.\(^{51}\) Unlike Baker’s eulogy, however, Sherwin took it a step further by openly accusing the Buchanan administration of murder. Sherwin described David Terry and the other California Southerners as “a combination of assassins, composed of men who are wedded to slavery” and who were acting under the promise of a reward from the president.\(^{52}\) As proof, he cited that Calhoun Benham, who had been part of the duel as one of Terry’s seconds, was afterwards appointed District Attorney of California. But his charge was not without its issues, namely in his portrayal of Terry as an expert duelist and Broderick as inexperienced with a gun. In fact, the opposite was true as Broderick had participated in duels before.\(^{53}\) Despite the fantastic nature of his account, Sherwin still got his message across that Democrats, and especially the president, were at fault for Broderick’s death.

Another Republican to charge President Buchanan with murder was newspaper editor John Forney. A former Democrat from Pennsylvania, Forney had once been close friends with Buchanan, but the relationship between the two men dissolved over the Lecompton Constitution. He then became a close friend of Broderick and Stephen Douglas, and for a time was

\(^{50}\) Sherwin, *Tribute*, 8.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 17.

a member of the Republican Party.\textsuperscript{54} In his reminiscences published in 1873, he recalled the last time that he had spoken with Broderick. During that alleged meeting in April 1859, Broderick indicated that he knew his death was imminent and as they parted ways, he told Forney: “You will live to write of me and to keep my memory green; and now good-by forever.”\textsuperscript{55} In making this statement, Forney claimed for himself the anointed responsibility of keeping Broderick’s memory alive. Part of that responsibility was to point the finger at those whom he felt to be responsible for Broderick’s death, and it was evident that the person he blamed was Buchanan himself. In an editorial published shortly after Broderick’s death, Forney declared: “Thus has fallen the first great martyr to the political principles of the campaign of 1856! We ask the arch-traitor to those principles, if, in his old age, and in the sunset of his life, he can feel that his hands are clear of the heart’s blood of Da\textsuperscript{2}vid C. Broderick?”\textsuperscript{56} The traitor of whom he spoke was Buchanan, and the charge that Broderick’s death was on his hands quickly sparked a response from the president himself, who threatened to file a libel suit against his former friend.\textsuperscript{57} Forney’s opinions about the responsibility for Broderick’s death did not change with the passage of time and his 1873 reminiscences still attributed it to Southern “traitors.”\textsuperscript{58} However, Forney also hinted at what Broderick’s death meant politically to the Republicans when he stated that Broderick’s blood served as “the seed of the redemption of California.”\textsuperscript{59} That redemption was the 1860 presidential election.

With the 1860 election, Republicans found a purpose for the memory of Broderick: promoting the election of their candidate, Abraham Lincoln, for president. As historian Theodore Hittell carefully broke down in his \textit{History of California} only thirty years later, Broderick’s death was so recent


\textsuperscript{57} “Buchanan vs. Forney.”

\textsuperscript{58} Forney, \textit{Anecdotes}, 28.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
in memory at the time of the election campaign, and so closely associated as being at the hands of the Southern Democrats, that “his spirit was alive and worked greater wonders than he himself could have worked if he had lived.” Among the Republicans who channeled Broderick’s memory was Pennsylvania Congressman John Hickman, who, on July 24, 1860, gave a speech in Philadelphia that attacked Democratic presidential candidate Stephen Douglas. In it he accused Douglas of abandoning Broderick during his last unsuccessful campaign against the California Chivalry in 1859. He described the fallen Senator as “that boldest, and truest, and greatest, of all the warriors in the battle for the right” and called for the audience to “Inscribe the name Broderick in fiery characters upon your banners - he was your champion - and you at least can afford to do him justice.” That justice he referred to was voting for Abraham Lincoln.

The most conclusive evidence of Republicans openly using Broderick for their own cause was not what they said about him, but what was illustrated. At the Republican National Convention in Chicago, an unlikely portrait appeared among those of other prominent politicians displayed upon the speaker’s platform. The portrait was of David Broderick and below it were the alleged last words that Baker and Sherwin both prominently recalled. While one can debate the connection that Republicans had with Broderick by just examining the words of prominent Republicans themselves, it is difficult to deny that they used Broderick’s image and death for their campaign purposes by including him and his last words at their


national convention. Having prominently spoken out against the expansion of slavery and using his last words to vilify the Buchanan administration for his death, Broderick presented the perfect campaign figure Republicans could easily use to their advantage.

Senator David Broderick is a figure who has been remembered as a martyr who fought and died for the cause of anti-slavery. While he was indeed opposed to slavery, it was rooted in his belief in free labor. Furthermore, he was a strong believer in popular sovereignty, which allowed him the freedom to shift between accepting or attacking pro-slavery legislation depending on the political situation that he faced. Tellingly, when one examines the tributes that were offered by his colleagues in Congress, the very people who would know best his political beliefs, not one of them made any significant comment on his anti-slavery convictions. While not exactly a crusader then, his anti-slavery stance still provided enough groundwork to construct an image to serve a purpose. For Republicans, this meant using him as part of their campaign strategy to discredit the Democratic Party and win the presidency in 1860. The man who most benefited from the mythmaking surrounding David Broderick, then, was the winner of that presidential election, Abraham Lincoln. Broderick’s long rivalry with the Southern Democrats, and ultimately his death, thus can be seen as just one of many stepping stones that cumulatively led the United States towards the Civil War.
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“It’s Not Even About the Booze!”
Politics, Prohibition, and the Mullan-Gage Law

Elizabeth J. Beutel

Alcohol consumption defined American culture in the 1920s. Hyped up in popular media, the iconic image of the era involves drinking and dancing in a smoky speakeasy well past midnight. This image becomes ironic, of course, given that the sale, manufacture, distribution, and transportation of alcohol were illegal.¹ Many people felt the federal government needed to put an end to the rampant drunkenness of the 19th century, as many Americans did not have the ‘willpower’ to stop drinking on their own. The 18th Amendment to the United States, as well its corresponding enforcement law known as the Volstead Act, tried to limit access to alcohol, and thereby reduce alcohol consumption. In addition to the federal law, the New York State legislature passed a law known as the Mullan-Gage Act in an attempt to provide a means to enforce the new Prohibition laws. However, the new enforcement law fixed none of the problems in the Volstead Act, rather, it restated the federal law almost word for word, and made a violation both a state and federal crime. Technically the combination of three different bills, the Mullan-Gage law came to be known by the state of New York as “little Volstead.”² It completely failed, and was repealed in 1923, just two years after it was passed. Mullan-Gage was attributed to the “Dry” forces, the side of the argument in favor of prohibition, and further alienated moderates to create a partisan issue, where a person was either Dry or “Wet,” against the prohibition of alcohol. The Mullan-Gage law was not a practical law, but

² Daniel Okrent, Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition (New York: Schribner, 2010), 242.
rather an exercise of the political power of the Dry forces.

The illegal liquor trade in New York City was infamous for its disregard of the 18th Amendment, and speakeasies flourished in this era. The exact number of speakeasies is not known, but the police commissioner estimated the city had “thirty-two thousand illegal drinking spots,” all of which sold alcohol. The Mullan-Gage law was passed after the enactment of the Volstead act, as a way to aid in the enforcement to the national law. However, in reality, it just doubled the punishment, as the New York Times pointed out.

The Mullan-Gage law was not needed to make unlawful the manufacture, transportation, or sale of intoxicating liquors for beverage purposes. The Volstead law already had made that a criminal offense against the United States. The Mullan-Gage law merely made the same act a separate offense against the State of New York and thus enabled the Federal Government to secure a double punishment “for the same acts.”

The only additional provision the Mullan-Gage law included that was not part of the Volstead Act was that carrying a hip flask in New York was the “equivalent of carrying an unlicensed handgun”. It is unusual, then, that the State of New York would pass this law after the passage of the national law. William Anderson, leader of the Anti-Saloon League, praised the law for allowing the local police forces to assist the severely understaffed and heavily corrupt Prohibition Agency. Trying to enforce Prohibition in New York had been considered a “colossal failure”. An effective enforcement law would have done more than double the punishment and make another less significant activity illegal. Mullan-Gage was widely regarded as a

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disaster, being called impossible to enforce and an affront to American liberty. It is only right to assume then, that there were other motivations to pass the Mullan-Gage law besides modifications and improvements of the Volstead Act.

The Mullan-Gage law increased the workload of the New York Police Department and other law enforcement officials in a few ways. The most significant aspect of the Mullan-Gage Law was it required NYPD and other law enforcement offices to participate in the enforcement of Prohibition. However, another important aspect of the law would prove to be a nuisance for both police and the justice system. Due to a section that made carrying alcohol on one’s person illegal, even holding legally obtained alcohol was prosecuted. It was later considered unconstitutional, but for a while, it made arrests more common than ever. Women were now being arrested more frequently, as they would blatantly disobey the law with the rising flapper culture. Little sympathy was offered to those who were found in violation of the law. Whereas the Volstead Act permitted the brewing of beers, wines, and spirits for home consumption, under Mullan-Gage, possessing alcohol without a permit could land a person in jail, as was the case of a druggist who could not prove he obtained the alcohol legally by home brewing, overlooking the fact that he was arrested in the hospital with severe burns after his still exploded, injuring him and killing one of his sons. The New York courts became so overwhelmed with violations of the 18th Amendment, that the judges in the Southern District were expected to see an annual amount of 50,000 cases, even though they could realistically only see 4000 a year. The absurdity of the Mullan-Gage Act adding this provision made enforcement much more difficult, and arrests much more common. The law was badly constructed, and, in the end, did nothing. Out of the thousands and thousands of arrests, “not even one jail sentence”

8. Fox, “PROHIBITION STILL THE LAW.
9. Lerner, Dry Manhattan, 76, 173.
11. Okrent, Last Call, 254.
was issued, only further highlighting the problems with enforcement of prohibition.\textsuperscript{12}

There was not a large public outcry for further legal action for the Dry cause. In fact, the law was predominately despised by the public, and many attacked the police in response to the law, including an incident of a woman “[swinging] a bottle of liquor precariously near [a] patrolman’s head.”\textsuperscript{13} The main driving forces pushing for a state level enforcement law were Dry lobbying groups. New York had not been kind to the lobbying groups, such as the Anti Saloon League. The league had tried to set up a division earlier in the century, with little success.\textsuperscript{14} The State was notoriously Wet and corrupt, with Tammany Hall controlling the politics of the state. The partisan politics that influenced the passage of the law shall be reviewed in greater depth later, but in New York City itself, Tammany Hall was able to prevent the funding of prohibition enforcement, with little complaint. A large part of the NYPD was Irish Catholic, an ethnic and religious group that very often voted Wet. They did not want to follow the law, and most often ignored any violation of the Volstead Act.\textsuperscript{15} Tammany Hall had a large grip on the politics of New York, and when it came to the Prohibition debate, citizens did not complain. The Anti-Saloon League faced an uphill battle, without public support, to push Mullan-Gage through.

The Anti-Saloon League had defined itself as a single-issue organization, “intimidating” politicians into voting for Prohibition. It had used this tactic at its inception, and proved very effective.\textsuperscript{16} By focusing on being a single issue-lobbying agency, it shaped the prohibition debate, swaying voters to the Dry cause on a platform of moral reform, and ousting Wet politicians for lawmakers more sympathetic to the Dry cause. One of

\begin{itemize}
\item[12.] Okrent, \textit{Last Call}, 254.
\item[13.] “DRY CHIEF FEARS STATE LAW REPEAL: Yellowley Says Such Action Would Be Serious Blow at Enforcement. CANCEL 8 LIQUOR PERMITS Six Retail Druggists, One Wholesale Firm and a Truckman Are Punished. WOMAN DECORATOR HELD Patrolman Says She Waved Bottleat His Head in Cabaret--Case Goes to Grand Jury.” New York Times, November 15, 1922.
\item[15.] Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, 74.
\item[16.] Okrent, \textit{Last Call}, 36.
\end{itemize}
their tactics in their efforts to gain political power was the usage of rhetoric in political cartoons, telling voters to vote Dry, and thereby threaten the position of an incumbent Wet. Ohio was one of their first battlegrounds, and the fight for Dry politicians in the state made the League grow to national prominence. The Anti-Saloon League proved this method, among others, worked extremely well, turning all but one state politician to the dry cause.\textsuperscript{17} This campaigning and lobbying effort was employed with the push for the Mullan-Gage law as well. Most notably, William Anderson, the representative for the Anti-Saloon League in New York, had a huge influence on the political atmosphere in Albany, respected among Dry forces for his “administration and public relations abilities.”\textsuperscript{18} He used tactics such as writing the \textit{New York Times} calling for the enforcement of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Amendment to fall in the hands of local officials, as well as the Prohibition Agents.\textsuperscript{19} His influence in Albany might have been appreciated, but his reputation among the common New York citizen was not favorable. After Mullan-Gage was repealed, a letter to the editor of the \textit{New York Times} said “[The citizens of New York] have grown very tired of this man Anderson, whose intemperance of speech is as nauseous as intemperance in drink.”\textsuperscript{20} Since there was such strong dislike of Anderson among the people, the only way he was able to gain any ground with moving the bill forward was through influencing the politicians in Albany. He utilized a Dry Republican majority from the more conservative, more prohibition friendly rural New York counties to push through the Mullan-Gage Act.\textsuperscript{21} It was typical of how the Anti-Saloon League worked, as the same methods were used to push the 18\textsuperscript{th} Amendment through Congress.

The Federal Prohibition Agency did not aid the cause well enough to Anderson’s liking, which was most likely his true motive as to why he wished the Mullan-Gage law to be enacted in the first place. With thousands

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  \item 18. Okrent, \textit{Last Call}, 122.
  \item 21. Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, 77.
\end{itemize}
of illegal speakeasies in New York City alone, it was impossible for the 300 agents to control all the illegal activity in the state of New York.\textsuperscript{22} It did not help that the agents were untrained and corrupt, often taking the illegal liquor and selling it to make a profit.\textsuperscript{23} Anderson was disgusted by this, and wanted the state police to enforce the Federal law. When they did not, he felt it “undermined all that the Anti-Saloon League had worked for.”\textsuperscript{24} A state level law ensured that the state police had to enforce prohibition. It was the legal obligation he needed to gain success. He swayed the more sympathetic counties and lawmakers, under-representing the Wet populations of the cities. This created a polarized argument, wherein it appeared that more counties, and people, favored Prohibition, when in reality, they did not.\textsuperscript{25} The newspapers outside of the large cities support the law, but newspapers in New York City, such as the \textit{New York Evening Post} and the \textit{New York Times} all criticized the law. These newspapers represented a larger population of people, but Anderson utilized an unfair system to push through his methods to get the results he desired.\textsuperscript{26}

Prohibition did not start out as a partisan issue. In the earlier days of the movement, lobbying agencies approached both Republicans and Democrats for support. Some other temperance organizations chose to not take a political side. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union had no mechanism in place for effective lobbying.\textsuperscript{27} However, temperance split individual political parties. The Republicans were divided on the issue, and the split had bearing on how the party would continue.\textsuperscript{28} As more Prohibition lobbying agencies appeared, it became clear that Republicans

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\item \textsuperscript{22} “THE GOVERNMENT FAILS” (The Chicago Defender: Aug 06, 1927).
\item \textsuperscript{23} Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}., 77.; and “ENFORCING PROHIBITION” (New York Times, October 4, 1932).
\item \textsuperscript{27} Kerr, \textit{Organized for Prohibition}, 50.
\item \textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, 44.
\end{enumerate}
were more likely to be Dry, and Democrats were more likely to be Wet. Anderson worked with Republicans against Tammany Hall in 1917 to win over New York as a Dry state. The Progressive corrupt political machine had a vice grip on New York City politics, as well as in the saloon. Tammany Hall would often make deals with saloons in the city, using them as meeting places, paying criminals in whiskey to cast multiple ballots on Election Day, and give the politicians money to pay any political favors. The corruption was so widely known and associated with saloons, that Anderson and the Anti-Saloon League created a slogan of “If we wish to purify politics, the saloon must be destroyed.” Anderson would later call upon the contempt of Tammany Hall again to help gain support from the public for Mullan-Gage. By 1921, however, the issue of alcohol would clearly divide Republicans and Democrats.

The party lines were so well defined that any sort of bipartisan decision on prohibition was news worthy, as an article about the Mullan-Gage law repeal reveals. It specifically points out the odd politicians out during the vote.

Steinberg, Jesse, Kaufmann, and Ullman of New York; Ricca of Kings, Seelback of Erie and Murphy and Griffith of Monroe, Republicans, voted with the Democrats, who presented practically a united front for the repeal bill, in favor of that measure. The only New York City Republican whose vote was cast with the drys was Assembly man Clayton of Kings, author of the Motion Picture Censorship bill. Kahler of Chemung and Livingston of Columbia, Democrats, voted with the large majority of Republicans against reporting the repeal bills.

Anderson used the party divide between Republicans and Democrats to push through Mullan-Gage, as the Republicans had the majority at the State level. Of course, the reason he had the support of the Republican Majority was the lobbying and threatening tactics commonly used by the Anti-Saloon

29. Kerr, Organized for Prohibition, 147.
30. Lerner, Dry Manhattan, 24.
League to influence politics in their direction. Edmund B. Jenkins of the New York State Assembly was a well-known sponsor of Dry enforcement, and was directly equated with laws proposed in the Assembly by the New York Anti-Saloon League.\footnote{Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, 27.} He kept his influence well after Mullan-Gage was repealed, continuing to propose Prohibition enforcement laws into the 1930s. He is a prime example of how Anderson influenced Albany. Anderson pushed for political figures to be on his side, or he would ruin their reputation. In 1917, he was called into a hearing for a number of state laws, and was accused of “maligning the character of state legislators with unsubstantiated rumors of corruption.”\footnote{Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, 27.} Instead of refuting these claims, he refused to produce evidence of his claims and took an affront to his pride, rather than admitting he was lying. By accusing the Democrats of being “hopelessly under the influence of Tammany Hall,” he was able to turn the public eye against the political party.\footnote{Kerr, \textit{Organized for Prohibition}, 147.} He did not even try to negotiate with the Democrats, as not a single Democrat in the state Assembly voted in favor of enacting the Mullan-Gage law.\footnote{“ASSEMBLY PASSES ENFORCEMENT ACTS: Votes, 81 to 62, to Put State Police Power Behind the Volstead Law. Backs Miller’s Policy. Opposed by Democrats.” (New York Times, March 17, 1921).} The influence of the Anti-Saloon League was so powerful that when Mullan-Gage was repealed, Governor Al Smith hesitated to sign the repeal into law, despite the fact that he was an outspoken Wet. He feared that signing the repeal would “damage his national political standing and fragment the Democratic Party.”\footnote{Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, 93.} He was conflicted about various sources telling him to sign or to not sign, including the Anti-Saloon League and Tammany Hall Leader Charles Murphy. The fear that Smith and other politicians had was not unfounded, as Anderson led a fierce political campaign for the Mullan-Gage law and against its repeal. Democrats and Republicans became deeply divided on the issue of alcohol, even though...
taking a firm stance could mean political suicide.

The polarized debate on Prohibition allowed Anderson to utilize another aspect of political power. Although the bootlegging was everywhere in the state, New York City contained a majority of the offenders. This is because New York City contained larger populations of minorities, and there was a deep-seated xenophobia that influenced the vote of the established white, protestant population. Irish Catholics were a large number of the immigrant population, and were predominantly Wet. Anderson attacked the ethnic group for their drinking habits, utilizing their underrepresentation in the State Assembly against them, as well as effectively turning the Dries against the whole population. He claimed they “neither understood nor respected American society,” thereby implying that drinking went against what it meant to be an American. Many established Evangelical Christians took to this rhetoric, as is evidenced by the newspapers in the rural parts of New York, where the Evangelical Christians tended to be more concentrated. Newspapers claimed that repealing Mullan-Gage was the “cause for the most profound concern on the part of every decent citizen” and that “it is incredible that the great majority of the people in the Empire State will subscribe to a partnership with bootleggers.” The idea that alcohol determined status as a citizen was not new, as it was expressed in World War I, when the Anti-Saloon League attacked German breweries, capitalizing on anti-German sentiment to push their agenda. Clarence Darrow, a predominate lawyer from Chicago, addressed the narrow minded view of the Evangelical Christian population, saying that Prohibition was a product of “the zeal and bigotry of religious leaders,” and that “the ignorant and bigoted have been willing to inflict any penalties upon any person who dared to interfere with

37. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, 204.
38. Ibid., 123.
their mode of thought and life.”

No matter how many people called out the hypocrisy of the law, however, it is true that the rural counties of New York had more representation in the State assembly. Anderson was able to use that majority to push through his state level enforcement law.

This is not to say that William Anderson was the only person on the Dry side wanting larger enforcement of Prohibition. Well before the Anti-Saloon League formed, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union called for temperance, organizing women into one of the first large scale women’s activist organizations. Often seen as the moral crusaders of society, women were, for many years, the face of Temperance and Prohibition, such as Carrie Nation and her saloon smashing hatchet and carpet bag of rocks. There was a strong push in the 1800s for women to preserve their families from the evils of alcoholism that could so horrifically afflict husbands and sons. Domestic violence, financial instability, and property management were all discussed in the question of alcohol, and it became the duty of the woman to preserve the family unit from the scourge of alcohol. While a noble view, this idea of women as the keepers of morality in the house did not hold into the 1920s. The decade brought along a new culture for young women, known as the flapper culture. One of the aspects of the flapper life was that young women drank alcohol, in direct contrast to the idea that intoxicating beverages were only drinks for men. Despite the many women spending their time in speakeasies and drinking cocktails, there was a push from the older generation of moral reformers to better enforce stopping the liquor trade. Organizations such as the New York State League of Women Voters called for political action. The leader, Mrs. F. Louis Slade, called for those in favor of prohibition to “write to the Governor or to attend in person the hearing to be held by him. The same league continued their political

41. “WHEELER CLASHES WITH DARROW HERE IN DRY LAW DEBATE: Darrow Speaks for Freedom, Saying Prohibition Makes This a Land of Spies. CALLS MEASURE BIGOTED Anti-Saloon League Head Says Law Is Will of Majority and Demands Obedience. 2,500 HEAR ARGUMENTS Wets, Predominating, Cheer Darrow and Hiss Opponent -- Walker Welcomes the Debaters. Darrow Calls Dry Law Tyrannical; Wheeler Defends It as Will of Majority” (New York Times, April 24, 1927).

42. Kerr, Organized for Prohibition, 45.
43. Okrent, Last Call, 15.
44. Lerner, Dry Manhattan, 176.
action by backing another Prohibition law in 1929, as a replacement for the Mullan-Gage law.\footnote{Okrent, \textit{Last Call}, 224.} It is not until well after Mullan-Gage, however that women take a political stance against Prohibition, most notably with Pauline Sabin, a former member of the Republican National Committee who became disgusted with the hypocrisy of those who voted Dry and then drank anyway.\footnote{“MRS. SABIN BRANDS DRY LAW A MENACE: Republican Committee Member Says She Has Changed Her Mind on Prohibition. URGES WOMEN TO ORGANIZE They Can Do More to Bring Repeal Than Men, She Declares--Finds Disrespect for Law Rife.” (New York Times, June 8, 1928).} She claimed the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and other temperance groups only were successful because they had “tremendous publicity.”\footnote{Lawrence S. Ritter, \textit{The Glory of Their Times; the Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It} (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 192.} Her criticism of the political influence of the Dry side is an influence that dates back well before the call to repeal any Dry laws. The collective effort of Dry women to gain the female vote against liquor assisted the male dominated organizations in the passage of Mullan-Gage.

It is clear that Mullan-Gage was the project of a very vocal few. Most average New York citizens either did not care, or openly broke the law. By making alcohol difficult to obtain, more people wanted the drink. Hans Lobert, former infielder for the New York Giants, expressed how well Prohibition worked in preventing the American public from getting alcohol.

[The other baseball players] were pretty tough. They were beer drinkers. They never drank hard liquor. After the game we’d go and have a couple of glasses of beer. Very few drank anything else. It wasn’t until prohibition came in, years later, that there was very much drinking besides a beer or two. There was lots more drinking \textit{during} prohibition than before or since.\footnote{“WOMEN VOTERS JOIN DRYS FOR STATE LAW,” (New York Times, November 16, 1929).}

Prohibition was ineffective, to say the least. The New York State representative to Congress called any sort of Prohibition “repugnant to the essence of democracy” while both the Volstead Act and the Mullan-
Gage laws were still in effect in his home state. With so many people from different walks of life denouncing the law as useless, the passage of Prohibition Laws like Mullan-Gage show the discrepancies of the American political system. It took only a few people, and in the case of Mullan-Gage, the larger efforts of predominantly one man, to influence politicians away from what the majority of the American people wanted. Instead, Anderson and a select other few used bribery, threats, lobbying, and xenophobia to scare politicians into passing a pointless law. If they did not have influence on politics, then it is very unlikely that Mullan-Gage would have existed. Lobbying effectively took away the voice of the American people, a fact that would appear in far more issues than just Prohibition.

