

Recounting the Past

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Recounting the Past

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Note from the Editor

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Systems Collapse in the Ancient Near East: Climate Change and the Fall of Bronze Age Civilization

By Charlie Verdico

It is easy to look at the world that humans have built and the crises within it and say that we are living in a world that does not resemble anything we have seen in the past. This is partially true—the innovations that humankind has made are truly remarkable and set us apart from those who lived before us, as do the pitfalls that we all face together. However, in reality, similar issues arose thousands of years ago, during the Bronze Age, a period that lasted from 3000 BCE to approximately 1200 BCE. The kingdoms of the Bronze Age—the Minoans, Mycenaeans, Hittites, Babylonians, Egyptians and Cypriotes, to name a few—saw a world with multinational trade, refugee crises, massive and powerful states, rebellions scattered across multiple countries, and climate change, among other similarities to our times. These societies collapsed in the year 1177 BCE, and in all reality, no one really knows exactly why these kingdoms collapsed.

Early scholarship concerning the collapse of the Bronze Age asserted that it was because of the Sea Peoples, several groups with mysterious origins that destroyed these kingdoms, razing everything in their path. The first person to suggest this was Emmanuel de Rougé, in his 1855 work *Note on Some Hieroglyphic Texts Recently Published by Mr. Greene*.¹ Scholarship, up until very recently, had essentially accepted the theory that the Sea Peoples were the prime cause of the collapse of Late Bronze Age societies.² Although civilizations of the Bronze Age did not know exactly who these people were or from where they came, they saw the Sea Peoples as a likely cause of the destruction of cities around the Middle East. Even among scholars today, there is no consensus on who the Sea Peoples were, what their motives were, or what impact they actually had on ending the states of the Bronze Age. All that is

¹ Moshe Dothan and Trude Dothan, *The People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 23–24. The date of Rougé's publication comes from the biography on the Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, *Notice biographique du Vicomte Emmanuel de Rougé* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1908), 41, <https://archive.org/details/noticebiographi00unkngoog/page/n51/mode/2up>.

² Nancy K. Sanders, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250–1150 B.C.*, rev. ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985); Alessandra Nibbi, *The Sea Peoples and Egypt* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1975).

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truly known about them is that they were a sea-faring migration of people who conflicted with many of the Bronze Age civilizations during the period of the collapse.

Recent scientific and archeological studies on climate change in the Late Bronze Age have added new depth to the subject. The findings of David Kaniewski et al. and Brandon L. Drake both indicate that there was a climatic event in the Late Bronze Age, most notably resulting in rainfall reduction and natural disasters. However, there is still debate over the impact of climate change, and their conclusions differ slightly.³ Kaniewski et al. argued that a drought event had significantly contributed to the end of the Late Bronze Age, stating “this climate shift caused crop failures, dearth and famine, which precipitated or hastened socio-economic crises and forced regional human migrations at the end of the LBA [Late Bronze Age] in the Eastern Mediterranean and southwest Asia.”⁴ Their argument, in essence, was that because the drought period, which caused scarcity and famine, happened in such close chronological proximity to the arrival of the Sea Peoples, the two events must have been related.⁵

Brandon L. Drake sought to test the hypothesis put forward by Kaniewski et al. that a megadrought, lasting centuries, contributed to the total systems collapse of the Late Bronze Age. His article “The Influence of Climatic Change on the Late Bronze Age Collapse and the Greek Dark Ages,” pointed toward a long, sustained period of arid climate and lessened rainfall. The Soreq cave in Israel contains a record of precipitation going back about 150,000 years. Dips in rainfall are able to be found out by looking at stable-oxygen isotope records. During the Holocene Epoch, there were three major drops in precipitation—the Younger Dryas (about 15,000 years ago), an event that took place around 3150 BC, and finally, an event taking place around 1150 BC, which places us right at our time frame of a collapse around 1200 BCE. Drake was careful to mention that this interpretation was based on low-resolution testing, so there is some doubt about its validity. While not all records perfectly support the claim, it is fair to say that according to the research, there was a drop in temperature and rainfall, and a more arid climate. So, does this mean that the Late Bronze age was destroyed by a megadrought? Drake argues that it does not. Rather, he asks why these sites were not rebuilt like they had been after previous disasters. He

³ It is important to note, for sake of clarity, that Drake focuses on Israel and Egypt, while Kaniewski et al. focuses on Cyprus and Syria. However, due to the fact that they draw similar conclusions (as do other articles that will be mentioned later), we can assume that the conclusions are about the same climate crisis.

⁴ David Kaniewski, Elise Van Campo, Joël Guiot, Sabine Le Burel, Thierry Otto, and Cecile Baeteman, “Environmental Roots of the Late Bronze Age Crisis,” *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 8 (2013): 9, e71004, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0071004>.

⁵ Kaniewski et al., “Environmental Roots,” 6.

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cites the rebuilding of Crete in 1620 BC after a volcanic eruption, and in 1460 BC, after an external invasion. If there was simply a drought that led to a systems failure, he asserts, these cities would have been rebuilt.⁶ While Drake argues that the megadrought was not *the* factor, it was *a* factor. Drake also cites issues such as earthquakes and rising food prices as possible factors for the Late Bronze Age collapse.⁷

Although her conclusion is slightly different, Simone Riehl made a similar claim: there was a climatic event that happened in tandem with the collapse of the Bronze Age. Riehl went into greater depth on agricultural production, specifically, examining which crops were able to survive drought and which were not. She found several crops that were drought resistant, including barley, emmer wheat, tetraploid free-threshing wheat and lentils. Lentils, the most commonly grown pulse crop and a diet staple, had a yield *directly related to rainfall*.⁸ As shown by Drake and Kaniewski et al., there is evidence for this lack of rainfall that led to the decline of the crop.⁹ Major changes in agricultural production can severely strain a society. Even if not all crops are drastically affected, small changes in these crops, along with the near disappearance of others, the stresses of earthquakes and other natural disasters, *and* the arrival of the Sea Peoples, could have led to an eventual collapse.

Sharon Zuckerman offered a different perspective, inferring that the destruction of a city lacking evidence of external conflict, in tandem with what archeologists saw in the destruction layer, points to the possibility of drought and famine that would have been caused by climatic shifts. She looked, in particular, at the city of Hazor in Israel. Puzzlingly, despite its destruction, “there is no archaeological evidence of warfare, such as human victims or weapons, anywhere in the site,” Zuckerman stated.¹⁰ What happened then? There is circumstantial evidence for a peasant uprising. Zuckerman pointed out that there was very little damage in the Lower City, where the common people would have lived, except for one area, the Orthostats Temple, where there was clear destruction; among the items destroyed were cultic vessels and beheaded statues of kings and queens.¹¹ She thus argued that Hazor had collapsed from within, indicating signs of internal revolt, which coincided with evidence that there was climate change that had led to drought, and, in turn, famine.

⁶ Brandon L. Drake, “The Influence of Climatic Change on the Late Bronze Age Collapse and the Greek Dark Ages,” *Journal of Archeological Science* 39, no. 6 (June 2012): 1865-1868.

⁷ Drake, “Late Bronze Age Collapse,” 1863, 1867.

⁸ Simone Riehl, “Archaeobotanical Evidence for the Interrelationship of Agricultural Decision-Making and Climate Change in the Ancient Near East,” *Quaternary International* 197, nos. 1/2 (March 2009): 10–12.

⁹ Drake, “Late Bronze Age Collapse,” 1867–1868; Kaniewski et al., “Environmental Roots,” 9.

¹⁰ Sharon Zuckerman, “Anatomy of a Destruction: Crisis Architecture, Termination Rituals, and the Fall of Canaanite Hazor,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archeology* 20, no. 1 (June 2007): 25.

¹¹ Zuckerman, “Anatomy of a Destruction,” 23.

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Zuckerman's theory could be applied to other cities that show little evidence of external invasion, challenging the idea that the Sea Peoples were the sole cause of the collapse of Bronze Age kingdoms.

Another work, Eric H. Cline's book *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, described the globalized Late Bronze Age, and then focused on what brought down its societies. With the emergence of new scientific evidence, Cline dismissed the Sea Peoples theory and identified the key problems that led historians to embrace it. "There is textual evidence for famine," he stated, "and now scientific evidence for droughts and climate change, in both the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, but again societies have recovered from these time and time again."¹² Cline went on to summarize all of the possible causes of the Late Bronze Age collapse: internal rebellion, the arrival of the Sea Peoples, earthquakes and the cutting of international trade routes.¹³ As if asked a multiple-choice question on the collapse's cause, he marked "all of the above."

Cline thus did what other scholars had not yet done, naming multiple factors, and thereby referencing what historians call a "systems collapse." In the words of Colin Renfrew, a systems collapse happens when "the failure of a minor element started a chain reaction that reverberated on a greater and greater scale, until finally the whole structure was brought to collapse."¹⁴ Unlike earlier, more traditional Bronze Age scholarship, Cline suggested that a combination of factors facing peoples of the Late Bronze Age had led to disaster. This is likely true, but Cline missed an important point. Evidence on record—particularly, modern archeological excavation and studies paired with surviving texts and artifacts—shows that climate change was an overarching factor in the smaller events that took place leading up to the collapse. Although scholars such as Cline have suggested that climate change was a factor in the collapse, this article serves to explain how it was not just a factor; rather, it was a dominating force at play in many other aspects that led to the collapse.

Recent evidence of possible internal rebellion, drought, natural disasters, and famines show that these factors jointly led to the collapse. Underlying these, however, was one factor: climate change. Climate change touched every one of these aspects to create a systems collapse, a total failure of many facets of civilization, leading to the overall end of the Bronze Age societies. Climate change often causes lessened rainfall, which leads to droughts and famines. Just as we see in our own time, it can also cause natural disasters, which can further

¹² Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 165.

¹³ Cline, *1177 B.C.*, 166.

¹⁴ Colin Renfrew, "Systems Collapse as Social Transformation: Catastrophe and Anastrophe in Early State Societies," in *Transformations: Mathematical Approaches to Culture Change*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Kenneth L. Cooke (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 497.

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contribute to famine. The droughts and famines produced by climate change may well lead to internal rebellions, weakening a state and leaving it prone to attack. But Late Bronze Age societies also faced growing pressure from outside forces. The Sea Peoples, who likely migrated because of climatic factors, destabilized already weakened systems, creating a perfect storm. The societies of the Bronze Age could have survived one, or even a few, of these events, but a combination at the same time led to the collapse of the most powerful states in the known world.

In this article, I will go through the list of factors mentioned in the historiography and tie in primary sources to substantiate different scholars' claims. Due to a lack of evidence that naturally comes from an age that existed thousands of years BP (before the invention of radiocarbon dating in the 1950s), inferences (using modern scientific and archeological analysis) will have to be made. The key question is why the Sea Peoples entered these states, although it is important to note that there is very little evidence to confirm who these groups actually were. To explain the role of the Sea Peoples, I will draw on contemporary letters and inscriptions from Ramses III's mortuary temple, Medinet Habu, alongside evidence from archeological dig reports. This article aims to piece together what happened in order to explain first and foremost that previous scholarship about the Sea Peoples was incorrect, and secondly, how climate change was in a position to impact all the other factors mentioned above. The Sea Peoples did contribute to the collapse of these civilizations. However, they were no more important than the droughts, famines and other factors. Climate change was the first cause, the one that set everything else into motion.

First, let us focus solely on the Sea Peoples, a term that Cline pointed out would never have been used by their contemporaries. For the sake of conciseness, the broad term will continue to be used throughout; however, to the Egyptians, these groups were the Peleset, Tjekker, Shekelesh, Shardana, Danuna and Weshesh.¹⁵ There is no hard evidence indicating who these people were, or why they came, but it can be speculated that they came from east-central Europe. There, as in the Middle East, the climate was shifting, causing more arid conditions.¹⁶ It seems like the Sea Peoples were searching for a new permanent home—not simply violence for violence's sake. Along with weapons and armor, they brought with them household goods and tools for building settlements, suggesting that they did not intend to return to their homelands.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cline, *1177 B.C.*, 1.

¹⁶ Drake, "Late Bronze Age Collapse," 1862–1870; Reihl, "Agricultural Decision-Making and Climate Change," 93–114; Kaniewski et al., "Environmental Roots," 1–10.

¹⁷ Joshua J. Mark, "Sea Peoples," in *World History Encyclopedia*, article published September 2, 2009, https://www.ancient.eu/Sea_Peoples/

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While we might not know who they were, other than through the names the Egyptians called them, we do know to a certain extent what the Sea Peoples did. Ramses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu bears inscriptions, one of which states the following:

The foreign countries (Sea Peoples) made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms: from Hatti, Qode, Carchemish, Arzawa and Alashiya on, being cut off at one time. A camp was set up in Amurru. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation was the Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh, lands united. They laid their hands upon the land as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: "Our plans will succeed!"¹⁸

It is unknown whether this was written by Ramses himself or simply in memorial to him, but this is the longest hieroglyphic inscription known to us. Even then, though, it does not tell us too much. What can be gleaned from the epigraph is that Egypt watched as Bronze Age kingdoms like the Hatti, Qode and other powerful states, with the most advanced bronze weapons, were falling with very little opposition to the Sea Peoples.

There are a few reasons behind the success of the Sea Peoples. One image, again on Medinet Habu, shows a scene from the Battle of the Delta fought between the Sea Peoples and Egypt in 1175.¹⁹ It depicts the Egyptians, on chariots, fighting the Sea Peoples, also on chariots. Ramses III, in larger-than-life form, can be seen to the right of the inscription, aiming a massive bow and arrow toward his enemies. In the bottom part of the image, one can see the captives that the Egyptians took during the battle.²⁰ The chariot was the most innovative and deadly war tool of the time, and the fact that the Sea Peoples had access to this type of weaponry meant that they could potentially face any Bronze Age army. There were other factors at play, however. The inscription also declares that "its land was like that which has never come into being."²¹

¹⁸ Inscription on the mortuary tomb of Pharaoh Ramses III, quoted in Frederick Monderson, *Medinet Habu: Mortuary Temple of Ramses III* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 6.

¹⁹ For a reproduction of this image, see Harold Hayden Nelson et al., *Earlier Historical Records of Ramses III*, vol. 1 of *Medinet Habu*, vol. 8 of *Oriental Institute Publications*, ed. James Henry Breasted (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), loc. 104 of 138, plate 37, <https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/oip8.pdf>.

²⁰ Monderson, *Ramses III*, 7.

²¹ Ramses III called the Hittites "Hatti" in his inscription.

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While we cannot know what this meant, this could have been an allusion to the fact that the land had been rendered barren by drought, which then led to famine.

In a mid-13th century BCE letter to Ramses II, the Hittite queen Puduhepa wrote, “within my lands, there is no barley.”²² This a contemporary account of famine in a Bronze Age kingdom, which gives credence to the claim that some cities were not fully destroyed by the Sea Peoples. Famine in an agrarian society like the Hittite one would have weakened it and left it vulnerable to attack. Thus, Puduhepa’s letter is evidence that there were multiple reasons why some cities fell. It is not out of the realm of possibility that by the time the Sea Peoples had arrived, the Hittites were already facing serious issues with drought and famine, ones that had resulted from climate change.

Drought was not unique to the Egyptians or Hittites. Kaniewski et al. showed that there was drought also in what today is Syria, where the city of Emar is located.²³ A contemporary account, in a letter found in the city of Ugarit, reads as follows: “The gates of the house are sealed, since there is famine in your house, we shall starve to death. If you do not hasten to come, we shall starve to death.”²⁴ Although the sender and recipient are unknown, it was likely that an official from Emar wrote the letter upon a visit to Ugarit as their home city was being ravaged by famine. The tone of the letter is fearful; without assistance, the city would succumb to hunger. We know that Emar was destroyed in 1185 BCE and famine likely played a large role in weakening the city.²⁵

Recent evidence has even shown that some cities were destroyed before the Sea Peoples had arrived. As mentioned before, there seems to be no evidence of warfare within the city of Hazor. As Cline wrote, warfare leaves behind evidence like bodies, arrowheads, and buried valuables that there had been no attempt to collect.²⁶ In Hazor, we do not see any of this. This is not to say that the city was not destroyed. Zuckerman demonstrated that there were “layers of ashes, burnt wooden beams, cracked basalt slabs, vitrified mudbricks, fallen walls and mutilated basalt statues” found at Tel Hazor, excavated by Amnon Ben-Tor. In many areas, the city was burned to the ground. It is important to note which areas were burnt and which were not.

²² Puduhepa to Ramses II, quoted in Izabella Czyzewska, “A Letter from Puduhepa Queen of Hatti to Ramses II Pharaoh of Egypt (KUB 21.38 = CTH 176)” (Master’s Thesis, Concordia University, 2007), 37, ProQuest (204794504).

²³ Kaniewski et al., “Environmental Roots,” 6.

²⁴ Letter *drdn* RS 19.11 (KTU 4.43, PRU 5, 114), quoted in Issam K. H. Halayqa, “The Demise of Ugarit in Light of Its Connections to Hatti,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 42 (2011): 305, <https://fada.birzeit.edu/jspui/bitstream/20.500.11889/4717/1/Halayqa-%20UF-42%20the%20Demise%20of%20Ugarit.pdf>.

²⁵ Cline, *1177 B.C.*, 112.

²⁶ Cline, *1177 B.C.*, 140–141.

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Cultic buildings and administrative palaces, places where elites spent their days, were the main sites burned. Smashed statues of gods and kings, along with ritual vessels, were also found. The parts of the city that remained relatively untouched were those where common people lived and worked.²⁷ Although we have no hard evidence like weapons or human bodies, all the signs hint at internal rebellion. The lack of weapons challenges the claim that there was external invasion. When peasants rebel against the elite, they often seek to destroy symbols of their power—their palatial buildings, their religious idols, and their places of worship. This was a clear attack against the ruling class.

Throughout history, peasants rarely revolted when they were content; rather, they rebelled when they were in danger, and the elites were the target of their rage. When people are lacking basic necessities such as food, the possibility of rebellion grows. Early modern historian Geoffrey Parker argued that famine can lead to the downfall of the political elite and ruling class. He pointed to the 1640s, a decade of global cooling that had not been seen before and has not been seen since, and which brought crop failures throughout the globe. Parker also claimed that the 1640s saw the most rebellion and revolution compared to any period throughout history.²⁸ While we do not have explicit evidence for internal rebellions in the Late Bronze Age, we do have modern evidence of a drought leading to famine in the Middle East during this period. Israel Finkelstein, who studied the Levant, wrote, “Deteriorating precipitation along this eastern frontier can bring about major economic trouble, accompanied by social unrest and demographic upheaval.”²⁹ Even without solid evidence, it is fair to assume that an internal rebellion could have taken place due to the specific parts of the city that had been destroyed and set fire to, and the confirmation of drought in the area affected.

Thus far, there is evidence for drought and for famine, evidence that can lead to an inference of internal rebellion. What about earthquakes? It is hard to distinguish between a city destroyed by earthquakes and a city destroyed by fighting, but there is a way to tell. Crushed skeletal remains found under debris, reinforced walls, and walls leaning at unrealistic angles are some ways archeologists can tell that a city was destroyed by earthquakes.³⁰ Drake describes something seismo-archaeologists call an “earthquake storm,” a

²⁷ Zuckerman, “Anatomy of a Destruction,” 24–25.

²⁸ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change, and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 111–114.

²⁹ Israel Finkelstein, Dafna Langgut, Meirav Meiri, and Lidar Sapir-Hen, “Egyptian Imperial Economy in Canaan: Reaction to the Climate Crisis at the End of the Late Bronze Age,” *Ägypten und Levante* 27 (2017): 256, <https://doi.org/10.1553/AEundL27s249>.

³⁰ Cline, *1177 B.C.*, 140.

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pattern of earthquakes that hits for years and even decades along a fault line.³¹ Amos Nur and Eric Cline found several indicators of earthquake-caused destruction only a few years prior to the societal collapse of the Late Bronze Age. In Mycenae, they identified several reinforced doors along with the crushed remains of three adults and one child. At Tiryns, they found four skeletons covered by debris. And at Ugarit, Knossos and Troy, they discovered evidence that an earthquake was the cause of massive fires throughout these areas.³²

All of this tells us not only that earthquakes happened, but that they were not isolated events. The earthquake storms described by Drake come in ebbs and flows, dormant for a while and then striking again. Evidence of earthquakes can only be traced to a few years before 1177 BCE, the date Cline placed the collapse. It is unlikely that these earthquakes alone caused it, but there are indications of massive damage—enough to put severe strain on a society. Even in modern times, countries can take years to rebuild from earthquakes. Combined with drought and famine and the possibility of internal rebellion, these cities of the Late Bronze Age would have had quite the challenge in front of them. Basically, they would have already been struggling to feed people, meaning that they were facing both reactions from the general public and an increasingly shrinking wealth pool. While there is no hard evidence in the historical or archeological record that directly points to difficulties rebuilding following earthquakes, it is possible to infer that these cities had been facing an increasingly difficult time due to climate change and the consequences of it.

The strangest thing about the collapse of Late Bronze Age societies is how quickly it all happened. Civilizations that had stood for centuries fell at once, seemingly overnight. The rate of the collapse and the frustrating lack of clear evidence led early scholars to rely on evidence that overemphasized the role of the Sea Peoples. Newer scholarship and research has given us tools to show how that claim is unsubstantiated. There is no doubt that the Sea Peoples were a factor in the Bronze Age collapse. But they could not have been the only factor. Taking into account modern scholarship, the evidence points to a systems collapse, and there was one factor that linked all parts of the collapsing system together during this period: climate. These societies had survived drought, invasion, internal rebellion, and natural disasters in the past, but had rebuilt.