Most agree that Prohibition was a failure. Although arguments have been made that it succeeded by reducing alcoholism, or that it was a success by even being passed, those were not the goals of the movement. The goal was to make alcohol impossible to obtain, as the text of the Volstead Act and the Mullan-Gage law shows. It completely failed in that regard. What it did show, however, was how political influence affects government and the passage of laws. Mullan-Gage was not an effective law, and would not have existed if William Anderson and other prohibition groups had not wanted to enforce a policy that the public did not want.

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50. Okrent, Last Call, 373.

51. Kerr, Organized for Prohibition, 276.


“MRS. SABIN BRANDS DRY LAW A MENACE: Republican Committee Member Says She Has Changed Her Mind on Prohibition. URGES WOMEN TO ORGANIZE They Can Do More to Bring Repeal Than Men, She Declares--Finds Disrespect for Law Rife.” New York Times, June 8, 1928.


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Mothers of Apartheid
Black Domestic Servants and Their Little Masters

Keegan N. Medrano

In the middle of the 1986 documentary, *Maids and Madams*, a film that explores the detrimental effects of black domestic servitude in South Africa, Bernadette Mosala of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), asks a group of young black children standing within the four-sided tin walls of a shanty, “do you think your mothers’ love those white children?” the group responded with a resounding “Yes.”¹ The memory histories presented throughout this work would appear to complement the concerns of these black children. The narratives collected throughout this work communicate a relationship of affect, often deep love and admiration, between some middle-class white children and the black domestics employed to care for them. However, for all the recollections of love, apartheid legislation effectively funneled black women into domestic servitude helping to fracture black family structures, while also utilizing the black female body to communicate subservience within the white household as a daily reminder of the larger system of racial segregation and hierarchization. Therefore, any memories of the love between whites and black domestics are ensnared within the racist, classist, and sexist ideologies that children were introduced and participated in. The children from these narratives must confront the tension between their affect and the ideologies of difference, while also experiencing the violent upheaval of apartheid beginning in the mid-1970s. The tension and anxieties of love, admiration, racism, classism, and sexism during apartheid’s

collapse influenced the construction of these personal narratives and reveals the strained, restructured social relationships of post-apartheid South Africa.

This work situates race, gender, class, bodies, and space into overlapping constructs as methods of communicating national, social, and personal anxieties, while simultaneously being experienced with emotions of love and admiration. South Africa is a place of frontiers and borders, a settler colonial region that legally divided land between South Africa’s racialized communities forcing the internal diaspora of millions of people to bantustans, townships, shanty towns, and other racialized communities. In doing so, South Africans of color often lived geographically distant and different lives. However, apartheid South Africa could never feasibly separate white and black existences and petty apartheid actually contributed to the desegregated performance of racialized difference. The frontier and border in apartheid South Africa demarcated white and black spaces, as both a terrestrial manifestation and a cognitive construction. South Africans of color existed on the terrestrial periphery, which supported the processes of abstraction and othering, but when these racialized communities did come into contact, when the frontier and border transitioned to the terrestrial center from a white perspective, the encounters were cast within unequal power relationships. Therefore, I conceive of apartheid South Africa not as a place of fixed frontiers and borders, but rather a place of “oscillating frontiers,” where the perceptual region of white South Africans needed both the distant and the intimate border and frontier. A representation of this occurred in the frontiers and borders of the kitchen and living room and the interaction between whites and blacks. As domestic servants, these women performed a subservient role, a uniquely, extended intimate encounter, with the opportunity for affect, but still embedded with unequal power dynamics. The domestic-child relationship between whites and blacks offered the opportunity to confront the abstraction and othering of the peripheral. However, to address this, black domestics were either housed in separate quarters or travelled home after work, tearing at the possible emotive bonds and exacerbating the ideologies of difference. While domestic servitude offered the opportunity to bridge the disparity between white and black existence, the racism, classism, sexism, and processes of distancing problematizes the affect felt and experienced.
Beginning in the mid-1970s and 1980s, the collapsing physical and emotional space being negotiated in the homes of white families began to be mirrored in the white streets of South Africa’s cities during the collapse of apartheid. The Soweto protests and subsequent State of Emergencies brought the black experience and violent oppression to the forefront of white’s perceptual regions penetrating the “oscillating frontier.” The tensions between affect, racism, classism, and sexism during the violent upheaval of apartheid influenced the construction of these memories and developed new racialized social relationships that entangle nostalgia with current racial tensions.

The Apartheid Archives Project is a transnationally formed scholarly body that gathers and studies the stories of South Africans. Since 2008, the project has been open for public submissions from all South Africans born before 1994. These submissions are reviewed by the researchers and then anonymized unless the narrator desires otherwise, though in many instances anonymity is maintained. This research collected the memory narratives of whites who mentioned domestic work in any manner. These narratives come from people aged from their late 20s – 60s speaking about their childhood. The sources offer a unique perspective that presents opportunities for argumentation, but also highlights the issues with memory formation and how they feature elements of both the past and the present, the lived experiences and the discourses of each of those. A historian must carefully maintain analyses of both, acknowledging the lived experience and the discourses of the remembered event and of the memory construction as it occurred. This work attempts to do so by charting the social contributions of each era, supplanting the memories with other sources.

Scholars of memories and those that deploy memories for their scholarly work have often confronted the ways in which they and others must utilize the sources provided to them. This is explicitly prudent for scholars of South African memories, conditioned by the cultural, political, societal, and


economic structures of apartheid. It is in the remembering of memories and formation of the past for South Africans, which will forever be colored by the divisive lens of the apartheid system. Memories for South Africans that lived through apartheid and into the transitioning and (post)apartheid world may attempt to fit past experiences into evolving ideas and ideals. *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa* edited by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee collects sixteen essays which address the issue in diverse and varied methods.\(^4\) The first two essays by Njabulo Ndebele and Andre Brink specifically focus on truth, memory, and narrative. Ndebele’s “Memory, metaphor, and the triumph of narrative” postulates that as more narratives are produced, these “may have less and less to do with facts themselves . . . than with the revelation of meaning through the imaginative combination of those facts.”\(^5\) The tinkering and formation of memories, the process of recreation exists with a set of meanings or conclusions that can be derived from. This is important to consider when focusing on white South Africans who have had their entire discourses and therefore their memories become obsolete. In addressing this, Ndebele continues by exploring the creation of “the bleeding-heart, English-speaking liberal South African, who has no understanding of why he is hated so much when he sacrificed so much for the oppressed.”\(^6\) In an effort to become a ‘good’ white South African, an amnesia develops about the passivity and complicity of apartheid life for English-speaking whites. The blame, and to an extent rightfully so, is shifted to the Afrikaans-speaking white, while English-speakers fall back on a tenuous legacy of progressive, anti-apartheid ideology.

On the other hand, Andre Brink in “Stories of history: reimagining the past in post-apartheid narrative” states that “the individual constitutes and invents her/himself through the constant editing and re-editing of


memory."

Memories are like a puzzle with pieces that must fit within a realm of ‘reality’ and ‘fact’ but are not completely tied to these concepts. Moments can be adopted, rearranged, or completely forgotten as one comes to term with these moments and the structures that existed in the past. Brink grapples with how a “story tacitly narrates an event . . . it is infused with, and transformed by, the notoriously unreliable complex of private motivations . . . that constitute the idiosyncratic, individual mind,” continuing “we can never be sure of it or gain access to it, and that the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors.”

It is important to reconsider this and other historical writing is just another recreation with private motivations of an individual’s mind. These narratives are unquestionably shaped by post-apartheid discourses but the mere fact that a post-apartheid discourse exists and that these narrators understand the evolution and shedding of discourses represents a shift in the way people think and talk about their past.

The focus of scholarly works such as Jacklyn Cock’s Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation, Alison Jill King’s Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Deference and Disdain and Shireen Ally’s From Servants to Workers: South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State has been to unveil and explore this hidden exploitative relationship between whites and blacks in South Africa. This important and necessary research unveiled an often hidden but integral part of South African life. From this research, Cock and then others after her uncovered that the impacts of this “coexisting” between black domestics and white families extended and were more complex than exploitation and seeped beyond into the social order. One manifestation of this was the importance of the black domestic in caring for the child while being forced to ignore their own children.


This harkens back to the introductory paragraph, which referenced the relationship that developed between black domestics and white children in *Maids and Madams*. However, Cock does not interview any white children during her studies. Furthermore, consistent with her Marxist and feminist analysis, Cock argues that “domestic labour is the instrument whereby white women escape from some of the constraints of their domestic roles.”

This analysis shifts the focus back to the black and white adults ignoring the emotive relationship that developed between white children and their primary caregivers. Without interviewing and researching white children’s perspective, Cock maintained that “domestic service [was] the only significant inter-racial contact whites experience, and they experience the relationship in extremely asymmetrical terms,” leading “many white South African children [to be] socialized into the dominant ideological order and learn the attitudes and styles of racial domination.”

Similarly, King’s *Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa* cites the aforementioned quote describing Cock’s “recognition of the seriousness of the impact of racial difference to class positioning in the childcare situation.” Whereas Cock attempted to perform a broad survey interviewing 225 people and focusing on the Eastern Cape, King prefers an “in-depth analysis of a small number of domestic service relationships.”

King’s work is not interested in “Marxist analysis,” but rather the “dependencies . . . and the feelings of the individuals involved.” King begins by presenting a story of a Johannesburg businessman who remembered “his nanny was like a ‘second mother’ to him,” and he repaid this kindness by providing her son with a janitorial position. King cites this as “indicative of the fact that within the childcare provision of domestic service race and class positioning are reinforced emphatically rather than realigned,” and while this may be true- this analysis disregards the relationship that developed and that in this instance the white businessman truly believes

his actions to be invoking emotive bonds.\(^{15}\) King, again, touches these ideas when discussing fellow sociologist Bridget Anderson’s work on domestic labor who argued “that when care is bought it ceases to be real care, because this is not a commodity that can be bought and sold.”\(^{16}\) The perspective of Cock, King, and Anderson are rooted in sociological work and embedded in an economic perspective that does not allow for the exploration of the feelings because as King writes later, “there are many instances of genuine bonding between employers and their servants, but this is not the point.”\(^{17}\) In this paper, that is exactly the point that will be discussed.

Shireen Ally’s *From Servants to Workers* captures the affectual ties established when discussing one domestic worker, Mavis Khubelo’s tight-knit familial love for the white children under her care.\(^{18}\) Ally expands upon the arguments in Cock and King by discussing the “‘like one of the family myth’” and that “paid domestic work [is] a practice of power.”\(^{19}\) Ally deviates from her counterparts by describing domestic labor as existing “in the tenacious continuities of the logics of apartheid servitude alongside some modernizing transformations.”\(^{20}\) Though Ally does not completely agree with Cock and King, she like the others, does not explore domestic labor from the perspective of whites and though this is understandable it creates an incomplete image. As long as certain white perspectives are missing, those from children or in this research of children, the economic paradigm is maintained, and furthermore the unwillingness to understand what the discourses surrounding domestic labor mean for those creating it not just those it is about- the story of domestic labor in South Africa will be incomplete. Arguments like those reiterated in Fish’s article which prefaces Cock’s assertion that the “institutionalised nature,” of domestic labor “was a direct reflection of the predominance of systems of race, class and gender

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inequalities that defined conditions of this time,” will continue to exist oversimplified.\(^{21}\)

For more contextualization, Ann Laura Stoler’s *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* discusses children’s refusal to adopt the entirety of adult culture in the Dutch East Indies. Rather, children accept hierarchical structures in “partial and imperfect ways . . . [where] they learn certain normative conventions and not others and frequently defy the divisions that adults are wont to draw.”\(^{22}\) In an attempt to address these concerns, colonial governments passed legislation that separated children form ‘native’ laborers and which supported lower-class children and their families. Similar attempts to separate white children and black domestics occurred in South Africa, where houses would be placed in the middle of lots with domestic quarters being situated away from the main home.\(^{23}\) Instead of the racial hierarchy remaining fixed and similar over time, the racial hierarchy supported by domestic servitude molted over time, connected to the external and internal political, social, and economic factors. For generations, apartheid cast South Africans of color from white spaces, allowing for opportunities of contact to communicate the difference explicitly, while normally relying upon the abstraction of blackness to maintain racial order and hierarchies. Domestic servitude represented the few opportunities for children to connect for an extended time with a South African of color endangering the abstraction and performances of difference that maintained black inferiority. These moments of affect and intimacy occurred within a larger shift of white and black contact as the protests and violent suppression challenged preconceived notions as these middle-class white children grew into adults during the 1990s and 2000s.

The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) is a research organization founded in 1929. The organization purports a liberal


ideology with support from various religious groups. In 1973, Sue Gordon, a member of various Domestic worker rights’ groups, produced a booklet in conjunction with SAIRR titled *Domestic Workers: A Handbook for Housewives.* New editions were printed in November of 1973, November of 1974, and June of 1975. The booklet presents the ideal relationship between a white employer and a black domestic. In a section titled “The children of the household,” Gordon writes “in all African societies . . . the respect for the aged [is important] . . . it is thus particularly distressing for an adult African to have to take orders from a child . . . care should be taken that children always treat the African worker with courtesy. As always in such matters, example is more important than precept: children will emulate the behaviour of their elders.” This help book captures the complex and conflicting nature of the relationship between whites and blacks. This booklet presents “African” cultural norms within a largely patronizing tone making sweeping generalization that these norms transcend all African societies. Even if we are to take this as just black South African societies, the diversity of black South Africans makes this problematic. Distressing is also an interesting term which has connections to emotions, particularly anxiety and weak fortitude, which could be tied back to the racialization and gendering of the domestic that strips them of power while coding the female and the black as weak. Courtesy, too, has meaningfulness, because it describes the awareness and the performance of politeness. The booklet features consistently problematic language which is couched in concepts of understanding and acceptance, that attempt to frame itself as for the betterment of black-white work relationships.

Another section describes the unfair wage gap and asserts that whites should pay a livable wage to their domestics. Gordon also argues that whites should never yell at their domestic, should take them to the bus stop, and should provide two weeks full paid sick leave. This book encapsulates many of the arguments this paper is attempting to support. The creation of this booklet represents that the *ideal* relationship between a white employer and


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 17.
black domestic was civil, cordial, and respectful. This booklet’s arguments place itself as a development on past discourses and relations, but this does not mean that it is nuanced in its understandings of race, class, and gender. In “Towards a Harmonious Relationship”, Gordon maintains that “no single simple step that would generate so much goodwill as the abandonment of the terms ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ for African adults,” however this comes after a section which deems the term “manservant” to be acceptable. Over time, the ideals of the relationship between white employers and black domestics changed, the ideal language, the ideal actions, how this relationship was ideally talked about and what it all meant changed and evolved over time.

“My name is Mandela, I’m a monkey like you, I live in Soweto, in toilet number two.” The above quote was recalled by a twenty four year old white male when describing his childhood. This rhyme was being propagated into the early 1990s by young white children, which, as the narrator notes, represents the idea that children could accept in such a playful manner the ideas of racism “shows [how] easily insulting racial identities and stereotypes where circulated at the time.” This sentiment is shared by another white South African living in Australia who did not remember, “ever being told that whites and blacks shouldn’t mix but I clearly picked up this unspoken message from the divides that existed everywhere around me. This was something I simply accepted as a given.” Racialized thought developed the ideological foundations for apartheid and the power of apartheid was in its ability to reproduce these ideas. For many whites, especially children, their isolated existence from blacks fostered the development of ideas of the other and the unknown. A foundation of other-forming comes from the inability or the lack of a desire to understand something new in the colonial experience. For children, their early development in a white community and within white areas formed “a


blanket of comfort that [was] far-removed from the reality of the time and the reality that a great number of my contemporaries would have grown up with."\textsuperscript{30} The pleasure, leisure, and wealth afforded to white South Africans allowed them to exist in a world distant from black life and the often violent oppression of these groups.

The man’s narration begins by discussing his relationship with his parents and how they never shared any political or racist sentiments. By describing the indoctrination into apartheid ideology as all-encompassing, figures like this narrator’s parents are offered a reprieve from the guilt. In presenting his family life in this manner, this narrator’s submission shares similarities with others, where the passivity and complicity of apartheid life is evoked. The man’s narrative continues “for not only was Soweto a strange, far-away place, so too where people lived there. In my youth, black people appeared as maids and gardeners, and like Soweto, did not really seem to be part of the world I was living in.”\textsuperscript{31} The realization of the separate spheres of existence breaks down the idea. While the people this man encountered did not seem to be a part of the world he lived in, their existence altered the white existence. An unadulterated white community were reminded of black existence through the relationship of laborers, importantly for children-maids or domestics. Similarly, another narrative described how they “grew up in a home in which we employed no nanny or maid or ‘garden boy’ – at least up until my early teens. So my contact with black people as a child was limited to seeing them in the street or working in the homes of friends.”\textsuperscript{32}

In apartheid South Africa, domestics were unknowing expressions of black existence and black life for whites. The relationship that could develop would become the unique, solitary bond between whiteness and blackness that could possibly break down the walls created by racism and apartheid.

This narrator continues, remembering domestics lying on the grass


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

speaking in their “own language – I remember the foreign sounds more than anything.” In describing the domestics as having different and foreign languages reiterates the ideas of separation. Black South Africans were so much not a part of white South African life that their language and everything that entails felt completely foreign- not South African. Connections can be made to the bantustans and the efforts by the South African government to remove citizenship and to force autonomy on bantustan inhabitants. The distance and difference between whites and blacks existed on two levels. Blacks lived in separate areas and were being expelled from South Africa becoming foreigners. Also, this distance made encounters between whites and blacks as those between people so different that they in fact felt foreign. The narrator continues, “thus black people, although very much in evidence in the outside world, didn’t really exist in my own family world. I viewed them as something strange and ‘other’.” White children were cognizant of black Africans and the position of domestic worker, but when they were not raised by a black domestic, the black African remained an ‘other’ shrouded in mystery and the unknown. Through this we can reconsider Jacklyn Cock’s assertion that domestics were the only mixed racial contact for many whites. Though apartheid attempted to maintain the separation of the different racialized groups, the infeasibility of the plan made this impossible. White and black encounters occurred often, though through performances of difference, such as through employment or petty apartheid legislation. Both of these, presented and represented the differences in white and black life. Domestic labor existed in a different realm, because though these were exploitative, asymmetrical relationships, the opportunity for intimate contact that could develop affect could humanize black South Africans.

The narrator also mentioned that domestics “would wave to me when they saw me but I didn’t know any of them by name.” As children, this white narrator was still conceptualized as innocent by these domestics. In waving, these domestics are being friendly to the white child. This is formed in the narrator’s memory but is juxtaposed to the second part of

sentence which states that he did not know their names. This captures the distance between the two but the possible, fleeting affect that could also be shown between these two groups. Domestics and their relationships with some white children could dispel and disprove the many unknowns and mysteries surrounding whites and blacks in South Africa. Domestic labor in South Africa could not possibly then only reproduce the social order because the formed emotive bonds clarified and questioned the hierarchies established.

A white female in her fifties remembered accepting the difference in apartheid existence. Furthermore, she like many of the other narratives recalled “that the black people we met were mostly domestic workers or garden workers.”³⁴ While conversing with a friend one day, the friend told her “that her nanny had taken her on the bus with her, one of the old green Putco buses. I felt envious of her and wished that I could go on a ride on a Putco bus too full of singing people. I longed to be part of those singing people.”³⁵ In this narrative, the narrator’s friend felt the need to share their experience. This means that this friend appreciated or at least acknowledged their domestic and enjoyed the experience. The bond that developed between the friend and her domestic from this shared experience of a bus ride was a source of pride that the friend could compare to the narrator. In forming the memory, the narrator recalled how the people on the bus were singing. The narrator remains critical of other aspects of her life placing whites as either being cruel or into other similar but more moderate categories. In doing this, the narrator establishes a dichotomy between white existence as angry, violent, and unjust while black people are not. The singing people on the bus are friendly, joyous different from the unfair, uptight white people in her life. Also noteworthy is the phrase “to be part of” which situates the narrator clearly away from the people in the singing people in the bus. The narrator understands that she is not and cannot be a member of these people. The separation of white and black life is quite clear for this narrator. Furthermore, the PUTCO bus line was a major mode of transportation for

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³⁵. Ibid.
non-whites, legalized by the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953. Whites would then, never ride on the PUTCO bus line unless in the company of a non-white African. Therefore, the domestic served a bridge between white and black existence. The narrator was envious because she did not have this relationship and could not experience the other side of the apartheid world.

A thirty year old white African remembered growing up “in a lower middle class white suburb. At that time my only personal encounters with black people were our maids and gardeners. The fact that my parents had a full time maid when they weren’t particularly well off themselves is telling in any event.” 36 This quote recalls the class structure embedded in the South African experience. Domestics represented a status symbol for many white Africans. Within the hierarchical structure of apartheid, there existed layers of whiteness based upon ethnic differences such as English-speakers, Jews, Greeks, Portuguese and class differences. The narrator is very aware of the different class their family was a part of. Nevertheless, the family employed both domestics and gardeners represents that the employment of black South Africans was something to seek, to ascertain in the development of the dream white South African lifestyle. For white parents, domestics were a symbol of their success in life. Even though the narrator grew up in a lower middle class life their maid had separate quarters which he “would at times want to visit the maid in her room in our garden (“the maid’s quarters” is the term I remember being used) but was not allowed by my parents.” 37

In Rebecca Ginsburg’s *At Home with Apartheid: The Hidden Landscapes of Domestic Service in Johannesburg*, houses in South Africa were built to accommodate domestics and to separate their existence whenever possible. Within the house, the employers set out parameters including domestics’ inability to use white toilets or use silverware. Ginsburg writes about how “popular ideas about hygiene and ‘Black germs’ . . . justified practices like the use of separate plates, outdoor toilets.” 38

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37. Ibid.

and domestic activists and the relationship between domestics and white people the ideas on contamination changed. By the late 1970s and 1980s, ideas around black domestics possibly contaminating whites were no longer acceptable or utilized. Ideas of contamination were shed and replaced with the idea of whites letting blacks use the same items. In a (post)apartheid world, many black domestics are now free to use the same items as whites. The fears that domestics will ‘Africanize’ your items no longer exists. The constant relationship of black domestics and whites bridged the gap during the evolutions on the acceptability of racial discourses. The narrator continues by struggling with “an old outdated order with what I know today, it is difficult to untangle and label “racism,” before continuing “I was taught as a child to always be polite to the domestic workers and can certainly remember being fond of all the women who worked in our house.”

This section represents the conflicting and problematic ideas that whites maintained black domestics. The whites in this instance would contend that in “being nice,” this narrator is challenging the notions presented by Cock about the relationship between domestics and whites. Not only did Cock consider children passive receptors of asymmetrical employer/employee relationships but that also parents were actively developing ideas of difference and other-ness. By using ‘polite’ the narrator could be presenting respect and admiration for their domestics. Also, the narrator describes being fond or having an affection or liking to his domestics. If we are to assume this, we can understand this narrative as an example that white existence was not only not always hostile but also welcoming to black existence. However, “being nice” can be viewed in an entirely different perspective. While ‘polite’ can mean being respectful and nice, it also carries with it connotations of Western civilization and bourgeois behavior. Polite posits a relationship based upon the norms of white life onto the black domestic. Furthermore, the idea of being taught to be ‘polite’ could be in an effort to prove this families’ desire to appear civilized and nice. The narrator’s utilization of ‘fond’ is imbued with an asymmetrical power dynamic. Fond such as ‘polite’ have connotations of difference and

of false or problematic affect. They are terms of ‘being nice’ but intertwined with concepts of power. The narrative explores “a kind of detachment . . . either . . . learnt from my parents or decided for myself was the only viable way of relating and this is what allowed racism to go unquestioned. Don’t get too involved. Remain professional. (I don’t want to know.)”

This section would seem to prove Cock and other scholars assertion that distance was a central part of the white and black experience. Rather I see this as representing the understanding that racism exists unquestioned until a connection is made between people. The development of affect removed, though never entirely, from the societal constructs, was an effective tool in breaking down the racialized barriers. Domestics linked white children to a possible non-racial or anti-apartheid understanding. However for the narrator in post-apartheid South Africa “these experiences continue to have an impact on me.”