³¹ Drake, “Late Bronze Age Collapse,” 1864.

³² Amos Nur and Eric H. Cline, “Earthquake Storms: What Triggered the Collapse?,” *Archeological Odyssey*, September/October 2001, 33–35, <https://www.baslibrary.org/archaeology-odyssey/4/5/12>.

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A climate crisis, however, ensured the finality of the collapse. Climatic events created conditions that linked together different stresses and pressures that led to the eventual downfall of Late Bronze Age civilizations. While scholars have acknowledged climate as a possible cause of the systems collapse, they have rarely touted it as the main factor. Climate change created the drought that led to famine and rising food prices. The famine led not only to possible internal rebellion, but also a migration of the Sea Peoples into the Middle East. Famine weakened the civilizations of the Bronze Age. Distracted by the internal rebellions born from hunger, these societies were left susceptible to an attack. Earthquakes caused by climate shifts were another distraction. Favorable climate conditions gave way in part to the success of these civilizations, but climate change led to quick, systemic breakdowns throughout the ancient Middle East. While we may never know exactly what happened to the civilizations of the Late Bronze Age, modern research and careful inferences can offer a clearer picture than previously. All that we can hope for is more breakthroughs in this area. Then we can continue to tell the tale of antiquity.

“Chemical Garbage of an Industrial Society”: Women’s Groups and Air Pollution Reform in 1960s St. Louis

By Matt Modrusic

On Monday, August 25, 1969 a thick layer of smog stalled over the city of St. Louis, Missouri. Considered the “chemical garbage of an industrial society” the smog was a combination of sulfur oxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter from industrial coal burning and automobile exhaust. Between eleven o’clock Monday morning and noon on Thursday, the Weather Bureau issued an air pollution alert, temporarily suspending factory work and urging residents to stay indoors.¹ During this four-day advisory, residents reported stinging eyes and increased coughing. Charles C. Johnson Jr., the leading health expert for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, claimed that the odors in St. Louis during this period “exceed those of Los Angeles,” which at the time was considered the air pollution capital of the United States.² A pilot flying into the city described the sight from above as “a bowl of milk” that obscured buildings and anything more distant than two miles away.³ Winds blew away most of the smoky haze by the end of the week, but lingering questions remained about what to do if another crisis like this occurred in the future.

Two months later, Missouri Senator Thomas F. Eagleton called to order a hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution of the Committee on Public Works. Outside of the Kiel Auditorium, where the meeting was being held, women stood holding signs in protest. Mrs. Henry Weinstock, a housewife who had never before attended a protest, held a sign adorned with a skull and crossbones that read “Air Pollution Stinks” on one side, and “Air Pollution Accelerates Death” on the other.⁴ She was joined by roughly 100 other women and men calling for stricter air pollution regulations. Before the hearing, Senator Eagleton had reached out to the St. Louis metropolitan branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to make copies of their research materials, which he considered

¹ Jerome P. Curry, “Smog Control Concern,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 31, 1969.

² “St. Louis Air among Dirtiest in Nation; Odor Worse than in Los Angeles,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 28, 1969.

³ “Smog Like ‘Bowl of Milk’ to Pilot Landing Here,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 31, 1969.

⁴ Patrick Strickler, “Housewife’s Fight for Clean Air,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 28, 1969.

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“invaluable.”⁵ Women’s groups had been active in the crusade against air pollution in St. Louis since the 1890s, but in the 1960s, they had begun to play a much more prominent role. Organizations such as the AAUW and the League of Women Voters (LWV) formed study groups, created informational pamphlets, spoke at hearings, and organized conferences to educate the public about the dangers of air pollution and to promote legislative reform. This article explores the paradox of female environmental advocacy and activism: despite not holding government offices, women in these groups became a driving force in changing local, state, and national environmental policies.

Historical writing about environmental activism and reform movements did not emerge until the late 1950s.⁶ At this point, historians focused on the problems and reforms of the Progressive Era. As the environmental movement of the 1960s grew, they paid greater attention to the harmful synthetic substances created by corporations, and society’s approval of those practices. Their analyses contributed to the development of the field of environmental history. In this new discipline, historians put more focus on synthesizing scientific environmental research with historical practice, arguing that *how* Americans used their resources was as important as who owned the resources.

Notably, the contributions of women in the field of science were not widely acknowledged in the work of historians of this era. Despite women playing a prominent part in discovering the dangers connected with man-made substances—most notably, the 1962 publication of biologist Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*—the historical conversation ignored these important scientific findings and the women activists who were involved in twentieth century environmental movements. Instead, historians of the 1960s focused mainly on male contributions, and failed to address why women were drawn to these causes. It would not be until the 1990s that historians began to acknowledge the particular dedication of women in the environmental movement. This more recent scholarship has argued that women had a unique relationship with the conservation of land and society, distinct from the motivations of men, that led them to pursue environmental reforms. These historians have explored how the practice of “municipal housekeeping” or “civic mothering” began in the Progressive Era and carved out roles for women in local and state politics.⁷

⁵ “Report of the Air Pollution Study Group,” February 16, 1970, Box 002, Folder 40, American Association of University Women, Ferguson-Florissant Branch Records, 1959–2015 (S1163), State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center—St. Louis. (This research center is hereafter cited as SHSMO—St. Louis).

⁶ See Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Roderick Nash, “American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier,” *Pacific Historical Review* 41, No. 3 (August 1972): 362–372. Nash was the first to publish the term “environmental history.”

⁷ Works asserting a greater importance for women in environmental causes include Mary Joy Breton, *Women Pioneers for the Environment* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998);

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My research recognizes the importance of women’s organizations in St. Louis, and the function that they played in educating the public about air pollution. The primary sources used in this article draw from the American Association of University Women and League of Women Voters archives at the State Historical Society of Missouri, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* archives, and two Senate Subcommittee hearings on air pollution held in St. Louis. This research also builds upon conclusions formed in Terrienne K. Schulte’s “Citizen Experts: The League of Women Voters and Environmental Conservation.” In her essay, Schulte argued that LWV members worked within the existing male-dominated political system and created a base of knowledge and resources that would be used by younger, more radical environmental groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The women in these groups became “citizen experts” who bridged the gap between the scientific community and the general public.⁸ This article examines how women’s civic groups in St. Louis, such as the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women, became citizen experts whose environmental advocacy raised public awareness and helped shape local and national legislation.

The fact that air pollution in St. Louis demanded national attention in 1969 is surprising because the city had historically been on the forefront of environmental regulation. In 1864, St. Louis was the first city in the United States to categorize smoke as a public “nuisance.” Three years later, the city produced an abatement ordinance, requiring chimneys of manufacturing establishments to be built twenty feet above any neighboring buildings.⁹ Despite these regulations, St. Louis continued to struggle with smoke pollution due to a lack of enforcement and the cheap cost of coal fuel. The main cause of the smoke was the burning of bituminous coal, a highly volatile natural resource that was plentiful in the region. This problem reached its peak on November 28, 1939. Referred to as “Black Tuesday” by the local newspapers, visibility in the streets was so poor that streetlights were turned on at nine o’clock that morning.¹⁰ The Black Tuesday crisis, while certainly the most

Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman’s Voice: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Glenda Riley, *Women and Nature: Saving the “Wild” West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). For a more general overview of women’s political reform movements in the twentieth century, see Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Susan M. Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream: American Women and Politics Since 1960* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

⁸ Terrienne K. Schulte, “Citizen Experts: The League of Women Voters and Environmental Conservation,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30, no. 3 (2009): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40388745>.

⁹ Frederick S. Mallette, “Legislation on Air Pollution,” *Public Health Reports* (1896–1970) 71, no. 11 (November 1956): 1069, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4589610>.

¹⁰ “Smog—Can Legislation Clear the Air?” *Stanford Law Review* 1, no. 3 (1949): 452, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1226371>.

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notorious episode of this era, was the culmination of seasonal air pollution trends that had occurred since before the turn of the century.

From the 1890s to 1940, women’s organizations played a key role in promoting smoke abatement reforms. According to historian Joel A. Tarr, one reason for the increased amount of environmental activism among women during this period was that as housewives and mothers, women understood better than anyone the negative health effects of air pollution on children, as well as the additional cleaning burden caused by ash and soot. Women, who had few political opportunities during this time, also saw cleaning up their cities as a form of community improvement that they could directly impact.¹¹

Women’s clubs were among the first citizen groups to study the increase in air pollution. The club movement had swept the nation, and St. Louis—like other urban centers—was no exception. In St. Louis, the earliest women’s clubs had been formed among the educated white middle class. Comprised of housewives and young, single professionals who gathered to discuss art and literature, by 1890, some of these clubs became invested in social and political issues such as environmental conservation. In the 1890s, the Wednesday Club, for example, which had begun as an English literature society, started a study group that examined the health hazards of smoke and pushed for anti-smoke legislation. In 1907, the club formed the “Women’s Organization for Smoke Abatement,” which divided St. Louis into five divisions and used volunteers to monitor and report smoke infractions to the Smoke Abatement Department and local newspapers.¹² White, middle-class women’s clubs quickly became key in publicizing air pollution incidents and educating the public about the dangers of human-made air pollution.

However, since women did not have political power, they needed to collaborate with engineers and government officials to enact the changes they sought. In 1923, the Wednesday Club joined with the all-male Engineers Club to form the influential St. Louis Citizens’ Smoke Abatement League in order to study ways to reduce air pollution.¹³ The efforts of the Wednesday Club ran simultaneously with other, exclusively male organizations across the nation during the Progressive Era. A notable comparison was the International

¹¹ Joel A. Tarr and Carl Zimring, “The Struggle for Smoke Control in St. Louis: Achievement and Emulation,” in *Common Fields: An Environmental History of St. Louis*, ed. Andrew Hurley (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 201.

¹² Katharine T. Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women’s History* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2000), 106.

¹³ Corbett, *In Her Place*, 106.

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Association for the Prevention of Smoke (later called the Air Pollution Control Association), which formed in 1906 and began collaboration with women’s clubs in 1921.¹⁴

The Citizens’ Smoke Abatement League was the first civic group in St. Louis to call for a reform of coal-burning practices in the city. In 1933, the organization proposed a significant reduction in the use of soft, bituminous coal from Illinois, which had a high sulfur content that led to the release of unsavory particles into the air. This recommendation, despite support from city officials, failed to gain traction due to efforts by coal lobbyists, such as the Coal Exchange of St. Louis, and the high price of cleaner coal methods. Six years later, following the Black Tuesday smoke event, the mayor of St. Louis appointed Raymond Tucker to the newly created position of smoke commissioner, which oversaw a new Smoke Elimination Committee. Tucker and the committee turned to prior advice from the Citizens’ Smoke Abatement League and urged consumers to purchase smoke-eliminating fireboxes or to use a higher-quality hard coal called anthracite. In 1937, the city prohibited the sale of high-volatile coal in portions larger than two inches, and required “washing” of bituminous coal that contained over 12 percent ash or 2 percent sulfur content.¹⁵

Meanwhile, St. Louis’s civic clubs mounted a campaign to inform the public about the dangers of coal burning and smoke inhalation. Among these clubs, women’s organizations, such as the League of Women Voters and the Women’s Chamber of Commerce, made up the majority of citizens invested in the topic.¹⁶ League members planned luncheons and lectures open to community members in which speakers presented on topics relating to air pollution, and helped sway public opinion towards greater smoke abatement measures. In April 1940—through the efforts of the Citizens’ Smoke Abatement League, the League of Women Voters, and the new Smoke Elimination Committee—the St. Louis Board of Alderman voted to pass a new ordinance requiring consumers to use smokeless fuel or smokeless mechanical equipment.¹⁷ With these new ordinances, St. Louis became the first major city to make significant progress in the reduction of air pollution. Following the

¹⁴ William G. Christy, “History of the Air Pollution Control Association,” *Journal of the Air Pollution Control Association* 10, no. 2 (April 1960): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00022470.1960.10467911>.

¹⁵ Tarr and Zimring, “The Struggle for Smoke Control in St. Louis,” 213.

¹⁶ Joel A. Tarr, “The Metabolism of the Industrial City: The Case of Pittsburgh,” *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 5 (July 2002): 527.

¹⁷ Roy J. Harris Jr., *Pulitzer’s Gold: Behind the Prize for Public Service Journalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 165. See also Joel A. Tarr’s “The Metabolism of the Industrial City” for how Pittsburgh adopted many of St. Louis’s reforms to similar success.

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reforms, the city’s homes and businesses shifted away from burning coal to natural gas as a fuel source, which led to a 75% reduction in coal smoke in the city within six years.¹⁸

Despite the successes of 1940, different environmental challenges arose in the next decades, which forced women’s clubs once again to become advocates for the environment. In the post-World War II era, two specific issues became catalysts for environmental activism among women. The first was the expansion of the suburbs. Between 1950 and 1970, the City of St. Louis saw a shift of 230,000 people to suburban St. Louis County neighborhoods.¹⁹ As urban dwellers raced to develop the outskirts of their cities, natural resources were destroyed. Because the newly developed suburban communities did not yet have sewer systems like they did in the cities, most residents relied on septic tanks. Septic tank failures, the pollution of rivers and lakes, and the removal of forested areas where children typically played led to a resurgence of activism among women’s groups nationwide during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most notably, local branches of the LWV closely studied water contamination issues and lobbied politicians to preserve lakes and rivers and establish proper sewage treatment facilities. These clean-up efforts, however, were often limited to the predominately white, middle-class neighborhoods where League members lived.²⁰

The efforts of the LWV during this time were rooted in careful research and deliberate political action. In University City—a municipality of St. Louis County—the LWV began studying water conservation in 1957. Informational packets circulated among members, discussing topics such as irrigation, industrial waste, soil conservation, and flood prevention.²¹ To spread this information to the public, League members nationwide spoke at local hearings on water conservation, and submitted a statement to the Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution in favor of the Water Quality Improvement Act of

¹⁸ “Smog—Can Legislation Clear the Air?” 458. See also Mallette, “Legislation on Air Pollution,” 1070.

¹⁹ Robert R. Gioielli, ““Black Survival in Our Polluted Cities”: St. Louis and the Fight Against Lead Poisoning,” in *Environmental Activism and the Urban Crisis: Baltimore, St. Louis, Chicago* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 40.

²⁰ Gioielli, ““Black Survival in Our Polluted Cities,”” 56. Housing options were limited for black St. Louisans due to discriminatory housing policies. In 1970, Wilbur Thomas—a black scientist from Washington University in St. Louis—gave a speech at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville that explained the harsh reality faced by poor black residents of St. Louis. He outlined environmental hazards unique to these residents, including lead poisoning, poor sanitation, and increased air pollution. He continued to publish articles on “Black Ecology” in St. Louis throughout the 1970s and formed the short-lived environmental group, the St. Louis Metropolitan Black Survival Committee.

²¹ “Too Little Water—The Irrigation Problem,” September 1957, Box 18, Folder 665, Metropolitan Area League of Women Voters Collection, 1919-1987 (S0248), SHSMO—St. Louis (collection hereafter cited as Metropolitan League).

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1968.²² According to Terrienne Schulte, however, because women’s names do not appear on the legislation, the role of League members in environmental reform has often gone uncredited. Nevertheless, the water pollution reform efforts of women’s groups in the 1950s laid the groundwork for similar air pollution campaigns of the 1960s.²³

The second environmental concern of the postwar era—and a consequence of the new suburban expansion—was increased reliance on automobiles for commuting. Before 1950, air pollution legislation was primarily concerned with locomotives and stationary sources of smoke. The main focus of earlier reformers had been smokestacks of refineries and other industrial factories; residential chimneys were also targeted, although to a lesser extent. As cars became more prevalent in American culture, emissions from consumer vehicles attracted the attention of scientists and activists nationwide. In Los Angeles County, automobile exhaust accounted for two-thirds of the total hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide emissions and 95 percent of all carbon monoxide emissions.²⁴

One of the unique challenges to St. Louis was its complex geographical and political boundaries. The St. Louis metropolitan area is composed of six counties—three in Missouri and three across the Mississippi River in Illinois—and the politically independent City of St. Louis. Because different jurisdictions are located closely together, polluters in one state could easily cause consequences for those in the other. A 1966 study highlighted the difference in opinion among the largest metropolitan St. Louis counties and the City of St. Louis. In the western suburbs of St. Louis County, residents were more likely to describe automobile exhaust and fumes as a major air pollution problem but find factory emissions less important. In Illinois’s Madison and St. Clair Counties, by comparison, industrial smoke was the major concern due to the presence of large manufacturers such as Granite City Steel. Air pollution from these industrial sources often traveled across the river into the City of St. Louis, where respondents noted greater amounts of factory smoke and odors than County residents.²⁵ To be effective, environmental legislation required bi-state collaboration that satisfied all of the surrounding counties.

In the fall of 1962, following petitions to the U.S. Health Department from both East St. Louis and the City of St. Louis, an Interstate Air Pollution Study

²² “Statement to the Senate Public Works Committee,” April 11, 1968, Box 18, Folder 665, Metropolitan League.

²³ Schulte, “Citizen Experts,” 22.

²⁴ Hamlet C. Pulley, “Precedents in Pollution Control,” *American Journal of Nursing* 66, no. 12 (1966): 2712, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3420432>.

²⁵ Jane Schusky, “Public Awareness and Concern with Air Pollution in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area,” *Journal of the Air Pollution Control Association* 16, no. 2 (1966): 74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00022470.1966.10468444>.

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was commissioned to study the causes of air pollution in the metropolitan area. Federal legislation regarding air pollution up to this point had been minimal, and enforcement was left entirely to individual states.²⁶ Following the model of previous environmental efforts, women’s organizations mobilized to find and share research among their members and the general public. In November 1963, the all-female board of the Citizens’ Air Pollution Committee for Greater St. Louis (later called the Citizens’ Committee for Cleaner Air) contacted the Metropolitan St. Louis League of Women Voters and invited members to an informational orientation meeting to discuss the problem of air pollution and the progress of the ongoing Interstate Air Pollution Study. Speaking at the meeting were public health officials and a member of the executive committee of the Interstate Study.²⁷

According to the results of the three-year-long comprehensive study, air pollution in St. Louis forced citizens to confront odors, respiratory difficulties, damage to natural life, damage to property, and increased traffic due to poor visibility on the roads. In addition, citizens faced the threat of invisible, odorless gasses mixing with sunlight to create more dangerous compounds. The study noted that threats were likely to increase as the population expanded and more people heated their homes, drove their vehicles, disposed of waste, and worked in factories. The study recommended broader emission regulations with strict enforcement, continued air quality monitoring, a record of the materials put into the air, and meteorological forecasting equipment that could predict unfavorable pollution conditions.²⁸

In 1966, shortly after the publication of the study, an East-West Gateway Coordinating Council was formed among government leaders of the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and Illinois counties. This council became the coordinating body between the three pollution agencies in the area, holding hearings on how best to implement the recommendations of the study. Due to

²⁶ Terry A. Trumbull, “Federal Control of Stationary Source Air Pollution,” *Ecology Law Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 283–312, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24111283>. The major environmental legislation passed by Congress—the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1948 and the Air Pollution Control Act of 1955—both granted a small amount of federal funds for the study of pollution sources. The Clean Air Act of 1963 allowed for the Department of Justice to sue corporate polluters, but only if they crossed state lines or if the state governor gave permission. This could have been a useful mechanism for the activists of the bi-state St. Louis metropolitan area; however, the enforcement mechanism required two six-month waiting periods and a public hearing before the government would step in. Due to the complex method for federal intervention, the 1963 act did not lead to a dramatic reduction in air pollution nationwide. However, it did create a framework upon which later legislation was built.

²⁷ Invitation to Air Pollution Orientation, November 22, 1963, Box 88, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda, 1916-1977 (S0530), SHSMO–St. Louis.

²⁸ Invitation to Air Pollution Orientation, November 22, 1963, Box 88, Folder 1158, League of Women Voters of St. Louis Addenda, 1916-1977 (S0530), SHSMO–St. Louis (collection hereafter cited as St. Louis League Addenda).

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uneven implementation of policies among the three jurisdictions, however, the Coordinating Council was not able to properly act as a regional enforcement agency.²⁹

While women did not serve on the executive committee of the Interstate Study or on the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, the public release of the findings of the Interstate Study in June 1966 initiated a surge of activity among St. Louis’s women’s organizations. The three most active women’s groups were the Citizens’ Committee for Cleaner Air (CCCA), the American Association of University Women, and the League of Women Voters. Each of these organizations described itself as non-partisan and worked within existing structures to promote environmental reform. But while these organizations may have been non-partisan, members took political action by reading scientific papers and distilling the complex language into informational materials for the public. These women operated as “citizen experts” who created petitions, organized conferences, and spoke at hearings to bring attention to the issue of air pollution in St. Louis.

The CCCA, formed in 1963 as the Citizens’ Air Pollution Committee and sponsored by the St. Louis Tuberculosis and Health Society, was the most active citizen group on air pollution in the early 1960s. While it was a small committee—in 1966, membership totaled twenty women and five men—the group was instrumental in organizing public hearings during the Interstate Air Pollution Study. Following the publication of the study’s findings and the failure of the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council to act on its recommendations, committee members shifted tactics to mobilize citizens on the issue of air pollution. The co-chairman and public face of the committee, Margaree Klein, urged women to write, call, or speak in person to governmental officials and the health department. “If hundreds of us complain maybe they’ll stop talking and do something about the problem,” she argued in a 1966 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* feature. Klein and her committee obtained hundreds of pamphlets from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and distributed them to raise awareness of the hazards of air pollution.³⁰

For Klein, the issue of air pollution was incredibly personal. Like most other members of her committee, she was a housewife and mother. After graduating from Juilliard School of Music, she married and became active in

²⁹ *Air Quality Act: Hearings on S. 780 and Related Matters Pertaining to the Prevention and Control of Air Pollution Before the Subcomm. on Air and Water Pollution of the S. Comm. on Public Works*, 90th Cong. 991–992 (1967) (statement of Lewis C. Green, Chairman, Mo. Air Conservation Comm’n).