The narrator concludes by expressing that they “know much more about these peoples lives and will even have conversations about current South African politics (albeit still in broken Afrikaans).” In *Maids and Madams*, language is often brought up as a barrier between domestics and their white employers. In this instance, the narrator and the domestic share a language of another group. This breaks down the barriers that may have existed or persisted and their desire to speak even while struggling represents an attempt to become involved in their experiences, ideas, and understandings- linking them as people. This narrator engages with the idea of acceptability by saying that they know more about them and talk to them. This could possibly show that this narrator has developed a new perspective and set of beliefs. However, the narrator uses distancing terms like ‘these people’ which maintains the distance and difference. This narrator ruminates on the relationship between domestics and whites and questions how they


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.
would establish such a working relationship.\textsuperscript{43}

The narrator considers questions of domestic labor in South Africa in a post-apartheid world. The questions are left unanswered as South Africans still work through and try to understand the structures that controlled their life and continue to do so. Though these answers are difficult to find, the experience of a white person and their domestic precipitated the questioning process and the reflection of the different lives of blacks and whites in South Africa. By questioning the meaning and intricacies of the relationship, this white narrator represents at least some shift within the some whites’ perceptions of black domestic labor.

A woman in her twenties living in the Guateng province recalled moving to South Africa from Botswana with her “domestic worker (Doris) [who] was like a second mother to me.”\textsuperscript{44} The woman remembers Doris “being a part of our family” as they explored the coastal regions as neither had seen the ocean.\textsuperscript{45} This young woman places a high level of affect and importance to Doris, her domestic. However, it should be noted that Doris was a part of her family and not her own. Without further background on Doris, this situation cannot be explored further. However, for all of the affect that whites attach to their domestic it is paramount to consider the distancing that domestic labor caused in black family structures. During their holiday, the narrator and her sister innocently demanded ice cream from their parents which became “the first day in my life that I realized people weren’t all the same and equal in the eyes of the world.”\textsuperscript{46} The family entered a Milky Lane, a South African dessert shop, and waited for service. After some time, the narrator’s father asked for service from a waiter but was ignored. Some more time passed when a manager walked towards the family and said “he wouldn’t serve us if ‘she’ was with us and that they

\textsuperscript{43} Narrative N50, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009-URL:http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124877/R/AG3275-B-1-41-50, Accessed March 10, 2015.

\textsuperscript{44} Narrative N26, Apartheid Archives Project, University of Witwatersrand, 2009-URL:http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory_enhanced/U/Collections&c=124875/R/AG3275-B-1-21-30, Accessed March 10, 2015.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
don’t serve ‘her kind’. He said she had to leave and wait outside while we ate.” The family left even though Doris contested saying “that she didn’t mind waiting outside but my dad had made up his mind and we left.”

In this memory, this family exists removed from South African society. Doris is an important part of this difference. The two young girls frustrated by the lack of ice cream and emotionally charged moments were left confused until their “father sat my sister and I down and tried to explain to us the intricacies of the system of Apartheid. He explained that in South Africa people didn’t like the black people and thought they were different to us. He also made the point that we should not change how we think and always remember that we are equal no matter what anyone says.”

The two children are introduced to the racialized world and how their family accept an alternative narrative. This experience may not have happened so soon or even at all if Doris had not been a victim of the racist sentiment of South Africans. The young woman continued to ruminate on the experience saying “I guess a lot changed within me. I have always remembered it and as have matured I have questioned more and more how that made Doris feel.” In this memory, the narrator is able to return and attempt to explore the meaningfulness of it. The close affectual bond described by the narrator coupled with the experience represents the possibilities that black domestics had for white children. The narrator wondered “if I was a bad person because I was white/ I think that it made me question my identity and the role of colour in discrimination. When I think back on it I feel pity not only for Doris but for my parents as well. They were helpless and could not fight for her, they could not demand that the manager serve us and could not change things for Doris; I often wondered how that made them feel.”

This part of the narrative marks a shift. This experience fosters and develops ‘white guilt’ in the narrator. This ‘white guilt’ becomes a common attribute for many white South Africans of the post-apartheid world. It expresses a disgust and refusal of past discourses but also suffers from

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48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.
bouts of amnesia. Furthermore, it places the focus of the experiences back onto the whites. This narrative becomes less about Doris and more about the guilt of being white and African.

In the white suburb of Westville in the Natal (KwaZulu Natal) province, a forty year old female focused on her memories of blacks how they always existed in a world subservient to her and other whites. This was part of the normalized world where “people of other races were “other”, that we should be separated from one another, and that this represented a “harmonious” equilibrium.”50 The narrator discusses how, “A black person never had a surname . . . My friends’ maids were introduced to me as “Beauty”, “Precious”, “Lydia” and the like.”51 The narrative makes a stark shift in tone when the narrator plainly states that her experience with her domestic was a “wake-up call.”52 The narrator remembered

I was brought up by a Zulu maid, Crezentia Zaca, who we called ‘Zaza.’ . . . My expectation that she would approach our relationship from a position of complete subservience was sorely misplaced. When Zaza told me to pick up my clothes from the floor, I did not feel the need to take her seriously. I uttered a few choice words to her, with racial connotations, and received in turn a few hard slaps to the bottom.53

The narrator grew up with the understanding that subservience was acceptable. She refused to take orders from Zaza because Zaza should have supported the subservient role that the child understood. The child utilized racial words, another example of how easily racialized language and hierarchical thought existed for developing white children. The repercussions for this took the narrator aback. However, the narrator remembered that she was going to tell her parents about “this “gratuitous” assault on me, and expected her to receive the appropriate sanction. My hopes were dashed when my mother asked her what had happened, and


51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.
preferred her version to mine (Zaza did not lie).” The child had adopted expectations of the differing levels in the hierarchy between whites and blacks. She describes the actions as being assault connected with ideas of crime, violence, and aggression. She expected sanctions, a very politically structured term instead. The mother placed her trust with Zaza as the primary caregiver and understood her in contrast with the white child. The narrator was horrified that “Zaza was given full permission to use whatever force it took to discipline me. There were several instances after this when she had cause to smack me. And smack me she did.” This narrator’s mother did not share the concerns of contamination and allowed Zaza to physically touch her daughter. Furthermore, by trusting Zaza with discipline, Zaza could influence and teach the narrator how she felt necessary. Zaza’s influence extended into the daily life of the family, where she would prepare and cook meals and “she would look after us when my parents came home late from work.” The narrator continued fondly speaking of how

Zaza became my authority figure and I had to answer to her. She was the one who gave instructions. She was the one who taught me to be honest, courteous, neat and clean. She was the one who corrected any undisciplined behaviour. She was the one who showed me that boundaries are essential. Zaza was one tough cookie.

The relationship between Zaza and this white woman was not entirely one-sided. The narrator remembered with the exuberance of a young child with a deep affectual bond that she would place a frog near Zaza’s room “watch her go berserk. Frogs were “tokoloshes”, evil creatures associated with black magic.” For the narrator this part of the memory is invoked with a tone of playfulness and fun between two people. This is an important moment for the narrator to discuss this along with all of the positive influences that Zaza


55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.
had on her. The relationship between Zaza and her white family developed into one “of friendship and mutual respect . . . They [Zaza and the narrator’s mother] had a lot in common: integrity, honesty, intelligence, an admirable work ethic, self-discipline.”59 Powerfully, the narrative concludes with the praise and language of emotive bonds that developed “because of absent parents, she was the only person I could turn to. And she was always there for me. And she stood for so much that is good.” Often, whites employed domestic laborers and from this white women could seek employment. This narrator remains removed from her own parents and for her, the figure that replaced her parents was Zaza. The woman she had originally expected to listen and to follow her commands developed into a beacon for the narrator. She continues

My role model was a black woman. And I came to emulate and not challenge her. And I am eternally grateful that I did. Because she made me the person that I am today. Because she inculcated in me a value system that showed me that “the other” is no different in matters that count. . . . It may seem strange to some that my experience with one black person could have changed my mindset in such dramatic terms. But it did.60

For this narrator, the deep affectual bonds that were established between Zaza and themselves is unquestionable. The narrator dedicated their narrative to the memory of a woman who played an integral part in the development of the narrator. The experiences are relayed nostalgically but with poignant emotional depth. The appreciation and bond between the two influenced the outlook and future actions of the narrator. Zaza was caring for a child, possibly separated from her own, probably exploited in the apartheid system but nevertheless, Zaza planted the seeds of non-racial, anti-apartheid thought which countered the discourses being produced by the apartheid government.

Phyllis was the domestic worker for another forty year old female from the Eastern Cape. This narrator explores ideas of sexual other-ness and private space. The narration begins, “I am bored, and I need to ask Phyllis


60. Ibid.
something. I burst into her room. The door was half shut I think, but I have no respect for her privacy, there are no boundaries between her space and mine.”

This section of the narrative explores ideas of status and space and personal privacy. For the narrator, Phyllis’ room is not a boundary and she can explore and enter whenever she wants. The teenager could have been raised or thought that Phyllis did not deserve any privacy and that Phyllis’ space may well have been hers but was also free to access for the whites in the family. This means that the status of Phyllis is diminished if existing at all as though she has her own space, she possess no privacy. The teenage child witnesses Phyllis having sex with a man, the moment startles the young woman but also excites her for she continues wanting to be enveloped in his arms too. We are having a relationship across the ‘colour bar’; he is a young activist... It is 1976, he is becoming increasingly politically active. He is a leader. I am in love with him, and of course I am against apartheid. He is murdered, like so many other young men of the time, at the brutal hands of those masquerading as public protectors. I survive, to join the struggle, to tell the tale.

Ann Laura Stoler in *Race and the Education of Desire* explores Dutch colonial fear in the East Indies of children and the sexualization of the other. Stoler writes that literature was developed on “the central theme of protecting children from the cultural and sexual seductions of those charged with their care.” These fears would have been shared in traditional, conservative South Africa as ideas of child sexuality were filtered through religious doctrines. In this instance, the narrator is not focused on Phyllis but the man she is with. The narrator constructs the sexual experience with the liberation of herself from the Christian discourses that oppress her and combines it with a confused passion of the other that forms in her stories of anti-apartheid activism. The narrator captures the importance that Phyllis had on her life by concluding “since my mother is absent, all of us know

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62. Ibid.

where we can get our comfort, enfolded in the large warmth of our ‘nanny’s’ arms.” 64 These young white children isolated from their parents developed tight-knit emotive bonds with those figures around them,

besides my sister, she is my favourite person in the world in those years – she is young, beautiful, full of fun. When she is angry with us, she knocks us on the head with her third finger, it is so painful we shriek, but it passes very quickly, unlike some other pains I know. 65

The narrator returns to her sweeping love story of mixed race to describe curtly but hauntingly that Phyllis like many other non-white Africans met a violent end for “she also died young, just like my hero, ultimately a consequence of the same violence. I found this out much later. I never knew her story. I never asked her. Just wrote my own.” 66 The violence of the apartheid system became a part of this narrative. The narrator recalled that even though Phyllis was a part of her life and an emotive bond developed, the child still existed in their own sphere. Domestics for this narrator did not necessarily bring them into the black existence. Instead, domestics created momentarily connections that could develop more complex and nuanced understandings of the world.

Another forty year old female from Durban, a coastal town in the KwaZulu Natal province made the focus of her narrative on “the relationship I shared with the woman who was employed in our family as domestic worker and child-minder.” 67 She continues

“As the youngest child of working parents, I spent a great deal of time with Emily. We developed a strong bond that spanned many years, beginning when I was strapped against her solid back to teenage and early adulthood when we mulled over prospective suitors; fashion and haircuts.” 68

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65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.


68. Ibid.
Again, the ideas of contamination is being explored. Contamination was a discourse that maintained the racializing other explored in Ann Laura Stoler’s *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. However, here the narrator describes being strapped to the back of her domestic. This connection repudiates the contamination discourses that are discussed in 1920s and 1930s Dutch East Indies. Over time, these similar discourses in South Africa of contamination fell away from acceptability. This narrator strapped to their domestic backs did not care nor believe in the contamination from Emily. This white child would then grow up and not utilize these discourses, therefore, discourses about domestics fell away, this “discursive shedding” represents the change over time between some white employers and black domestics. On the other hand, it cannot go unnoted the phrase “strapped against her solid back”. There are strong racializing connotations to the selection of this phrase. These words construct an image of Emily that is linked to animalistic language. It is unlikely that the narrator would have used similar diction, which means that this narrator in all of her descriptions of affect and of liberalization was still influenced by the racial and hierarchical thought of the apartheid system. The socialization of difference and of subservience remained an aspect of this narrator and many others.

Their discussions were not always about mundane, daily activities. The narrator remembered political conversations, where “Emily introduced me to the ideas of Oliver Thambo, Nelson Mandela and the ANC at an early age. I have clear memories of listening to her stories about the men who were locked in prison because they were fighting for the rights of black people.” Emily and this narrator had a more direct political experience than the other narratives discussed. In the other narratives, the domestics seemed to influence the white South Africans as their affectual relationship humanized blacks. Emily served as a direct conduit for the radical politicization of this narrator as she remembers it. The narrator continued,

“These conversations usually took place when we were alone together . . . I can still see myself tucked up under my blue eiderdown while Emily stood at the window, looking out at the street, and explaining to me why our neighborhood, the schools my siblings and I attended, the stores where we shopped and the restaurants where we ate, were only
inhabited by white people.”

The two even discussed within the white suburb the narrator lived in “who treated their domestic workers respectfully and who did not. I became very conscious, when entering the homes of friends, of the tone in which they addressed their employees, whether they were given their meals in tin bowls and mugs, and whether they were referred to as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’.” The narrator recalls with a tinge of regret of how she was “unaware of the full implications of the circumstances that had enshrined Emily as my primary protector.” She remembered how she felt loved and supported but “did not ponder what her commitment to me meant for her relationship with her own children. Ever since I could remember I had clung to her skirts and delighted at the clicks that ran so easily off our tongues.” Again, though Emily is painted with terms of endearment, appreciation, and of meaningfulness, the narrator’s language is difficult to reconcile. Consistently, the narrator uses metaphoric flourishment that suffers from connectivity to racializing language. It is difficult to parcel out the meaningfulness of a quote that is couched with affect and admiration but delivered with problematic language. The narrator continued by remembering “sitting on Emily’s lap while she braided my hair, icing Marie biscuits together at the kitchen table and napping under the trees in the nearby park are peppered with disturbing memories.” The relationship between Emily and the narrator led them to reflect on

“one final thought. It is both a hope and a regret – the hope that she was aware of the central role that she played in my life and the regret that she moved away before I had the opportunity to tell her myself. I left home to attend university where I learned all about race, class and gender yet this awareness only translated into a full appreciation of the one person in my life who was immeasurably


70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.
This narrative reflects the complex and difficult relationships between post-apartheid white adult’s memories of white children and their domestic. This narrator clearly believes in the relationship that existed between themselves and Emily. They attach deep meaning to their time spent together and problematizes how the relationship was formed and what it meant. Furthermore, Emily developed strong sentiments through politicization and humanization of black South Africans. However, this narrator engages in a rhetoric of white guilt, which as we have seen earlier, returns the focus back to the white person and their emotional and psychological pain during apartheid. Also, this narrator sometimes utilizes diction which invokes racial and other forming language that seems to relinquish or diminish the influence that Emily had on this narrator.

Domestic labor was often hidden and not discussed, until Cock’s *Maids and Madams* presented the exploitation of the black woman in South Africa. Cock and those that followed wanted to bring a voice to this group. In doing so, these works explored the many facets of domestic life including unfair pay, poor conditions, disturbances of the black family structure, and racialized discourses of difference, contamination, and space. From this, Cock and those that followed generally accepted the argument that domestic labor in South Africa reproduced the unequal hierarchies. These unequal hierarchies reproduced in white children would then become the hierarchies these future white employers would utilize. However, as the narratives above have shown this does not completely capture the story of domestic labor in South Africa. Rather, the relationship that sometimes developed between white children and black domestics did not entirely reproduce the apartheid system. These stories of playfulness, affect, and emotions challenge previous arguments. In a way, domestics in South Africa represented bridges between black and white existences. In developing a deep emotive bond, the barriers that existed could be eroded. Domestics gave white children a face, a mind, an object of affect that could lead to anti-apartheid or non-racial sentiments. It is possible to consider domestics as political activists for the development of anti-apartheid sentiment.

of anti-apartheid thought in some members of the white community.

However, it is important to remember that these memories from white South Africans are also representative of the tension that these people experienced growing up in South Africa during the violent attempts to maintain white power structures. In this way, the white South Africans who submitted memories to the Apartheid Archives Project were working through the tensions and anxieties of that period and the current South African political and social climate. Many problematic colonial discourses remain present for white South Africans and the black domestic has become co-opted as a nostalgic representation of white guilt. Many of the black domestics in these narratives are venerated, but tragic characters communicating tensions and anxieties over white privilege in South Africa, which are constantly being rearticulated through non-political power structures in (post)apartheid South Africa.
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“Smells Like, Victory”
The Memory of the Vietnam War in American Film

Matthew D. MacKay

Any American might recognize the iconic scenes: the slow thump of a helicopter, the tree-line bursting into a hellish blaze, the long march in monsoon rain, the buzz of bullets ripping between trees, and the soundtrack, maybe The Doors or Credence Clearwater Revival. The motifs are so recognizable that they have become fodder for spoof, like in 2008’s Tropic Thunder. Yet throughout the duration of the war itself, conventional wisdom in Hollywood was to keep Vietnam at arm’s length. War movies in the 1960s like Patton and Tora! Tora! Tora! looked back to WWII, while the Spaghetti Western dominated the action adventure genre. In 1967’s The Green Beret, Vietnam was a backdrop to an overtly pro-war film that followed the conventions of World War era propaganda films. It was not until the late 1970s that the Vietnam War began to be widely portrayed in popular films. Starting around 1978, a series of popular and critically acclaimed movies debuted that upended the genre of the American war story. Together, these films formed a now-familiar genre with consistent and instantly recognizable themes, motifs, and plot devices. In the films of this new genre, the Vietnam War is the context and catalyst for a profound disruption in the American national consciousness.

Not only did the Vietnam War films signal a disruption in Americans’ belief in our nationalist mythic narrative, but they also bely the specific character of the deepening disillusionment of the time. The genre of Vietnam War films established a particular set of themes and plot devices that appear remarkably consistently throughout the eight films surveyed below. All of these films offer a protagonist dealing with trauma. This trauma is tied to a sense of confusion and purposelessness that robs the protagonists of a unifying belief through which they process their terrifying experiences.
Military hierarchy is portrayed as inept, murderous, corrupt, and cruelly out of touch, which feeds the sense of purposelessness. An incomplete solution is offered in the hyper-masculine brotherhood of “noble grunts.” This brotherhood is held together by shared, stoic suffering and the acceptance of violence. These films portray a racialized Vietnamese people who are never given proper consideration, and they all deal in some way or another with the racial make-up of the American forces in Vietnam and the inequality of their burdens. These thematic issues and the consistency with which they operate in these films show the particular ways that the American public had been processing the experience of the Vietnam War. They show not only the disruption of American martial values, but also the personal psychic toll of this disruption on individual lives.

Historians like Tom Engelhardt and Christian Appy have marked the late Vietnam War period as an era of reversal, a seismic shift in the mythic narrative of America. Engelhardt’s *The End of Victory Culture* makes a particularly interesting study of the genre of war stories in American culture that goes all the way back to the portrayal of conflict with Native Americans by the colonial settlers of New England. Others have framed this moment in American popular culture as a collective loss of innocence, or the unraveling of the myth of American exceptionalism. While Engelhardt’s postulation of a “victory culture” at the heart of American mythology is fascinating and convincingly argued, the workings of cultural memory are more complex and inconsistent than such a broad archetype might suggest. By undertaking a deep read of this particular set of Vietnam War representations, it is possible to look past broader mythological narratives and into the confused, disillusioned, and newly cynical attitudes of the American public. This essay examines eight widely popular and critically acclaimed war films starting in the late 1970s. *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1978), *Platoon* (1986), *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) offer a decent cross-section of the first wave of Vietnam War films and represent an immediate and emotive response of the American public to the end of the war. *Forrest Gump* (1994), *We Were Soldiers* (2002), and *Tropic Thunder* (2008) offer a few examples of how the genre progressed and critiqued itself through the 1990s and 2000s. While each of these films offers a unique perspective on the war, they all
share a few important features that are particularly revealing of the issues at
the center of the American memory of the war.

In these films, the setting of Vietnam is dark and chaotic. The
Vietnamese are rarely in view and when they are, they are often faceless,
unnamed, and inscrutable. Instead, the films focus squarely upon the character
of the American soldier, usually in a small platoon of draftees. The main
character typically goes through some sort of initiation, sometimes set in
stark contrast with an introductory scene of domestic tranquility, sense, and
order. The protagonist either survives a life-altering trauma like the Russian
roulette game in *The Deer Hunter* or suffers a slow decent into madness like
Martin Sheen’s journey upriver in *Apocalypse Now*. The military hierarchy
is either charmingly incompetent, like Robin Williams’ polka-loving
supervisor in *Good Morning Vietnam*, or murderously cynical like Charlie
Sheen’s commander in *Platoon*. These characters display a specific vision
of American masculinity rooted in brotherhood and violence. A few of these
films comment more openly about race relations within that brotherhood,
usually through the resigned cynicism of black platoon-mates. Almost
none of these films have significant female characters with the exception
of *Forrest Gump*’s Jenny, whose character arc traces the counter-culture
and anti-war movement as the reverse side of the Vietnam War coin. Some
take a wider lens and critique specific war policies and politics, others are
more interested in the traumatic transformations of individual soldiers, but
taken together these films represent a consensus about the character of the
American memory of war.

The way that producers of popular films chose to frame narratives
of the war and characterize their protagonists suggest that the 1970s and
1980s was in fact a period of profound disruption. This disruption affected
not only popular conceptions of the American national narrative, but also
the personal meaning of American national identity, the relationship of trust
between citizens and their government, and beliefs about the role of the
United States in the world. Crucially, films on the Vietnam War portrayed
this disruption through the trauma, disillusionment, confusion, and fear of
individual soldiers: characters whose lives would be forever darkened by the
experiences of the war. The Vietnam War films of the late 1970s and 1980s
represent a critical blow to the mythology of American expansionism and
martial prowess that resonated with the American public. The consistent thematic treatment of this mythology throughout these eight films shows the specific character of American disillusionment in the war and the traumatic effects of the war on the people whose lives were touched by it.

Christian Appy and Tom Engelhardt have both pointed to this era of Vietnam War films as evidence of a turning point in American nationalist narratives. Engelhardt’s *The End of Victory Culture* proposes that these films are a significant marker of the death of a genre of American war stories that began with the earliest European colonists. The “American War Story,” as Engelhardt calls the genre, takes two forms: the “free story of America” offered to every American child at school, and its retelling in popular media.\(^1\) In the first version, the story is told through classroom history and emphasizes a sense of expansive, national destiny. In the second, a belief in the inevitable expansion of American liberty is transmitted through war stories. These stories originated in capture and rescue narratives from the earliest contacts between European settlers and local native Americans. The genre is marked by a set of motifs—the circling of the wagons against screaming Indian warriors, the lone settler fighting for his life, the rescue of captured women in daring, murderous raids—that reinforced an American frontier ideology in which we conquered the west through a series of righteous, defensive wars.\(^2\) As the genre evolved alongside the progress of American history, the characters changed but the victory story remained the same.

Appy makes a similar argument, but instead frames the story in terms of the dismantling of our faith in American exceptionalism. He describes this belief as “The broad faith that the United States is a unique force for good in the world, superior not only in its military and economic power, but in the quality of its government and institutions, the character and the morality of its people, and its way of life.”\(^3\) The Vietnam War, in Appy’s argument, was a moment of reckoning in which Americans had to confront


\(^2\) Ibid.

their collective belief in their own superiority and righteousness.

As cultural historians, Appy and Engelhardt both trace the American exceptionalism theme through popular media narratives. The key feature of this methodology is the reciprocal relationship between authors, broadcasters, and filmmakers and their audiences. Popular stories both produce and reflect popular beliefs. In both arguments, the Vietnam War marks an end, or at least a crucial turning point in Americans’ conceptions of their national identity. Because their arguments are broad and trace this victory discourse over the whole course of American history, they both rely on general themes from a wide range of elite cultural narratives. This study takes their argument one step further by looking at representations of the Vietnam War in closer detail. The films on the Vietnam War fit nicely into Appy’s and Engelhardt’s frameworks. The general themes of the disruption of an orderly world, the chaos and madness of war, and the lost faith in American righteousness run through all eight of the films surveyed. Beneath the disruption of our national narrative, however, is the disruption of individual, human narratives. Not only are the characters in these films confronting the hollowness of the American mission in Vietnam, they are confronting their own consciences, their own psyches, and their own relationships to their comrades at arms and their families and communities at home. This link between the personal and the national is the stuff of art, and the ability of cinema to examine these themes in messy human detail is one part of what makes film so influential in American public consciousness, and so enjoyable.

Stanley Kubrik’s *Apocalypse Now* opens with an iconic and haunting sequence. Set to the song “The End” by The Doors, the opening shot lays fixed on the tree-line, filtered in a brownish orange, as a helicopter slowly thumps and the guitar builds up to a crescendo. As the climax of the song hits, the trees burst into towering flames. Kubrik cuts to Martin Sheen’s character in a grungy hotel room. “Saigon… shit.”

The initiation here is not for the character, but for the audience. Willard’s journey up river begins a bit later when he meets up with his riverboat captain and Colonel Kilgore’s 9th Armored Cavalry.

In *Full Metal Jacket*, *Forrest Gump*, and *We Were Soldiers*, the initiation and home constructions are set at boot camp. Here, the brotherhood is trained, enforced, and welded through shared hardship. In *Full Metal Jacket*, the brotherhood is forged by the characters’ shared terror of the drill sergeant. In *We Were Soldiers*, Mel Gibson’s Lt. Col. Hal Moore describes a Sioux custom of nursing boys by every woman in the village so the grown-up warriors would fight for every woman as if they were their own mothers. Gibson’s character urges his trainees to fight as a family.\(^5\) The films that utilize boot-camp scenes to introduce their characters share familiar motifs – the screaming drill sergeant, obstacle courses where trainees climb over walls and crawl through mud, and the cynical masculine banter of young platoon-mates. All these motifs derive from earlier war film conventions, but they take on a more sinister connotation when used to introduce ideas about the Vietnam War.

One common plot device of the Vietnam War movies surveyed here is the initiation. At some point in each of these films, the main characters get their first taste of the war that opens a huge crack in the façade of whatever idealism they carried with them into Vietnam. In *The Deer Hunter*, the initiation is sharp and traumatic. After the end of the first act, the director Michael Cimino abruptly cuts to his main characters in their first battle. Michael (Robert DeNiro), Nick (Christopher Walken), and Steven (John Savage) fight bravely, appearing to exhibit some of the ideals of heroic combat they had expressed in the opening act. Their heroic ideals are short lived after their capture, and the experience of the three best friends as POWs is the central trauma of story.\(^6\)

In Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*, the main character Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) enters the war as a volunteer, leaving his university to enlist. When his platoon-mates ask him why, he answers by arguing that the draftees

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are disproportionately poor and non-white and everyone should share the burden of the war. His black platoon-mate replies, “You have to be a rich kid to think that way. Everyone knows the poor are always getting fucked over by the rich.” This does not dissuade Chris from his views, but combat does. The platoon runs into a village that they suspect is harboring Viet Cong and Chris gets caught up in a tense sequence where he nearly participates in a massacre. The initiation device is a useful stage setting. In each film, the introductory scenes set a pre-combat status quo in the identities and ideas of their characters that the war will shatter. The “baptism by fire” motif sets up the thematic progression in these stories, introducing the set of events that will unravel each of these characters.

The films of this genre all use the same narrative structure that sets up characters with a sense of order, patriotism, or idealism that is immediately challenged upon setting foot in Vietnam. One way that these films prepare this conflict is by starting their character arcs at home. *The Deer Hunter* devotes its whole first act establishing the characters’ relationships to each other and their industrial Pennsylania town. Michael, Nick, and Steve are best friends who work together in the same factory, and share a love of deer hunting. The opening act takes us through the final days of their domestic tranquility. They are all getting together for a friend’s wedding, a beautiful and extended scene filled with dark foreshadowing. The scene lavishes in specificity, from the Russian immigrant wedding rituals to an emerging love triangle between Nick, Michael, and Meryl Streep’s Linda. At one point, a drunk Michael approaches a veteran at the bar, wishing to introduce himself and ask about what it’s like over there. The soldier clearly does not want to engage in this conversation, and replies to Michael’s prodding with a repeated, muttered, “Fuck it.” The character of this soldier sharply contrasts with the merriment of the wedding and the stubborn idealism of Michael and Nick. After the wedding, the friends all go up to the mountains for one last hunting trip. Before they go up, Nick and Michael banter about their theory of “one shot” – a clean, honorable kill. Nick and Michael are clearly the talented hunters, and Michael stalks a buck up the side of the cliff in a stunning series of shots that portray some kind of spiritual transcendence. After Michael’s kill, the camera pans back, setting the character at the foot

of towering mountains and punctuated by angelic music. The scene cuts abruptly to combat, beginning the second act.  

*The Deer Hunter*’s central theme is the bonds of brotherhood and the masculine friendship between its three main characters. The movies on the Vietnam War are all deeply interested in this portrayal of American masculinity. Unsurprisingly, there are very few named female characters in any of the films surveyed here. Vietnam is portrayed as an exclusively male space. The kind of masculinity on display in these films is based on the brotherhood of shared suffering, the acceptance of and use of violence, and the distant cynicism that allows these men to process the horror and grief they all share. In *Platoon*, a major theme of Charlie Sheen’s character Chris is his search for acceptance within his platoon. Chris starts the film as an outsider, a naïve idealist and a rich kid in a community of cynical realists from the lower classes. Chris gains his acceptance into the community through violence and drug use. He loses his rookie status during his first village raid. His first instinct is to try to help, but when the villagers don’t cooperate, he gets frustrated and angrily fires his rifle at their feet. By opening up his dark side, Chris gains the respect of some of his peers. The pivotal male-bonding scene occurs at base, when Chris joins his platoon-mates for some weed and opium after hours. This is the context where the soldiers’ feelings come out, where they are free to express their sadness, frustration, and anger (but not fear) in the safety of a drug-induced haze. Outside, especially in combat, it is all machismo all the time.

The thematic portrayals of home and masculine friendship sets up the ordered world that the war will unravel. In this world, family, friendship, patriotism, idealism, and a belief in the heroic American warrior form the foundation of a pre-war status quo: a foundation that appears ordered and stable but contains hidden cracks. The war exposes these cracks through either a single life-changing trauma or a slow descent into chaos and madness. In *The Deer Hunter*, the trauma occurs at the beginning of the second act. Michael, Nick, and Steven have hardly been shown in battle before they appear in a Vietnamese POW camp. The conditions are horrific:

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the prisoners are kept in partially submerged bamboo cages under a hut, with one cage reserved for misbehaving characters that leaves only enough space above water to gasp for breath. The true horror, and the experience that propels the rest of the story, is the Russian roulette game. The prisoners are forced by a maniacal Vietnamese captain to play against each other. Sitting across a table, with screaming guards pointing rifles in their faces, they take turns gathering the courage to pull the trigger. The tension in these scenes is relieved either by the click of an empty chamber or the ghastly explosion of a shot to the head. Michael coaches his friends through the game. He persuades Steven to take his shot, which hits but glances against his skull, earning him solitary confinement in the penalty cage. Michael convinces Nick to abandon Steven with a terrifying plan to volunteer for the game with higher stakes: three bullets in the six-round revolver. Nick and Michael take turns gambling with their lives and hit three empties in a row before Michael uses the remaining three to kill the guards, rescue Steven, and escape the camp.  

The experience leaves all three men utterly broken. Steven’s legs are amputated and his psyche irrevocably damaged, but his wounds earn him a ticket home to a VA psychiatric ward. Nick can barely remember his own name and spirals into a wild depression that sends him seeking an underground Russian roulette gambling ring in Saigon where he can relive his brush with death over and over again. Michael also finds himself in the Saigon gambling dens, but leaves Vietnam with at least some hold over his own sanity. When he returns home at the beginning of the third act, he finds that he cannot relate to his old community. He doesn’t show up to his welcome home party, distances himself from Linda, and reaches out to Steven and Nick, both of whom remain lost to him. He manages to force Steven to return home from a psychiatric ward against his will, but he is unable to rescue Nick. Michael returns to Saigon to find his friend playing Russian roulette one final time, unable to convince him to come home or even recognize his former best friend. Nick’s last gamble is a loser and ends with a suicidal shot to the head, punctuating the tragedy.

of this film in one horrifying scene.\textsuperscript{11} \textit{The Deer Hunter}’s portrayal of its characters trying and failing to deal with their trauma is a fascinating but deeply disturbing commentary on the experience of the Vietnam War. Far from the heroic sacrifice of previous iterations of the war film genre, \textit{The Deer Hunter} confronts trauma and PTSD with all its suffering, horror, and destruction.

All the films in this genre deal with the theme of trauma in one way or another. In \textit{Apocalypse Now}, the trauma of war is displayed not through one singular event but a slow descent into madness. Martin Sheen’s Captain Willard sets out armed with a sardonic acceptance of his new mission, to assassinate the rogue Colonel Kurtz who has adopted “unsound methods” and established a cult-like unit of loyal soldiers operating in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{12} The journey upriver to find and kill Kurtz drives the plot forward. The first episode in the journey upriver is an encounter with the 9th Armored Cavalry, led by the enigmatic character Col. Kilgore. These are some of the best and most iconic scenes of the film. Willard just needs the mouth of the river accessible so his patrol boat can pass upstream, but Kilgore is not convinced until he recognizes Lance, a member of the captain’s party and a famous surfer from Southern California. Kilgore happens to be a surfing enthusiast, and agrees to attack the village at the mouth of the river so that he can watch Lance surf on a nearby beach. Kilgore is a fascinating character. When we first meet him, he is striding confidently through the aftermath of a battle dropping “death cards” on the bodies of the Vietnamese villagers so the Viet Cong would know who killed them. He dons a traditional cavalry hat when he steps out of his helicopter, evoking the memory of American cavalry commanders like Custer who were heroicized in American popular retelling of the Indian Wars. He waxes philosophically on the pleasures of warfare: “I love the smell of napalm in the morning… It smells like, victory.” In this world, Kilgore represents the “victory culture” that Englehart proposes as the unifying feature of the American war story. In his climactic scene, Kilgore leads a helicopter assault on the village at the mouth of the river with characteristic flair. He insists on playing Wagner’s “Flight of the

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Deer Hunter}, 1978.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Apocalypse Now}, 1979.
“SMELLS LIKE, VICTORY”

Valkyries” over loudspeakers as the gunships approach, ostensibly to terrify the enemy but actually to stoke his own ego. Regardless, the music makes for a marvelous soundtrack, setting the senseless violence of the attack in juxtaposition with traditional martial values. Kilgore’s cavalry hat and Wagner’s classic song allude to values of militarism and masculinity from earlier eras — courage, chivalry, patriotism, and honor — that contrast sharply with the chaotic violence on display in Vietnam.

Cpt. Willard’s episodic journey upriver gets increasingly dark, violent, and chaotic. Any sense of order and mission progressively breaks down with each stop along the way. The characters on the patrol boat gradually get killed or descend into drug-induced stupors. The USO show featuring Playboy girls of the month gets overrun by horny soldiers, and the bunnies reappear further upstream as sex slaves to be bartered for fuel. No unit Willard comes into contact with seems to have any commanding officers. The cinematography gets increasingly more stylized and abstract, and director Francis Ford Coppola uses steadily darker filters to shoot each episode. When Willard finally reaches Kurtz, he finds a hoard of painted Cambodian tribesmen guarding a ruined Angkor-like temple littered with dead bodies and severed heads on spikes. Kurtz’s troops appear to have “gone native” and follow their god-like commander with religious devotion. Kurtz himself, played by Marlon Brando, is a fallen character. Once a model soldier marked for swift promotion to high command, Kurtz became disillusioned with the American mission in Vietnam. His main critiques are the military’s lack of understanding of the Vietnamese motives of the war and the lack of political will to do what needs to be done to “win.” In the end, Kurtz had accepted his fate, but simply wanted to be understood, and to die like a soldier, not at the hands of a political assassin. Kurtz’s character represents and critiques the arguments of U.S. military commanders who would insist throughout the war that all they needed was more men and weapons in order to finish the job.

Apocalypse Now is a highly stylized and meticulously crafted film. Its storyline is an adaptation of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, a classic novel about the Belgian colonial regime in the Congo. Conrad’s story is also driven forward by a journey upriver that parallels its main characters’

confrontation with chaos and madness. The analogy between Conrad’s Belgian Congo and Vietnam is a thorough critique of the American war effort as an imperialist, colonial enterprise, a critique that is absent from the other films surveyed here. The director Francis Ford Coppola succeeds in putting an analytic context on his portrayal of the war that historicizes his representation in a way the other films do not. By tying his story to a classic critique of colonialism, Coppola suggests one root of the futility and senselessness of the war is in the fundamentally flawed ideology of the American military and political elites. There is no hint of communism in any of these representations, and any references to domino theory are made ironically, but Coppola suggests an alternative framework of colonialism through which his audience can understand the war. This underlines key features of the American memory of the war: its lack of a clear organizing mission, its faceless inscrutably enemy, and the breakdown of patriotic martial mythology. *Apocalypse Now* casts the war as an imperialist venture, which offers some meaning to why the troops on the ground felt so aimless and cynical. The representation of military policies and hierarchy in the Vietnam War genre gets at the core of why the patriotic mythology of the American soldiers broke down. The terror and tragedy of war is a universal experience, but the specific character of this terror in the Vietnam War experience was compounded by a sense of purposelessness.

In Engelhardt’s study, previous American wars were characterized by a culture of triumphalism and a unifying mythology of heroism and patriotic sacrifice in the inevitable defeat of a savage enemy. America had never “lost” a war before Vietnam, but it is not just the winning or losing that drove American disillusionment, it was the breakdown of the credibility of the unifying mythology behind previous wars. In World War II, the whole nation mobilized for war. Unified by a common sense of purpose in opposition to German fascism and Japanese imperialism, catalyzed by the Pearl Harbor attack on American soil, the entire American public rallied together to struggle for victory. Throughout the Cold War, the American public remained unified by political rhetoric encouraging the fear of communism, the clear big bad enemy in the Soviet Union, and the patriotic ideology centering the defense of democracy and American values. Engelhardt argues, however, that the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima
and Nagasaki dealt a fatal blow to the foundation of Americans’ beliefs in
the righteousness of their common cause. In the Vietnam War films, this
common cause is a cynical joke and portrayed as empty and powerless.

In *Apocalypse Now*, this discord is present in Cpt. Willard’s initial
orders—the military wants Kurtz dead for political, not military reasons.
The soldiers he meets along the river almost universally lack commanding
officers and display a total breakdown in unit cohesion. In *Good Morning
Vietnam*, Robin Williams’ Adrian Cronauer runs up against his humorless
commanders who are bent on censorship and repressing Cronauer’s lively
personality. In *Platoon*, the main character’s platoon commanders argue
over whether to massacre a village they suspect is collaborating with the
Vietnam, leading Tom Berringer’s Staff Sergeant Barnes to murder Sergeant
Elias, played by Willem Dafoe. The leadership is not just incompetent, it sets
the soldiers up for failure. The “search and destroy” mission is deceptively
simple: find the enemy and kill him. But in the context of the Vietnam War,
where village women drop grenades into helicopters and have weapons
stores under their huts to supply guerillas, finding the enemy is a subtle
and difficult exercise for which the soldiers are not trained. The search
and destroy missions lead these platoons of draftees, regular American men
dropped out of their ordinary lives and into the fierce jungle, into terrifying
firefights against a faceless enemy. All the noble grunts can do is struggle
on and try to survive a confusing and chaotic world on their own.

The “faceless enemy” is the racialized Vietnamese, repeatedly
referred to as “gooks” “Charlie” or “Viet Cong,” none of which carry
any real meaning into the characterization of the Vietnamese enemy. The
portrayal of the Vietnamese in this genre of films is deeply problematic
and underscores another key feature of the American disillusionment in
the war: the total lack of understanding of the historical and nationalist
context of the Vietnamese anti-colonial struggle. The Vietnamese are
barely represented in these films. Of the eight films surveyed in this
essay, the only two named Vietnamese characters are in *Good Morning
Vietnam*: Cronauer’s young friend Tuan, who turns out to be a Viet Cong
agent, and his love interest Trinh. The Vietnamese in *The Deer Hunter* are
represented by the Russian-roulette loving captors in the POW camp and the
participants in the underground gambling ring, also centered on the ghastly

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game. This connection between the Vietnamese and Russian roulette in *The Deer Hunter* is strange and deeply unsettling. In an otherwise carefully considered and marvelously crafted film, the Vietnamese appear only as vicious and maniacal gamblers. In *Platoon*, the Vietnamese are mainly represented as dead villagers or screaming soldiers sprinting out of the bush. *We Were Soldiers* represents a North Vietnamese Army commander in occasional cutaway scenes primarily as a chess opponent for Mel Gibson’s character to defeat in a battle of tactical wits. The title character in *Forrest Gump* makes the unwittingly ironic observation: “We were looking for some guy named Charlie, but we never found him.” Robin Williams’ character in *Good Morning Vietnam* makes a similar joke: “We’ve realized that we’re having a very difficult time finding the enemy. It isn’t easy to find a Vietnamese man named ‘Charlie.’ They’re all named Nguyen, or Tran, or…” This is a joke with deeper layers of meaning. On the surface, it’s a riff on the military convention of code names. Underneath, it’s a critique of the yawning gulf between the military’s understanding of the Vietnamese and the reality of the Vietnamese people.

The character of the Vietnamese in these representations is highly racialized. Watching these movies involves an endurance of the unproblematic and prevalent use of racial slurs reducing the Vietnamese side of the conflict to inscrutable, dehumanized enemies. The fact that Cronauer is eventually betrayed by his Vietnamese friend and cannot connect with his Vietnamese love interest adds some darkness to an otherwise uplifting comedy that defies general comedic conventions. This difficulty in identifying the enemy, whether amongst villagers or supposed South Vietnamese allies in the big cities, led to a situation where soldiers could not distinguish between combatants and civilians. *Platoon* in particular deals with this problem head on—one of the main conflicts for Chris is a moral quandary over whether or not to massacre a village. Chris’ naïve idealism is challenged by his encounter with the villagers and he cannot understand why they don’t see that he is there to help. This fundamental


lack of understanding of the Vietnamese people and of what their stakes were in this war is not only present throughout the films in the Vietnam War genre, but also through the execution of the war itself. As portrayed in these films, without a clear understanding of the purpose of American involvement in Vietnam, the Vietnamese people disappear. In the imaginations of both soldiers and filmmakers, the complex motivations of the Vietnamese actors in this war were reduced to racial stereotypes.

The portrayal of black soldiers in the conflict must also be viewed through a racial lens. In some cases, the racial dynamics are discussed explicitly: in *Platoon*, Chris has an open discussion with a black platoon-mate about the economic and racial makeup of the American forces. In *We Were Soldiers*, a conversation emerges among the army wives about the injustice of segregation in comparison to the black soldiers’ sacrifices for the war. In other places, race is not openly discussed but represented intentionally through the depiction of black soldiers and their relationships with their white comrades. All of these films have black characters, not as main characters but in important supporting roles. A common theme running throughout these depictions is the stoic, if ironic, bearing of the racial burden by the black soldiers. The message is surprisingly consistent: of course, the black soldiers are going to get the dirtiest and most dangerous assignments, of course they’re going to be overrepresented among the draftees. This component of Vietnam War films is hilariously critiqued in *Tropic Thunder*. Robert Downey Jr.’s character is a white Australian Oscar-winning method actor in black face, or in other words, “a dude playing a dude disguised as another dude.”16 Downey Jr.’s character is confronted about his representation of blackness several times over the course of the movie by his costar Alpa Chino, an actual black dude. Comedy can sometimes offer cultural criticism with greater self-awareness than drama. The satirical black characters in *Tropic Thunder* critique the way that black characters are portrayed in this genre. Although race relations formed a crucial lens through which minority soldiers became disillusioned with the war, *Full Metal Jacket, Apocalypse Now*, and especially *Platoon* offer overly-simplistic and problematic portraits of black soldiers. *Platoon* gives a superficial nod to the struggles of black soldiers

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while centering the story on its white main characters. Even *Forrest Gump* plays with this critique with Bubba, Gump’s departed best friend from his war service and fellow shrimp company namesake. Bubba is in many ways an exaggerated version of the black supporting character common to most of the first wave films. Bubba is portrayed as a simple southern kid (a perfect match for Forrest) with a huge lower lip and an obsession for shrimping. Bubba dies in the war and Forrest takes it upon himself to carry on their dream of captaining a shrimp boat together. Bubba’s exaggerated features and the characterization of his Louisiana family both critique the portrayal of black characters in Vietnam War films and allude to a deeper racial history of the war.

*Good Morning Vietnam* works somewhere in between the first wave war movies and the later, more self-critical entries in the genre. The film came out the same year as *Full Metal Jacket* and shares some of the thematic elements and character types of the war movies, but at its core, *Good Morning Vietnam* is a romantic comedy that is mostly interested in spotlighting the energetic and endearing personality of Robin Williams. And yet, Robin Williams’ character has a black best friend played by Forest Whitaker, runs up against an obstinate and confused military hierarchy, and must face hard truths about his role in Vietnam after his traumatic experience from the bombing of his favorite café. In these ways, *Good Morning Vietnam* participates in the conventions of the genre even while it uses Saigon and the Vietnamese people as a backdrop.

The eight films surveyed here are remarkably consistent in their deployment of particular thematic, plot, and character constructions. They share an overarching narrative of patriotism, idealism, or nationalist mythology swiftly collapsing when confronted by the reality of the war. Their characters undergo a traumatic experience or a slow decent into madness in reaction to the breakdown of their mythologies. They find some meaning in the masculine brotherhood of soldiers through shared hardship and confronting chaotic violence. These films share a stinging critique of military policies, command structures, and politics. They cast Vietnam as an exotic place of darkness and chaos and they show the Vietnamese as faceless, inscrutable savages. They highlight the race and class tensions

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within the US military and the raw deal offered to black soldiers. They try to rationalize atrocity by casting the American GI as a noble grunt, a victim placed in an unwinnable situation and abandoned by military and political hierarchies. They depict the tragic disconnect between veterans of the war and their old lives and communities back home.

Taken together, these thematic elements paint a picture of the American historical memory of the Vietnam War that emerged in the late 1970s. In combination with the media coverage of the Watergate scandal and Richard Nixon’s resignation, the American public underwent a crisis of confidence in the nationalist narratives and mythologies that justified the Vietnam War. The draft meant that the war touched the lives of Americans in every community, but particularly in low-income communities and communities of color in which the American war narrative already held a more problematic meaning. Engelhardt describes the change in the genre of war movies as an “end of victory culture,” and these movies certainly support his thesis, but it doesn’t describe the depth of the American historical memory of the war. These movies show a sense of loss, a personal suffering that connects the changing discourses in media narratives and political ideologies over the 1970s to the lived experiences of the communities whose members fought on the front lines. These movies show an attempt at rationalizing the senselessness and brutality of the war by casting blame on a corrupt and incompetent military and political structure. While a primary critique of the political and military leadership is the lack of understanding of the Vietnamese people and the history of their nation, at no point do these movies offer evidence that the American public had any understanding of Vietnam either. This might be the crucial disconnect, and the reason why the Vietnam War is such a tragedy in American memory. The folly of containment doctrine and domino theory, the abrupt destruction of nationalist martial mythologies, and the disconnect between political objectives and facts on the ground all stem from a lack of understanding of what the Vietnamese stakes were in this conflict. Without this understanding, the American public had little ability to make sense of the war, and framed its memory in terms of chaos, disillusionment, and cynicism. Instead, Americans projected their own image onto the conflict and emphasized the trauma, suffering, confusion, and racism that defined their experiences.
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PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


The White Woman’s Burden  
Chinese Prostitution in San Francisco

Laurie Frazier

On a cold Thursday evening in November 1905, Mooie Qui, fled from the underground prostitution ring. She ran “into the street and showed [a] note to the first man she saw with a star on his breast.” When the officer read the note, it directed him to take the note-giver to the mission house of Donaldina Cameron. From this refuge, located in San Francisco’s Chinatown, Cameron endeavored to rescue girls and women from the subjugation of the so-called “yellow slavery.” Mooie Qui’s story made it into the San Francisco Chronicle the following month as another example of Cameron’s work. While there were many charities and institutions who helped prostitutes escape the sex trade, the most notable organizations focused on aiding Asian women. The mission houses would remove girls from harsh conditions, force Christian conversions, and deport them or marry them off to Chinese men. Such infantilizing treatment dehumanized these women and reinforced negative white sentiments towards Asian females. The institutions that helped these women, under the guise of charity, facilitated Chinese discrimination to flourish in the city of San Francisco in the early twentieth century.