³⁰ Charlene Prost, “She Wants Women to Kick, Holler to Obtain Cleaner Air,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 26, 1966.

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Missouri politics.³¹ Her involvement in air pollution reform began after numerous trips to the hospital with her son, who had intense allergic reactions to contaminants in the air.³² Klein’s drive to protect both the well-being of her children and the environment connected her to previous generations of women conservationists.

In October 1966, the CCCA organized an expanded “Cleaner Air Week,” which included a public meeting with smoke abatement equipment manufacturers and public health officials. Outside the meeting, Margaree Klein and Alma Blumenfeld wore gas masks as they greeted guests and handed out flyers entitled “A Woman’s View of Air Pollution” in front of the auditorium.³³ While Cleaner Air Week events had been sponsored by the committee in prior years, this year included cooperation with local branches of the LWV and the AAUW. The regulatory Missouri Air Conservation Commission contributed as well, co-sponsoring an essay contest for high school students on the topic of air pollution control, with a prize of \$100. The specific purpose of this week was to mobilize voters in the city’s general election to vote for a provision that included purchasing fly-ash controls for the city’s two garbage incinerators.³⁴

A month later, Klein and the CCCA held a petition drive to collect 10,000 signatures in favor of air pollution abatement. Other local organizations assisted in the collection, as well as social studies teachers and engaged students. At a planned hearing in November 1966, Klein presented to the Missouri Air Conservation Commission petitions with 16,000 signatures, well over the target number. During her presentation, Klein addressed the lack of

³¹ Brett A. Collins, “Obituaries: Margaree Klein; Author, Political Activist,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1995. Klein was active in the Democratic Party, serving as a committeewoman for the state party and as a delegate for John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson to the national conventions in 1960 and 1964. She and her husband moved to California in 1968, where she continued to be active in politics.

³² Prost, “Cleaner Air”

³³ *Mrs. Margaret Klein and Mrs. Marvin Blumenfeld, Wearing Gas Masks, as They Pass Out a Health Bulletin, “A Woman’s View of Air Pollution,” in Front of Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis, 1966*, Associated Press wirephoto, Library of Congress, *New York World-Telegram* and the *Sun* Newspaper Photograph Collection, Washington, DC, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c14379>. Alma Blumenfeld is referred to as “Mrs. Marvin Blumenfeld” in the photograph’s caption. However, a “Mrs. Alma Blumenfeld,” whose husband was called Marvin, was active in local Democratic politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Her first name is found in articles on that subject. “Creve Cœur Democrats Elect Edward Filippine,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 16, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/142216013>; “Going to State Capitol,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 21, 1965, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/142270736>; “Jacob C. Katz,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 2, 1974, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/139451582>.

³⁴ Essay Contest, 1966, Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda. CCCA events in the following year would include an essay contest with a \$500 prize and a “Leaf-in” at elementary schools to promote composting practices. See “Clean Air Week Opens Here with an Expanded Program,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 23, 1966.

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action on air pollution. “Our atmosphere has become permeated with as much speech pollution as air pollution,” she declared. “Instead of deeds we are polluted by promises.”³⁵

While the work of the CCCA continued throughout the 1960s, other women’s organizations with more resources and larger memberships dominated reform efforts of the late 1960s. In 1965, the Ferguson-Florissant branch of the American Association of University Women formed a study-action group to research the topic of air pollution in St. Louis. Boasting 900 members in metropolitan St. Louis, the AAUW sought to bridge the gap between experts and the general public. Members joined the study group motivated by issues that hit close to home. These were university-educated women—some with scientific backgrounds—who were able to combine their subject area expertise with civic engagement. For example, Dr. Helen Graham, a 75 year-old professor of Pharmacology at Washington University’s School of Medicine, became involved with the study group following the building of the Portage Des Sioux electric plant, whose smokestacks were visible from her backyard. Similarly, study group president Ida Burroughs was motivated to clean up her neighborhood’s air after a cement plant was built down the street from her home.³⁶

In July 1966, the Ferguson-Florissant branch reached out to the other metropolitan AAUW branches to plan an air pollution workshop in collaboration with Washington University in St. Louis.³⁷ The university was home to Dr. Barry Commoner, a prominent scientist and ecologist of the time, who often spoke at national conferences on the hazards of air pollution and nuclear energy. Commoner was a founder of the Committee for Nuclear Information (CNI), a group made up of Washington University scientists—including Graham—and politically active women.³⁸ Another prominent CNI founder was Edna Gellhorn, who also helped found the National League of Women Voters and served as its first vice-president. Gellhorn and the LWV had helped push for St. Louis smoke abatement policies in the 1940s, and her work at the CNI continued that tradition. The CNI published *Scientist and*

³⁵ “16,000 Sign Petitions for Air Pollution Controls Here,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 28, 1966.

³⁶ “Good, Clean Fun at Air Pollution Picnic,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 29, 1967.

³⁷ Invitation to Women’s Groups, July 22, 1966, Box 002, Folder 40, American Association of University Women, Ferguson-Florissant Branch Records, 1959–2015 (S1163), SHSMO–St. Louis (collection hereafter cited as Association of University Women).

³⁸ Gioielli, “Black Survival,” 47. While the group advocated for air pollution reforms, the key target of the CNI were the dangers of nuclear testing. CNI volunteers gathered baby teeth and ran tests that found increased levels of radioactive strontium-90 that correlated with atomic bomb tests. The baby teeth survey led to increased mobilization of nuclear reformers, including Women Strike for Peace and contributed to President Kennedy’s decision to sign the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

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Citizen, a journal from which articles about different forms of pollution were widely circulated among women’s groups in St. Louis.³⁹ The *Scientist and Citizen* articles and the collaboration between Washington University researchers and civic organizers helped establish the knowledge base that women’s organizations would draw from when making efforts to educate the public.

While planning for the conference continued, AAUW members attended a meeting of the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council in October. Graham delivered a statement to the council that encouraged the bi-state effort to “start towards un-choking our citizens without choking our industries.” Graham noted the need for a regional solution with uniform standards due to the geographical proximity of the metropolitan area. The solutions proposed by the AAUW were not radical, and members wanted minimal involvement from the federal government. To them, citizens and corporations would respond more favorably to regional mandates as opposed to federal directives.⁴⁰

The joint AAUW and Washington University “Regional Conference on Problems of Air Pollution” was held on November 5, 1966 and drew 155 attendees and fourteen guest speakers. The speakers included scientists studying air pollution, local government leaders, and representatives from the corporate realm. Panel discussion topics included the “Cost of Pollution vs. Cost of Pollution Abatement” and the “Effects of Air Pollution on Health.” AAUW members viewed the conference as a success, with a few notable exceptions. According to correspondence between Helen Graham and Milton Leitenberg—the Scientific Director of the CNI—the representative from the American Petroleum Institute and the scientist from General Electric both dramatically understated the hazards of air pollution. To Leitenberg, the petroleum representative’s remarks were “irresponsible and unprincipled.” Graham agreed, describing the speech as “a waste of everyone’s time” and “an insult to the intelligence of the audience.” Both concluded that if future conferences were held, a knowledgeable moderator should be enlisted to keep panelists on topic.⁴¹

Over a five-year period from 1965 to 1970, members of the AAUW air pollution study group established themselves as citizen experts on the aspects of air pollution. They familiarized themselves with technical papers published by the Air Pollution Control Administration and the Public Health Service, as well as with legislative procedures in order to determine the best route of

³⁹ Bryce Nelson, “Scientist and Citizen: St. Louis Group Broadens Educational Role,” *Science* 157, no. 3791 (1967): 903–905, 907, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1722095>.

⁴⁰ “Statement to East-West Gateway Coordinating Council,” October 19, 1966, Box 002, Folder 40, Association of University Women.

⁴¹ Helen Graham Correspondence, January 15, 1967, Box 002, Folder 40, Association of University Women.

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reform. In 1968, the AAUW held a second conference on air pollution that led to the formation of the Coalition for the Environment, a volunteer organization that comprised members of thirty different regional organizations. Members of the air pollution study group often “graduated” to other organizations, including the Coalition for the Environment, the Air Pollution Control Association, and the Committee for the Environment. AAUW members attended every county air pollution hearing, and delivered messages to the Senate Public Works Committees in 1967 and 1969.⁴²

During the 1967 Public Works Committee hearing on the Air Quality Act of 1967—which heard testimony from the Mayor of St. Louis, scientists, industry leaders, and public health officials—the AAUW was the sole citizen’s group in St. Louis to provide a statement. In it, metropolitan president Betty H. Rands called for “uniform, airshed-wide standards, regulations, and enforcement” and a regional body funded through the federal government.⁴³ Rands’ recommendations were in line with what had been presented by the senators, scientists and public health officials during the hearing. The case of metropolitan St. Louis made it clear to lawmakers that bi-state solutions were only effective with federal enforcement of regional standards.

The Air Quality Act of 1967, passed later that year, contained provisions for establishing Air Quality Control Regions and setting standards for those regions. The law was originally heralded as a success by environmental activists, but a lack of urgency by the federal government in establishing regions and standards led states to continue using their own standards.⁴⁴ It would take two more years of public pressure and several notable pollution episodes before Congress would be forced to take more drastic action against air pollution.

In the years following the passage of the 1967 Air Quality Act, several environmental disasters became national headlines. In 1969, the largest oil spill in American history occurred off of the coast of Santa Barbara, California. Later that year in Ohio, the Cuyahoga River caught fire as a result of pollutants in the water. These events had had a profound effect on how Americans viewed the urgency of environmental reform. When calls for federal action on pollution gained traction with the American public in 1969, women’s groups became just one facet of a larger environmental movement. New groups, such as Environmental Action, Zero Population Growth, and Environmental Defense

⁴² “Report of the Air Pollution Study Group,” February 16, 1970, Box 002, Folder 40, Association of University Women.

⁴³ *Air Quality Act: Hearings on S. 780 and Related Matters Pertaining to the Prevention and Control of Air Pollution Before the Subcomm. on Air and Water Pollution of the S. Comm. on Public Works*, 90th Cong. 1116. (1967) (statement of Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, Chairman, Subcomm. on Air and Water Pollution).

⁴⁴ Trumbull, “Federal Control of Stationary Source Air Pollution,” 289.

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Fund, were generally made up of young, idealistic college students. These reformers were more willing to take quick, active measures compared to groups like the AAUW and LWV, which studied issues for years before acting.⁴⁵ While St. Louis’s smog crisis in 1969 did not receive national headlines to the extent that other environmental disasters that year did, the local reaction to the episode sheds light on the changes in public perception regarding the environment.

When Maine Senator Edmund S. Muskie held a pollution hearing in St. Louis in 1967, the AAUW was the only citizen group to present a statement. But in the October 1969 hearing, two months after St. Louis’s smog episode, Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton fielded statements from dozens of interested parties. Representatives from the LWV, AAUW, and CCCA all spoke before the Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution. Marian Kuster, representing the AAUW, outlined three specific reforms in her address: reduction of emissions from automobiles, air quality criteria for individual pollutants, and additional research on control devices. Kuster addressed the specific concerns of women. “Women are very troubled by environmental pollution. Many of us spend our days with youngsters,” she stated. “What will they face after a lifetime dose of some of the newer poisons that are about?”⁴⁶

The long list of civic-minded groups and professional organizations that provided statements and letters in favor of stricter environmental protections reveals the much broader coalition that had formed since the previous hearing in 1967. It included the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center, Girl Scout Council of Greater Saint Louis, International Organization of Women Pilots, Missouri Association of Landscape Architects, National Council of Jewish Women, KMOX Radio, Coalition for the Environment, Teamsters Local 688, South County Citizens for Better Government, Illinois Citizens’ Clean Air League, and Lung Specialists of St. Louis Against Air Pollution. Alongside these groups and organizations, concerned citizens, too, wrote numerous letters.

While statements ranged in topic, many returned to common themes such as children developing asthma, vehicles covered in ash, noxious odors, and

⁴⁵ Schulte, “Citizen Experts,” 9.

⁴⁶ *Problems and Programs Associated with the Control of Air Pollution: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Air and Water Pollution of the S. Comm. on Public Works, 91st Cong.* 159–160 (1969) (statement of Marian Kuster, American Association of University Women, Mo. State Div., St. Louis). Kuster regularly referred to herself as “Mrs. Richard E. Kuster”; however, her first name is provided in a *Springfield (MO) Leader and Press* article from October 1972 and is confirmed by a 1969 article in the *Flat River Daily Journal*, which lists her as “Marion Kuster (Mrs. Richard).” “AAUW Conference Features Talk on Abortion, Equal Rights Law,” *Springfield (MO) Leader and Press*, October 1, 1972, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/305472486>; “Leadership Consultant and Senator among Women’s Seminar Speakers,” *Daily Journal* (Flat River, MO), March 26, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/418040410>.

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toxic air corroding car paint and women’s hosiery. The letter-writers also criticized a lack of local, state, and federal regulation. Seeing unequal enforcement from local governments, these citizens targeted local industries such as Monsanto, Union Electric, and National Lead Company. One citizen, representing the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center, wrote, “As an example, these same laws will cause me, as an individual citizen, to be arrested and fined if I so much as burn the leaves that fall from my trees. However, an industrial complex such as National Lead is allowed to dump far worse pollutants into the atmosphere and nothing is being done to control them.”⁴⁷ Throughout the hearing, nearly all of the statements, including some from local manufacturers, recognized the need for better air pollution control equipment and tighter enforcement of pollutant standards. Senator Eagleton took these criticisms back to the Senate Public Works Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution in Washington, where Edmund Muskie, its chairman, would craft the landmark 1970 Clean Air Act.

Many of the groups present at the October 1969 Senate hearing in St. Louis also attended a hearing of the Missouri Air Conservation Commission the following month. Citizens again spoke out for the need not only for stricter standards, but more importantly, tighter regulation of those standards. A high school student named Janet Knickmeyer played guitar and sang a song calling for greater environmental protections, which earned the loudest applause of the night.⁴⁸ By the end of 1969, the St. Louis crusade against air pollution was clearly no longer the territory of scientists and middle-class white women. While women’s groups had done the early research and outreach to hold public hearings and create educational materials, the movement had expanded to working class men and women of all ages.

Even as the environmental movement gathered more attention outside of women’s organizations, groups like the League of Women Voters continued to be leaders, especially in educational outreach to citizens. Between 1964 and 1970, the National LWV used its Education Fund to hold three seminars across the country to educate the public on water quality issues. In April 1970, League Vice President, Ruth Clusen wrote a letter of support for a House bill to fund environmental education programs across the nation. “If this kind of education

⁴⁷ *Problems and Programs Associated with the Control of Air Pollution: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Air and Water Pollution of the S. Comm. on Public Works*, 91st Cong. 230–244 (1969) (Appendix V).

⁴⁸ E. F. Porter Jr., “Standards Discounted in Clean Air Campaign,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 13, 1969. Among the groups present at the hearing were the Lung Specialists of St. Louis Against Air Pollution, Citizens Clean Air Council, League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, United Steelworkers of America, Teamsters Local 688, and the St. Louis Tuberculosis and Health Association.

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had been a basic part of the curriculum in every school during the last generation,” she stated, “perhaps the environmental problems that face us now in crisis proportions would not be so pressing.”⁴⁹

Despite being at the forefront of environmental issues such as water pollution, land use, and waste management, the LWV was slower to act on the issue of air pollution. While the St. Louis Metropolitan LWV branch had established an air pollution study group in 1966, the issue was not on the national agenda until 1970. Similar to the AAUW and CCCA, members of the St. Louis Metropolitan LWV Air Pollution Study Group gathered research materials, spoke at hearings, and wrote letters to senators to push for environmental reforms. Metropolitan St. Louis League members devoted their energy to confronting specific corporations in the region that were not in compliance with state standards. In April 1970, Union Electric requested a one-year variance from the Missouri Air Conservation Commission, which would allow them an extension to implement sulfur dioxide control equipment in their three area power plants. At that time, the sulfur dioxide levels in the St. Louis area were 95 percent greater than the legal limit, and utility plants like Union Electric accounted for 55 percent of sulfur dioxide emissions. Metropolitan LWV Air Pollution Chairman Huldah Rode urged the women in her organization to put pressure on companies like Union Electric and the National Lead Company by attending the public hearings, and encouraged members with shares in the companies to attend stockholder meetings to pressure company management to implement control measures immediately.⁵⁰

In September 1970, the LWV created a new national item: Environmental Quality. Along with this new agenda item came updated materials sent out by the LWV Education Fund. This included a “Facts and Issues” newsletter on air pollution administration, regulation, enforcement, and funding. An “Environmental Quality Leaders Guide” was sent to LWV branches, which outlined recent developments in air pollution legislation and potential reform

⁴⁹ “Statement on H.R. 14753,” April 9, 1970, Box 26, Folder 878, Metropolitan League. A “Mrs. Donald E. Clusen,” from Green Bay, Wisconsin, is listed as the national LWV’s water resource committee in a *Kansas City Star* article from 1968. This would align with Ruth C. Clusen, environmental activist and later president of the national League. “Riot View to Senate: Statement by Mayor Davis Is Put into Record,” *Kansas City Star*, April 12, 1968, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/675214409>; “Ruth Clusen, Civic Leader and US Official, Dies at 82,” *New York Times*, March 17, 2005; *Ruth C. Clusen and Roger A. Markle Nominations: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources*, 95th Cong. 35 (1978) (biographical summary of Ruth C. Clusen).

⁵⁰ Union Electric’s Variance Requests for Regional Power Plants, April 21, 1970, Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda. Referred to as “Mrs. James A. Rode,” Huldah Rode was heavily involved in the Missouri League. “Huldah E. Rode,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 10, 2002, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/142459668>.

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measures.⁵¹ This new focus on air pollution by the LWV National Board prompted a flurry of activity among branch members. In November, the Metropolitan St. Louis Branch of the LWV created a thorough report on the air pollution status in the region. The report was a culmination of nearly five years of research in the Air Pollution Study Group. It contained a history of air pollution control measures in St. Louis, the St. Louis branch’s plan for financing air pollution costs, and methods of public participation available to LWV members in Missouri. Perhaps most importantly, the report included a list of forty local corporations and their level of compliance with Missouri air pollution laws.⁵²

The same year, national developments shifted media attention away from the environmental outreach work of women’s groups. On April 22, 1970 Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson organized the first “Earth Day,” a nationwide teach-in at university campuses, churches, and other organizations designed to bring attention to the sources of pollution. According to the Earth Day website, 20 million Americans demonstrated that day in support of environmental protections.⁵³ These activists—many of them younger and more diverse than those in women’s organizations—provided further evidence that environmental protections were no longer solely the domain of the well-to-do. At a St. Louis Earth Day celebration, an African American group called the Metropolitan St. Louis Black Survival Committee performed a series of skits dealing with urban pollution. In one skit, a performer highlighted the difference in experience between different groups in the region:

How long must we wait before the world is free of pollution! ... For our rich white brothers deny the black, the Indian, the Chicano, and the poor, food to eat ... [They] aren’t concerned about poor people being unemployed, they don’t care about the lousy schools. Or cops who whop the heads of the poor, and they don’t care about the expressways that displaced our neighborhoods and the problems of pollution they bring in. As a matter of fact, they never cared at all about the problems until they started calling them environmental problems and saw that the mess in the food, water, and air wasn’t just killing poor folk but was killing them too.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Facts and Issues,” Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda; “Environmental Quality Leaders Guide,” Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda.

⁵² “Facts and Issues,” Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda; “Environmental Quality Leaders Guide,” Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda.

⁵³ Earth Day Network, “The History of Earth Day,” 2020, <https://www.earthday.org/history/>.

⁵⁴ Christy Peterson, *Earth Day and the Environmental Movement: Standing Up for Earth* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 2020). See also Gioelli, “Black Survival,” 56.

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This new generation of environmental activists considered the disproportionate effects of environmental issues on minority populations in the American cities. They were also more willing to take direct action to solve problems.

These changes represented a significant departure from the tactics of women’s organizations in the 1960s. According to Schulte, women’s groups like the LWV were overshadowed by the efforts of the new activists, and the impact of these groups has therefore been neglected by historians. Middle-class, white women’s groups did not take up the direct action of the environmental protestors of the 1970s, and considered the new organizations simplistic and uninformed on the issues. In turn, the idealistic college students at the forefront of these new movements increasingly viewed these women’s groups as part of an ineffective political establishment that hindered major environmental reform. This divide between the movements can be attributed to class differences as much as any generational or ideological gap. The white, middle-class members of women’s groups who now populated the suburbs of St. Louis did not experience firsthand the continuing environmental threats posed to the diverse, working-class residents of the city. Due to their economic privilege, groups like the LWV were able to take a more deliberate approach to reform through established legislative channels. As the environmental movement gained momentum nationally in the 1970s, membership in the LWV began to decline; however women’s groups continued to be active in the St. Louis region.⁵⁵ Members of the Metropolitan LWV attended workshops, created educational materials, and testified before House and Senate committees on air and water pollution issues throughout the 1970s.⁵⁶ League members continued to research and advocate on behalf of the environment up to the present day, tackling issues such as acid rain, endangered species, waste disposal, and climate change.