The discovery of gold in California in January of 1848 brought an influx of men from all over the world. At first, they only trickled in, but by 1849 they were coming in large numbers. Very few women came with them in part due to the dangerous journey to California, and because the men did not intend on staying very long. Some dangers of the journey included unsafe sailing vessels, a six to eight-month voyage by sea, the treacherous crossing at the Isthmus of Panama, hostile Native Americans,

harsh climate, difficult terrain, and, of course, disease. The cost of such an expedition was also a deterrent. Because of these factors, women became one of the most prized commodities in San Francisco; “When one appeared in public[,] men clustered around and stared.” Because so few women came to San Francisco, prostitutes were treated with the same veneration as any respectable woman.Prostitutes worked in various venues such as saloons serving food and drink, standing with customers and dealers, in parlor houses, and brothels. Women came from all over the world to take advantage of the booming prostitution industry. The most popular came from France, but many also came from Central and South America, and China in particular.

Chinese prostitutes were not abundant at the start of the Gold Rush, but as Chinese men realized that they were staying longer than planned, demand grew. The women who came over contributed to their family’s incomes. Parents both received an initial payment for their daughters and then could go on with one less mouth to feed. Though these women were generally considered by many to be slaves who could not easily better their position and were bound to die young, they also became the target of police crack downs on prostitution. These women would be arrested and fined, deported, or put into the custody of a Mission home. However, these prostitutes were often morally excused for practicing this profession since they were considered “a slave with no control over her situation” and the

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4. Ibid., 91.


8. Ibid., 8.

9. Ibid., 124.
large community of men supported the profession.

San Francisco during the California Gold Rush was the breeding ground for a booming prostitution economy. The lack of normal social constraints during the Victorian era in California allowed for a freedom in society not seen in Europe or the eastern United States. The absence of wives in the territory also permitted for an increased social status and income for prostitutes. As the city’s inhabitants began to realize that their residency was permanent, wives and families started to push prostitution to the fringes of society. The return of the strict moral codes of Victorian society also brought the need for regulated sex work. The group most targeted by these laws and reform efforts were Chinese prostitutes.

As was often the case during the Victorian era, the female sex workers were often viewed as immoral and the victims of circumstances. Jacqueline Barnhart refutes that idea in her 1977 dissertation, *Working Women: Prostitution in San Francisco From the Gold Rush to 1900*. She examines prostitution in this era through the lens of working women who chose the profession they were in. Pointing out that very few jobs were available to women at this time, Barnhart suggests the high profit margins of the occupation made sense for women as away to supplement their earnings or to make it their sole source of income. However, Barnhart primarily looks at prostitutes who willingly entered this profession and thus her finds do not extend to Chinese prostitutes who were usually pressed into the sex trade. Her work focuses mostly on American and European women, along with some attention on Latin American women. Barnhart does briefly cover the experience of Chinese women through her discussion of Ah Toy. Toy is most famous Chinese prostitutes turned madam of her own brothel who came out of the era. Through Toy’s story, Barnhart is able to show how Chinese prostitutes were the most likely to be targeted by police crackdowns on prostitution.

Benson Tong’s 1994 book, *Unsubmitive Women* looks into Chinese women who were able to rise up from their circumstances and leave the profession behind. Tong does not portray them in the stereotypical manner that the portrait of them having no control of their lives, lacking the ability


to decide, and having to live under a harsh master, dehumanized these women.\textsuperscript{12}\textsuperscript{11} He points out that the women who did leave sex work behind usually did so through marriage, a fact that the census in the later part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century confirms. Tong also discusses how Chinese women received more unjustified attention than other ethnicities who worked in the industry of prostitution.\textsuperscript{13} Tong suggests that the strict moral code of Victorian society and the women’s lack of familiarity with their surrounding enhanced racial segregation.

In 1980, Paul McHugh published Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform, in which he explores the social reforms in the United Kingdom related to prostitution. He focuses on the way in which groups acted to repeal the Contagious Disease Act of 1864, and why they opposed it. The Contagious Disease Act stipulated that police could arrest prostitutes in ports and army towns and force them to submit to an STD inspection. If a prostitute was found to have an STD she would have to undergo treatment for it before being released. While looking mostly into the efforts of a middle-class activist, Josephine Butler, he points out that middle-class women organized to uphold working class women and human rights for prostitutes, even though they disapproved of the occupation of prostitution and never bothered to know or understand about these women.\textsuperscript{14} His discussion of these reforms and the thoughts of reform leaders shows how the ideology made its way over to the United States at around the same time. The views of prostitutes and prostitution in Victorian society were very universal, considering it “the great social evil.”

Mildred Martin’s 1977 Chinatown’s Angry Angel focuses on Donaldina Cameron, the renown social worker from the Presbyterian Mission House (now called the Cameron House). Cameron’s mission was to rescue Chinese girls and women from prostitution and indentured servitude. Once she rescued these women, she would either help them gain employment or help them return to their homes. Cameron’s belief in Chinese women being


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 124.

inherently poor and defenseless contributed to, rather than deterred from their dehumanization. Tong would likely consider Cameron’s constant reference to these women as her “daughters” a patronizing epithet. However, Martin presents it as a term of endearment born from deep compassion. Cameron did not do her work as a social obligation or a means of establish meaning in her own life. Rather, she saw her efforts as an inherent part of her ethical, and what she called Christian, duty. As such, Cameron is quoted as thinking about the media and her cause, “Donaldina wondered what effect publicity about them would have on the work. She wanted the awful existence of Chinese slavery known.” She had a deep faith and truly believed that “With God all things were possible.” Martin’s biography of Cameron gives a wonderful view of the workings of a Chinese prostitution rescue house and what happened to them afterward.

While these books touch upon the topic broadly, their overlap provides important information into how prostitutes were treated and viewed. The special attention given to Chinese prostitutes brings up an interesting topic as to why they were targeted more than other groups. Granted, the extra legislation against their race brought unusual attention; these women were ostracized not only from society as a whole, but within their own profession. While there were general laws in place against prostitution, specific laws that identified Chinese and Japanese prostitutes targeted them. Such laws included forbidding Asian women to be brought over to California for the purpose of prostitution. Since the laws specifically identified women of those races, it added a separation between Chinese and white prostitutes. Also, most of the Chinese prostitutes rarely ever left Chinatown, which isolated them from other prostitutes as well. The added emphasis on them is not because of their profession but because of their race; targeting them was just a gentler form of racism. In my research, I will address how Chinese prostitutes in San Francisco were targeted in the mid-nineteenth century, how this compared to the treatment of women of other ethnic backgrounds in prostitution, and how the treatment of these women reflected on society as a whole.


Like many others in the mid nineteenth century, Chinese men left their homes for the gold in California. They did not plan to make California their home and therefore left their families behind, thinking they would return rich. The wives of these men maintained their family relationships by remaining behind and continuing the custom of serving her in-laws. Social upheavals in China during the 1800s included the declining Qing dynasty, the opium wars, population growth in southern China, the Taip’ing Rebellion, The Red Turban Revolts, and the Punti-Hakka feuds; all of which played a part in the increase of Chinese women entering prostitution unwillingly. Since women were not considered as valuable as boys and men they were vulnerable to being taken or given up by their families. As conditions worsened in China, it became more likely that families struggled to feed all members and survive. Women would agree to travel to California under the ruse that they would be entering indentured servitude for domestic work. Another ploy given to the girls and their families was that they would be sent to America in order to marry Chinese men. In many cases, giving up their daughters over to indentured servitude or marriage to a man in another country was emotionally difficult for families.

Upon arrival, these girls were either sent to a predetermined brothel or man, while most were sold at auction in alleys. These girls, the majority of which were in their early teens, if not younger, would sign contracts before and after being sold and then have to give the money used to buy them to their captor. In 1893, laws were passed that prevented Chinese and Japanese women from being brought into the state of California “for the purpose of selling her to any person whatsoever.” But the Tongs, as well-known procurers of Chinese prostitutes, simply had the women claim to be wives, sisters, or daughters of men already in the state in order to get around this. Laws previously passed in 1870 and 1873 had already set up

17. Tong, Unsubmissive Women, xvi.
18. Ibid., 40.
20. Rutter, Upstairs Girls, 47.
restrictions on this as well. The enforcement of these laws were easy to get around not only through deception but also by bribing officials.\textsuperscript{22} Although it was common for officials to be paid to look the other way, by all forms of prostitution, Chinese prostitution involved much more than just bribing the police; it meant bribing customs agents and, dock officials as well as law officials.\textsuperscript{23} A lot of effort and money was spent for women who usually did not live past their 20s; especially at a time when Caucasians were very much against their Chinese male counterparts. These women were usually not the ones in fancy parlor houses entertaining high end clients; in fact, they were found in cribs in Chinatown working for quantity, not quality. Why would officials try to stop Asian males, look the other way when it comes to Asian females? The dehumanization of Chinese prostitutes by the media and society as a whole played a part in the issue of Chinese prostitution, as does the sexualization of these women.

Lucie Hirata states that one of the reasons why Chinese prostitution flourished in San Francisco was due to whites encouraging it to lessen the perceived threat to white women.\textsuperscript{24} The increase in prostitutes coupled with Chinese traditions meant that the Chinese men were less likely to bring wives and families over and settle down. The wider society played on this and allowed the prostitutes in so they could encourage the men to not make California their permanent residence. By using race to their advantage, white society was willing to turn the other way with regards to their laws, if it meant encouraging the Chinese to return to their home country. However, as increasingly more white females came to California, created families, and brought Victorian society with them, they adopted Chinese prostitution as the “white woman’s burden.”\textsuperscript{25} This meant that Victorian minded women in San Francisco began a crusade against prostitution that emphasized the saving of Chinese women.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} Rutter, \textit{Upstairs Girls}, 49.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 27.
With the increased population of white women in the area, so too came an influx in ideals and values of the Victorian family. Within the scope of this Victorian system of values, the fight against prostitution made perfect sense. However, the emphasis these “burdened” white women put upon the issue of Chinese prostitution, as opposed to Irish, French or otherwise, highlights how their effort was less so spurred from a moral higher calling and more so from a feeling of racial superiority. Mission houses set up to help these women and save them from the evil and violence of their profession would often force Christian conversions on them along with the restrictive ideals of Victorian society. The publicity of Donaldina Cameron’s efforts shows that it was more for the benefit of the white women than the benefit of the prostitutes. On several occasions the *San Francisco Chronicle* printed stories of how Cameron would help rescue these women; these articles would put an emphasis on Cameron and her methods and less on the females she was helping. Of course, the articles about these prostitutes emphasize that they are “rescuing... them from a horrible fate.”

One article in 1897 is dedicated to Miss Culbertson, the superintendent before Cameron, and her work at the mission house. In this article, they hardly mention the girls and women she had helped, and instead praise Culbertson’s dedication to her work despite the danger and detriment to her health. By specifically praising Culbertson the media completely leaves out those whom she is helping and only mentions them in order to show what a great person she is. It shows that while praising her dedication to helping Chinese prostitutes, the main interest lies with the white women and how morally superior and virtuous they are. They use the mission house and the work being done there as the means to show the superiority of the white women. By barely acknowledging the Chinese women in the articles or only showing them in the light of poor defenseless creatures, they support the idea that the Chinese are second class citizens; if that at all. They are considered secondary characters in these stories that would not have existed without them. The continued emphasis on the whites involved in these events or the emphasis on the morally wrong proceedings allows

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for the public to continue to only see Chinese sex workers through one lens, as victims and the males as harsh perpetrators. This is so even though many Chinese women participated in forcing others into prostitution.\textsuperscript{29}

Once the women successfully entered the country they were put up for auction, “When the sale began, the girls were brought in one by one to the block. They were stripped, punched, and prodded and in some cases examined by Chinese physicians.”\textsuperscript{30} While some of these women went into higher-class brothels, the majority went into cheap cribs. The brothels catered to a higher clientele than the cribs, and the girls there wore silks and perfume. They might be bought as a man’s mistress for a time and then returned when he didn’t want her anymore. The women who ended up in cribs had a much harder time. They were cheaper and served a rougher crowd. They lived in dirty, dark conditions with only enough room to service her customers. Whether in a brothel or in a crib, both types of prostitutes signed a contract. These contracts would state that they had to serve for four years, but several clauses would allow the contractor to easily add years onto that. The illiteracy levels of these females most often meant that they marked these documents without knowing what it said.\textsuperscript{31} Any attempt to run away meant that they were “to be held a slave for life.” Rutter makes the point that the Chinese emphasis on honor and devotion to their family meant that it was rare for these women to try and escape.\textsuperscript{32} This image of submissive girls who attempted to endure the harsh conditions of their lives most likely added to the image of sexual pleasure. Men, knowing that these females were often here illegally and bound by tradition to obey their masters, often found an added exotic appeal in this. This meant that the men coming for some cheap entertainment could find it easily and without much trouble with these girls. Even if they wanted to, these females could not go to the police if customers or masters mistreated them.

The grim conditions that prostitutes faced fueled society’s view

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} “The Human Merchandise,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, January 28, 1874.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Segraves, \textit{Soiled Doves}, 138.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Rutter, \textit{Upstairs Girls}, 46.
\end{itemize}
of these practices as immoral, which extended to all Chinese immigrants. Since women were forced into this service, society often excused them, allowing them to escape morally while painting them as physically weak. The men who forced the women were considered the vilest. While most white prostitutes were also condemned for their profession as well, they were not excused morally like the Chinese women were. They had usually chosen their fate, whether out of necessity or curiosity, they had to deal with those consequences. While the issues of white prostitution were being prosecuted through laws, they did not make the news as much as Chinese prostitutes. The difference between white and Chinese cases of prostitution in the news shows that people were more concerned with the Chinese. By printing articles about the injustice and the conditions that the women experienced allowed the newspapers to shape society’s opinion against the Chinese men even more. The men who brought the victimized women over in these accounts “exercised complete control until they landed in San Francisco,” which added more fuel to the feelings against Chinese men already in existence. By going against the Victorian ideals of how women were supposed to be treated, allowed both white men and women to get behind the sentiment of keeping the Chinese out of California. Of course, while the women who were forced into this profession were exempt morally, society still ostracized them.

These women were kept isolated from the society at large so when they were taken from the environments of the cribs they faced the daunting task of not only adjusting to foreign surroundings but also to a culture very different to their own. Leaving meant joining a mostly Christian dominant culture that dressed differently and spoke another language. Many of these women spoke only enough English in order to call out to customers on the streets. Most were illiterate and often didn’t learn to speak, read, or write English until they came to a Mission home. Because of this, many did not venture into wider society. This isolation coupled with the already weak image of them allowed for wider society to take advantage of them once rescued by Missionary workers.


34. Tong, Unsubmissive Women, 124.
Donaldina Cameron was one of the most famous Missionary workers to help these women and girls. She was born on July 26, 1869, in New Zealand. Her parents came from Scotland and had a total of seven children. Her father had a sheep ranch that he later moved to the San Joaquin Valley along with his family in 1871. After a few bad years of weather and the death of her mother, the family moved to San Jose and later to Oakland. In Oakland, she became friends with Evelyn Brown whose mother was the president of the Occidental Board of Foreign Missions. It was due to Mrs. Brown’s influence that Cameron entered work at the Mission Home. Cameron was fascinated by Mrs. Brown’s stories of Miss Culbertson who ran the Presbyterian Mission House; Cameron, “Found it incredible that children and young girls could be so brutally treated. She turned the conversation repeatedly to the plight of the Chinese girls in San Francisco.” Cameron’s first job at the Mission House was teaching the girls to sew and later joining the rescue parties. When she discovered that not all the girls wanted to be in the Mission House, Cameron was shocked and could not understand why they would reject help. Miss Culbertson explained by saying, “These are children of darkness” and they were afraid of their masters or “others who asked [for] sanctuary changed their minds when they discovered the Home’s requirements.” The requirements of the Home meant living in simple cotton clothing, eating simple meals, doing chores, and going to lessons. The Mission House, after rescuing the girls, would educate them in western ways; Cameron couldn’t understand why they would not wish to learn. Despite resistance from those who did not accept her help, Cameron is credited with saving at least 3,000 girls from “yellow slavery” since she began her work in the Mission House in the spring of 1895.

Donaldina Cameron constantly referred to the girls she rescued as her “daughters”. This term, while she intended it to be an endearment, was actually very patronizing. By only calling them that, and using it for all of them, the term shows that these females were seen as nothing

35. Martin, Chinatown’s Angry Angel, 34-35.
36. Ibid., 44.
37. Ibid., 23.
more than children who needed the constant guidance of a mother and the only fitting mother for them was a white woman. In fact, many of Cameron’s “daughters” referred to her as “Lo Mo” which translates to mother. Cameron’s care of these girls, like any good Christian woman, included teaching them about Christianity. In a statement recorded by the San Francisco Chronicle, Cameron states that the females were taught Christianity, “but were not coerced.” It is not easy to imagine that she or the news reporter chose this phrasing as a direct stab towards those trying to reclaim the girl. However, the fact that all those who enter the house were taught Presbyterian Christianity does, in fact, point out that they were coerced. It also shows that white women working to help these women felt it necessary to convert them. In order to show off the good work that the Mission house was doing, Cameron would bring some of her “daughters” along with her, “How illuminating for people who knew Chinese only as laundrymen and cooks- or highbinders- to see her daughters in pink shams, hear them recite scriptures, and ‘sing like little birds.’” Presenting the girls this way proved that wider society could convert the Chinese to their ways.

Their form of charity and doing good could not happen without trying to convert them to their “white ways” and the best way to do so was through religion. Cameron also married many of these women off to Chinese men. This is another way to help these “heathens” and convert them to ways of white society. Since the Chinese wouldn’t do it themselves, women like Cameron took it upon themselves to accomplish this. However, many of the women they married off had been prostitutes. Since these women were excused morally due to Chinese prostitution being known as “yellow slavery,” it was acceptable for them to marry Chinese men. Had a white man married a former prostitute, society would have shunned both the white man and the white prostitute. Since these men and women were Chinese, white society held them to a lesser set of moral standards and therefore it was okay for them to marry former prostitutes. The double standards also set up for divisions between the different races in prostitution. This is a blatant form of the racist sentiments towards the Chinese. The fact


that they were all right with the Chinese marrying the type of woman that would not have been acceptable for a white man shows how they viewed the Chinese as lesser. These marriages also show how the whites still felt that the only way to better the Chinese was to make their society more like the white society but still kept separate from them. This also meant that they were still encouraging the law that dictated that the only Chinese women in California must be wives of the men already there.

Even though the majority of the Chinese prostitutes chose or were chosen by death as a way to leave the profession, many were able to leave through other means. Marriage was one of the most popular forms of escape. While whites did not see it acceptable for other whites to marry former prostitutes, Chinese society saw it as acceptable for a second wife to be a former prostitute since “prostitutes were seen as daughters who obeyed the wishes of the family.”40 This acceptance also helped Cameron and those like her, who once rescued the females, tried to marry them off. This conflicting view of former prostitutes showed another way in which the Chinese did not conform to white society, adding more fuel to racism and the ideology that they were immoral. Not only were they forcing these women into prostitution, they were also willing to marry them; something white society thought they were above. Marriages also brought on the extra challenge of pimps, owners, and Tongs coming after their “property.” Fiancés would often try to buy their future wives from their masters, but they did not always succeed. Involving the courts did not always work in their favor either. Judges might unknowingly send the women back to their masters.41

Another way in which they left the trade was by escaping to humanitarian institutions. Such institutions included the Magdalen Asylum and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. While the latter focused on getting them out of prostitution, they did not do much after taking them out of the environment. They focused on miners, which excluded the majority of prostitutes.42 The Magdalen Asylum not only taught the former

40. Tong, Unsubmissive Women, 164.
41. Ibid., 174.
42. Ibid., 176.
prostitutes about religion, but also domestic skills. The majority of women in this institution stayed for only a little while before being deported back to China. The placement of this institution in a white neighborhood allowed for many to be ignorant of its existence. The placement of this institution in a white neighborhood also allowed for them to display the ideals that they encouraged. Teaching these women only religion and domestic work is a direct example of Victorian society that emphasized the woman’s virtuous role in the home. Since these women apparently were lacking in those departments, white women had to take it upon themselves to correct this deficiency. The idea that these women were uneducated in domestic skills shows that white culture did not accept any of the skills taught to girls in China as acceptable. By believing that they must educate these women in what they considered basic skills shows that they were only concerned with reinforcing Victorian ideals on Chinese women.

Such missionary homes in Chinatown were more accessible to prostitutes who wished to escape. The ones that held the market on helping prostitutes were of Methodist and Presbyterian denominations. These mission homes were as much for those they helped as they were for those who ran them. This catered to the belief that by helping the Chinese they were securing their place in salvation. Many of these houses encouraged Chinese women to convert to Christianity and return to China to spread the word of God. This agenda accomplished two things: first, that they expanded the influence of white society; second, that they returned to China. While working under the guise of humanitarian and Christian values, these organizations encouraged the women to return to China. Returning to China might include the risk of being forced back into prostitution, but white society did not see that possibility, or if they did they chose not to speak of it. By encouraging the women to return, they also encourage the men to return. Since the law prohibited interracial marriages, the only way for a Chinese man to marry was to have a bride sent over or marry a former

43. Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 177.
44. *Ibid*.
prostitute. Sending the reformed prostitutes back to China meant fewer females available in California for the Chinese men to marry. It was a subtle way of coercing the men to return to their homes and find a wife, while at the same time, making immigration into California much more difficult than before.

While Chinese prostitution was brutal and unpleasant, leaving it behind also meant entering a much more racist environment. The separation they experienced not only from their homes, but from their culture, and others in their profession who isolated them in a way that other races did not experience. In an attempt to be humanitarian, many of the organizations that helped these women escape also encouraged the spread of racism. Instead of focusing on what these women believed was the help they needed, the organizations often forced religious education and Victorian social ideals upon them. Marrying them to other Chinese men or sending them back to China usually followed this. Organizations like these were rare for other races to go to when they wished to leave prostitution behind. Starting over for non-Chinese prostitutes was difficult to do since they were not morally excused. This emphasized the idea that the Chinese women were no more than children who did not know any better. The newspapers usually spent very little time discussing the females that were rescued and focused instead on praising the white women who helped them. They showed that the focus was still on the whites and that very little care was felt towards these foreign women.
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Analyzing the Ku Klux Klan of 1920’s Fresno

Geoffrey A. Ramirez

It is difficult to approach a topic that is as divisive as the Ku Klux Klan. Images of burning crosses, menacing hooded figures, and stories of violence, murders, and terror enter the minds of many when the topic of the Klan arises, for understandable reasons. The original incarnation of the group sought to avenge perceived injustices meted out against white southerners in the Reconstructed South through violence and terror. Following the Klan’s resurrection in the early twentieth century as the “Invisible Empire,” violence continued to be a powerful tool in the group’s arsenal. Because of this association, the American public came to believe that the Invisible Empire was composed solely of small-minded individuals who held onto outdated and dangerous values. To the public, only fringe members of society could have promoted and participated in Klan activities which included mob violence, penning threatening letters, and political manipulation. Yet, analyzing the revived Klan tells a story not of ignorant laborers but of doctors, salesmen, and other skilled workers of upper and middle-class society who not only supported the racial and “true-American” values of the Klan but were also focused on fixing local issues within their respective communities.

In the early 1920s, a Klan chapter was organized in Fresno, California which displayed similar characteristics to other chapters created around this time yet enough distinctions exist to mark the Fresno chapter as fairly unique. The Fresno Klan reflected the values and complex membership roster of other Klan chapters in America yet did not fully embrace the political activities that other chapters promoted and participated in during this era. Either through choice or poor leadership, the Fresno Klan characterized itself as more of a racial fraternity than an active political body. What this represents is that while prevailing notions of race existed at all levels and
regions of the United States. during this time each Klan chapter followed its own distinct program. While Klan chapters were intent on spreading Klan ideals the methods varied from city to city. To categorize the entirety of the Invisible Empire of this time as wholly violence-based or a collection of grassroots political bodies would be erroneous. The Fresno Klan stood apart from both definitions and attempted to garner membership and public support for the Empire mostly through pageantry.

The Klan of the 1920’s is not a direct descendent of the Reconstruction Era Klan which tyrannized the South following the Civil War, rather it was born from a highly-romanticized portrayal in the film *The Birth of a Nation*. The 1915 film presented the original Klan as American heroes despite its “blatant racism and historical inaccuracies,” fostering what historian Shawn Lay described as a “promising opportunity for a revival of the Invisible Empire.”1 “Colonel” William Joseph Simmons laid the foundation for reviving the Klan in 1915, having worked as a professional recruiter for various fraternities, he dreamed of building a patriotic group of his own “that would ‘destroy from the hearts of men the Mason and Dixon line and build thereupon a great American solidarity.’”2 In 1924, the Fresno Klan proudly displayed Simmons’ values in an advertisement printed in the daily *Fresno Morning Republican*. The ad stated that Klan stood for “white supremacy,” “the Tenets of the Christian religion,” the “sanctity of the home, the... protection of...pure womanhood,” and, interestingly, for “preventing the causes of mob violence and lynchings.”3 While the stance on mob violence was perhaps a later addition to the Klan’s values due to public pressure, it must be noted that first and foremost among the twelve beliefs stood adherence to the Constitution.4 On a national level, the Invisible Empire adhered to Simmons’ version of patriotism and, in a sense, did succeed in removing the Mason Dixon line from the hearts of Klan members.