Women’s civic organizations, in St. Louis and on the national level, helped increase both public awareness of environmental issues and the knowledge base of citizens in the fight to reduce air pollution. Throughout the 1960s, groups like the Citizens’ Committee for Cleaner Air, American Association of University Women, and League of Women Voters attracted media attention, interviewed public officials, sponsored conventions, and spoke at Congressional hearings to push for cleaner and safer communities in the St. Louis area. The 1969 smog crisis and subsequent Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution hearing revealed the importance of environmental

⁵⁵ Schulte, “Citizen Experts,” 21. Schulte offered several explanations for why membership in the League of Women Voters declined during this period including the rise of feminism, members joining the workforce, and a trend of decreased involvement in community organizations.

⁵⁶ “Statement in Support of H.B.,” Box 89, Folder 1158, St. Louis League Addenda.

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protections to the citizens of the metropolitan St. Louis region. On December 31, 1970, due to pressure from legislators, civic groups, and scientists, President Richard Nixon signed the Clean Air Act into law, which significantly changed the federal government’s role in environmental protection.⁵⁷ This bill, and the Clean Water Act that passed two years later, were overwhelmingly popular and bipartisan. St. Louis women’s organizations were among the first in the postwar era to recognize the need for greater environmental protections, and their early research into air and water pollution issues set the stage for their actions in the 1960s. While others would use direct action to advance environmental reforms, those groups benefited from an established base of educated citizens informed by women’s organizations. As environmental problems continue to plague the world, the need for an informed citizenry persists. The work of women’s organizations in St. Louis in the 1960s provides a model for how a challenging issue such as air pollution—once researched and explained—can become solvable by civic action.

⁵⁷ Trumbull, “Federal Control of Stationary Source Air Pollution,” 303. The 1970 Amendments to the Clean Air Act established national standards for stationary sources and mobile emissions. The act also created a more efficient process for enforcement of the standards that gave polluters thirty days to comply with the implementation plan. The newly created position of EPA administrator would oversee this process and bring civil suits against the violator. Under this new law, private citizens could also bring suits against polluters, including the federal government.

Comparing the Free Black Communities of the Antebellum North and South

By Mefmet Sadiku

What picture comes to mind when imagining Southern slaveowners? Most likely, it is of Southern whites. However, what is less well-known is that some free blacks of the South owned black slaves as well. When discussing the African American experience during the antebellum period, the South's peculiar institution has preoccupied much of the literature. Less attention has been given to the marginal experiences of free people of color in the South during the era. The historical record shows that some blacks were in fact living in freedom, not only in the North, but in the South as well. Their experiences differed depending on the specific region and setting, whether urban or rural. Just as in other histories, the historiography is far from all-encompassing, and there is further room to analyze and categorize the lived experiences of free black people of the antebellum period. Free blacks of the North and the South were hindered by wider white society. But surprisingly, Southern free blacks generally found themselves in a better socio-economic position than their Northern counterparts due to the unique circumstances in which each community found itself in their respective section of the nation.

The historical literature on free blacks during the antebellum years is relatively sparse, especially regarding the Northern free black experience. Early studies on free blacks arose at a time when the Civil Rights movement and social history renewed interest in the variety of black experiences. Such endeavors were spearheaded by historians of the neo-abolitionist school of thought. Early authors such as Charles S. Sydnor, Carter G. Woodson, Leon Litwack, and Ira Berlin examined in greater detail the lives of blacks whom prior historians had often minimized by their focus on southern slave culture.¹ These historians illustrated the typical social, legal, and economic position of blacks in the antebellum period, giving predominant attention to the black experience in the South. In the North, their research focused on racial discrimination against free blacks, racial identity formation, community

¹ See, for example, Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).

formation, and the black elite.² Their general conclusions were that free blacks faced significant prejudice and discrimination in the South, as expected, but also in the North.

However, in recent literature on the history of free blacks, historians have refined the portrait of antebellum black experience. Examining further examples of free black communities that were outliers, these studies have challenged the common conception of the free black experience. David W. Dangerfield, Richard C. Rohrs, and Leslie M. Harris illustrated the agency of free blacks in the North and South, while accounting for the challenges placed upon them by white society.³ Areas of examination that further fleshed out a more nuanced understanding of the antebellum free black experience included black free-labor politics, religious and intellectual thought, activism, and differences of urbanization and region.

In addition to the scholarship on the topic, this article will analyze newspaper articles written by abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, the personal diary of a successful free southern Black person, a petition presented for another free black individual in the South, and an agricultural census comparing two communities in the border region of the North and South. This article intends to add to the current historiography by comparing the free black experience of the South with that of the North, in order to identify the relevant socio-economic factors that influenced the respective sectional black experience. The existing literature seems to contain comparative examination of the socio-economic circumstances in which free blacks found themselves above and below the Mason-Dixon Line. The findings of this study reveal the pivotal role that the institution of slavery had on the free black experience of the South. For although free blacks faced many hardships as second-class citizens in both the North and South, free black communities in the South fared better in achieving meaningful socio-economic status and security. So long as white southerners did not perceive a threat from liberated blacks, slavery allowed for a free black niche in the society and economy of the South—a situation that was ironically not available for free blacks in the North.

Prior to the American War of Independence, the free black caste in colonial society was a rare exception to the predominant black enslaved experience. However, the American struggle against the British Crown provided an opportunity for blacks to earn their freedom, whether fighting for

² John H. Bracey, August Meier, and Elliott M. Rudwick, eds., *Free Blacks in America, 1800-1860: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1971).

³ David W. Dangerfield, "Turning the Earth: Free Black Yeomanry in the Antebellum South Carolina Lowcountry," *Agricultural History* 89, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 200–224, <https://doi.org/10.3098/ah.2015.089.2.200>; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Richard C. Rohrs, "The Free Black Experience in Antebellum Wilmington, North Carolina: Refining Generalizations about Race Relations," *Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 3 (August 2012): 615–638, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23247372>.

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British loyalists or for the revolution. In the aftermath, free blacks became a sizeable minority throughout the thirteen colonies, both in the North and in the South.⁴ The post-Revolutionary era marked a new chapter in the black experience, as new forms of black communities and culture developed as a result of newfound freedom. Although reinvigorated by their new and improved circumstances, free blacks met with great resistance from entrenched American racism and interests of racial exploitation.⁵ Much of American society, especially the slaveholding elite of the South, found the existence of free blacks to be a threat to the basic conception of racial hierarchy perceived by white European Americans and to the institution of slavery. Because free blacks could develop the same “civilized” cultural institutions, they might assimilate into the civic culture of the newly established republic. Despite the spirit of equality that permeated the constitutional republic, an increasing free black population found its rights and opportunities curtailed. The free black experience of the antebellum period was deliberately limited by the dominant white society in the early republic.⁶

Free blacks in the South faced many legal restrictions, discrimination, and racial hostility in general, as one might expect in states that had continued to uphold slavery until the Civil War. Southern laws required them always to carry a certificate of freedom, lest they be claimed as a slave again. In the courtroom, free blacks could not be members of a jury, give testimony against whites, and were punished more severely than their white counterparts; in some instances, they could be sold into slavery again. Migration and movement within and between states were legally limited for free blacks. The right of assembly was also curtailed, as many free black social activities and organizational meetings were subject to curfews, required a white sponsor, or were banned completely. Segregation, by custom and statute, also became a feature in the antebellum South, having developed to control not only slaves but urban free blacks as well. Exclusion from public parks and burial grounds was also prevalent. As far as the education of blacks was concerned, it was forbidden for the most part, except for small private schools and tutoring. Employment discrimination was also an obstacle for many free blacks in the South, relegating them predominantly to the more unskilled and menial jobs in the Southern economy.⁷

Despite living in free states that seemingly had more progressive politics regarding abolition and race relations, northern free blacks faced similar obstacles imposed upon them by the wider white society. The geographic distinction between the Northeast, containing the original states of the Union,

⁴ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 15–17.

⁵ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 51.

⁶ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 89–92.

⁷ Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick, *Free Blacks in America*, 1–2.

and the Northwest, where states were established and settled later, often by white Southerners, should be noted. Both regions harbored inequalities, but discrimination was far more pervasive in the latter. Laws regulating the activity of free blacks in the Old Northwest were largely based upon the slave codes of the South. The rights to vote, serve on a jury, or even testify against whites in court were not available for free blacks. In fact, free black migration to Northwestern states was heavily disincentivized, requiring payment of a bond as a means of guaranteeing oneself not to be a public charge; by the end of the antebellum period, black migration was completely illegal in the Old Northwest.

On the other hand, the Northeast did not have statutes against free Black participation in the courts, but social custom heavily disincentivized this in most cases. The right to vote was available for free Blacks until the beginning of the early nineteenth century, when many states passed disenfranchisement provisions. Northern cities also harbored racial antagonism, which was often channeled into vigilante and mob violence, with riots occurring in the metropolitan areas of Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New York, and other cities throughout the early nineteenth century. While segregation was not enforced by law for public institutions, with public schools being the exception, by custom many public and private spaces, including public transportation, segregated the races, with free blacks receiving the worse accommodation—if not entirely excluded. Northern free blacks also faced severe employment discrimination similar to that faced by free blacks in the South. In fact, during the nineteenth century, the free black working class saw a significant reduction in its position because the white working class and European immigrants competed for limited job opportunities in cities.⁸

Despite the many hurdles that free blacks faced against their livelihoods and success, both in the North and South, some still managed to achieve a comfortable living, and a few were even able to obtain a modest prosperity. Many successful free black entrepreneurs specialized in the service trades, with their clientele focused on well-to-do whites. Others focused on artisanal trades, such as shoemakers and bootmakers, carpenters, brickmakers, tailors and dressmakers, and cabinet makers, especially in the South. In most urban centers, both in the North and South, there was enough economic opportunity for free blacks to carve out their own niche in the local economy, sometimes even monopolizing certain trade and service sectors. Such economic differentiation provided enough of a foundation for a social class system to form within free black communities—one comprised of a middle class, a working class, and an elite. The free black elite milieu included entrepreneurs

⁸ Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick, *Free Blacks in America*, 1–3.

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of the service sectors, house servants of the most socially prominent white families, and well-educated professionals such as lawyers, ministers, doctors, and teachers.⁹

However, an aspect that has not been thoroughly reviewed in the existing historical literature is the way that different socio-economic circumstances faced by free blacks in the different sections of antebellum America affected their socio-economic outcomes. Such an analysis is important in explaining the demographic distribution of free blacks between the North and South, which was greatly influenced by free black perceptions of which environments were most conducive to sustaining and protecting their unique status as blacks who were not bound by the institution of slavery. Regarding demographics, Ira Berlin wrote

Between 1810 and 1820, free Negroes increased only 20 percent, less than a third of the previous decade's growth. In the meantime, the number of whites and slaves surged upward, and by 1840, both were increasing more rapidly than free Negroes. The free Negroes' rate of growth continued to fall in the years that followed, and in some places the free Negro population suffered an absolute decline. The proportion of free Negroes in the black and the free populations slowly slipped backwards ...¹⁰

While the census data does seem to suggest a slow decline of the free black population, the numbers nevertheless continued to grow. Furthermore, other census data also clearly show that throughout the early nineteenth century leading to the Civil War, the free black population of the South consistently exceeded that of the North. This comparative observation alone seems to suggest that the perceived incentives for free blacks to migrate North for a better life were outweighed by the incentives to continue to stay in the South. This assessment does not negate the fact that Southern free blacks faced significant oppression by the local white society; rather, it suggests that many free blacks did not necessarily view the North as enough of a marginal improvement to their standard of living to justify migrating there.¹¹

One of the reasons for free blacks to remain in the South, and not migrate to the North, seems to have been marginally better economic opportunities and prosperity. These better economic prospects were ironically the result of slavery. In their *Valley of the Shadow* Project, William G. Thomas III and Edward L. Ayers used two border state counties—one located in Pennsylvania and the other in Virginia—for a historical comparison representing the wider border regions of the antebellum North and South. All else being equal, one

⁹ Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick, *Free Blacks in America*, 3.

¹⁰ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 135.

¹¹ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 136–137.

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county had slavery, and one did not. When comparing the average wealth of the residents of Franklin County, Pennsylvania with that of Augusta County, Virginia, the residents of Augusta, excluding slaves, were more well-off by almost every significant metric. Augusta residents owned more property, had larger farms with higher cash value, and possessed slaves as property and labor. This difference in standard of living between the two counties was almost solely a product of the availability of slaves in the areas where it was legal to possess them.¹²

Free blacks in the South did benefit from slavery, which helps explain why so many continued to live in the slave states. Slave labor was used heavily in the production of corn and wheat during the appropriate seasons, leading to higher cash values than the farms of Franklin County. Slaves were also rented to non-slaveholding residents for other agricultural and industrial tasks. Additionally, the property value of the slaves themselves added to the overall wealth of the residents. However, the most important fact is that such statistics were not only applicable to the white residents of both counties. Even the free blacks of Augusta County were on average wealthier than their Franklin counterparts, for they also benefitted from the county's economic structure by either owning or renting slaves themselves when needed.¹³ These statistics seem to indicate that free blacks also benefitted economically from slavery in the same way as their white peers did. Considering that free blacks in the North could not benefit from the institution of slavery in the same way, one can only infer that free blacks living in the South enjoyed a superior standard of living because of the slaves around them.

Slavery was not the only factor in determining where free blacks decided to live. Proximity to kin was a powerful non-economic motivator, and the North also had its own socio-economic circumstances affecting its free black communities.¹⁴ William Lloyd Garrison, famed abolitionist and journalist, in 1831 founded the antislavery newspaper the *Liberator*, which he printed and published on a weekly basis. One of the early issues of the newspaper included an article by Garrison that analyzed and compared the various predicaments in which blacks found themselves in antebellum America. He wrote,

Few whites will eat with blacks. Even where blacks and whites are domestics in the same kitchen, the blacks, as I have been told, are often compelled to eat at a separate table. So it is said that white journeymen and apprentices of mechanics often refuse to work with blacks. The prejudice

¹² U.S. Agricultural Census, Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War, University of Virginia Library, https://valley.lib.virginia.edu/ag_census/.

¹³ U.S. Agricultural Census, Valley of the Shadow.

¹⁴ William G. Thomas III and Edward L. Ayers, "The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities," *American Historical Review*, The National Endowment for the Humanities, <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR/>.

has taken two different forms in the different parts of our country. At the North, few blacks are mechanics, because the whites will not allow them to work with them. At the South, on the contrary, few of the mechanics are whites, because they will not do the same sort of work as blacks.¹⁵

From this observation, one can glean that both in the North and South free black workers faced prejudice from their white peers. However, the distinction between the two prejudices mentioned by Garrison shows two different circumstances that produced two separate outcomes. In the North, prejudicial social custom led not only to a segregated workplace, but also to exclusionary practices against free blacks seeking employment, especially working-class blacks. This assertion is also supported by the aforementioned employment discrimination that free blacks in the North often faced due to competition with working-class whites and immigrants. Such competition led to more racial resentment, resulting in further work segregation and the outright exclusion of free blacks in certain job markets.

As for Southern prejudice, social custom led to the stigmatization of certain work deemed only fit for blacks, whether free or enslaved. Both prejudices were part of a broader network of oppression faced by free blacks, yet they led to substantially different outcomes. In the Northern case, such prejudice led to a loss of employment opportunities for free blacks, which in turn led to worse socio-economic outcomes in the long term. In the South, prejudice did not lead to a loss of employment opportunity, but rather enabled free blacks to monopolize and control certain sectors of the local economy. Free Blacks being able to secure certain niches of economic activity without white interference due to prejudiced stigma, ironically enabled better economic conditions for the free black community. Eventually, free blacks in the South also faced reduced employment opportunities due to the gradual increase of urban working-class whites, but never to the same extent as in Northern urban areas. As such, the social forces created by the institution of slavery sometimes created circumstances that were more favorable to free blacks than the socio-economic conditions present in the North.

In addition to economic factors, the different social and legal forces in the two sections of antebellum America highly influenced free black experience. In the South, the institution of slavery, in particular, affected the social standing of free Blacks in various ways. Extensively examining race relations between free blacks and whites in Wilmington, North Carolina, Richard C. Rohrs wrote,

¹⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, "The Colored Population of the United States No. 2," *Liberator* (Boston), January 22, 1831, https://link-gale-com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/apps/doc/GT3005832664/NCNP?u=ilstu_milner&sid=NCNP&xid=42e9937f.

As happened elsewhere in the South, North Carolina enacted legislation to restrict the rights and freedoms of the state's free black population during the antebellum period. White North Carolinians, like white southerners in general, were intent on "protecting the slave population from the 'evil and insidious influences' of the free Negro[es]." Because Wilmington was North Carolina's best port and an important link in north/south land travel, local residents feared that their slaves would be even more susceptible to these "evil and insidious influences." As early as 1785, the North Carolina General Assembly required the free black population of four towns, including Wilmington, "to register... and wear an arm band with the word 'Free' on it."¹⁶

This quote indicates that the slave states of the South enacted many laws that restricted free blacks as a means of controlling them because, whites believed, free blacks near populations of enslaved ones might rouse their ambition to become free or to help them become free. Under such circumstances, it seems that the main impetus behind restricting the movement of free blacks, along with requiring them to register, was not so much racial animosity—although this was certainly not absent—as it was protection against any threat to the vested interests of the slave aristocracy and its beneficiaries. This case suggests that if free blacks limited themselves to the expectations and rules of the racial hierarchy and culture of the South by not doing anything to agitate the social order of the slaveocracy or threaten the foundational institution of slavery, then they could reasonably expect to be left to their own devices and free to pursue their livelihoods in the South.

The claim of free blacks being able to secure their livelihoods by not disrupting the status quo and behaving in accordance with certain boundaries and expectations is also supported by Rohrs's findings. In Wilmington, in a trend similar to the rest of the South, the enforcement of local laws and regulations targeting free blacks was often lenient. In one example, Rohrs explained, "despite legislation intended to limit free blacks' access to weapons, licenses for gun ownership were routinely granted. As late as the 1850s, Wilmington free black resident William Kellogg annually received permission to own a firearm."¹⁷ In other cases, local law enforcement was often negligent in enforcing ordinances targeted against free blacks and regional courts and assemblies continued to grant freedom to slaves despite stated intentions of reducing the local population of free blacks. In fact, the local white population often relied upon the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor provided by local free blacks.¹⁸ From these findings, it becomes more evident that despite

¹⁶ Rohrs, "The Free Black Experience," 617.

¹⁷ Rohrs, "The Free Black Experience," 620–621.

¹⁸ Rohrs, "The Free Black Experience," 620–622.

the amount of legal interference in the lives and activities of free blacks, local community dynamics and relationships seem to have played a larger role in the lives and experiences of free blacks. Only at the personal and communal level can one truly assess the character of free blacks and judge them according to the norms and customs of the South.

It is well documented that free Blacks in the South often used their established relationships with whites in their community, along with their general reputation garnered through socially acceptable interactions within the community, to shield themselves from oppressive laws and assist in interacting with the systems of power. William Johnson, a successful free black barber living in Natchez, Mississippi, was respected by the wider Natchez community for being a businessman, slaveowner, and friend of several influential white men. Johnson had established and maintained a reputation for being “a man with a ‘peaceable character’ and in ‘excellent standing’” and for having “held ‘a respectable position on account of his character, intelligence, and deportment’.”¹⁹ Johnson’s reputation and close ties with influential white members of the community allowed him such a good standing with the law and authorities that he did not have to present a petition in order to stay in the state of Mississippi.²⁰ In fact, according to one of Johnson’s diaries, he also used his connections and reputation in order to help facilitate the approval of petitions for other free blacks, such as his apprentices, by securing the signatures of respected whites.²¹

While it is certainly true that most free blacks were not at the same economic and social level as Johnson was, even free blacks of more humble status were often shielded by their reputation among whites. The abstract of another petition sent to the Mississippi state legislature in 1830 read as follows:

Thirty-three citizens of Natchez ask that a free woman of color named Esther Barland, the owner of a lot a ground and a house built by the fruits of her own industry, be permitted to remain in Mississippi. She should not be subject to the penalties of the 1822 act concerning “Slaves, free Negroes, and mulattoes,” they contend, because of her industry. The governor’s proclamation demanding rigid enforcement of the 80th and 81st sections of the 1822 act caused her much anxiety. She is “much grieved at

¹⁹ Kimberly Welch, “Black Litigiousness and White Accountability: Free Blacks and the Rhetoric of Reputation in the Antebellum Natchez District,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5, no. 3 (September 2015): 381, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26070325>.

²⁰ Welch, “Black Litigiousness and White Accountability,” 380.

²¹ William T. Johnson, September 5, 1841, William Johnson Diary, 1837-1843, vol. 20, p. 61, Louisiana Digital Library, <https://louisianadigitalibrary.org/islandora/object/fpoc-p16313coll51%3A49480>.

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the idea of being driven from the Land of her home and her friends to find shelter she Knows not where.²²

It seems that Esther Barland was of humbler means, yet no less than thirty-three citizens staked their own reputation in asking that she stay in their community, due to her perceived high character and industriousness. These examples, of free blacks utilizing their hard-earned reputation and cultivated associations and friendships with whites, represent a wider trend of free blacks living in the South attempting to signal to Southern society that they were not a threat to the slave power status quo, and that they were willing to conform to the acceptable expectations and behaviors set upon them by whites, all to mitigate obstacles to obtaining a decent life and a modicum of success.