From his fraternity experience, Simmons was able to draw from


3. “We Stand for the Following – Do You?,” *Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, CA), May 18, 1924.

a wellspring of Masonic inspiration, designing the Klan’s ceremonies and infamous attire with Masonic tinges. The Klan’s chain of command and various managerial positions received titles such as “klatiffs, kludds, kligrapps, klabees, kladds, and klexters” with individual chapters being titled “klaverns.” In 1915, Simmons gathered thirty-four initial members and successfully petitioned the state of Georgia for an official charter, igniting a cross on Stone Mountain Thanksgiving night to formally signal the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in America. While certainly dramatic, the Invisible Empire remained contained to Georgia and Alabama through the rest of the decade but that quickly changed after Simmons gained the aid of the Southern Publicity Association and the business acumen of Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler in 1920. The pair reorganized membership procedures, hired full-time recruiters known as “kleagles,” and promptly sent representatives throughout the South. Klan activity and membership increased rapidly, so much so that it caught the attention of the New York World which then published an expose on the organization in 1921. The free exposure by the press and official inquest by Congress only served to drive public interest in the organization higher, enough so that the Empire eventually spread to California.

Sometime in 1921, during this atmosphere of interest and under so far unknown circumstances, the Invisible Empire arrived in Fresno. On July 23, the Kleagles operating within Fresno sent the first list of member names to California Klan headquarters in Los Angeles. The klavern seemed to operate in secret, as no news on Klan activity in the city existed before the events in spring of 1922 brought mass public attention its presence.

5. Invisible Empire, 6.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 7.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 8-9.
11. Ibid., 7-8.
12. “District Attorney Announces Names on Kleagle’s Lists,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 5, 1922.
In Inglewood, California, a small suburb of Los Angeles, Klansmen led a raid against alleged moonshiners that wound up shattering the secrecy surrounding the Fresno klavern. With prohibition in full swing at the time, the Klansmen of Inglewood sought to bring about vigilante-style justice on the supposed moonshiners in accordance with “Colonel” Simmons’s desire for his new Empire to adhere to the Constitution. While moonshiners may not come to mind as the typical victims of Klan violence, Klansmen saw it as their duty to uphold law and order when they deemed it necessary. However, the actions of the Inglewood klavern came to a disastrous end, resulting in the death of a constable and an official investigation on the nature of the Klan in California.

On the night of April 22, 1922 Inglewood Klansmen raided the home of “Spaniards who conducted a winery under federal license” but who had been presumed by the Klansmen to be bootleggers. A marshal arrived at the scene of the raid and, following a scuffle, proceeded to shoot and kill Constable M. B. Mosher who was a part of the masked mob. During the coroner’s inquest on the matter, the members of the mob were gathered for testimony where it was uncovered that the Inglewood klavern was responsible. Judge Frank R. Willis announced that a jury would be called to fully investigate the nature of the organization in Inglewood. The *Fresno Morning Republican* remained an attentive reporter of the situation as it unfolded. On April 27, 1922 the *Republican* reprinted an evening report which stated that the District Attorney of L.A. directed a successful raid on Klan headquarters in the business district of the city. The investigators acquired membership applications, regalia with name tags, and all manner of personal and professional papers. When the L.A. investigators began to

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
comb through this evidence they unearthed massive amounts of information about the network of the Invisible Empire in California and began to make rosters and other evidence available to public officials from cities found to have klaverns. Without the ineptitude of the Inglewood Klansmen, Fresno’s klavern would have most likely remained hidden until they had organized well enough to safely announce their existence.

“Investigation of Ku Klux Klansmen Turned to Fresno” ran on the first page of the Republican on April 29, bringing the existence of Fresno’s klavern to public knowledge. The drama unfolded through May of 1922 and public officials were quick to suppress any possible avenue of Klan activity. Fresno’s District Attorney B. W. Gearhart presented the names of six police officers who were among those listed on membership rosters for the Fresno klavern and said that he would “break [the Klan] up and prevent any outrages.” On May 1, “Inside Fresno Klan Story Bared” headed the entire first page of the Republican and nearly every column was devoted to news on the organization. Names of Kings County members were presented along with a photograph of the first threat letter sent within Fresno which ordered one W. A. Colquhoun to leave town. Without the advantage of time and secrecy, the Fresno Klan may have ultimately been crippled in its ability to exert any sort of lasting control over the city. While this point will be brought up again later, it must be stated now that the full weight of the District Attorney and the public being pressed upon the Fresno Klan less than a full year from its possible inception may have stunted any chance of gaining more talented and effective members. Before the exposure, however, the Fresno Klan did manage to gather a wide range of respected Fresno natives into its ranks.

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of Every Right” presented the names of fifteen members of the Fresno klavern which included “five dentists, a former city trustee, a member of the Fresno fire department, a member of the public works department... and several prominent businessmen...”23 Among these names were Dr. L. F. Luckie, a physician and “Exalted Cyclops,” or head, of the Fresno Klan, and one J. M. Euless, a local real estate broker.24 While information on Dr. Luckie was scarce, Euless existed as a rather prominent figure in Fresno history. In the 1946 Fresno Community Book which presented small biographies on notable Fresnans, Euless’s achievements are presented in no short order. The book proudly proclaims his successful organization of the Euless-Dermer raisin pool which “[sold] the raisins of all its members for more than the outsider was able to obtain, and paid all the pools obligations, and still had money left in the treasury.”25 Euless had also been a member of the Fresno County Chamber of Commerce, the Farm Bureau, a member of the Elks Lodge and Odd Fellows and had a “liveable [sic] six-acre estate, located at the corner of Huntington Boulevard and Peach street.”26 The biography makes no mention of his previous affiliation with the Klan. J. M. Euless was not a man who existed on the fringes of society. He was a respected businessman with ties to the agrarian elite, a far cry from the dangerous vigilante that D.A. Gearhart was painting the local Klansmen to be.

The notion of the Klan being made up of ignorant members has roots in the same decade the organization resurfaced and is tied to the 1924 book by John Moffatt Mecklin The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind. In his book, Mecklin states that the resurgent Klan’s “masks and parades, its anonymous threatening letters, its childish attempts to intimidate its enemies...can find no justification in a well-ordered society.”27 The typical

23. “Gearhart Condemns Klan As Violator Of Almost Every Right,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 1, 1922.
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 231.
Klansmen, according to Mecklin, was a part of a “diminishing stock” who were dismayed by the arrival of foreigners and “the growing strength of the Catholic faith” in the United States.\textsuperscript{28} Mecklin further describes the movement as “small town” and states that the organization helped the members compensate for their mediocre existences along with senses of “personal or civic inferiority,” through the ornate pageantry.\textsuperscript{29} This stance on the Klan was hardly countered through the rest of the twentieth century. As Leonard J. Moore notes in his section of \textit{The Invisible Empire in the West}, many historians tended to agree with the belief that the movement was made in response to “the benighted culture of rural, small-town America.”\textsuperscript{30} Yet, Euless certainly did not embody this small-mindedness that Mecklin and others projected onto the average Klansman. He was a prominent businessman fully involved in the Fresno community. He had no need to compensate for an inferiority complex and his banking and organization of a grower’s pool certainly afforded no sense towards keeping Fresno small. Was Euless simply an anomaly? A rare, well-reasoned individual standing within a crowd of small-minded men?

On May 5, 1922, the \textit{Fresno Morning Republican} printed a list of 240 alleged members of the Ku Klux Klan in Fresno County.\textsuperscript{31} This presented the opportunity for the author to analyze who the Klan had managed to attract as members. Several names were cross checked with the 1922 Fresno City Directory and produced interesting results. Fred W. Loomis was listed as a manager at Reliable Auto Trimmin Company; H. L. Owensbey was listed as a rancher; R. B. Tucker was a salesman; R. W. Goodell a carpenter; and J. G. Hewlings a tower man for Sante Fe rail.\textsuperscript{32} Working men to be sure, but skilled ones. The names released earlier also

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28.] Allport, “Review of The Ku Klux Klan,” 430.
\item[29.] \textit{Ibid.}, 429-430.
\item[31.] “District Attorney Announces Names On Kleagle’s Lists,” \textit{Fresno Morning Republican} (Fresno, CA), May 5, 1922.
\item[32.] \textit{Fresno City and Fresno County Directory 1922} (Sacramento: Polk-Husted Directory Company, 1922), Sections G, H, L, O, T.
\end{footnotes}
listed doctors, businessmen, and a fireman meaning that the Fresno Klan did not fully encapsulate the social stereotype which Mecklin painted the organization with. How these men came to join the organization helps to paint a picture of the membership composition as well. In an exposé on the Fresno klavern, W. N. Gilliam stated that he had been approached by his friend, Dr. L. H. Irwin to join the local klavern and that initiates were sworn in at the Odd Fellows Hall of Fresno.33 This suggests that the kleagles who recruited in Fresno did so through the local fraternities which were likely comprised of educated, middle-class gentry, the complete opposite of Mecklin’s description. These were men who had influence and control over the affairs of the community and could have been organized into a well-funded, and tactical, political arm.

The findings of seven historians who presented their work in *The Invisible Empire in the West* also refute Mecklin’s portrayal of 1920s Klansmen. The collection of essays includes detailed analyses of membership demographics of the klaverns organized in El Paso, Denver, Anaheim, Salt Lake City, and Eugene and La Grande, Oregon. The findings are very similar to the cursory analysis of Fresno’s klavern. Due to a 1924 application book, historian Robert Goldberg was able to statistically analyze the 17,000 members of the Denver Klan and found that members belonged to varying social classes with many of the early joiners being middle to upper-class as a result of recruitment techniques which focused on local fraternities.34 As the Invisible Empire grew in prominence within the city, the roster began to represent “a near occupational cross section of the local community.”35 To Shawn Lay, official membership rosters were unavailable but citing a study which found that the number of white collar workers were made up primarily of “Non-Spanish-surnamed workers,” he concludes that the majority of El Paso Klansmen were most likely white-

33. “My Experiences As A Klansman,” *Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, CA), May 2, 1922.


collar workers. Christopher Cocoltchos’s analysis of Anaheim membership demographics concluded that they were “neither economically nor socially insecure” as Klansmen owned a fair amount of property and were very active in civic activities. Thus the Fresno membership reflected a middle-class composition which made up klaverns in other parts of the United States at this time.

The ultimate argument of The Invisible Empire in the West is that the driving forces behind the popularity of the Klan in the 1920s were entwined with grassroots social and political motivations. That is, that the broad “true American” values the Klan stood for could be applied in a variety of local situations and looked to be an answer to perceived failures or injustices that Klansmen saw present in their communities. Shawn Lay’s essay “Imperial Outpost on the Border: El Paso’s Frontier Klan No. 100” argues that the rise of the KKK in El Paso was due in part to “widespread anger and frustration over what was perceived to be a general breakdown of law, order, and social morality.” The years of chaos resulting from the 1910 Mexican Revolution had scared residents along the border and fed into suspicions that Mexicans were inherently violent and cruel. When the Mexican vote helped defeat local prohibition in 1918, residents felt it was evidence of Mexican immorality allowing the Klan to appeal to this belief for support.

Robert Goldberg found in his study of the Denver klavern that while the organization played on racial tensions to attract members they also pledged to clean the city of its crime problem, Denver having been plagued with bootleggers, brothels, and police corruption charges. The surging membership allowed the Denver Klan to secretly support the election of


39. Ibid., 69.

40. Ibid., 70.

Benjamin F. Stapleton on a platform of city clean-up in 1923.\textsuperscript{42} He quickly set to purging the police department of corruption and amplified activity against criminal actions.\textsuperscript{43} Klan membership was fueled by these local concerns and the various klaverns acted as voting blocs that could influence local and state governments to desired effects.

Fresno Klansmen seemed concerned with upholding the law but not to the same extent as the klaverns researched by the seven other historians. One of the only instances where Klansmen were involved in promoting a measure of lawful activity came in the form of one article in the evening newspaper \textit{The Fresno Bee}. On June 16, 1923 \textit{The Bee} reported that a railroad worker named W. S. Armstrong was fined for possession of liquor in Big Creek, a city within Fresno County, but he claimed it was a frame up staged by Big Creek’s Klan.\textsuperscript{44} Armstrong asserted that he had been approached by an informal acquaintance on where to acquire liquor and was then jumped by a group of men after obtaining it, some of whom Armstrong recognized as local Klan members.\textsuperscript{45} Armstrong’s story concludes here but on June 30 an order was passed banning the utilization of “stool pigeon tactics,” using a decoy to facilitate a transaction, for the purposes of liquor arrests in Fresno.\textsuperscript{46} This was possibly due to the entrapment utilized in Armstrong’s case but more importantly this is the only piece of information that could be found which indicated that Fresno County Klansmen were concerned over lawfulness in the local populace. The extent at which local concerns played into recruitment and activities of the Fresno Klan is not as apparent or existent as with other klaverns across the country in the 1920s.

Also unlike the cases presented in \textit{The Invisible Empire in the West}, research into the Fresno klavern uncovered no evidence of extensive activity in local politics. This is likely due to the city’s quick response upon discovering the Klan’s presence. On May 2, 1922 Deputy Charles Farnam resigned after

\textsuperscript{42} Goldberg, “Denver,” 47-48.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{44} “Gang Violence Is Charged [In] Liquor Arrest,” \textit{The Fresno Bee} (Fresno, CA), June 16, 1923.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{46} “Death Knell Of ‘Stool Pigeons’ Sounded To-Day,” \textit{The Fresno Bee} (Fresno, CA), June 30, 1923.
admitting he was a member of the local Klan and the following day Mayor Truman G. Hart “removed seven members of the [police] department who had taken the oath of allegiance to the Klan.” These police resignations were the only real high profile removal of Klansmen in public positions but showcased how the city was quick to check the Klan’s ability to influence city affairs at any avenue. Where secrecy afforded the Denver and El Paso klaverns to exert large amounts of control over local government, the early exposure and response would have made it difficult for the Fresno Klan to operate on the same level.

The activity in neighboring Kern County, where the lawlessness of the Empire was displayed with vigor, almost certainly fueled public resistance to the Klan’s presence in Fresno as well. The Republican reported on May 7, 1922 that several high-ranking members of Kern County were associated with the Klan, including the deputy sheriff, the chief of police, the chairman of the Board of Supervisors, and a former assistant district attorney. The days leading up to this revelation were also rife with reports of violence in the county. On March 6, 1922 the Republican reported incidents of “night riders” who terrorized local citizens including George N. Bowman who had been ordered to leave town after being dragged through oil. The extent of control the Empire assumed in Kern County undoubtedly frightened Fresno officials, both in the methods and values it represented. The secrecy and underhandedness of the organization, no matter how patriotic it claimed to be, did not sit well with the accepted American values of the public. The Klan’s activities in Kern County and elsewhere flew in the face of legality and people did not want to be associated with it.

The Fresno Klan did not falter completely under the public glare and managed to garner new members in the following months. On May 4, 1922 the local chapter boasted in the Republican of 12 new initiates who

47. “4 More Policemen of Fresno Found On Ku Klux Klan List,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 2, 1922; “City Policemen Discharged For Oath To Klan,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 3, 1922.

48. “Chief of Police, Supervisor Head, Among Members,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 7, 1922.

49. “Night Riders Halt Raids But Marked Victims Still Flee,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), March 6, 1922.
joined to “a great deal of applause” during the height of the exposure. The previous day, May 3, a threat letter was sent to District Attorney Gearhart which stated that he had underestimated the power of the Fresno Klan and claimed the group would only grow due to the exposure. On May 21, 1923 The Fresno Bee quoted the Exalted Cyclops, the title of a klavern head, Dr. L. F. Luckie as claiming that nearly 100 people had joined the organization at a weekend gathering at Huntington Lake. Some of these new members had joined the Big Creek chapter and likely had a part to play in the scuffle with Armstrong the following month. While time proved the Fresno chapter slightly correct in their 1922 assertion that they would continue to expand, the slow rate at which it occurred is almost certainly attributed to the early exposure brought upon them.

Klan activity largely stagnated in the city until the early summer of 1924, being reduced to very minor news pieces in the interceding year since their exposure. In October of 1923, the klavern decorated the grave of a fallen member with an arrangement of K’s laid across a floral piece. This disgusted a non-Klan associate of the deceased who then tore down, only to have the arrangements put back up with the support of the family. The only other quarrel the Fresno Klan was involved in was an editorial one. In December of 1922, the Fresno klavern sent a letter to The Fresno Bee decrying an editorial The Bee had posted which criticized the Berkeley klavern’s use of a school auditorium to hold a rally. The Klan’s letter denounced the piece as defamatory and claimed that the organization only stood for upholding American morals and values, not “hatred, religious prejudice and

50. “12 Initiated Into Klan At Meeting On Friday Night,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 4, 1922.


52. “Many Joined Klan, Says Fresno Doctor,” The Fresno Bee (Fresno, CA), May 21, 1923.

53. “Invisible Empire Guards Grave,” The Fresno Bee (Fresno, CA), October 11, 1923.

54. Ibid.

55. “Fresno Ku Klux Klan Condemns Fresno Bee,” The Fresno Bee (Fresno, CA), December 11, 1922.
mob rule.” 56 The Fresno Bee published a response which offered a list of reported instances of violence perpetrated by the Kern klavern along with news that other fraternal organizations had declared the Invisible Empire un-American as evidence to the contrary. 57 The editorial ended the assertion that “if the local...Klan does not know these facts then it has failed to follow the current events of the past two years.” 58 Beyond these two instances, the Big Creek issue, and the claim of new members in May 1923 the Fresno Klan largely disappeared into the background of local affairs and it raises questions as to why.

Beyond the obvious stunting affect early exposure had on the organization, another possible explanation for the relatively quiet two-year period between major stories may be that the local chapter underwent serious internal reorganization. The 1922 December editorial to The Bee is signed Fresno Klan No. 1 but advertisements run in the Republican in 1924 are signed Fresno Klan No. 2, indicating some type of restructuring. Internal friction between members may possibly account for this. While it is possible that members of the group elected to retain a largely ceremonial and fraternal organization, a lack of strong leadership under the Exalted Cyclops Dr. L. F. Luckie in organizing the Klan’s activity could have stunted its potential in influencing the community.

In W. N. Gilliam’s three-part exposé on the Fresno Klan he detailed the lack of true activity that the Fresno Klan seemed to possess in its early existence. According to Gilliam, the meeting he attended began with commendations for local officers whom upheld the law, denial of reports on Klan lawlessness, and making “defamatory remarks” against Jews, Catholics, Japanese, and African Americans. 59 At the meeting it was also discussed how they could threaten officers for not enforcing city ordinances but “No actual threats against officers were made” while Gilliam was a

57. “Mirror Of Facts For The Ku Klux Klan,” The Fresno Bee (Fresno, CA), December 11, 1922.
58. Ibid.
59. “My Experiences As A Klansman,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 3, 1922.
member. Gilliam also mentioned that when a “citizen” of the Invisible Empire, Clyde Young, attempted to offer a suggestion of what the Klan could do in the city he was told sit and be quiet. Gilliam claimed that Cyclops Luckie had ruled that “he [Luckie] was boss, and that any subject that he did not want discussed would not be allowed.” The next day, Young was expelled without reason and 31 members, including Gilliam, withdrew themselves from the organization due to its practicing of what they deemed to be undemocratic fraternal practices. If Luckie had actually acted in such a manner then it would suggest that he was a very incapable leader. Rather than organize members into a cohesive unit, it is possible that Luckie’s dictatorial leadership only compounded the issues the klavern found itself in. While Gilliam’s expose is undoubtedly biased with his own desire to downplay his support and involvement with anything illegal or reprehensible, his depiction of Luckie seems to be an accurate representation of the man.

Information on the internal workings of the Fresno Klan is scarce, but Luckie’s public boasting of gaining new members in May of 1922 and 1923 showed his devotion to the Klan. He also appears in the story concerning the decorations of the dead Klansman, having supported the family’s decision to reinstall the floral K’s which were torn down. His appearances set a precedent for his presence in any news concerning his klavern. Where the Fresno Klan needed a voice, he was there. Yet, no mention of Luckie is made in a 1924 report by the Republican of 100 women being sworn into the organization at the Fresno Fairgrounds, nor of those in subsequent articles posted by the Fresno Bee. This suggests that at some point before May 1924, Luckie was either removed or voluntarily left the klavern. It can be assumed that this would have occurred during or resulted from the reorganization of the klavern as Fresno Klan No. 2. The combination of

60. “My Experiences As A Klansman,” Fresno Morning Republican, May 3, 1922.
61. “Klansman’s Experiences,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 4, 1922.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. “Klan Initiate 100 Women In Public Service,” Fresno Morning Republican (Fresno, CA), May 20, 1924.
exposure and poor leadership may have stunted the growth and activity of the Fresno Klan from 1922 to 1923 and despite reorganizing itself the Fresno Klan would never fully recover.

News of the Fresno klavern remained scarce until May 13, 1924 when an advertisement in the *Republican* marked a month-long flurry of Klan activity in Fresno. On page seven of the paper, dominating the bottom right corner, ran an ad proudly presenting the “Ku Klux Klan State Wide Fiesta” which included such attractions as a Klan wedding, no less than three ceremonials, and lectures by prominent Klan officials all to be held at the Fresno Fair grounds.65 In a display of journalistic humor, the *Republican* reported on this new development the following day with a small article hidden on page nine which simply was simply titled “Klan Expects To Add Many New Members.”66 Despite running advertisements for the fiesta throughout the month, the *Republican* offered little exposure to the event compared to *The Fresno Bee*. *The Bee* followed the fiesta throughout its duration and presented detailed, if sometimes minor, reports on the lectures made by Reverend Horace Lackey and other speakers. Rev. Lackey lectured on a series of topics ranging from alcoholism to reasserting that immigrants should be made to “kiss that starry flag and swear allegiance to the constitution.”67 On May 25, the *Republican* offered one of its few reports on the Fiesta stating that around 600 people had marched in a Klan parade through the city.68 While certainly grand in scale and pageantry, the Fresno fiesta would prove to be the last big hurrah of the Klan in the county in the 1920s.

On May 29 the *Fresno Bee* reported on the end of the fiesta, stating in a tiny column on page two that, after all the glowing words and parades, a collection hat was passed around the gathered Klansmen in order to solicit

65. “Fresno Ku Klux Klan State Wide Fiesta And Public Ceremonial,” *Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, CA), May 13, 1924.

66. “Klan Expects To Add Many New Members,” *Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, CA), May 14, 1924.

67. “Klansman Vows Alien Convicts Must Kiss Flag,” *The Fresno Bee* (Fresno, CA), May 21, 1924.

68. “600 March In Klan Parade,” *Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, CA), May 25, 1924.
donations for cause. Information on the Fresno Klan becomes scarce beyond this point but it would be presumptuous to declare what fate the klavern succumbed to. More importantly, the Fiesta proved that the Fresno Klan had major connections with klaverns across California and the United States and also had the means of organizing mass activity. But it the Fiesta occurred two years after being discovered in the city and during a time when Klan activity was starting to taper off across the nation. The Fiesta came at the height of the Fresno Klan’s power yet fizzled away just as quickly.

The Fresno Klan was not overtly political in its motivations like Denver, El Paso, or Anaheim, nor did it commit to violent acts like the klavern of Kern County. But the klavern’s middle-class and skilled worker membership certainly reflects the roster of other klaverns in the United States and thus counters the idea of John Moffatt Mecklin that Klansmen were mostly ignorant, rural, working class men. The Fresno Klan shared the core beliefs of the organization, standing for white supremacy, adherence to the Constitution, and general Americanism and gathered a few hundred members over its lifespan suggesting wider appeal in the area for these ideals. While the Fresno Klan embodies some of the ideas that are presented by the works of Shawn Lay and his colleagues it was not fully motivated to act in accordance to grassroots concerns. The Fresno chapter seemed content with remaining a fraternal organization even after reorganizing into an effective body. A basic summation of the reports on Fresno Klan activity can be read as having burnt a few crosses, sent a few letters one of which sparked an editorial tiff with The Fresno Bee, been associated with a beating in Big Creek, decorated a grave, and helped to organize a statewide fiesta. Due to the combination of public pressure and poor leadership, the Fresno Klan never grew into a secretive political arm or violent band. It instead focused on fraternal pageantry as a means of promoting Klan ideals within the community.