As a counterargument, one could point to free black population demographics to suggest that these findings are not universally applicable, as the discrepancy between the number of free blacks living in the Upper South compared to the Lower South was very significant. The Upper South contained on average at least five times as many free blacks as the Lower South, with the 1840 census showing the least discrepancy.²³ It should be reiterated that such findings cannot encompass every unique black experience, only generalities. However, the Upper and Lower South divide still reinforces the fundamental assertion that much of the slave state policies regarding free Black populations were based on preserving the institution of slavery. The Upper South generally viewed slavery as a necessary evil. It was morally abhorrent to bond in servitude human beings even if they were considered inferior, yet to do otherwise would result in a threat to white dominance. The Lower South, on the other hand, had no moral qualms about keeping blacks enslaved. Gradually, the different sections of the South faced varying economic circumstances that contributed to their divergent views on slavery. The growing wheat culture of the Upper South resulted in a lessening need for new slaves, whereas the cotton culture of the Lower South necessitated a growing need for slaves.²⁴ This reality indicates that tolerance of free blacks was tied significantly to the perceived long-term viability of slave labor and the institution of slavery, resulting in a greater number of free blacks living in the Upper South than in the Lower South.

²² James Carson et al., Petition from thirty-three citizens of Natchez, Mississippi, to Mississippi General Assembly concerning Esther Barland, 1830, Legislative Papers, Petitions, and Memorials 1830, Record Group 47, vol. 19, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, Petition Analysis Number 11083008, Race and Slavery Petitions Project, University Libraries, Greensboro, North Carolina, updated October 30, 2007, <https://library.uncg.edu/slavery/petitions/details.aspx?pid=525>.

²³ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 136.

²⁴ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 86–88.

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On the other hand, while free blacks in the North attempted to employ “respectability politics” as a means of improving their community’s station in wider society, it was done more as a way to integrate into white society and to be perceived as being civilized enough to be considered equal to whites. This line of thought makes sense as free blacks living in the North were not directly contending against slavery. Northern free blacks were living in a society that was theoretically supposed to treat them the same as whites under republican principle, yet actually treated them as second-class citizens not for reasons of vested institutional interest, but rather out of racial animosity and racism. Therefore, in order to achieve better conditions for free blacks in the North, racial equality was first needed—otherwise, living among white society was not a sustainable long-term goal. This resulted in free blacks forming and adopting similar social institutions and values, such as religious groups and Northern black spirituality.²⁵

However, such developments only caused more resentment and anxiety among whites. Much of white public opinion in the North reflected racist attitudes despite the efforts of free blacks. Investigating the reasons for why the population of free blacks declined in free states, the *Detroit Free Press* concluded,

The free negroes are now more numerous in the slave than in the free States—a result not to be easily credited or comprehended, when we think of the opposite institutions and tastes that exist in the two divisions of the Confederacy. It must be referred partly to the more favorable climate of the South, and partly to a natural inclination in a portion of the race to submit to the degraded condition of their ancestors rather than undergo the hazards so often attendant upon higher civil standing in more northerly States.²⁶

Such public opinions reveals that white society did not view as endearing the attempts of free blacks to assimilate and shed their former identities as slaves. To many northern whites, blacks were simply too inferior and incapable of truly maintaining white civilized culture and American republican values.

²⁵ Laurie Maffly-Kipp, “African American Christianity, Pt. I: To the Civil War,” TeacherServe, National Humanities Center, updated June 2005, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/aareligionc.htm>.

²⁶ “Selections from the *National Era*: What Becomes of the Free Colored People?” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper/North Star* (Rochester, New York) VII, no. 41, September 29, 1854, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A11BE9340B7A005AB%40EANX-12C59B251C5F7D20%402398491-12C59B255DFE2D48%400-12C59B25CE3D2828%40Selections%2Bfrom%2Bthe%2BNational%2BEra%2BWhat%2BBecomes%2Bof%2Bthe%2BFree%2BColored%2BPeople>.

But unlike their compatriots in the South, who strove not to agitate or provoke the sensibilities of the social order in which they lived, free blacks in the North were animated against the reactionary tendencies of white society towards their attempts to seek equality. According to Leslie M. Harris,

In the 1830s, a new coalition of black and white middle-class reformers challenged the racial order of the nation. These “radical abolitionists” called for an immediate end to southern slavery, unlike the gradual emancipation that whites had enacted in the North, and without plans to colonize free blacks. Radical abolitionists also pledged to fight racism by elevating “the character and condition of the people of color” so that blacks could “share an equality with whites, of civil and religious privileges.”²⁷

Of course, such a response from the free black community and its white allies could only provoke a more pronounced backlash. Free black and white abolitionist agitation for greater freedoms and equality in the North, along with calls for ending slavery in the South, resulted in increased racial hostility and persecution from Northerners. In response to the increasing radicalism of the abolitionist movement and free blacks, proponents of slavery and racist whites of all classes were united in preventing what they deemed to be a threat to the racial order of antebellum America, North and South alike.²⁸

The backlash manifested itself in several avenues of society. While free blacks faced discrimination and inequality since their inception as a caste unto themselves, there had been a considerable shift in tolerance from the early decades of the republic to the mid-nineteenth century. Many of the provisions for limiting free black migration to the Northwestern states had gradually become more restrictive as the antebellum era progressed. The same was true for the franchise to vote in the rest of the free states.²⁹ Perhaps one of the most ferocious battle spaces for free black equality was over public schooling. In an 1849 edition of the *North Star*, Frederick Douglass reprinted the argument of famed antislavery-minded senator Charles Sumner that public schools in free states were illegally and unconstitutionally separating students based on race. In it, Douglass highlighted the clear reasons why whites refused to let black children attend school with white children: to do so would lead to an obvious improvement in the socio-economic circumstances of free blacks, along with a

²⁷ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 171.

²⁸ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 172.

²⁹ Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick, *Free Blacks in America*, 1–2.

symbolic concession that blacks were indeed equal to whites.³⁰ This example, along with the other established ways in which free blacks in the North were discriminated against either with legal or social penalties, explains the increasing crackdown that the various free black communities of the North faced as a result of perceived fears of a potential social and economic uplift of a previously marginalized group.

Such heightened antagonism between the races was resolved in more than just socially acceptable and legal ways, as the free black communities of the North suffered vicious assaults and mass violence from racist whites through the antebellum period. Another reprinted article in the *North Star* described the unlicensed mob violence that was committed against free black residents, along with the damage to their property committed by the racist mob. Besides identifying the assailants as being predominantly composed of Irish immigrants, the article also highlighted the apathy that white civil society had concerning the unjustified violence committed against free blacks.³¹ This *North Star* article shows that free blacks were often treated as a monolithic group that agreed with and pursued the radical claims that abolitionists made at the time. As such, even if some free blacks wanted to follow the strategy of their brethren in the South by not seeking to agitate for better conditions, they were targeted nonetheless by the chaotic violence of the streets.

What made such violence different from the rest of the country were the specific socio-economic conditions of the North, which further compounded increased racial animosity arising from abolitionist and free Black activism. In the case of New York, which was inculcated with social and economic forces different from any urban centers in the South, Harris explained,

New York City had important economic ties to the South, and merchants feared the alienation of southern slaveholders. Working-class whites feared losing jobs to blacks and resented the efforts of the abolitionists and other evangelical reformers to impose a new morality on them. In New York City, these whites also feared the economic and political power of reformers like the Tappans, who represented a new middle class whose

³⁰ "Selections: Argument of Charles Sumner, Esq., against the Constitutionality of Separate Colored Schools," *Frederick Douglass' Paper/North Star* (Rochester, NY), February 22, 1850, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A11BE9340B7A005AB%40EANX-11D0A365DDE95170%402396811-11D0A365E6F8C2C8%400-11D0A3660BC93E10%40Selections%2BArgument>.

³¹ Northern Whig, "The Slave and the Free Republic," *North Star* (Rochester, NY), April 10, 1851, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A11BE9340B7A005AB%40EANX-11D0A37772B63168%402397223-11D0A3779A67A8A8%403-11D0A37801301F78%40The%2BSlave%2Band%2Bthe%2BFree%2BRepublic>.

vision of economics, politics, and morality potentially threatened their livelihoods. . . Such fears resulted in the 1834 anti-abolition riots, the worst riots in antebellum New York City.³²

As a result of the heightened racial tensions caused by activism directed against the racial hierarchical status quo, such social resentment was often resolved through socially informal and extralegal channels. As such, free black communities were put in a position in which they could neither ignore the injustices that were occurring to them nor refrain from the struggle for equality. Social forces were set in motion to fuel a cyclical pattern.

Arguably, the antebellum period was too varied to allow for a universal comparative analysis of free blacks in the North and South. One could also say that although free blacks in the North may have suffered more in the short term, their activism was an important component in how the Civil War erupted, creating better socio-economic conditions for most blacks of America in the future. It is certainly valid to suggest that there need to be separate studies that look more closely at certain periods of the era for more precise comparisons of free black populations and a fuller picture of the dynamics at hand. As for the second point, it can certainly be argued that when taken as a whole, free blacks living in the North developed a civil and political consciousness due to their agitation and activism. However, the assumed free state/slave state dichotomy that could have made the comparison of free blacks in the different sections an easy question, is not, in fact, quite so.

Examining primary sources on the lived experience of free blacks in the North and South, and building from the established literature regarding the matter, my analysis suggests that although free blacks faced many hardships as second-class citizens in both the North and South, free black communities in the South fared better in achieving meaningful socio-economic status and security. Ironically, this was in large part due to the existence of the institution of slavery in one section of the country and not in the other. Slavery allowed for specific socio-economic circumstances, such as the fact that non-slave black Southerners were on average more prosperous due to slavery, and that laws that controlled free blacks mainly existed to defend slavery, which allowed free black people to prosper relatively unmolested. These circumstances allowed free blacks to be perceived as no threat to the institution of slavery and to the Southern Slave Power status quo in general. This was not be the case in a “free” North, which experienced increased racial animosity due to immigration and industrialization, along with increased agitation for equality by a conscious free black community and white abolitionist allies. These findings add further

³² Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 172–173.

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complexity to an increasingly nuanced historical assessment of the free black antebellum experience. Despite their precarious position in society, antebellum blacks in the South tended to be better off than free blacks in the North. That is why many stayed there.

By Any Means Necessary: Examining the Labor Conflict That Led to the Red Summer of 1919

By Zach Peterson

In the December 1915 issue of *Crisis*, the flagship publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), editor W. E. B. Du Bois dedicated a page to the late Booker T. Washington. Washington had succumbed to complications of the heart and the kidneys on November 14, about two weeks before this issue was published.¹ Even though the two men represented opposite sides on how racial equality could be achieved, Du Bois heralded his ideological adversary not only as “the greatest Negro leader since Frederick Douglass,” but also as “the most distinguished man, white or black, who has come out of the South since the Civil War.”² Du Bois went on to describe the numerous causes to which Washington had devoted his life, a list so long that many believed that he had literally worked himself to death.³

Among Washington’s accomplishments, and perhaps the most important of them all, was his work regarding economic inequality. Through his role in the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute—a historically black, land-grant university that focused on a humanistic education—Washington advocated for an economy where well-educated blacks could make meaningful contributions, often through the creation of their own businesses.⁴ While unprecedented and undoubtedly groundbreaking, this was but one part of America’s economic puzzle. Spurred by the wildly fluctuating job market and general social instability that accompanied World War I, millions of Southern blacks had either already sought or were in the process of seeking more gainful employment in the North. This created two problems. First, the void that they created in the South was immense; it disrupted the traditional agricultural labor hierarchy and left the vast majority of Southern farmers resentful of black agency.⁵ Second, the environment that black migrants barreled toward in the

¹ Alex Dominguez, “Booker T. Washington’s Death Revisited,” *Washington Post*, May 5, 2006.

² W. E. B. Du Bois, “Booker T. Washington,” *Crisis*, December 1915, 82.

³ Dominguez, “Booker T. Washington.”

⁴ Du Bois, “Booker T. Washington,” 82.

⁵ Steven Essig, “Race Riots,” in *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, ed. Janice L. Reiff, Ann Durkin Keating, and James R. Grossman (Chicago Historical Society, 2005), <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1032.html>

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North—specifically in cities such as Chicago, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh—was by no means emblematic of a progressive, egalitarian haven. The massive influx of black workers found themselves immersed in ongoing labor strife that was only exacerbated by the introduction of a racial component.⁶ In short, racialized labor conflict invaded every crevice of America during the period between 1915 and 1916, and, in Chicago, was the dominant cause of the race riots during the Red Summer of 1919.

The riots lasted for a week—July 27, 1919 to August 3, 1919—and over the course of those seven days, thirty-eight people were murdered. All fifteen whites and sixteen out of the twenty-three blacks who lost their lives did so at the hands of “vicious mobs and lone gunmen”—private citizens engaging in violence.⁷ The remaining seven blacks were killed by police who, almost always white, provided steadfast backup for white agitators. The immediate cause of this bloodshed, while not necessarily an accident, seemed incidental. As a group of black boys swam in Lake Michigan, seventeen-year-old Eugene Williams was struck square on the forehead by a rock thrown from the shore. Williams ultimately drowned, and when his friends were not able to convince a white police officer to arrest the assailant, a perverse game of telephone ensued. Rumors spread among blacks that the police had actively prevented efforts that could have saved Williams’ life, and among whites, the story was that a white man had been struck and killed by a black man instead.⁸ However inflammatory it was, to say that the death of Eugene Williams ignited this period of violence would be a gross oversimplification of Chicago’s volatility during this period.

Over the course of U.S. history, racial conflict has proven to be a perpetual possibility, and in this specific instance, there are several historians who have offered their interpretations of the complex web of causation that led to the 1919 race riots. Often considered the premier analysis, William Tuttle’s *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, published in 1970, claimed that the Northern migration of blacks during World War I exacerbated racial tensions in Chicago. When coupled with an emerging black press that circulated militant thought—spearheaded by the NAACP and the founder of *Crisis* himself, W. E. B. Du Bois—Tuttle believed that these racial factors were directly responsible for the violence that occurred later.⁹ While he outlined several labor disputes in

⁶ Lee J. Alston and Joseph P. Ferrie, “Social Control and Labor Relations in the American South before the Mechanization of the Cotton Harvest in the 1950s,” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 145, no. 1 (March 1989): 133–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40751177>.

⁷ William M. Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 10.

⁸ Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot*, 8.

⁹ Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot*, 260.

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Chicago that played a role in heightening the violence, Tuttle considered them smaller shocks affecting the riots. He ultimately suggested that all labor issues resulted from migration, which supported his broader argument. Since then, other historians have expanded upon Tuttle's ideas by showcasing social, economic, and political factors that highlight alternative perspectives, creating new wrinkles in Tuttle's original question: What caused this violence?

Widely regarded as one of the most effective analyses of the Red Summer since Tuttle's work, Jan Voogd's 2008 book titled *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* interacted with Tuttle's argument in an intriguing way. Voogd acknowledged the tremendous impact of black migration northward, militant black press, and World War I—what Tuttle deemed the causes of this violence—but argued that this “unique confluence of factors” actually magnified a sense of hysterical racism among the nation's whites, which in turn precipitated the riots.¹⁰ She supported this argument by isolating demographic, economic, and cultural “caste ruptures” in American society at the time, which were seen as threats to ideals of white masculinity and dominance.¹¹ In tandem with a heightened tendency toward aggression—an unfortunate symptom of a society only recently removed from World War I—it became clear to Voogd that hysterical white racism, not Tuttle's “New Negro” activism, caused the outbreak of violence in Chicago.

Two years later, Cheryl Hudson examined the significance of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations (CCRR). Established in October of 1919 with the intent of restoring the long-term order and integrity of the city, the CCRR quickly revealed that segregation was its preferred means to that end. Hudson highlighted a proposed resolution from a mere few days after the violence had ceased, which stated that “many of the causes of friction can be removed by an intelligent and equitable separation of the race.”¹² Advocacy for this legislation came even after the Grand Jury tasked with convicting various rioters took a dramatic stand against State's Attorney MacClay Hoyne, refusing to continue prosecuting the procession of black citizens that Hoyne brought before it, asserting that “black Chicagoans were not the main instigators of the conflict.”¹³ In a bit of brutal irony, this very same Grand Jury—later supported as well by the Coroner's Jury, which primarily determined causes of death—saw no overlap between its rhetoric against Hoyne and its subsequent recommendation of voluntary segregation. This situation is effectively

¹⁰ Jan Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 3.

¹¹ Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance*, 41-48.

¹² Chicago City Council resolution, quoted in Cheryl Hudson, “‘The Negro in Chicago’: Harmony in Conflict, 1919–22,” *European Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (2010): 55, <https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.29.1.53/1>.

¹³ Hudson, “‘The Negro in Chicago,’” 56.

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encompassed by Voogd's theory regarding threats to white male domination. Here was a courtroom full of white men, who after struggling through an arduous summer of violence, wanted to make sure that it never happened again. These men decided that their "boundary" in this case was, literally, the divide between Chicago neighborhoods. Perceiving the black community as their threat, the CRRR's response was to officially sanction segregation, thus setting a precedent for institutionalized racism in Chicago that persisted for much of the twentieth century.

Up to this point, this topic had almost exclusively been discussed through a racial lens, pitting whites against blacks in a clear-cut way. In the 1970s, Tuttle claimed that a change in black consciousness was the catalyst for racial violence. Nearly forty years later, Jan Voogd and Cheryl Hudson shifted the blame onto whites, describing a sense of hysterical white racism that was ignited by fear and anxiety toward those very same consciousness shifts, and that was the true catalyst for Chicago's entry into the Red Summer. In the two years after Hudson's arguments were published, however, two articles put the intricacies of black culture under a microscope, revealing that the black community was by no means united against white society. Through their analysis, these articles established a thought process that labeled each perspective not only by race but by economic class—most importantly isolating black labor migrants as unmistakably poor.

The first article was published in the spring of 2010—only a few months after Hudson—by Nicholas Wisseman. While making it clear that he did not believe there were any elements of causation between these two events, Wisseman illustrated a correlation between a rejected Japanese proposition for the equal treatment of all "alien nationals" at post-WWI peace talks and the violence of the Red Summer.¹⁴ Wisseman recognized the importance of the Japanese plea to domestic racial issues when he cited Du Bois's assertion that "the League [of Nations] was the only real chance to 'work for Democracy of all races and men.'"¹⁵ However, it became apparent that Du Bois only represented a portion of the black population: those behind Tuttle's point of emphasis, the "New Negro" activists. The vast majority of migrants to Chicago during WWI would identify with this ideology, as it was New Negro outlets such as Chicago's often-inflammatory black newspapers the *Defender* and the *Whip*, as well as Du Bois's *Crisis*, that drew them to the industrial metropolis in the first place.¹⁶ Wisseman showed that as much as black labor migrants

¹⁴ Nicholas Wisseman, "'Beware the Yellow Peril and Behold the Black Plague': The Internationalization of American White Supremacy and Its Critiques, Chicago 1919," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 103, no. 1, (Spring 2010): 43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25701259>.

¹⁵ Wisseman, "Beware the Yellow Peril," 45.

¹⁶ Wisseman, "Beware the Yellow Peril," 54.

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influenced the New Negro cause during the war, it was those who returned home from it that provided the “teeth” of the doctrine. This escalation is exemplified by an article from the *Whip* in which a veteran observed that “there is only one way to stop segregation, and the Negro learned how in France.”¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, this black movement of newfound militance was not well-received by established whites in Chicago. Interestingly though, they were not the only demographic to protest the bold and determined advances. While the protests of Chicago’s “settled black population” did not deny that the efforts of the New Negro were a step in the right direction in terms of civil rights as a whole, Wisseman quoted James R. Grossman who suggested that “they were not necessarily eager to see the newcomers become their neighbors.” Many established, middle-class blacks in Chicago were anxious that the brazen new movement, led mostly by unfamiliar blacks whom they deemed to be “uncouth” and “embarrassingly Southern,” would “disrupt the supposed race harmony that had previously existed in Chicago.”¹⁸ Both this fear and uncertainty, and the established blacks who were overcome by it, represented a different social group. In terms of the ideological grapple between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X during the “proper” Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, this group identified with the former. Granted, King’s contributions to the civil rights cause were astronomical compared to these decidedly “elite” blacks around the turn of the twentieth century. The comparison lies in the fact that both were an older generation, and neither were comfortable with a movement based on violent resistance.

Instead, supporters of this nonviolent philosophy felt that the best course of action was to minimize conflict, submitting to status-quo expectations while slowly trying to improve how “superior” whites perceived them. Historian Johnathan Coit analyzed this dynamic in a 2012 article, and while he was not the first to do so, labeled it as a “politics of respectability.”¹⁹ By “embodying the virtues of hard work, good manners and hygiene,” to name a few, black leaders, Coit claimed, “assumed [whites] could be convinced to abandon their prejudice.”²⁰ When this new generation of black migrants came to Chicago, it was only the beginning of a contentious relationship between what could be called two separate factions, just as Wisseman had described in his article two years prior. Coit explained that as the “New Negroes” began to display that they had every intention of fighting back against white violence in the black belt, Chicago’s black leaders—effectively synonymous with the ideas of

¹⁷ Wisseman, “Beware the Yellow Peril,” 60.

¹⁸ Wisseman, “Beware the Yellow Peril,” 55.

¹⁹ Johnathan S. Coit, “‘Our Changed Attitude’: Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 2, (April 2012): 225, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23249074>.

²⁰ Coit, “‘Our Changed Attitude,’” 227.

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respectable politics—denounced the counter-measures, not distinguishing between offensive and defensive violence, and even going as far as to call “any who counseled violence” traitors to the “Negro” race.²¹ Going even further in defense of their platform, they suggested that the aggression was a result of “refusal to follow the example of their leaders and their inability to control their emotions,” thereby likening any black agitator to the savage whites on the other side.²² By including that statement, Coit indirectly acknowledged the earlier remarks of Voogd and Hudson, who both cited hysteria and threatened masculinity as catalysts for white violence.

Described as “hoodlum elements” by Illinois governor Frank Lowden,²³ white newspapers transformed the black leaders’ comments into ammunition against the racial implications of the riot itself. Coit explained that “violence represented a detour from the serious business of solving the city’s ‘race problem’.”²⁴ Black leaders recognized this strategy, and their swift response included the complete abandonment of their anti-violence rhetoric, a claim that black “assertiveness” caused the riots, and lastly, a re-branding of the entire riot as a “demand for equality” on behalf of the entire black community.²⁵ This hasty shift succeeded in keeping the focus of the riots on the issue of race; however, it did not mend the bridge between the New Negroes and the African American politicians. Represented by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen’s periodical the *Messenger*, the New Negroes “criticized established black leaders for their refusal to call for armed self-defense prior to the events of the Red Summer.”²⁶ These activists believed in a “total war” mentality in which violence was the primary weapon against racial injustices, and therefore did not include the “revised conception” of violence presented by Chicago’s black leaders.²⁷

Ultimately, Coit’s analysis of these competing black viewpoints did not contribute to Voogd’s and Hudson’s claim that white racism was the root cause of these riots. The New Negroes may have believed that their violent acts were the only possible response to white racism and oppression, but the philosophy of respectable politicians proved that it was not the only potential solution to that problem. However, by separating the black population of Chicago into these two distinct groups, Coit challenged the idea of a clean-cut, racial bifurcation that was present in Tuttle’s analysis. This historiography has served to outline the changes and additions in scholarship since Tuttle’s original

²¹ Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 232.

²² Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 232.

²³ Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 233.

²⁴ Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 234.

²⁵ Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 239.

²⁶ Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 250.

²⁷ Coit, “Our Changed Attitude,” 250.

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research. The following primary-source analysis shifts the focus back onto the question of race, diving deeper into one of Tuttle's original points of emphasis in an attempt to prove that factors related to labor, and those factors alone, were the cause of the race riots during the infamous Red Summer of 1919.

Hiring blacks as "strikebreakers" to replace disgruntled white workers became a relatively common practice during this era, and the negative impact that it had on white union organizers added a racial component to the already-unstable labor environment. One deadly example of this conflict occurred in Piermont, New York in late 1916. Thomas Hughes, the white president of a local paper workers' union, was shot and killed by John Miller, a black "strikebreaker" whom Hughes sought to convert.²⁸ As uncommon as this may have been in a small, industrial town like Piermont, unionization and the conflict that accompanied it had no boundaries. But hostility was also not limited to black aggressors—earlier that same year, four white New York men were arrested on charges of attempted murder after they confessed that "they had been hired for \$100 by the shirtmakers' union 'to beat up and kill strikebreakers'."²⁹ In addition to existing disputes over wages, working conditions, and weekly hours, the racial aspect of this conflict persisted wherever there was money to be made.

One of the largest and most profitable economic sectors during this period was the railroad industry, where labor conflict was relatively common. Historically, railroads had been among the nation's most volatile industries. In 1894, Eugene V. Debs and the American Railway Union mobilized over 100,000 workers against the Pullman Car Company in a nationwide strike.³⁰ In this era, railroad companies were faced with managing the continuous struggle between numerous different "trainmen brotherhoods," and often their solution—the cheapest one—was simply to replace any unionized workers with new, black migrant workers from the South. In fact, this strategy was so widespread that in September 1916, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that a "national committee" of railroad employers had come together to facilitate the "pooling and distribution of strikebreakers to points most in need."³¹

Unusually high union pressure had prompted these actions, however. Typically, union issues were dealt with by individual firms. For example, while not a railroad company in the traditional sense, the Pullman Car Company enjoyed an expansive monopoly of the railroad car manufacturing business, employing tens of thousands of porters to supervise those cars. It was not uncommon for them to replace striking white workers with black ones; as the

²⁸ "Shot by A Strikebreaker," *New York Times*, September 26, 1916.

²⁹ "Confess Union Hired Them to Attack Strikebreakers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 8, 1916.

³⁰ Jonathan Bassett, "The Pullman Strike of 1894," *OAH Magazine of History* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 41, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25163135>.

³¹ Roads Of U.S. Form Alliance to Fight Men," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 31, 1916.

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Freeman, a black-owned Indianapolis newspaper put it, “The heads of such organizations care nothing about the conditions or circumstances of either [the white man’s] brotherhood or labor treaties; all they care about is to fill their own pockets.”³² This quote touches on a misconception of the time. White workers who had been cast aside often resented black workers for taking their jobs; their hatred was also based on their perception that their employers favored black workers for reasons more than economics. The Pullman Company most certainly did not—in fact, it was often just as discriminatory as the rest of white society at this point in history.

The December 1915 issue of the *Crisis* presented the findings of an official NAACP investigation into what the group deemed “The ‘Jim Crow’ Car.” Author T. Montgomery Gregory cobbled together various accounts of black train passengers dating back to August of that same year, all of which detailed their aggressively negative experiences on Pullman train cars.³³ Describing problems ranging from conductors who smoked and sneezed without any attention to passengers, to filthy toilets that afforded very little privacy, Gregory frequently used the words “pen” and “cattle car” to characterize the conditions that black patrons faced under the supposed hospitality of the Pullman Company.³⁴ He even cited one instance “on one of the most favorable trains in the South,” where conductors converted his “colored” car into a white smoking car and transferred him into a different one—one emitting an odor that, he claimed, had not yet left his nostrils even at the time he wrote this article.³⁵

Conditions for Pullman’s black employees, while perhaps not as physically revolting as the experiences that Gregory described, were in no way favorable either. The November 1915 issue of the *Crisis* included an excerpt from the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* that described a federal inquiry into the Pullman Company. Porters had raised grievances about the ratio of salary to tips, ultimately claiming that their \$27.50 a month was not enough to stay healthy and fed and “look pleasant.”³⁶ Pullman responded to the inquiry by stating matter-of-factly, “we can get all the men we want at that rate” and “perhaps the wearer of the uniform should perhaps consider himself lucky.”³⁷ This corporate ultimatum illustrated the idea that, just as white porters were expendable when they tried to unionize, black porters could be considered similarly temporary if they proved to be ungrateful for the opportunities they had been given.

³² Sylvester Russell, “Pullman Strike Breakers Win,” *Freeman* (Indianapolis), April 15, 1916.

³³ T. Montgomery Gregory, “The ‘Jim Crow’ Car,” *Crisis*, December 1915, 33–34.

³⁴ Gregory, “The ‘Jim Crow’ Car,” 33.

³⁵ Gregory, “The ‘Jim Crow’ Car,” 33–34.

³⁶ *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, “The First Day’s Inquiry by Federal Industrial Commission,” *Crisis*, November 1915, 24.

³⁷ *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, “The First Day’s Inquiry,” 24.

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Overall, these instances of black involvement in industry presented a double-edged sword for the black community as a whole. On one hand, they were resented by the white labor class for “stealing” their jobs, as well as by predominantly white unions for acting as strikebreakers. But on the other hand, the jobs that black workers most frequently “stole” were rarely ever the positive, gainful employment that they had set out to find. Instead, at a slightly higher cost for their employers, they were subject to much of the same prejudice and discrimination that dominated the South. As a result, many of the members of the new black working class began to harbor some resentment of their own. In some ways represented by the mortal wounding of local union president Thomas Hughes by a black strikebreaker, this same violence would later manifest itself in the race riots of 1919.

As influential and pervasive as Northern labor conflict was in this decade, it did not exist in a vacuum. The massive influx of black workers into the North left a debilitating void in the South, whose economic system was still largely dependent on cheap, black labor. As a result, members of the planter class scrambled to restore their means of livelihood in time for harvest, casting aspersions at their former subordinates in the process. One such argument, submitted to the *New York Times* from Savannah, Georgia, gave the illusion of looking out for black interests. Author Sigo Myers acknowledges the migration’s “serious interference with the natural course of business” in the South, but continues by expressing his concern for the Northern communities toward which blacks were headed.³⁸ Citing labor competition and a higher cost of living among other factors, Myers asserted that “the negro laborer is nowhere as well off as in the South” on account of favorable climactic conditions, “companionship among his race,” and a higher level of “consideration for his weaknesses.”³⁹ This argument illustrates the negative connotation that the idea of blacks upholding a higher standard of living held for many upper-class whites. Essentially, success put blacks closer to the perceived “level” of whites and, by extension, created a more equitable society as a whole. Needless to say, whites such as Myers resented any attempt to bridge this status gap.

This narrative was further perpetuated by an editorial from the January 1916 issue of *Crisis* in which Du Bois responded to an excerpt from a book by author (and presumably Southern cotton planter) John A. Todd. Todd lamented that America’s crop would forever be hindered by “the lack of sufficient labor.”⁴⁰ The physical decimation of the Southern black labor class was not the only problem, according to Todd; he also pointed out that “since the liberation

³⁸ Sigo Myers, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, August 17, 1916.

³⁹ Myers, letter to the editor.

⁴⁰ Du Bois, “Lazy Labor,” *Crisis*, January 1916, 132.

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of the slaves, good Negroes have ... an incurable aversion to steady and especially prolonged labor.”⁴¹ Interestingly, he argued that black wages had actually increased due to the scarcity of their labor, yet he could not understand why they did not want to work six or seven days a week to maximize their profits. Additionally, he criticized their spending habits, implying that their purchases were superficial and merely made to “copy the luxuries of the white man.”⁴² Du Bois’s rebuttal was strong, encouraging the habits of “black laziness” that Todd perceived if those very habits were the reason for increased wages.⁴³ More importantly, however, this argument aligned with Mr. Myers’s earlier narrative of insecurity. Todd bashed the black community for its poor financial decisions, but perhaps he only did this in an attempt to repress them, as he was afraid of what might happen if their consciousness advanced.

A later article in the *Crisis* drove the proverbial stake into the ground. Titled “The Business of Prejudice,” this April 1916 piece looked at the perspectives of various publications across the country covering the presence of blacks in typically white labor markets. From the *Baltimore American*, an L. Cordery offered a black perspective by denouncing an idea very similar to Todd’s: “the idle Negro.”⁴⁴ From the Miami newspaper *Metropolis*, however, A. G. Holmes took a white perspective on the chauffeur market that can be encompassed by this apprehensive statement: “Permit Negro chauffeurs and the wedge has entered, and where will it stop?”⁴⁵ Finally, an editorial from the Columbia, South Carolina *States* wondered “whether or not a number of white men shall be held down in order that the Negroes shall be retained as a class of cheap laborers.”⁴⁶

Overall, these perspectives reflected the significance of economic factors to race relations throughout the North and South during the 1910s. The migration of blacks from South to North left a massive labor void, and Southern resentment of that agency fostered doubt even in the minds of blacks, who worried about the ramifications of their mobility. As for their experiences, blacks who moved to the North would encounter labor conflict, which would segregate along racial lines as the decade continued. Those who remained in the South not only found themselves competing with the white labor class for jobs; they also often drove up wages and inched closer to a decidedly white standard of living that threatened the very basis of segregationist policy.

This fear-inducing sense of competition showed no signs of receding—much to the dismay of those who valued the status quo—and in fact it only

⁴¹ Du Bois, “Lazy Labor,” 132.

⁴² Du Bois, “Lazy Labor,” 133.

⁴³ Du Bois, “Lazy Labor,” 133.

⁴⁴ L. Cordery, “The Business of Prejudice,” *Crisis*, April 1916, 299.

⁴⁵ Cordery, “The Business of Prejudice,” 300.

⁴⁶ Cordery, “The Business of Prejudice,” 300.

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intensified as it became more common for blacks to establish their own businesses instead of just competing for dwindling unskilled labor opportunities. The January 1916 issue of the *Crisis* recognized a few examples of black agency in its “Economics” section, including building contracts, property values, and even a tidbit about President Woodrow Wilson and the First Lady dining at a house “owned and conducted by Thomas F. Lovett, a colored man.”⁴⁷

These efforts were not just those of fortunate black families, or of people who simply got lucky, however; rather, they were part of a coordinated approach by a national organization called the Negro Business League. The League was founded in 1900 by Booker T. Washington, who believed that the root of many racial issues was economic discrimination.⁴⁸ In keeping with character for Washington, whose establishment of the Tuskegee Institute cemented his status as an educator, the Negro Business League focused just as much on educating the black community as it did on helping it find profits. An article in the *Washington Bee* on July 15, 1916, described the organization’s strategy as this: “Whenever a strong man in one line is located, his experience is passed along to other communities in order to strengthen them along the same line.”⁴⁹ Washington realized the importance of collectivism in this endeavor and therefore designed the League to function best—and perhaps at all—when all of its members were working together. Those “strong men of the line” were not limited to the black community either, as Washington was able to foster personal relationships with white elites like Andrew Carnegie and Julius Rosenwald, who had just become the president of Sears Roebuck.⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, the support of these titans of industry, however influential, did not equate to more than a modicum of acceptance from the rest of white society. As a matter of fact, this expansion of black success only exacerbated white resentment, all while largely maintaining the arena of labor as the nucleus of race-based strife. Furthermore, despite the economic advances of the black community during the latter half of the 1910s, many blacks still understood that the socio-economic fate of their race still rested firmly in the hands of whites.

Du Bois’s editorial from the March 1916 issue of the *Crisis* described the environment in St. Louis in the midst of a proposal for segregation. Du Bois began by writing that “Colored St. Louis and its friends are today fighting for

⁴⁷ “Economics,” *Crisis*, January 1916, 115–116.

⁴⁸ Joseph Bernardo, “National Negro Business League,” BlackPast, November 26, 2008, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-negro-business-league/>.

⁴⁹ “How it Works: Concrete Examples of How the National Negro Business League is Trying to Serve the Business Men of the Race,” *Washington (DC) Bee*, July 15, 1916.

⁵⁰ Bernardo, “Negro Business.”

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life and breath.”⁵¹ He described a black community that was first indifferent toward the proposal, wondering what could be different between the segregation that already existed and segregation backed by the law.⁵² While they eventually changed their view and mobilized voters against the proposal, the 15,000 black voters stood little chance against more than 100,000 whites. Du Bois concluded, “Thus is the colored American in the hands of his white friends.”⁵³ Ultimately, the expansion of black agency into establishing business expanded feelings of white resentment in a similar way. In this instance in 1916, Du Bois’s reaction seemed to suggest defeat—that for the moment, the black community appeared to be helpless. But three years later, after repeated attempts at progress were continually met with calls for segregation, these same labor conflicts would violently boil over into the race riots of the Red Summer.

This exploration of primary sources supports the claim that labor-related conflict was the dominant cause of the race riots during the Red Summer of 1919. Hopeful about the potential for upward mobility in the North after millions of able-bodied men left the workforce for the war, a comparable number of blacks pulled up their systemically stunted roots in the South. Unfortunately, their opportunism clashed with the established socio-economic hierarchies of urban whites; even when blacks were motivated to start their own businesses and tried to carve out a space for themselves, they were met with even harsher opposition that led to a reinforcement of Jim Crow principles. These were the initial grounds for white resentment, and over time, simmering tensions spilled out across Northern cities and towns in the form of brutal race riots. This degree of discrimination may not exist today, but prejudice certainly does. We see it across countless minority groups, including women and the LGBTQ community, but race-based prejudice remains among the most prevalent. As seen with the events leading up to the Red Summer, sometimes time—effectively forcing a disenfranchised population to stew in an inequitable society—can be the most dangerous factor of escalation.

⁵¹ Du Bois, “St. Louis,” *Crisis*, February 1916, 240.

⁵² Du Bois, “St. Louis,” 240.

⁵³ Du Bois, “St. Louis,” 240.

American Nazis in the U.S. Press: Reportage on Domestic Nazism, 1933-1939

By Sam Anderson

Isadore Greenbaum was an unlikely attendee of the German American Bund's celebration of George Washington's birthday at Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939. At the time, Greenbaum was a young Jewish man of twenty-six years old, a Brooklyn native, and a plumber by trade.¹ A few years earlier, he had traveled to Hitler's Nazi Germany while serving in the merchant marines and became one of the few Americans who had witnessed the Third Reich up to that point. On this day, he was sneaking through security into the event at Madison Square Garden to witness the largest Nazi rally ever to take place in the United States.

The stage directly to the front of Greenbaum, who stood in the first several rows of spectators, was lavishly decorated with the perverse combination of symbols of two ideologies that would soon be at war. At center stage hung a massive, full-body banner of a stoic-faced George Washington, flanked on both sides by the stars-and-stripes and swastika banners, the latter, the symbol of Hitler's National Socialist Party. After the nearly twenty thousand spectators had filed into the Garden, the "Star Spangled Banner" was played and a clergyman from Philadelphia, Reverend Sigmund von Bosse, took the podium to introduce the first in a series of speakers. He set the tone for the night, commenting, "if Washington were alive today, he would be a friend of Adolf Hitler."²

The headline speaker of the rally was none other than Fritz Kuhn, the national leader of the German American Bund and self-titled *Bundesfuhrer*. Throughout the 1930s, the Bund had grown into the loudest proponent for American Nazism; its members styled themselves as Hitler's *Sturmabteilung* (SA) thugs and believed National Socialism was the answer to the United States' recent turmoil.³ Following the lead of anti-Semitic comments of previous speakers, Kuhn's speech, in the words of historian Arnie Bernstein, "was a verbal symphony played through his thick German accent, a melodious

¹ Philip Bump, "When Nazis rallied in Manhattan, One Working-Class Jewish Man from Brooklyn Took Them On," *Washington Post*, February 20, 2019.

² Arnie Bernstein, *Swastika Nation: Fritz Kuhn and the Rise and Fall of the German-American Bund* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 182.

³ Susan Canedy, *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma; A History of the German-American Bund* (Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf, 1990), 1.

sound to the ears of his audience.”⁴ The anti-Semitic commentary was not melodious to Greenbaum, however. As Kuhn addressed his fellow Nazis, Greenbaum leapt onto the stage and rushed towards Kuhn. Greenbaum was intercepted by Kuhn’s stormtrooper thugs, the *Ordnungsdienst* (OD), who beat and stomped on him, thus making him a hero to those who opposed Fritz Kuhn and the German American Bund in a matter of moments. He escaped serious injury after being pulled away by policemen who were meant to discourage confrontation between Nazi supporters and the thousands of protesters who had gathered outside Madison Square Garden. Greenbaum was arrested for disorderly conduct and paid a \$25 dollar fine.⁵

The *New York Times* described Isadore Greenbaum the next day simply as a man who had been charged with disorderly conduct at the Nazi rally. The *Times* and other newspapers in the 1930s routinely reported on the German American Bund and various other Nazi groups operating in the United States, such as the Bund’s predecessors, the Friends of New Germany, and William Pelley’s Silver Legion, which in the mid-1930s was “a growing organization that commanded a nationwide presence and was a force to be reckoned with in its strongholds.”⁶

In what way were these American Nazi movements reported in the American press at the time? The 1930s invigorated interest in new ideas in the United States and around the world, fascism among them. To many, democracy or capitalism was on trial; fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, or the communist Soviet Union, seemed plausible models for a new system to save Americans from the economic turmoil of the Great Depression. In the words of historian Robert Rosenbaum, “Americans longed for strong leadership ... Some of the best minds thought capitalism had failed and that democracy was outdated.”⁷ It is this context that must be taken into consideration when examining how the press dealt with American Nazi groups that promoted, according to Bradley Hart, “antidemocratic ideas that threaten the very system that allows them to be discussed in the first place.”⁸ The peculiarities, nuances, omissions, and language generated by news publications in the United States play an enormous

⁴ Bernstein, *Swastika Nation*, 187.

⁵ Bernstein, *Swastika Nation*, 189-191. After the outbreak of war between the United States and Germany, Isadore Greenbaum served in the U.S. Navy and attained the rank of Chief Petty Officer. It was at this time that he was interviewed by *Stars and Stripes* magazine, which dubbed him “One Punch Izzy”; he was apparently given that title because the press claimed Greenbaum laid a fist on Kuhn (which he does not seem to have actually done). After the war, Greenbaum moved to Southern California and worked as a fisherman, where he died in 1997. Bump, “When Nazis rallied in Manhattan.”

⁶ Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2018), 67.

⁷ Robert A. Rosenbaum, *Walking to Danger: Americans and Nazi Germany, 1933-1941* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 57.

⁸ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, 22.

role in how Americans understand and remember the United States' regrettable past of domestic Nazism, as well as dealing with the perceived fracturing of American society in the current era.

The historiography of Nazism in America has been reevaluated in the past few decades. However, the history of these domestic Nazi groups has largely been forgotten in the collective consciousness. I present two theories as to why this might be. First, there is the popular American narrative of the Second World War. This narrative of the "Greatest Generation," who answered the call to defeat the Nazi menace and liberate the freedom-loving people of Europe is a powerful one. Equally important is the public reaction to the Nazi atrocities of Hitler's Final Solution, which only amplifies this narrative—and for good reason. The United States played an important role in destroying what has become the "universal index of evil."⁹ In similar fashion, conquering the hardships of the Great Depression is celebrated in the national discourse, while the disdain that many felt for capitalism when at its weakest is forgotten. The totality with which the Nazi regime in Germany was destroyed offers a second theory. There could not be a legitimate claim for Nazism after the fall of Nazi Germany in 1945 for Adolf Hitler died and so, seemingly, did the entire ideology. Most American Nazi groups did not survive after the outbreak of the war. Attention then turned, almost immediately, to the looming specter of communism and Soviet Russia, which would dominate American popular culture for the next fifty years. Americans, for this reason, were prone to thinking that Nazism had been dealt with absolutely, and to be preoccupied with communism, as was popular in the second half of the twentieth century. As a result of these two factors, American discourse on domestic Nazism in the 1930s and early 1940s was "lost."¹⁰

Despite the conventional historical narrative, recently, historians have sought to make the historiography of the United States' relationship with Nazism more complete and have certainly been influenced by present-day politics in the United States. Susan Canedy began this process in her work *America's Nazis*. A history of the evolution and demise of the most prominent American Nazi group, Fritz Kuhn's German American Bund, Canedy's work highlighted the real power that the group wielded, and the strong reaction of Americans to it. By her account, the rise of such groups in the United States shocked many Americans. "It was one thing to watch columns of marching Nazis in the newsreels," she wrote, but "it was quite another to see them gathering strength in America."¹¹

⁹ Christopher Vials, *Haunted by Hitler: Liberals, the Left, and the Fight against Fascism in the United States* (Boston and Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 36.