When District Attorney B. W. Gearhart declared the Invisible Empire to be “Violators of Almost Every Right” he was certainly correct in regarding it to the organization as a whole. The Fresno Klan was a branch of a fraternity which promoted racism, participated in mob violence, and

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69. “Donations Asked At Klan Fiesta,” The Fresno Bee (Fresno, CA), May 29 1924.
attempted political manipulation of cities and states. These facts are damning and should not be ignored when analyzing any part of the Invisible Empire. Yet, taken by itself the Fresno Klan seems to have been far a “Violator of Almost Every Right.” The Fresno Klan largely failed in influencing the city’s actions or its citizens. It had been forced, through pressure or choice, to focus on the public image of itself and the Klan as a whole. The Fresno Klan of the 1920’s ultimately existed as an ineffectual, perverse fraternity with only one grand fiesta to its name.
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"VIOLATORS OF ALMOST EVERY RIGHT"
Sugar Mamas
British Women and the War on West Indian Slavery

Stephanie D. Polos

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, an age of restricted female rights and responsibilities, the movements to abolish the slave trade and slavery itself in British colonies provided a rare opportunity for women to be involved in political and social activism. Abolitionists and politicians mobilized female supporters from all sectors of British society to produce and spread anti-slavery rhetoric and support for reform. Despite their traditional restriction to domestic activities, many women actively and enthusiastically took on the challenge of abolition and their participation became an integral part of the abolition movement. Without women’s participation in the movement, the push for abolition would have been much more difficult and may not have been achieved until much later in the nineteenth century. Capitalizing on their position as the moral center of the home and and embracing their ability to influence communities, women used pamphlets and in-person campaigns to spread abolitionist sentiments throughout Britain. In addition to their influence in the abolitionist movement in Britain, the social and political activism of women fed directly into the feminist and suffragette movements later in the nineteenth century.

This project explores how British women overcame their political limitations and used their social positions in order to challenge the institutions of slavery. Women’s activism against the slave trade and later against slavery had dramatic but overlooked political, social, and religious implications for Britain. Most of the primary sources used were written by women and their anti-slavery organizations, including pamphlets promoting the moral and political righteousness of abolition and reports from abolitionist societies which had been organized by and consisted of women. These sources provide a rare look at early political activity by women in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries, as women generally did not produce an abundance of political literature until the women’s movement later in the nineteenth century. They also provide a reflection on the roles of women in society, and demonstrate that women could be influential and important to British politics even though they had little political power.

British slavery was a contradiction in and of itself. While the kingdom’s economy and wealth was based on the economic production of its colonies in the West Indies, the British took great pride in their liberty and Christian principles. For a nation that was so rooted in Christianity, slavery was considered a stain on its reputation. Many opponents of slavery focused on this hypocrisy, noting that it was “absurdity and folly...directly at variance with the enlightened policy of our Government and of the age in which we live.” Slavery was deemed an abomination of the highest level of morality. Abolitionist pamphlets and writings emphasized the cruelties of West Indian slavery in order to bring its realities to British society, claiming that in order to have “the most perfect freedom,” British society must “no longer impose upon others a slavery...most oppressive; and...no longer range the world to increase the misery of mankind.” The stage had been set for a widespread push for Parliament to abolish slavery.

In the final decades of the eighteenth century slavery quickly became, and long remained, an issue intermingled with religion, politics, social conventions, and international relations. The specific motivations for involvement in the abolition movement varied from person to person, but generally fell under at least one of these categories. The most important reason for activism was the idea that slavery directly contradicted religious beliefs in what many Britons considered “the most-highly favored...of all

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3. *West India Sugar* (Liverpool: George Smith, 1827), 2.

4. [William Fox], *An Address to the People of Great Britain on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Daniel Lawrence, 1792), 3.
Christian nations.” Abolitionists often saw the need to end slavery as part of a moral duty to relieve the suffering of an oppressed people. Many anti-slavery societies grew out of religious communities, which believed that slavery was “a decidedly religious question” and incorporated Evangelical principles into their campaign. These organizations argued that when people ignored the Christian call to love their neighbors and to be interested in the welfare of mankind, “the love of God is extinguished, and our own true happiness is extinguished with it….when we become careless of their interests, we are moral suicides.” While the New Testament preached love and humanitarianism to a certain degree, it said nothing that prohibited or condemned slavery, while the Old Testament provided passages that allowed for the acquisition and possession of slaves. Slaveholders and traders were accused of using this lack of biblical criticism to excuse cruelty and greed, which abolitionists believed would discredit the religion in the eyes of slaves. Side-stepping the issue of Christian charity and humanitarianism, many opponents of abolition, such as House of Commons member Isaac Gascoyne, focused on the economic risk of ending slavery was dangerous for investors and for the empire, arguing that doing so would cripple the British economy and power structure. Even though both pro- and anti-slavery parties believed that their cause was divinely sanctioned, many opponents of slavery believed that evolving religious attitudes placed Christianity on the side of the abolitionists.

Complementing the belief that Christian doctrine condemned the slave trade was the idea that African slaves, as well as all African people, needed to be “civilized” in the British model. Following Enlightenment concepts,

5. [Heyrick], Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences, 14.

6. An Appeal to the Christian Women of Sheffield, From the Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery (Sheffield: R. Leader, 1837), 13.


10. HC Deb 10 June 1806 vol. 7 cc591-593.
the abolition movement emphasized ideas of natural rights and a need for education, which contradicted the system of slavery. However, civilizing slaves could not be accomplished while nominally Christian plantation owners and slave traders continued to violate religious laws.\textsuperscript{11} Abolitionists stressed that focusing on educating the slaves without abolishing slavery diverted “public attention from the great fundamental evil itself, to the partial alleviation of the distress which it occasions, [which] shall do harm instead of good.”\textsuperscript{12} Before Britain could lead the way in “civilizing” the people of Africa, they first needed to end the system which oppressed the Africans.

Politicians, while hesitant to take on the complicated issue, could not avoid the battle over slavery. Pro-slavery and anti-slavery parties both pushed Parliament to take a stand. The idea was rapidly spreading through Britain that something “which is morally wrong cannot be politically right.”\textsuperscript{13} Parliamentary action was led by the Evangelical Party, the reform party, and “hard-headed, practical men” like William Fox and William Wilberforce.\textsuperscript{14} This was a combination that guaranteed humanitarian reform. However, any attempt to limit or end the slave trade met with powerful opposition. Fox complained that the great wealth that came out of the slave trade “created an influence that secures its continuance.”\textsuperscript{15} Abolitionists recognized the overwhelming power that greed had over politics. In addition to opposition by people who profited from slavery within Britain, colonial legislatures took advantage of their distance from the government and ignored recommendations and orders from Parliament concerning the slave trade.\textsuperscript{16} For legislation to have any affect, reform-minded politicians like Fox and Wilberforce needed widespread public support.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Elizabeth Heyrick, \textit{Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition} (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia A. S. Society, 1837), 10.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Associations} (London: Bagster and Thoms, 1828), 5.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} \textit{An Address to the Inhabitants of Europe}, 10.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} Frank J. Klingberg, \textit{The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism}, ([Hamden, Conn.]: Archon Books, 1968), 130.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} [Fox], \textit{An Address to the People of Great Britain}, 3.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16} [Heyrick], \textit{Apology for Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Associations}, 3.}
In the late eighteenth century, women were largely excluded from the debate over slavery. During this time, they were commonly confined to the home as wives and mothers, and were expected to stay out of political issues.\textsuperscript{17} This was not always seen as a disadvantage. Many women considered themselves “happily excluded from the great theatre of public business, from the turmoils of ambition, the strife of debate, and the cares of legislation.”\textsuperscript{18} Despite this artificial but culturally ingrained inferiority, women found small ways to contribute to the abolitionist movement. Fox, a popular pamphleteer as well as a politician, urged people to refuse to use products, especially sugar and rum, produced by slaves in the West Indies until planters agreed to stop importing slaves.\textsuperscript{19} Given the structure of domestic duties, this call was primarily aimed at women who ran their household. While there was some success in this campaign, historian Clare Midgley notes that its main contribution was “the role it played in creating in large numbers of men and women a sense of individual responsibility for slavery, and a belief in the possibility of achieving its downfall through extra-Parliamentary action.”\textsuperscript{20} For many, this was the first taste of social and political activism.

The other main contribution women made in this first stage of the abolitionist movement was through the publication of anti-slavery poetry. Poets such as Hannah More and Ann Yearsley produced “political propaganda for a huge audience” as part of the abolition movement.\textsuperscript{21} Their poetry publicized the plight of African slaves in the West Indies and urged women to involve themselves in the movement:

\begin{quote}
Say not that small’s the sphere in which we move,
And our attempts would vain and fruitless prove;
Not so - we hold a most important share,
\end{quote}

18. [Heyrick], \textit{Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences of British Women}, 3.
19. [Fox], \textit{An Appeal to the People of Great Britain}, 11.
In all the evils - all the wrongs they bear,
And tho’ their woes entire we can’t remove,
We may th’increasing mis’ries which they prove,
Push far away the plant for which they die,
And in this one small thing our taste deny;
We must, we ought, ‘tis Justice points the way;
Mercy and Charity loudly call - “obey.”

Emphasizing the domestic and Christian duties of British women, the poems condemned participants in the slave trade, sympathized with the slaves, and emphasized the need to civilize Africans. The women portrayed slaves as akin to Rousseau’s “noble savages,” capable of reason and society, but unjustly condemned to slavery because they were “convicted…of a darker skin.” Despite support from different levels of society and literature spreading information about anti-slavery, women’s involvement in this first wave of abolition was small compared to their participation in the movement to abolish slavery entirely two decades later.

After much difficulty, the British slave trade was finally abolished in 1807, although slavery itself was still legal. Abolitionists hoped that when the slave trade ended, “the evils of slavery would be gradually mitigated, and the whole system would soon come to an end.” However, it quickly became apparent that this would not be the case. The slave trade “flourished under other flags” and continued in the West Indies in spite of British legislation. Some had predicted this outcome, arguing that “the African slave trade be the most prominent feature in this wickedness [of slavery], yet it is but a feature: and where it is abolished the West India slavery would


still exist.” In 1824, Elizabeth Heyrick, a popular abolitionist and pamphlet writer, complained that it had been “seventeen years since the Slave Trade was abolished…but Slavery is still perpetuated in our West India Colonies, and the horrors of the Slave Trade are aggravated rather than mitigated.”

Even though the British slave trade had ended more than a decade earlier, the practice of slavery and its cruelties continued unabated until British society again turned its attention to the issue in the 1820s.

Following the realization that there was no end to slavery in sight, in 1823 a new wave of campaigns began, this time focused on the total abolition of slavery. Despite their continued lack of a political voice, women were far more influential in this second wave of activism than they had been thirty years earlier. Most importantly, female abolitionists like Elizabeth Heyrick and the women of abolitionist societies found a way to be an integral part of the movement without venturing too far from their traditional domestic and social roles, for going too far beyond the gender boundaries would be perceived as a threat and would have complicated their work for the anti-slavery movement.

The call for women to participate in this new movement came early. Traditionally considered the more sensitive of the sexes, it was believed that women’s personalities particularly disposed them “to regard with peculiar hostility an institution which rudely tears asunder all the strongest ties of nature.” The abolitionists calling for women’s involvement emphasized that the lack of a political presence should not prevent them from using their domestic role to influence public opinion and undermine the slave system. Women and their ability to influence society and spread word about the horrors of slavery quickly became a central focus of the abolitionist movement.

British women voiced their opposition and circulated stories of atrocities in the West Indies through an outpouring of pamphlets and propaganda. Just as in the earlier era of the anti-slavery movement, these

26. [Fox], An Address to the People of Great Britain, 12.
27. Heyrick, Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition, 3.
28. Midgley, Women Against Slavery, 43.
29. [Heyrick], Apology for Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Associations, 4.
writings were aimed at exposing the cruelties of slavery and spurring British women into action. Elizabeth Heyrick, one of the most prolific of the writers, encouraged her “enlightened and patriotic countrywomen [to] reflect on the present situation of England with regard to that cherished crime.”\textsuperscript{31} The pamphlets encouraged a variety of different means of activism, including boycotting West Indian sugar and influencing family members. Many of these pamphlets were written by women and specifically intended for other women to read, creating a network of female abolitionists through which stories of atrocities and calls to action were spread.

Much of the abolitionist literature directed toward the women of Britain focused on the condition of female slaves. To appeal to the perceived femininity and sensitivity of women, and to generate the idea of a universal bond of womanhood and family, writers emphasized the horrible treatment of female slaves in the West Indies. Stressing the “malignant influence which slavery exerts over the female character,” authors portrayed enslaved women as “the weakest and most succourless of the human race…whose afflictions and degradations were once experienced by many of the inhabitants of this land.”\textsuperscript{32} The connection between formerly oppressed women of Britain and currently oppressed women of the West Indies was meant to outrage the “civilized” women of Britain. Pamphlets emphasized how slavery deprived women of their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers in order to outrage the feminine sensibilities of British women.\textsuperscript{33}

As soon as the pamphlets circulated abolitionist sentiments and recommended methods of protest, women throughout Britain quickly began to organize against slavery. In 1825, the Female Society for Birmingham was established as the first women’s anti-slavery association. Other areas soon followed the example of the ladies of Birmingham and within a decade

\textsuperscript{31} [Heyrick] *Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences*, 9.

\textsuperscript{32} [Heyrick], *Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences*, 12; and *The Third Report of the Female Society for Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their Respective Neighbourhoods, For the Relief of British Negro Slaves, Established, April 8, 1825* (Birmingham: Benjamin Hudson, 1828), 11.

women’s anti-slavery societies could be found throughout Britain. The general aim of these societies was “the diffusion of information on the subject of Slavery, and the promotion of the immediate and complete extinction of that cruel and iniquitous system, throughout the British dominions.” However, when women began to establish these anti-slavery societies in the 1820s they were careful not to overstep their domestic boundaries and to maintain a non-threatening image. The belief that women had no business in politics was still very strong, and many prominent abolitionists, including the movement’s unofficial leader William Wilberforce, were initially against these women’s organizations. Despite this initial opposition, larger abolitionist societies soon recognized the potential of these women’s societies due to their success in using their domestic and social influence. Women’s anti-slavery associations around Britain quickly became an official part of the abolition movement, although largely still limited to activism in the domestic sphere.

Their restriction to the domestic sphere did not reduce women’s enthusiasm for the cause; instead it led to a powerful display of strength. Pamphlet writers and abolitionist society members revived the sugar boycotts of the 1790s to demonstrate how far women’s influence could reach in support of abolition. As the head of domestic responsibilities, women generally had control over food and household goods. Seizing this opportunity and proclaiming that “great effects often result from small beginnings,” abolitionists urged supporters to “encourage, by their example, as well as by their influence, the use of the produce of free labour, in preference to that of slave labour.” Members of the anti-slavery societies campaigned in person in neighborhoods, encouraging abstention from slave-produced sugar, and even boycotted local business that used sugar produced by slave labor in the West Indies. The vocal opposition of women to West Indian sugar was extremely influential on community views and commerce.

34. Midgley, Women Against Slavery, 44-47.
35. An Appeal to the Christian Women of Sheffield, 3-4.
37. Heyrick, Immediate, Not Gradual, Abolition, 8; Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Associations, 6.
Thomas Clarkson, a prolific anti-slavery writer, noted their success during his travels through Britain and estimated that “no fewer than three hundred thousand persons had abandoned the use of sugar.” The great number of people who took the stand to boycott West Indian sugar demonstrates the wide influence of women in the abolitionist movement.

Women also used their domestic roles to shape the political opinions of family and friends. One abolitionist group urged women to “throw all your talents, all your influence, into the scale of justice and humanity.” Anti-slavery associations encouraged female supporters to use their superior moral sensibilities to influence the political views of the men and women around them: “you can influence your husband, children, relations, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, in a certain manner and to a certain degree…by bringing their moral feelings and their religious principles to bear on it.” Elizabeth Heyrick believed that a woman’s moral influence was so strong that any immoral practice they chose to focus on would not endure their opposition. If women set their hearts on a cause and worked hard for it, it had no chance of surviving. Taking advantage of their unique position in society, women often used their position as the moral center of a family and their influence in society to support the fight against slavery.

Women also spread abolitionist sentiment to other women. Although they had no direct political voice, “to the hearts and consciences of our own sex…we have unlimited access.” Anti-slavery societies tasked women with spreading abolitionist sentiment to their “less enlightened countrywomen,” who in turn could apply more pressure on the men of society. Stories


42. [Heyrick], Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences, 3.

43. [Heyrick], Apology for Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Association, 11.

44. [Heyrick], Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences, 16.
circulated about wives and relatives of members of Parliament pushing their husbands to support abolition. These elite women set an example of the proper way for women to influence their husbands and families without venturing too far beyond the limits set on their sex.

While the activities of ladies of leisure were much more prominent within anti-slavery societies, participation in the movement was not limited to women of privileged classes. The opportunity to participate in the abolition movement united women from various social, religious, and political backgrounds, including “radical proto-feminists,…conservative Evangelicals…, Whig grandees…, and feminist advocates of political economy.” Middle- and working-class women were encouraged to follow their lead by boycotting West Indian sugar and signing petitions. While the movement did little to relax social tensions or loosen the strict divisions of society in general, it did provide a cause that people of any social level could support. Women of all kinds became the voice of the anti-slavery movement in domestic society, a role which required “no shining abilities, nothing beyond ordinary common sense,” and could be achieved by women who possessed “neither talent, power, nor influence.” When promoting the end of a social evil like slavery, every woman had the ability and the responsibility to do her part.

It was inevitable that this new branch of activism alarmed some people. Naturally, plantation owners were concerned about the popularity of the sugar boycotts and tried to discredit efforts of the abolitionists. The end of the slave trade and boycotts of slave-produced goods obviously had an effect on the income of slavery advocates. However, social opposition went much deeper than material interests. In spite of the fact that female


abolitionists largely operated in the domestic sphere, men and women who believed that women belonged in the home and out of politics saw their activism as a threat to the traditional way of life. Women were accused of partaking in unfeminine and unbecoming activities. Others emphasized the idea that charity began at home, and that women should focus on reform in Britain before anything else. The idea that women were involving themselves in political issues seemed immoral and immodest. The women took all of this criticism in stride, emphasizing that the task had been “left to [men] for many a year, but the result of its being so left is not very encouraging,” referring to the failure of legislation and lack of progress. Still, many female activists did their best to keep their activities within the sphere of domestic and religious responsibility in order to reaffirm their traditional roles.

However, a few women ignored traditional opposition and took their activism one step further. Between 1830 and 1833, “hundreds of thousands of women…signed anti-slavery petitions [to Parliament],” an activity that often met with “male opposition and female ambivalence.” Women still had no legal right to sign and present petitions, but their doing so demonstrates how far they were willing to take their activism regardless of any public displeasure it could cause. This radical break with tradition was proof that many women were unhappy with their lack of a political voice and that they were ready to leave their conventional domestic sphere.

The petitions and boycotts had a profound effect on the abolitionist movement. Parliament officially abolished slavery in 1833, after years of activism by men and, more remarkably, by women. Women’s activism against slavery progressed from writing poetry and boycotting sugar to actively campaigning and participating in the abolitionist movement.

50. *A Vindication of Female Anti-Slavery Associations*, 3.


52. A Lady [pseud.], *A Dialogue Between a Well-Wisher and a Friend to the Slaves*, 7.


They had a new role as political entities, despite still having few political rights. However, their fight against slavery was not over. Regardless of the legislation which outlawed slavery throughout the British Empire, it soon became clear that “that accursed system, whose destruction the British people had decided upon, is not destroyed, but exists in aggravated severity.” British abolitionists turned to the task of eradicating the foreign slave trade, acquiring complete freedom for former slaves in the West Indies, and even encouraging and supporting “those noble-minded and devoted women in America, who are making great efforts and painful sacrifices in defence of the sacred rights of Freedom.” The women of Britain were prepared to lead the world by their example and push for the total and global abolition of slavery.

The participation of British women in both stages of the abolitionist movement was an important step in freeing them from traditional domestic confines. Their vital role as producers and circulators of information and rhetoric for the anti-slavery cause gave them a new political presence. Their actions in the anti-slavery movement were largely a selfless effort, since they apparently gained little from the movement other than knowing that they had supported a moral and just cause. However, their participation also instilled the idea that women could be and, for many, should be politically active. Their influential actions in support of reform and abolition had lasting effects. Before the nineteenth century was over, women once again took to political activism and reform, this time for their own benefit. For most women involved, the abolitionist movement provided their first opportunity to have a political voice, and they were not willing to step back into their traditional apolitical role. By the end of the nineteenth century, women were once again becoming politically active for the cause of suffrage and women’s rights.

55. An Appeal to the Christian Women of Sheffield, 5.
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ANTHOLOGIES:


The Meaning of Freedom
Alternatives Emerging from the African American Experience of Slavery

Chika Okoe

INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine the meanings of freedom as a concept conceived and acted upon by African American slaves, freedmen, and freedwomen in the United States. The struggle for freedom serves as a commonplace framework for understanding and contextualizing African American history. This freedom struggle encompasses not only slave revolts, but also many other forms of resistance including but not limited to: marronage, escapes via the Underground Railroad, truancy (skipping out on plantation work for short periods), radical attempts to remake American society during Reconstruction (1861-1877), the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power movement and, arguably, contemporary struggles for racial justice such as the Black Lives Matter movement. The goal of this paper is to reconstruct the meaning of “freedom” as it was articulated by enslaved and newly free African Americans. Black people in the United States have occupied unique positions of “unfreedom” within a nation reputedly founded in the name of freedom. It seems worth investigating black understandings of freedom as contrasted with the constructions of freedom encountered in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Freedom and liberation are concepts which form the theoretical backbone of American national life, as linchpins of the country’s founding documents and as inspiration to numerous resistance movements. Within the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the freedom that is constructed represents an ideology based on exclusion: women and all those racialized as non-white (African Americans, Asians, American Indians) were not imagined as partaking of the ideal that all men are created
equal and are endowed with inalienable rights. The conception of freedom espoused by framers of American democracy such as Thomas Jefferson has been described as a negative formulation. That is, freedom was defined through what it was not—subordinate or slave. I intend to search for alternative ways of conceiving freedom, ways that may become evident through investigations of African American cultures and acts of resistance.

The founding documents of the United States, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, invoke freedom and equality as the nation’s impetus for existence, but exhibit startling contradictions with respect to these concepts. The authors of these documents, in fact, ensured unfreedom for significant portions of the population: Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and women were locked out of the protections and privileges conferred by citizenship in the new nation. The contradictions inherent in these writings were reflected in actions of the framers of American democracy, such as holding slaves while professing that all men are created equal. Contradiction of this sort unsettles the critical observer’s ability to utilize these ideas in describing what constitutes citizenship, or meaningful participation in national life, or even what a racially just American society might look like. Or at least, as critical observers, we are compelled to question the meaning of freedom in national life.

How can we usefully think of what it means to be American without recourse to what appear to be thoroughly compromised historical notions? It can be useful to look to meanings of freedom forged though African American experiences, specifically during the period of enslavement and the early stages of emancipation. Slavery, the quintessential “unfreedom,” was defined by several specific conditions. These were: (1) cultural alienation, (2) status as property, (3) the ever-present threat of sale, (4) the denial of income for one’s labor, and (5) subjugation to the force, power, or will of another and (6) the forceful containment of a person within physical boundaries. Following from this definition, I anticipate that conceptions of freedom emerging from experiences of enslavement will evidence strong desires to engage openly in cultural practices such as worship, to maintain

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and strengthen family ties, to be compensated for labor, and to move about freely according to one’s own will and desire. Because the black church is widely considered to be one of the most powerful and influential black institutions, I will argue that religious or spiritual notions of freedom as a “promised land” are in evidence. I am interested in interrogating what the promised land actually consisted of through an examination of slave spirituality and song. I intend for the present study to highlight understandings of freedom that prove more useable than the freedom founded on exclusion encountered in the nation’s founding documents.

**Review of Prior Research**

The term “freedom” is widely used within scholarship about African American history. Freedom is what was sought by runaways who joined maroon communities or who fled to the “Free” North. Scholars interpret freedom as being encoded in the spiritual songs and powerfully informing the religious practices of the enslaved. Numerous documented slave revolts can be understood as attempts to secure freedom. Countless acts of resistance, from Frederick Douglass’s defiantly learning to read, to the “dress up” practices of enslaved women who made or appropriated fancy gowns and wore them to clandestine black festivities in the South, were all performed in order to attain some measure of freedom. I hope to tie together several of these strands in order to arrive at a new understanding of freedom, drawing from the experiences, practices, and beliefs of African Americans.

Enslaved people’s primary struggle was to break their chains of bondage. After formal Emancipation came Reconstruction, when the concept of freedom expanded to encompass ideas of black inclusion into the civic and social life of the nation. The present paper is meant to serve as a preliminary research into the meanings of freedom, as it was both understood and enacted by African Americans while enslaved and immediately after emancipation. While many types of evidence could be marshalled in this search, the scope of this paper limits the inquiry to just a few types of evidence, including the use of two primary sources and numerous secondary sources.