¹⁰ Michael Joseph Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 18.

¹¹ Canedy, *America's Nazis*, x.

Bradley Hart and Arnie Bernstein have added to Canedy's work with their own, titled *Hitler's American Friends* and *Swastika Nation*, respectively. Together, they paint a larger portrait of American Nazism. Bernstein provided a more in-depth portrayal of Fritz Kuhn and the Bund, and detailed their rise from its fledgling precursor, the Friends of New Germany, as well as real Nazi agents in the United States, who hoped to build support for the Hitler regime through American Nazi groups. Hart, on the other hand, examined Nazi sympathies in the United States beyond the German American Bund, to include Charles Lindbergh, the Silver Legion, and the America First movement, as well as industrialists and businessmen. He argued that the potential threat posed by these Americans with Nazi sympathies was far greater than traditional discourse allows us to remember and was not confined to groups with ethnic ties to Nazi Germany.¹²

All these historians have added to the foundational understanding of America's Nazis leading up to the Second World War. Among the others, Michaela Hoenicke Moore and Robert A. Rosenbaum have described how Americans and their government dealt with the Third Reich, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union during the years that Hitler ascended to power in Germany. They remind us of the "central themes that characterized the American debate on the Third Reich: disbelief in the face of news from the Third Reich, and the depiction of National Socialism as a disease."¹³

Nevertheless, none of these historians focused on the way in which domestic Nazism was reported in the press, and mentioned this subject only in passing, if at all. Andrew Nagorski and Laurel Leff have come the closest. Nagorski's work, *Hitlerland*, is based on first-hand accounts of American correspondents in Nazi Germany. The reports by and experiences of these correspondents, often read in publications such as the *New York Times*, *Life* magazine, or *Foreign Affairs* journal, served as the only source of information to come out of Nazi Germany for everyday Americans. The greatest asset of Nagorski's work was the historical context his research makes clear. "When you're in the center of a whirlwind," he explained, "daily life can continue with deceptive normality at times, even when the abnormalities, absurdities, and injustices are all too apparent."¹⁴

Leff, a veteran journalist and professor of journalism, described and criticized how the *New York Times* reported on the Holocaust in her work *Buried by the Times*. Leff based her argument on the peculiar situation of the *Times* editor, Arthur Sulzberger, stating that he purposely downplayed Nazi

¹² Hart, *Hitler's American Friends*, 17.

¹³ Michaela Hoenicke Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xiii.

¹⁴ Andrew Nagorski, *Hitlerland: American Eyewitness to the Nazi Rise to Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 8.

atrocities against Jews because of his own devout Jewish convictions and his intention to spare the *New York Times* a reputation as a Jewish newspaper. Sulzberger vehemently believed that Judaism was not tied to ethnicity, according to Leff. “Jews were just like any other citizen,” he maintained. “In fact,” Leff wrote, “American Jews who helped other Jews because they were Jews threatened to undercut their position as Americans.”¹⁵ Nagorski and Leff in their own ways began to investigate contemporary reporting on the Nazis. However, Moore was correct when she wrote that “little effort has been made in the existing literature to view American official policy deliberations on Nazi Germany in the context of contemporary media and public controversies.”¹⁶ The same could be said for reporting on domestic Nazism as well.

It is also worth noting two works on fascism in America, *The Coming of the American Behemoth* by Michael Joseph Roberto and *Haunted by Hitler* by Christopher Vial. These works have provided detailed political context for the historiography. Although they do not deal specifically with reportage on domestic fascists or national socialists, this context is crucial when investigating the press of the era. Without understanding the complex political background of the 1930s that followed the system-shattering Great Depression, the ever-prevalent nuances, dynamics, and characteristics of news articles, their authors and their readers are likely to be overlooked. In Roberto’s words, “To historians, [*The Coming of the American Behemoth*] beckons further inquiry that will weigh the evidence presented here as the basis for future studies.”¹⁷

I argue that the press did not depict domestic Nazism as a “disease” in the way Michaela Hoenicke Moore described, which dominates the traditional narrative.¹⁸ Instead, Nazism fits within the raucous political landscape of the United States between the World Wars. As such, the American supporters of National Socialism were subjected to the gauntlet of public opinion, which in the 1930s, was varied, intertwined, and complicated. This more authentic experience with domestic Nazis was reflected in each news organ of the day, each with its own shading or underlying agenda. To explore how the press reported on domestic Nazism, I have gathered and examined articles pertaining to American Nazis from three well-known publications from the 1930s and selected them because they represent the wide spectrum of public opinion that permeated American society.

The *New York Times* was the gold standard in terms of influence over the American public, and an industry leader in terms of objectivity due to editor Arthur Sulzberger’s proclivity toward witness-style writing and desire to

¹⁵ Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

¹⁶ Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, 3.

¹⁷ Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth*, 9.

¹⁸ Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, xiii.

separate the paper from any sort of reputation as a Jewish publication.¹⁹ The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, a powerful Chicago newspaper known for its conservative and isolationist stance under the direction of the captivating and ardent Republican Colonel Robert R. McCormick, represented the sensibilities of its midwestern audience.²⁰ Lastly, the *Nation*, a leading far-left magazine, during the 1930s, aligned more with communism and identified fascists in every corner of American life. I chose these three because of their geographic, political, and subscriber diversity. By comparing the ways in which these news sources portrayed events, groups, and controversies, we can begin to expand understanding of the effect these news sources had on public discourse and the extent to which they mirrored the evolving societal and political landscape of the 1930s.

All the articles addressed are drawn from the digital archives of their respective press. Over the course of this article, I will work through each of these sources separately and chronologically. The chronological examination of articles from each source will trace the subtle changes in the coverage and public opinion of domestic Nazi groups over the course of the decade. Some events are examined through the lens of multiple sources, such as the German American Bund's celebration of Washington's birthday at Madison Square Garden in February 1939, which was such a grandstand event that it was widely reported and criticized across the country. This rally was just the type of fanfare that a newspaper could not ignore, but each publication treated it differently.

The *New York Times*, in the 1930s, was the premier newspaper in the United States, and possibly even the world. Laurel Leff described the *Times* as being more dedicated to foreign news than any other American newspaper.²¹ For this reason, it wielded immense influence on the perceptions and opinions of not only the American public, but also the international community. In Leff's estimation, the prestige of the *Times* cannot be overstated. She wrote, "The *New York Times* is probably America's most influential news organ because it is used by the nation's most influential people as their primary source of information."²² The *Times* was as influential internationally as well due to the emphasis it put on being the industry leader in foreign correspondents. Leff quoted public relations expert Albert Lasker, who summed up the kind of prestige the *Times* garnered abroad by noting that foreign governments tended to judge American public opinion based on

¹⁹ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 9.

²⁰ Interestingly, in 2008, Barack Obama was the first Democrat the *Tribune* endorsed for president in the paper's history. "Tribune 2008 presidential endorsement," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 19, 2008.

²¹ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 9.

²² Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 10–11.

editorial comments in the *Times*. It is even said that the Catholic Pope Pious XII was a fervent reader of foreign affairs, and particularly, in the *New York Times*.²³

The *New York Times* lived up to this prestigious reputation in its coverage of domestic Nazi groups. Of the three publications examined, the *Times* was the most comprehensive, most objective, and most likely to report on groups like the Friends of New Germany or Fritz Kuhn and the German American Bund. The *Saturday Evening Post* described the *Times* as the closest thing the United States had to a national newspaper as one half of its Sunday subscribers hailed from outside the New York area, and as it circulated articles in 525 other newspapers across the country.²⁴ It is logical that the larger foreign subscriber base would garner more comprehensive, witness-based reporting that could appeal to wider audiences. The opposite was evident in the writings of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Nation*, which deliberately appealed to more regional or localized political communities. Also, *The Times*'s position in New York allowed it proximity to the largest of domestic Nazi groups, as well as the strongest public reactions to them. In other words, geographically, the *Times* was simply in a better location to report on the strong public reaction to American Nazi groups, such as the Bund, than most newspapers in other parts of the United States.

One of the first times American Nazis made the front page of the *New York Times* was on October 26, 1933. The article, titled "Ban On Nazi Rally Upheld by O'Brien," reports the results of a hearing held to decide whether the Friends of New Germany could hold its annual German Day celebration, which would become a major event for pro-Nazi groups in New York in the coming years. The *Times* seemed to have an impressive amount of information on the Friends of New Germany as early as 1933; they mentioned its leader Heinz Spanknoebel by name, and reported that "Heinz Spanknoebel had taken control of the United German Societies here in the interests of the 'Friends of New Germany'."²⁵ The *Times* coverage also included some early commentary on opposition to the group. In regards to allowing Spanknoebel to hold a meeting in a municipal armory, the newspaper stated, "It was urged on the Mayor ... that to permit this Nazi ascendancy to be displayed publicly in a city-owned armory would enable alien organizers to represent in Germany that they even had obtained municipal approval, despite the vehement opposition of the largest Jewish population in the world."²⁶

²³ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 10–11.

²⁴ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 10.

²⁵ "Ban on Nazi Rally Upheld by O'Brien; Leader Is Absent," *New York Times*, October 26, 1933.

²⁶ "Ban on Nazi Rally Upheld," *New York Times*.

Early reports on domestic Nazism nearly always mentioned German aliens, such as in the March 23, 1933 article titled, "Nazi Unit List Over 1000 Aliens."²⁷ Public perception and government investigations would inflate the amount of support groups such as the Friends of New Germany received from Germany throughout the 1930s. In truth, Hitler understood little about the United States, and other than keeping the nation a neutral power, seems to have cared about it even less.²⁸ However, clearly the perceived threat of infiltration by a Hitler-controlled group operating on behalf of the Third Reich was greater than the reality of an American rebranding of National Socialism perversely infused with sacred American ideals.

Interest in Nazi aliens infiltrating the United States continued in 1934. The focus was not yet American Nazis, but Nazi officials or spies using the various German American ethnic groups to produce and distribute propaganda and develop a network of sympathizers. One interesting article on this included the testimony of the commander of Company E, Seventy-First Regiment, New York National Guard, who declared that the Guard unit had been infiltrated by pro-Nazis who were drilling with the armory's rifles. The article also alleged that German agents were being inserted into the United States via German steamships while serving as crew to avoid immigration officials. Additionally, it noted a shocking letter, purportedly written by a German American Sergeant serving within Company E, "inviting Steel Helmet members to join that organization."²⁹ The Steel Helmet was originally set up as an organization for German Americans who had served in the Great War, but increasingly supported the Friends of New Germany. Here, again, the fear was of German nationals subverting and infiltrating the American system.

This trend began to change in the second half of the 1930s. A year later, the *Times* published an article on the Friends of New Germany in which the Friends declared that the "organization had embarked on a policy of establishing the 'complete principles of National Socialism' in the United States ... what the Storm Troopers were in Germany the Friends of New Germany intend to be in America."³⁰ No longer were they pretending to be a collection of German American ethnic groups; they were now American Nazi sympathizers and Hitlerites.

By 1936, Fritz Kuhn had assumed control of the coalition of German American groups with Nazi sympathies. Under his leadership, the Friends of

²⁷ "Nazi Units in United States List 1,000 Aliens; Admit Their Aim Is to Spread Propaganda," *New York Times*, March 23, 1933.

²⁸ Hart, *Hitler's American Friends*, 9.

²⁹ "Says Nazis Here Drill in Uniform," *New York Times*, June 8, 1934.

³⁰ "Drive for Nazism in U.S. Is Planned," *New York Times*, September 11, 1935.

New Germany transitioned into the German American Bund. By March 21, 1937, the *Times* had recognized the leadership change. “The chief Nazi organization in this country, the German-American League [Bund],” wrote Hugh O’Connor of the *Times*, “is led by Fritz Kuhn, a chemist on leave from the Ford automobile works in Detroit.”³¹ Kuhn, more than in the past, would attack the press, especially the *New York Times*, with traditional anti-Semitic Nazi complaints citing the “lies of the press” and following “protocols of the elders of Zion.”³² However, O’Connor distinguished between European Nazism and its new American breed. He stated,

these Nazis are subverting American democracy. On the other hand, many observers think that American democracy has subverted the Nazis. The Nazis had a complete equipment of Nazi ideas, but none of the Nazi apparatus of coercion . . . As a result the Nazi movement in America is still struggling to amount to something more than just another of the numerous small societies in which Germans like to organize.³³

In other words, the *Times* in 1937 was still reporting that these groups lacked real power—both in terms ideological influence and adherents.

As anti-Nazi sentiment and protest increased in New York, the *Times* increasingly portrayed the German American Bund and Fritz Kuhn as crocks, criminals, or anti-Semitic loose cannons—in short, as enemies of the United States. The front page of the *Times* on March 1, 1938, bore an article reporting on Adolf Hitler’s order to Nazis in the United States to quit the Bund or related groups.³⁴ This order was likely influenced by the way the *Times* had been portraying Fritz Kuhn. Hitler and his government, who had never believed in the success of National Socialism in the United States, saw Kuhn as “a cloying friend who seeks attention but with whom it is simply too embarrassing to be seen in public.”³⁵ Obviously the bad press and growing anti-Nazi sentiment that Kuhn was generating was self-defeating, and the Third Reich needed to distance itself.

Kuhn’s statements and rhetoric during his numerous testimonies before state and federal committees regarding the goals and actions of the Bund even further soured public opinion toward American Nazi ideology. An example of this appeared on page one of the June 24, 1938 issue of the *New York Times*. In his testimony, Kuhn alleged that Jews controlled US political parties and

³¹ Hugh O’Connor, “Nazi Course Here Beset by Discord,” *New York Times*, March 21 1937.

³² O’Connor, “Nazi Course.”

³³ O’Connor, “Nazi Course.”

³⁴ “Hitler Again Orders Nazis Here to Quit Bund and All Such Groups,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1938.

³⁵ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, 47.

needed to be forced out of power. The article stated, “Kuhn explained at a State legislative inquiry in the Supreme Court building here yesterday ... ‘All the Jews are enemies of the United States’.”³⁶ Kuhn, the self-titled *Bundesfuhrer*, was routinely portrayed in the press as a caricature of himself—loud and boisterous, dressed in Nazi-styled military uniform, and speaking with a thick Bavarian accent. It was “under his guidance, [that] the Bund became the aggressive arm of American fascism.”³⁷

This characterization of the Bund culminated in the *Times* article describing George Washington’s birthday celebration held by the Bund at Madison Square Garden, the same article that mentioned Isadore Greenbaum as “a young Jewish listener.” The *New York Times* described Madison Square Garden that night as “a fortress almost impregnable to anti-Nazis” due to the extensive presence of both police and the Bund’s thugs.³⁸ The article continued with Fritz Kuhn’s sardonic speech. It reported that he had “denounced the ‘campaign of hate’ he said was being waged against the organization in the press, the radio, and the cinema ‘through the hands of the Jews’. ‘We do not say all Jews are Communists,’ he continued, ‘but we do say that the Jew is the driving force of communism’.”³⁹ It is clear that Kuhn was referencing the *New York Times*, as Kuhn had routinely accused the paper in the past of being an arm of conniving Jewry. However, the irony of the alleged ‘campaign of hate’ against the Bund was surely not lost on the *New York Times* or its readers in New York City, whose metropolitan area was home to nearly half the Jewish population of the United States.⁴⁰

Kuhn and the German American Bund would not enjoy the same level of success after the infamous rally at Madison Square Garden. By the time Hitler declared war on the United States four days after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, American tolerance for sympathizers of the Third Reich had effectively ended. As early as 1936, President Roosevelt had ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation to monitor German sympathizers and communists in the country.⁴¹ Due to public attitudes and pressure from the House Un-American Activities Committee, the German American Bund voted to disband the movement in 1941.⁴² Kuhn would spend the Second World War in various

³⁶ “Kuhn Admits Aims Are Same as Nazis,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1938.

³⁷ Canedy, *America’s Nazis*, 83.

³⁸ “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1939.

³⁹ “22,000 Nazis Hold Rally.”

⁴⁰ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 10.

⁴¹ Rosenbaum, *Walking to Danger*, 73.

⁴² Canedy, *America’s Nazis*, 205.

internment camps until 1945, when he was deported to Germany and immediately arrested by U.S. authorities for war crimes in occupied Germany. After a series of trials, imprisonments, and escapes, he died in obscurity in 1951.⁴³

The *New York Times* coverage of the German American Bund serves as a benchmark against which we can judge other publications of the period. The *Times*' objectivity and comprehensive reporting, as well as its prime position to witness the American Nazi movement clash with American society, upholds the reputation that Laurel Leff described. "The *Times* was unique ... in the comprehensiveness of its coverage and the extent of its influence among American opinion makers," she wrote.⁴⁴ No doubt the *Times* influenced the strong public reaction by many New Yorkers, and its wide circulation and prestigious reputation for informative reporting likely contributed to the decision by government officials to investigate these pro-Nazi groups.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* was another powerful American newspaper in the United States. Although not on the level of the *New York Times* in terms of national influence, the *Tribune* was widely circulated throughout the Midwest and was a respected newspaper in the region. The *Tribune* was also one of the leading conservative American newspapers of the 1930s.⁴⁵ The demographics of its readers were vastly different from that of the *Times* as there was a heavy concentration of German Americans in the Midwest and had been for decades. "Germans were a significant component of 'old immigration' ... They were a conspicuous presence in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin," Robert A. Rosenbaum explained.⁴⁶ The *Chicago Tribune* was less likely to detail specific Nazi groups as the *Times* had done with the Friends of New Germany or the Bund, and instead spoke of them more vaguely. This was not because groups of Nazi sympathizers did not exist in Chicago; the Fascist Silvershirt Legion and the American First Committee were headquartered in Chicago because of the city's profound isolationist and right-wing attitudes. Moreover, the Bund had worked to set up Nazi camps not only in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, but also in places like Illinois and Wisconsin.⁴⁷

Most importantly, the paper reflected the staunch conservatism of its owner, Colonel Robert R. McCormick. A former cavalry commander in the Illinois National Guard, McCormick defined the policy of the *Tribune* as "pro-American" and its position as dedicated to peace and isolationism.⁴⁸

⁴³ Canedy, *America's Nazis*, 226.

⁴⁴ Leff, *Buried by the Times*, 5.

⁴⁵ Vials, *Haunted by Hitler*, 30.

⁴⁶ Rosenbaum, *Walking to Danger*, 69.

⁴⁷ "Discloses Nazis Will Open Camp Near Milwaukee," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 4, 1937.

⁴⁸ Lloyd Wendt, *Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1979), 599.

McCormick used his paper as a tool to wage war against President Roosevelt, New Dealers, and the purported corruption of the political left. According to Lloyd Wendt, “In 1936 the *Tribune* led an exasperated Midwestern constituency that agreed Franklin D. Roosevelt was moving the nation towards bankruptcy and into the hands of the radical left.”⁴⁹ In a departure from the example set by the *New York Times*, McCormick loved gossip—perhaps most of all when it confirmed his own suspicions of New Dealers and interventionists. McCormick described New Dealers as “Tammany Hall on a continental scale” and the interventionists as “latter-day Tories inhabiting the Atlantic seaboard.”⁵⁰ Clearly, McCormick regarded his headquarters in Chicago, Tribune Tower, as a Midwestern beacon for those who opposed interventionism and communism and supported more right-wing “American” ideals. He believed it his duty to use the platform of the *Tribune* in this way. Inadvertently, this aligned the newspaper with some fascist and National Socialist ideals, opening it up to criticism on the similarities in rhetoric. Historian Christopher Vials deftly described this similarity when he wrote, “conservatives and rightists recognized in fascism the rudiments of a shared worldview: the need for a muscular response to Marxism and organized labor; a desire to restore national honor and an organic unity.”⁵¹

Like the *Times*, the *Tribune*, up until the late 1930s, was greatly concerned with foreign agents infiltrating the United States, rather than with homegrown subversives. A February 16, 1935 article in the newspaper provided a great example of this dynamic at the *Tribune*. Titled “Reds and Nazis Linked to Acts against America,” it compared the work of foreign propagandists for Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. “When this country [United States] recognized Russia that country gave a pledge not to spread its doctrines here,” it recalled. “A month later . . . the communist international at Moscow advocated bringing about by force changes in the American government.” In the next paragraph, it reported, “Nazis have used every pressure ‘to consolidate persons of German birth in this country into one group subject to dictatorship from abroad.’ The committee compliments 20 million Americans of German descent for resisting these efforts.”⁵² While these charges may or may not have been factually true, the article makes clear that the ‘Reds’ are the greater and more prevalent subversive threat. In fact, the *Tribune* had no qualms about accusing opponents of being communists and it is said that McCormick “habitually referred to

⁴⁹ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 587.

⁵⁰ Robert Norton Smith, *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick, 1880–1955* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 353–353.

⁵¹ Vials, *Haunted by Hitler*, 31.

⁵² “Reds and Nazis Linked to Acts against America,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 16, 1935.

Roosevelt officials as commissars.”⁵³ The *Tribune* complimented the many German Americans for resisting Nazi propaganda, while the *Times* focused on the loud fraction who embraced it.