I take as a starting point key insights offered by Angela Davis, who frames some of the issues at stake for our study by raising questions about
connections between will, resistance, freedom, and liberation in her *Lectures on Liberation*. These lectures were given in 1971, when, resulting from the upheavals of the civil rights movement and the birth of black studies as a discipline, scholars began to interrogate the master narrative of American history with regard to its deeply embedded racial assumptions. Up until this time historians had largely failed to write about enslaved people as active agents of history; instead they had been characterized as those who had been acted upon.

Angela Davis sought in these lectures to investigate the extent to which one who is enslaved may experience freedom. Through a close reading of *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Davis shows that “the first condition of freedom is the open act of resistance.”

Davis draws a distinction between *freedom*—which she views as a static ideal, considered by white Americans to be an inherent quality or a possession—and *liberation*, something that is forged through struggle and actively pursued.

The three autobiographies of Frederick Douglass narrate a journey from enslavement to self-emancipation guided always by a thirst for freedom. Douglass made a strong connection between knowledge and power, and his first “open act of resistance” was to learn to read. Because his conception of freedom was communal, he wrote and spoke forcefully and tirelessly on behalf of abolition, and felt that he would never be truly free until all of the brother and sisters he had left behind in slavery, also became free.

Davis’s work accords with the earlier writings of Herbert Aptheker, a protegé of W.E.B. DuBois who centered an understanding of American slavery around the phenomenon of the slave revolt. Originally published in 1943, Aptheker’s *American Negro Slave Revolts* focused on the 250 recorded rebellions and revolts he was able to uncover. Aptheker broadened the discussion of slavery to include considerations of the will and resistance of the enslaved, at a time when the prevailing opinion was that slaves had

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placidly acquiesced to their condition.⁴

W.E.B. Du Bois’ monumental *Black Reconstruction in America* gives a historical account of Reconstruction from the perspective of the “self-activity” of African Americans. Du Bois recounts massive work stoppages initiated by slaves after the outbreak of the war that helped to ensure the end of the institution of enslavement. Du Bois also writes of the thousands of slaves who emancipated themselves from slavery by fleeing behind Union Army lines during the Civil War. He goes on to detail the political activities of the freedmen in the context of Reconstruction governments that provided some of the first public schooling and public health departments in the southern states.⁵ In his 1903 *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois traces a trajectory of African Americans from slavery to a formalized freedom that included massive poverty, inequality, and suffering. Du Bois makes a special study of the “sorrow songs,” or spirituals, that encapsulate centuries of feeling, spiritual striving, and supreme cultural achievement.⁶

Another author who highlighted the theme of will and resistance among enslaved people is George Rawick, who penned “The Historical Roots of Black Liberation” in 1968. Rawick wrote that the emergence of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement was in no way mysterious; that the self-activity of black slaves had fostered multifaceted forms of resistance that helped to generate a strong black community and cultural forms like music, dance, and storytelling. Tales of Br’er Rabbit, who survives and occasionally even triumphs over those more powerful than himself, constitute one instance of cultural production. Rawick judged unique features of the enslaved community, like distinctive religious practices of “African cult meetings” and “sings,” to be the roots of rebellions, abolitionism, and the

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black freedom struggles of the late twentieth century. Cedric Robinson, in his 1987 masterwork *Black Marxism*, would further develop the thesis that black resistance in the Americas was born out of the preserved cultural memory of life on African soil.

George Rawick was attentive to African American culture as the editor of the 41-volume publication *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, which compiles the oral histories gathered from former slaves by interviewers with the Federal Writers Project during the Great Depression. He wrote the introductory volume, a study of the making of the slave community “From Sundown to Sunup,” the period in which enslaved people could forge a culture of resistance and survival, which Rawick credits with fostering liberatory impulses. The remaining 40 volumes comprise around 2,000 oral histories from all across the country, and present rich material on individuals’ experiences of enslavement, emancipation, Reconstruction, and more. These interviews present difficulties to the careful researcher because of the power imbalances they reflect: White interviewers were questioning black subjects during the 1930s and 40s in the Jim Crow era South. Additionally, the transcriptions tend to reflect racism on the part of interviewers, who created “nonsense orthographies” (gross misspellings) to reflect black speech patterns and to give the impression of faithful recordings, when in actuality, much of the material was written down after the (unrecorded) interview had taken place.

Paul Gilroy, in his 1993 study *The Black Atlantic*, focused scholarly attention on the new culture generated by Africans who came to the New World as slaves and their descendants. Gilroy posited that the creators of “black Atlantic” culture embraced non-rationality through music and found expression for emotionality in spirituals and the blues. Gilroy, like Cedric

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Robinson, aimed to identify an epistemology, ontology, and axiology characteristic of Africans in the Americas.

As this paper aims to examine the transition from legal enslavement to formal emancipation, Saidiya Hartman’s 1997 study *Scenes of Subjection* provides perspective on the period. Hartman posited the continuation of domination during this period, arguing at the same time for practices of self-fashioning among slaves. Hartman’s work acknowledged the ability of slaves to enact resistance, “everyday practice” in her terminology, that may not result in liberation but nonetheless creates space for the humanity of the enslaved to be expressed. One of Hartman’s important contributions was to provocatively trouble the meaning of formal emancipation, with the claim that “an amazing continuity belied the hypostatized discontinuities and epochal shifts installed by categories like slavery and freedom.”

Stephanie M. H. Camp’s 2004 study, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, also highlights the resistance of enslaved people—specifically women—to their condition, as essential to understanding the subjectivity and survival of African Americans under slavery. Camp researched acts of everyday resistance on the part of enslaved women in the plantation south, paying particularly close attention to slaveowners’ methods of physical and spatial constraint, as well as to the “rival geographies” of the enslaved. Her study offered evidence of how bondwomen created spaces of resistance and enjoyment through truancy, secret dances in the woods, practices of dress up, and displays of abolitionist literature, so as to instantiate a momentary freedom.

Recent scholars have analyzed the founding documents and early history of the United States and surmised that America’s originary freedom was based on exclusion and subjugation. Anne Cheng, in *The Melancholy of Race*, utilizes a psychoanalytic lens to diagnose a melancholic “exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others” by the dominant racial group in the United States. Cheng assessed the freedom written into the Declaration of Independence and the U.S Constitution as being based on


exclusion of African Americans and Asians.\textsuperscript{13} In *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe points to how African slave and Asian coolie labor facilitated the rise of republics in Europe and North America and helped to structure Enlightenment thought. Subjugated labor on the plantations of the New World, Lowe wrote, created “the conditions of possibility for European philosophy to think the universality of human freedom, however much freedom for colonized peoples was precisely foreclosed within that philosophy.” Lowe went on to examine the ways in which the “affirmation of the desire for freedom is so inhabited by the forgetting of its conditions of possibility, that every narrative articulation of freedom is haunted by its burial, by the violence of forgetting.”\textsuperscript{14}

Cheng’s and Lowe’s investigations into the contradictions exemplified by the founding documents of the U.S. provide motivation to my own project of exploring the historical meanings of freedom. I intend to examine continuities and contradictions between the dominant construction and the alternative conceptions that may become evident through examination of black histories of resistance, cultural forms, and narratives. What appears to be absent from these prior studies is any explicit theory of what constitutes black notions of freedom, as distinguished from dominant—white—ideas and ideals. While many of the studies referenced examine enactments of black freedom through acts of everyday or more extreme resistance, none purports to seek out a notion of freedom that is not based on exclusion, not defined over and against what it is not. This study aims to discover ways of understanding freedom that may be discerned from oral histories, writings, songs, and forms of resistance of enslaved and formerly enslaved African Americans.

**Methods**

I utilize an extensive survey of secondary literature on questions of the relation between slavery and freedom and the self-conceptions of the enslaved. These analyses are relied upon as guides into an archive whose


nature is extremely limited. Many slave published narratives are extant, and these will be touched upon briefly. I also utilize a historical method, analyzing some primary documents that speak to conceptions of freedom by enslaved and formerly enslaved people. Because of the preliminarily investigatory nature of this inquiry, I have gathered information about the ideas of freedom held by slaves throughout the United States. I have looked into sources of information about slaves from about the founding of the republic, from about 1776, until the end of the period of Reconstruction in 1877.

My data comes from two primary sources: the spiritual songs of African American slaves as recorded in *Slave Songs of the United States*, an 1867 publication dealing primarily with songs sung on the Sea Islands of South Carolina; and the meeting minutes of the 1866 Freedmen’s Convention of North Carolina. Commentary in the book about slave song provided information about how the songs were performed and developed. I looked at the song lyrics for evidence of ideas of freedom, any characterizations of what the “promised land” was hoped or expected to be like. This paper draws more heavily on secondary literature than lyrical content for its analysis, looking to scholars who have provided clues as to how to glean from the spirituals underlying ideas of freedom.

**ANALYSIS**

**Religious Practices: “Literally to be Free”**

Religion and uniquely African American religious practices were central to black people’s constructions of freedom during the time of slavery and at the dawn of emancipation. Black spirituality served as a space within which to dream freedom, to metaphorize freedom through songs looking forward to a promised land. Spirituality also served as a vector for political activity, which was largely sublimated but at times burst forth into revolt. The spiritual songs of the slaves played a role of tremendous importance within slave religion and slave resistance.

For enslaved people, the practice of religion was not confined

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within walls. Religious worship was often conducted outdoors. Even in circumstances where slaves were provided weekly church services by white clergy, it was not uncommon that weekly parallel services would be conducted “in dugouts and hollows.” Some slaveholders forbade their slaves from attending church altogether, but enterprising worshippers frequently held secret prayer meetings in woods and swamps. Ellen Butler, born a slave in Louisiana in 1859 recounted: “Massa never ‘lowed us go to church but they have big holes in the fields they gits down in and prays. They done that way ‘cause the white folks didn’t want them to pray. They used to pray for freedom.”

The idea that the slaves prayed for freedom goes part of the way toward explaining such fierce devotion to worship even at the risk of severe punishment. Building on Angela Davis’s assertion that one begins to enact one’s liberation through acts of rebellion, it follows that this defiance of the wishes of white slaveholders created the felt experience of freedom. Constraints could temporarily be thrown off and worshippers had opportunity to give vent to “emotions that slavery would naturally tend to curtail. The Negro went to church literally to be free,” in the words of LeRoi Jones.

That religion would form such a central place within the lives of slaves, giving space to the expression of their longings for freedom is easy to understand. Because slaves’ social “place” was reflected and affirmed by white control over their physical place, it became of prime importance for the enslaved to secure for themselves some space outside the control of whites and beyond the constraints of slavery. Freedom, then, in connection with worship is marked by unrestrained or “free” movement (to secret gatherings) and activity within a “free” space, or one in which slaves could act autonomously.

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Spiritual Songs: Music as a Sublimated Form of Politics

Thomas Barker names as one of the defining characteristics of slave religion “the way in which it conceived of the spiritual and the material as part of an indivisible unity.” One of the hallmarks of slave religion was the singing of spirituals, songs “sung primarily as rowing songs, field songs, work songs, and social songs, rather than exclusively within the church.” Barker contends that this intertwining, or nonduality, of the spiritual and the material directly informed the slaves’ conception of freedom so that the experience and the imagination of freedom enabled and reinforced one another.

Barker builds on insights from Paul Gilroy in order to draw attention to the frequent practice of retrieving from the past an indictment of the present, and at the same time enacting a hope for the future within the spiritual songs of the enslaved. In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy identifies collaboration between the Enlightenment ideal of reason and practices of racial terror, and shows that slaves’ rejection of this ideal is embodied in their embrace of music: “According to Gilroy, language loses something of its referentiality when rationalism walks hand in hand with terror and brutality. Thus, Gilroy writes, ‘the power and significance of music within the black Atlantic have grown in inverse proportion to the limited expressive power of language.’” Spirituals such as “Go Down Moses,” “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” and “Michael Row the Boat Ashore” make links with the captivity of the ancient Hebrews in Egypt in order to construct a consciousness of freedom, to create a world outside the time and space of enslavement in the Americas. In the words of one scholar, “the slaves created a new world by … extend[ing] the boundaries of their restrictive universe backward until it fused with the world of the Old Testament, and upward until it became one with the world beyond.”

which is always a rejection of the present world. Freedom becomes not just a notion, but a space and time in which enslaved people could step outside of the constraints of their everyday world.

In echoes of arguments made by George Rawick in “The Historical Roots of Black Liberation,” Thomas Barker writes that spirituals, as a practice through which enslaved individuals could express their longings relatively candidly, constituted a form of resistance to white domination. He views spirituals as a repository for sublimated desires and simultaneously as a mechanism of revolutionary consciousness. Perhaps it is no surprise that Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, the leaders of two of the most sensational cases of attempted slave revolts in American history, were both preachers. The following quote about emancipation from Booker T. Washington supports the idea that slave spirituals nurtured the spirit of resistance through continually imagining and calling for freedom.

As the great day grew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the “freedom” in these songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually threw off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the “freedom” in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world.”

-- Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*  

The spirituals as they come to us in published form do not completely reflect the practices of antebellum singers. It must be remembered that these were performances involving the whole body, evoking an overall sense of


full embodiment which in at least one contemporary account resembled a state of bacchantic ecstasy in which the congregation of a Virginia African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1869 “seem[ed] to realize the actual coming of the chariot, and their elevation to the golden seats.”25 This type of metaphorical “transport” speaks to the ability to almost bend time and space in order to instantiate freedom. Freedom here is free movement and free expression, a time and place beyond the present constraints of the body.

Besides physical gesture, another aspect characterizing slave song was highly inventive improvisation. It seems that the songs were built up through improvisation, invented lines being added to known ones. Further, a communal spirit was embodied in the call-and-response format of the songs.26 All of the songs functioned as call-and-response participatory experiences, in which a line would be sung by whoever was leading, and then the refrain sung by all those gathered together formed the response.27 Improvisation represents a mode of free expression, arises from autonomy and self-fashioning. At the same time, rootedness in responsive community points to a freedom that is not individualistic, but rather engages the individual in a relationship with the whole.

PLANTATION WORKERS IN SOUTH CAROLINA: REFUSAL OF THE “SLAVE CROP”

In South Carolina, the U.S. Navy occupied the Sea Islands settlement of Port Royal in November of 1861, which prompted almost all whites to flee to the interior, abandoning their plantations and slaves in the process. The enslaved populations of the islands held by Union forces during the Civil War lived out a type of “rehearsal” for Reconstruction in which they were able to contribute to the creation of a new way of living that came to be known as the “Port Royal Experiment.” Among these former slaves’ earliest actions was to sack the great houses of their former masters. They


destroyed cotton gins and proceeded to plant corn and potatoes. African Americans at Port Royal refused to plant the “slave crop” of cotton, which had only ever enriched whites, but had never benefitted them. To the newly free blacks, “free labor” meant farming their own land and living largely independently of the marketplace (by contrast, to whites the term signified blacks working on plantations for wages). Freedmen and freedwomen of the South carolina Sea Islands initially defined freedom as their claim to autonomous control over the plantation lands they had worked as slaves.

After the war ended, much of the plantation land was auctioned off for nonpayment of taxes by the Treasury Department. Blacks’ claims went unrecognized by the government; they were given no special reference, and most of the land went to army officers, government officials, and Northern speculators and cotton companies. These northern interests took control of plantation land and hired black people to raise cotton. Some freed people managed to pool their resources to purchase a small portion of the land that was sold, thereby preserving their vision of land-based freedom in the place of their former enslavement. This response to adverse conditions also highlights a strong sense of community that enabled black people to resist white domination.

At Davis Bend, in the Mississippi Valley, another “experiment” in Reconstruction took place. In what was called by some a “negro paradise,” freedmen and freedwomen cooperatively ran a large-scale plantation after the white owners fled. Unlike the residents of Port Royal, these blacks did not eschew the marketplace and raised successful cotton crops to sell. This community prospered into the 1880s and sent several of the first blacks into government in the state. For the former slaves at Davis Bend, who had been allowed an unusual amount of autonomy in the management of plantation affairs prior to emancipation, freedom was an opportunity to acquire wealth and participate in the market economy and the government. This is markedly different from the ideas of freedom seen at Port Royal.


The divergence may result from the unique conditions of the enslaved community at Davis Bend. This plantation had been a “model” slave system instituted by Joseph Davis, brother of Jefferson Davis, the Confederacy’s president. In the model plantation, slaves were far better fed and housed than was customary in Mississippi, and they were able to exercise extraordinary measures of self-governance. One leader of the slave community had run a store. Neighboring planters had mocked “Joe Davis’s free negroes,” an indictment which calls to mind the acts of will, or self-activity, posited by George Rawick and Angela Davis as central in the fashioning of liberation.  

**Freedmen’s Conventions in North Carolina: Men of the Great Tradition**

In Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1865 and 1866, freedmen held conventions where they came together to discuss and decide about the issues facing their communities with the aim of uplifting the race. The 1865 meeting was a few days prior to the state constitutional convention, and delegates highlighted issues of just compensation for labor, education for black children, and the reuniting of black families. Delegates also stressed the need for black inclusion into the political process. The meeting minutes still survive for the four-day 1866 convention. At that meeting, delegates from all over the state repeatedly stressed the need for both religion and education among the black community. The delegates established the Freedmen’s Educational Association of North Carolina, with the aim of aiding in the establishment of public schools, “from which none should be excluded on account of color or poverty and to encourage unsectarian education in this State especially among the Freedmen.” The freedmen resolved to form auxiliaries to the state organization and that these auxiliaries would be charged with recording incidents of the “outrages” of violence being committed against blacks throughout the state and reporting these to the state organization and the newspapers. The men praised the passage by the 39th Congress of the Freedmen’s Bureau bill, the Civil Rights bill, and the 13th Constitutional Amendment. They prayed that “a like spirit should

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guide the 40th session, until the protection of all citizens equally under law would be secured.” The delegates earnestly protested against the taking of black children to be bound out for labor without the parents’ consent, a practice that hearkened back to conditions of unfreedom under slavery. The conventioneers concurred with the arguments made by the unreconstructed states that taxation without representation was unjust, holding that this reasoning applied as well to the “native born colored citizens of North Carolina.” At the close of the first day’s session, the freedmen sang the spiritual “Sound the Loud Timbrel.” They were moved to sing the song again following a speech given by North Carolina Governor John Worth during the second day’s proceedings. Analysis of this meeting shows that the main concerns of this group of men revolved around securing access to education, attaining equal political and social rights, and dealing with incidences of violence by whites against blacks.32

These conventioneers were relatively privileged freedmen with the resources to travel to the state capital for four days and to pay the convention’s dues (plus monthly membership dues), and all had reputations that led to their designation as being “of moral character.”33 We can see what historian Eric Foner terms the “Great Tradition” at work among the delegates of the Freedmen’s Convention of 1866 in their repeated emphasis on the uplifting qualities of education and religion, their insistence on suffrage and equal rights, and the highly educated, decorous language with which they conduct the proceedings. According to Foner, the Great Tradition, exemplified by Frederick Douglass, affirmed that blacks formed an integral part of the national body and were entitled to same rights and opportunities as whites. Within this tradition, free blacks were encouraged to forsake menial work, educate themselves, and live unimpeachable lives, thus elevating the race.34 This belief system evidences a belief in the promise of full American citizenship for African Americans.

This group of freedmen surveyed the landscape in 1866 and surmised that their freedom would be supported and extended through education,

32. Freedmen’s Convention of 1865, North Carolina History Project.

33. Ibid.

34. Foner, Reconstruction, 58-60.
moral impeccability, and political participation. Note that the delegates’ material concerns included securing physical safety in the face of concerted campaigns of racial terror, preserving family ties, and affirming the rights of black parents to custody of their children. For these men, freedom was necessarily inflected by the experience of racist violence and of slavery’s impediments to education and the continual threat of the dissolution of families. Freedom to these North Carolina freedmen, meant education for all, not just blacks, tellingly. The first state-run free public schools in the South were instituted by Reconstruction governments that included black lawmakers advocating these measures. Freedom meant the right to reunite and to preserve the family. Freedom meant safety from violence. Freedom still connoted a realm beyond the troubled present, a place accessed and expressed through spirituals: “Sound the loud timbrel o’er Egypt’s dark sea. Jehovah has triumphed -- his people are free!”

Conclusions

The meanings of freedom to enslaved and emancipated African Americans varied by context, although spiritual practices and spiritual songs create a clear throughline among varying classes and locations of black people. Spirituals were songs sung by all, from South Carolina lowcountry farmers to conventioneers. The songs evince an abiding practice of imagining an alternate time and place as a way to temporarily transcend the constraints of the less-than-free present. The songs served as a form of resistance, allowing the singers to enact freedom as defiance, as the open act of rebellion that is fundamental to liberation. Spiritual devotion, through “sings” and through prayer meetings were also a way to create space and time outside of enslavement, freedom as a spatio-temporal experience. In spirituals we can see how freedom meant free expression, improvisation and creativity as mechanisms of affirming an autonomous self. The songs as well as provided opportunities to give voice to the emotionality and sufferings expressed in these “sorrow songs.”

Communality also emerges as a central theme that relates to freedom. We have seen already how spirituals were sung as a group affair, in call-and-response, throughout the black community. Delegates to the North Carolina Freedmen’s Convention showed great concern for the violence
afflicting blacks throughout the state and took collective action, charging each delegate with responsibility for documenting and publicizing acts of violence in his area. Frederick Douglass theorized his own freedom as incomplete until the time that all people held in bondage should go free. The notion of racial uplift is itself a communal value, that African Americans as a community ought to have access to practical and moral education and to political and civil rights. In the case of education, the freedmen seemed to conceive of community quite broadly, advocating schools for all children without regard to race. Preserving family ties was also a major prerogative of freedom, a concern to protect the community from being torn asunder, as had happened during slavery. Finally, newly free people in the Sea Islands of South Carolina showed the faith they had in community by pooling together their resources to buy land. They enacted freedom as collective decision-making power over the use of land and as the ability to grow their own food and remain relatively independent or “free” of the market economy controlled by whites. Free black folks at Davis Bend, Mississippi, participated in the market for cotton, and they did so successfully as a cooperative, a community-run plantation.

For middle-class and well-to-do blacks, freedom after emancipation came to signify equal rights under law and representation and inclusion in governance. This understanding of freedom to mean social and political rights aligns with the views espoused by the framers of the Constitution. There is likely a correlation with the higher socioeconomic status of freedmen who took Frederick Douglass as a model of the Great Tradition. The notion at work here may be that of freedom as a possession to be acquired or safeguarded, the static ideal that Angela Davis contrasted against liberation, which arises from action.

Alternative understandings of freedom—divergences from the freedom-as-exclusion enshrined in America’s founding—emerge from black resistance to white domination. African American spirituality is one powerful form of such resistance. Faith in and expression of a realm beyond the conditions of alienation and subjugation formed the basis of black spirituality. It is no accident that the wooded places, caves, and hollows that served as places of worship were not subjected to the control of whites. Wild places constituted a rival geography to that of enslavement. Spiritual songs
provided a means of transport to alternate times as well as places, whether to visit the ancient past of the Hebrews’ captivity or to glimpse some future kingdom where freedom would reign. In the spirituals, freedom appears as a spatio-temporal concern and as a survival mechanism, as in lines from the song “Poor Rosy”:

...Heav’n shall-a be my home. I cannot stay in Hell one day, Heav’n shall-a be my home. I’ll sing and pray my soul away, Heav’n shall-a be my home.35

The lyrics express resistance against the reigning regime, an outright rejection of “hellish” conditions of racialized oppression. The repetition of “shall” gives voice to a fierce determination and a faith that the singer will reach another world, that “away” to which the soul will make its home. Songs such as this provide evidence of the liberatory self-activity of African Americans in slavery and continued to be sung long after formalized emancipation.36 Creating and maintaining cultures of resistance, through song and other means, is an aspect of the work of liberation. Both freedom and liberation can perhaps be viewed as belonging to a spiritual or otherworldly realm: ideals that may not be achievable in this life, but that serve as aspirations. From the spirituals we learn that we can aim at freedom through the liberatory work of resistance, the unending struggle for autonomy within community, for creativity, self-expression and affirmation of our human experience.

35. Allen, Ware, and Garrison, eds., Slave Songs of the United States, 51.

36. Many of the freedom songs sung during the marches, sit-ins, and freedom rides of the civil rights movement were improvised from old spirituals. An example drawn from SNCC workers in McComb, Mississippi had these lyrics: “Michael, row the boat ashore, Alleluia; Christian brothers, don’t be slow, Alleluia; Mississippi’s next to go, Alleluia.” Cited in Charles Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 126.
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