In a strikingly similar event to the Bund’s use of Madison Square Garden, a very short 1936 article reported the Chicago Park Board’s approval of a request to use Soldiers’ Field for a German American celebration to be held that summer, as well as the protest in reaction to the board’s decision. “Commissioner Harry Joseph alone voted against the grant, demanding that the use of the swastika, official flag of the Nazi government, should be barred... President Robert J. Dunham [of the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners] said the United States government, and not the park district, controls the display of flags.”⁵⁴ The attitude here by the parks district mirrored the kind of tolerance of Nazi symbolism displayed by the *Tribune*, which pointed out that the lone opposition came from Harry Joseph, who was Jewish. The same sort of representation of Harry Joseph’s opposition can be seen in the *Chicago Tribune’s* 1937 piece detailing a clash between Nazis and protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin. According to this article, “While 150 Nazi sympathizers listened to speeches inside the German-American club today, seventy-five pickets, most of them known communists paraded outside.”⁵⁵ It seems the *Chicago Tribune* had a tendency to mention communists and Nazis together, and to depict the protesters as the agitators. “They [Nazis] stood talking in groups outside the clubhouse until the pickets arrived,” it noted.⁵⁶

Yet an interesting piece appeared on page one of the *Chicago Tribune* in 1938. It reported a fight between about forty men with an additional two hundred pro-Nazis and loosely organized anti-Nazis being held back by police. The actual fight was of little real importance, but the change in how these factions were described, alongside the fact that this report appeared on the front page, was notable. It cited a “street battle between members of the Silvershirt Legion of America, a pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic organization, and a loosely organized band of the legion’s opponents...”⁵⁷ This was one of the few mentions of a Nazi group by name, and while its opponents were often described as communists, here they were characterized as a ‘loose band’. This is likely due to changing public attitudes towards domestic Nazism through the 1930s, as seen also in the *New York Times*, for this was not a headline one would read in a 1935 issue of the *Tribune*. Perhaps McCormick, who was no

⁵³ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 574.

⁵⁴ “Protests Use of Nazi Flag at German-American Fete,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1936.

⁵⁵ “150 Nazis Meet in Kenosha as 75 Reds Picket,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1937.

⁵⁶ “150 Nazis Meet in Kenosha,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

⁵⁷ “Two Injured, 4 Are Jailed in Anti-Nazi Riot,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 24, 1938.

supporter of dictatorships, was trying to posture his paper in a way that distanced the *Tribune* and himself from any inkling of support for the Silvershirt Legion of America or related organizations.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune*'s language describing domestic Nazis varied from what was read in the *New York Times*. It reflected the conservative leanings that the paper was known to have. It was much more tolerant of domestic Nazism in its language, and nearly always included alongside those reports critiques of "Red" agitators. This was aligned with the paper's isolationist and conservative policies. Similar to, and perhaps in part due to, the *New York Times*' subtle shift to more critical descriptions of Nazis in New York, the *Chicago Tribune* recognized the shifting perceptions of domestic Nazism, and by the late 1930s, its language more closely resembled that of the *Times*.

In contrast to the *Tribune*, the *Nation* was a leading far-left magazine in the 1930s, which strongly supported unions, workers and socialists, and was sympathetic towards communism. Thus, the *Nation* perceived the threat of fascism less in American Nazi groups, than in industrialists, anti-unionists, and the United States government. It is important to understand this dynamic. Christopher Vials was correct in saying that "the liberal journals [such as] the *Nation* ... published a substantial amount of antifascist commentary and reportage." However this reportage often commented on groups such as anti-New Dealers or isolationists— not actual American fascists or Nazis. The *Nation* rarely distinguished between those who opposed communism, and those who actively supported fascism.⁵⁸

As early as 1930, the *Nation* was reporting on the fascist sympathies in the United States, which E.C. Lindeman believed were being fanned not by Nazis or domestic groups, but by the press. "[Fascist] sympathies do exist, and, moreover, are cultivated by most subtle means," he admitted, explaining, "In what follows I have attempted to indicate how the press may purposely or unwittingly contribute to a potential sympathy for Fascism among American citizens."⁵⁹ Interestingly, the publication to which he was referring was the *New York Times*. The *Nation* seems to have been able to find fascists anywhere, much like American Nazis saw Jewish communists in nearly every circle. While not specifically speaking of American Nazi sympathies, the article accused the *New York Times* of appeasing fascists with its dramatic language, asserting, "If this particular correspondent wishes to place himself at the

⁵⁸ Vials, *Haunted by Hitler*, 25.

⁵⁹ E. C. Lindeman, "Fascist Sympathies in the United States," *Nation*, September 10, 1930, 267.

service of Mussolini, this is, of course, his affair but when he attempts to influence American citizens in the same direction he performs a public function, and this is not wholly his affair.”⁶⁰

Like the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Nation* also perceived the influence of Hitler on domestic Nazi efforts as greater than it really was in the first half of the 1930s. The magazine referred to Heinz Spanknoebel’s Friends of New Germany in 1933 as “the American branch of the German fascist party,” and mentioned him by name as the “commander-in-chief of the Nazis in America ... designating officials in New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, St. Louis, Boston, and Jersey City ... wherever a strong German-American population seemed to offer a fruitful field for agitation.”⁶¹ It can be inferred that the ‘fruitful fields for agitation’ were anywhere where isolationist feelings ran high. Somewhat facetiously, the *Nation* subsequently referred to Spanknoebel as Herr Spanknoebel, and ended with a warning for “labor in the United States,” writing, “The rapid growth of the Ku Klux Klan movement in this country and the more recent success of William Dudley Pelley’s anti-Semitic ‘Silver Shirts’, who are working hand in hand with the American Nazi representatives, should furnish food for thought.”⁶²

While the *Nation* did describe “real” fascists such as Spanknoebel, it also found them in unexpected places. In “Fascism Hits Washington,” which appeared in the *Nation* in 1938, Paul Y. Anderson accused the US government of supporting fascism, asserting:

The American fascist movement has advanced to its present stage despite the lack of a central agency to assemble its ideas and serve as an outlet for their expression. That lack has not been supplied, and the agency is operating at full blast—with government funds. It is officially titled the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities.⁶³

Intriguingly, although the Un-American Activities Committee did investigate communist agitators at the time, in 1938, the Committee was focused on Fritz Kuhn and the German American Bund, on the instruction of President Roosevelt. The Bund, by this time, was overtly anti-Semitic, anti-communist and, somewhat confusingly, fusing together the ideals of the American far-right with Nazism. This allegation by the *Nation* provides an example of its tendency to label anyone opposing leftists as “fascist.”

⁶⁰ Lindeman, “Fascist Sympathies,” 268.

⁶¹ Ludwig Lore, “Nazi Politics in America,” *Nation*, November 29, 1933, 615.

⁶² Lore, “Nazi Politics in America,” 617.

⁶³ Paul Y. Anderson, “Fascism Hits Washington,” *Nation*, August 27, 1938, 198.

The *Nation* called the Bund rally at Madison Square Garden in 1939 “the worst exhibition of Jew-baiting ever seen in the United States.”⁶⁴ The article discussed at length the anti-Semitic insults hurled at Jews during the rally, differing from the accounts of the *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune*. It also linked this language to physical attacks on Jews, while providing no evidence that they were indeed linked, as shown in the following: “Two other attacks upon Jews, stabbings with knives instead of words, one occurring a few days before the Bund rally and the other a few days afterward. I would not overemphasize the coincidence. I haven’t traced a direct connection of cause and effect. Still, they belong together.”⁶⁵ This theory showcased the paranoia of leftists, and the *Nation*’s ability to craft a narrative that was convenient to its political platform. The *Nation* condemned anti-Semitism much more explicitly than the *Times* or *Tribune*, instead of giving the actual details of the rally. The magazine criticized anti-Semitism not just among the German American Bund, but “among other racial groups—Hungarians, Swiss, Scandinavians, Syrians, and Arabs.”⁶⁶

Clearly, the *Nation*’s coverage of American Nazi groups centered on the fight against right-wing ideology and its support from industrialists and government—whether real or imagined. Unlike the prestigious *New York Times*, or the conservative *Chicago Tribune*, the topic of domestic Nazism in the *Nation* mostly angled to expand the definition of American fascism rather than characterize or report the movements of actual American Nazi groups like the German American Bund in New York City or the Silver Shirt Legion in Chicago. The *Nation*’s leftist readers who were more concerned with union rights, expanding socialism, and fighting industrialists than with the fringe American Nazi movement explains the magazine’s emphasis. The larger threat for communists and Nazis in America alike was the existing system; while rhetoric against each other was necessary to maintain support from its base, it is easy to see why the *Nation* was more concerned with its broadened definition of fascists than with established groups.

Ultimately, these publications represented the social factionalism that characterized American society in the 1930s. The societal upheaval that was the Great Depression, and the various reactions to it, manifested themselves on the pages of news sources like the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and the *Nation*. The design of Arthur Sulzberger to put an objective newspaper in the hands of international and influential readers while deftly wording the *Times* so as to not undercut American Jews was a dynamic that was not

⁶⁴ George Britt, “Poison in the Melting-Pot,” *Nation*, April 1, 1939, 374.

⁶⁵ Britt, “Poison in the Melting-Pot,” 374.

⁶⁶ Britt, “Poison in the Melting-Pot,” 374.

apparent on the surface, but it is crucial to understanding the news organ that held such an important position. The personality, stout Republicanism, and sheer bullheadedness of Col. Robert McCormick made the *Chicago Tribune* into the voice of an isolationist and patriotic midwestern constituency that, to this day, still largely distrusts big government. Last, the *Nation*, the far-left propagandist magazine that grew paranoid of industrialists and nationalist sentiments in American society, found fascists on every corner. The nuances of these news sources mirror the noisiness of public opinion in American society; the complexities of how the press chose to cover American Nazi groups is just one example. This is the aspect missing from the historiography, and what is forgotten in the historical narrative. The multifaceted discourse that characterized the American press in its coverage of domestic Nazis has been, traditionally, replaced with the narrative of the United States' exceptionalism in confronting such ideologies. In the present, as American society is experiencing similar fractures and factionalism, we might be inclined to draw on the forgotten narrative of a time when the diverse voices that made up American society were also very noisy.

(Extra)Ordinary Power: Frontier Sentimentalism and Shifting Perceptions of Gender

By Erin Hastings

Since the early days of the republic, the American frontier, or “the Old West,” has captured the imagination of Americans, leaving a lasting impact on U.S. identity and historical memory. As every Illinoisan knows, Abraham Lincoln is the symbol of their state. The sixteenth president’s log cabin roots are a favorite link to his later image as “Honest Abe.” These images are indelibly ingrained in national memory, but they compel twenty-first century historians to dig deeper into the narrative. Are these primarily masculine, idealized frontier narratives all that deserve to be remembered about the history of the frontier? Or are there more layers, more voices in the narrative yet to be uncovered? The historiography of the American frontier has only somewhat recently expanded to include other groups like women and their important role in cultural formation on the frontier, which will be the focus of this study.

The American frontier was a complex social fabric in which women were the key weavers. While historians have examined women’s roles on the frontier and their importance as actors, they have yet to properly distinguish the frontier woman’s impact from the larger historical context of Victorian America. To fully understand women’s crucial historical relevance on the frontier, one must understand the nineteenth-century cultural milieu that dictated American social norms. The missing piece of the puzzle in the historiography of frontier women has been the impact of sentimental culture in daily frontier life. Sentimentalism, defined by historians of Victorian America as “the cult of feelings that dominated middle-class literature and culture from 1830-1870,” was engrained in women’s roles, in particular, and did not simply fade when they migrated to the frontier.¹ In fact, it played a key role in women’s frontier lives.

When migrating with their families to the frontier, women took their cultural values from the East with them. Women were sentimentalized by the “cult of true womanhood” that placed them on a moral pedestal as the preservers of family virtue and thus, American character. Women were viewed as innately more moral, virtuous, and close to God. Women were “the model of soulful sensibility, the sex that alone could *naturally* act ‘above the standard of

¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), xiv.

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humanity’—in whose sensibility lay the means to save humanity.”² Sentimental literature, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, exalted feminine virtue as being the key to a moral society. When women started migrating to the western frontier—initially to states like Ohio and Illinois in the 1820s, but expanding to California by the 1880s—they took these sentimental values with them, hoping to “civilize” the western wilderness. As their journeys west progressed, however, women found these values becoming more flexible and the shifts in sentimental culture provided them more powerful roles.

In the new setting, women remained the preservers of culture in the domestic sense, but their roles expanded as they moved beyond purely domestic duties to help with what was typically “masculine” work. As the “separate spheres” of work blended, many marriages began to take on more of a balanced and cooperative role. In addition, women became foundations of their communities, affording them more influence in public spaces. Communities of women aided each other and exchanged knowledge and survival skills. Women were able to maneuver within frontier communities with more agency because they were at the heart of the social tapestry and were both “exploited and extolled as the basis of community strength.”³ As their roles changed and adapted to the frontier, women did not worry about losing sentimental values; instead, they included those values in their new lives. With this new role in forming and shaping frontier culture and values, I argue, women also altered definitions of sentimentalism. At the heart of this new cultural formation was what I call “frontier sentimentalism,” which still exalted women as moral beings, wives, and mothers, but also valued their work and viewed them as capable and strong. Frontier sentimentalism shows a shift in nineteenth-century perceptions of gender, and frontier women were at the heart of it, driving the change.

With sentimental culture defining U.S. national identity, it comes as no surprise that women carried these values with them to the West when migrating with their families. Frontier women were seeking to preserve true womanhood while also having newfound power to create a distinctive culture as frontier women. Diary-writing was especially important to them because it provided the

² Andrew Burstein, *Sentimental Democracy: The Evolution of America’s Romantic Self-Image* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 21.

³ Margaret K. Brady, “In Her Own Words: Women’s Frontier Friendships in Letters, Diaries, and Reminiscences,” in *World Views of the American West: The Life of the Place Itself*, ed. Polly Stewart, Steven Sioparin, C.W. Sullivan III, and Suzi Jones (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000), 166,
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=usupress_pubs.

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freedom to record their own narratives and express emotions, while also serving as a coping mechanism on the uncertain terrain of the frontier. Diaries were mediators between

the author's self-perception as a Victorian lady and her feared loss of that identity in the wild. It was a way of carrying a piece of their old identity into the creation of the new. A propensity for journal writing was a well-accepted sign of gentility in the nineteenth century. Journals were seen as a means of improving one's expressive skills and sense of discipline.⁴

Diaries were therefore vital to nineteenth-century frontierswomen not only for coping with their new setting, but also—as an examination of their writings will demonstrate—to their sense of identity.

Accompanying changing norms and the increasing importance of diaries to women was a shift in emotional standards. This redefined American and women's identities, as per the popular frontier myth, “unceasing movement was essential to American identity.” According to Susan J. Matt, “the mythology of individualistic pioneers has been used to motivate successive generations to move on bravely and without hesitation, despite the fact that the pioneers themselves were homesick and hesitant, and that many hoped to—and sometimes did—return home.”⁵ For women, when it came to the rugged individualism associated with the frontier, the “ideals of feminine behavior did not always sit easily together, as women were supposed to be defined by the home but also willing to leave it.”⁶ Essentially, while migrating to the frontier required immense bravery, women were expected to be the foundations of the family, keeping the kinship unit grounded and strong.

These dueling expectations for women were the start of a shift in frontier identity. Not only were women ripped from their homes, the very thing that was supposed to define them, but during a long migration, they were expected to set aside their own feelings of homesickness for the benefit of their families. Upon her migration across the Atlantic from England to Illinois in 1831, Rebecca Burlend captured the demands placed on women leaving their home, stating in her memoir, “Never before had I felt so much to devolve on me, and perhaps never in my life did I feel it my duty to practise [sic] self-denial.”⁷ Burlend was leaving behind her country, and two of her seven children, and she

⁴ Gayle R. Davis, “Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason,” *Women's Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987): 7.

⁵ Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

⁶ Matt, *Homesickness*, 53.

⁷ Rebecca Burlend and Edward Burlend, *A True Picture of Emigration*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Lincoln, NB: Bison Books, 1987), 13.

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missed her homeland dearly. She was, however, conscious of her emotional responsibilities during migration, stating, “My native land was as dear to me as ever: my two children, whom I had bidden adieu, were strong ties. But the consciousness that it was my duty to bear up the sinking spirits of my partner, left me only one course to adopt.”⁸ Thus, a sense of duty toward their families remained constant among women throughout frontier migration; however, their emotional labor changed as they had to be the foundations of strength.

The sense of duty that women like Burlend felt was also fostered through religion, which was an important part of women’s lives. It was also an immense source of comfort for frontier women when reconciling their Victorian values with the tumultuous change of settling far from home. Religion was a tool against fears of identity loss for frontier women. In their new setting, women and their families could not always make it to church, be it because of migration, severe weather, or illness. Given that women were expected to be inherently virtuous, religion was often a topic of their diary entries and contributed to their feelings of longing. Religion was a central part of female gender identity for women, and when they were unable to attend church, frontier women felt that they were missing an integral practice associated with “true womanhood.” Notes about religion were among the most important ones women made in their diaries, and not being able to attend church and lamenting it showed the desire to adhere to this norm and cling to the comfort of their previously established identities. On April 11, 1858, an Illinois woman living in the Peoria area wrote, “So rainy & muddy I did not get up to church. Oh the Sabbath seems so little like one when I do not go to church.”⁹ Worried about the loss of identity when unable to access an important signifier of it on the frontier, women turned to their diaries to cope, reconcile shifts in identity, and express emotions that would not be acceptable outside of their private writings because of their duty as the emotional strength of the family.

Settlement on the frontier was busy, chaotic, and time-consuming. Women were required to help in new ways to ensure survival, but they still clung to their female identities through religion. Many women framed their religion and relationship with God as a duty and would sometimes feel neglectful of it in the new western environment where travel often came with little or no rest, and women were sometimes consumed solely by work. On June 28, 1846, Susan Shelby Magoffin, traveling along the Santa Fe Trail, wrote in her diary asking God to be “pardoned” for neglecting the Sabbath. “It was the Holy Sabbath,” she stated, “appointed by my heavenly father for a day of rest,” and lamented

⁸ Burlend and Burlend, *A True Picture of Emigration*, 13.

⁹ “Pioneer Lady: Peoria’s Secret Scribe,” Milner Library, <https://transcription.library.illinoisstate.edu/collections/show/3>.

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having “classed it so much with the days of the week, that I regularly took out my week’s work, knitting [sic]. Oh, how could I ever have been so thoughtless, so unmindful of my duty and my eternal salvation!”¹⁰

While being a central component of a woman’s identity in the East, religion was also pivotal on the western frontier as a platform for pioneer women to exercise more agency, as it allowed for greater community participation. Churches were not only vital to the identities of women, but they were especially important as “emotional, social, spiritual, and psychological advisors and outlets.”¹¹ Because frontier and rural areas could be isolating, and they “had fewer support systems and sources of information than men, who could relate to other men at the local shop, livery stable, the grain elevator, the stockyards, or in the fields, women often turned to their churches.”¹² Through their churches, frontier women could form public identities and vital networks, as well as become valued community members, without compromising the ideals they valued and wanted to uphold.

Since religion was a form of duty for pioneer women, it allowed them a more powerful community presence in an acceptable way that did not threaten the status quo. Under the banner of morality and community stability, women took up public space in rural frontier communities and had support networks to mediate their shifting identities. One way they did so was through benevolent societies, such as the one that Sarah Bayliss Royce, who migrated to the San Francisco area in the 1850s, helped her fellow women create. Worried about social declension in the West, Royce warned “disreputable” people that “while Christian women would forego ease and endure much labor, in order to benefit any who suffered, they would not welcome into friendly association any who trampled upon institutions which lie at the foundation of morality and civilization.”¹³ While the connections women made in these societies were not always intimate, they were an extension of the community “family.” In addition, female networks helped remedy women’s feared loss of identity in their new circumstances by providing an element of solidarity and familiarity.¹⁴ Thus, religion, and the associations they begat, allowed women in the West greater participation in public community life and agency in shaping their social roles in their new setting.

Perhaps even more important than religion-based communities to their new roles and shifting identities were the intimate and private relationships that

¹⁰ Deborah Lawrence, *Writing the Trail: Five Women’s Frontier Narratives* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 18.

¹¹ Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 38.

¹² Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 38.

¹³ Lawrence, *Writing the Trail*, 57.

¹⁴ Lawrence, *Writing the Trail*, 57.

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women formed with each other in frontier communities. After all, relationships with men were often unacceptable outside of courtship and marriage. Thus, the friendships that nineteenth-century women had with each other, alongside kinship ties, played an essential and central emotional role in their lives. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, a specific “female world of varied yet highly structured relationships appears to have been an essential aspect of American society . . . It was a world in which men made but a shadowy appearance.”¹⁵ Women’s relationships with men were not marginal or devalued by any means, but the arc of women’s lives was defined by their relationships with other women that were intimately bound by a shared biological and emotional experience. In the new frontier setting, these networks of women became even more significant.

For one, they were another means for pioneer women to cope with the changes in their lives and mediate their shifting identities while retaining traditional Victorian ideals. These female networks were not just legitimate and widely accepted. They were “the very cornerstone of social relationships within and outside the family itself,” as they provided emotional and physical support and functioned as a social glue that held communities and families together while simultaneously providing a locus of power for women who were traditionally denied one in a patriarchal society.¹⁶ As the latter suggests, in the uncharted frontier where women served as the foundation for community strength, female networks provided women spaces that they controlled and opportunities to reshape their identities and exercise new autonomy, even as they continued to embrace their traditional identities. As Margaret K. Brady stated, “the knowledge women share with each other when they experience a space reserved for them functions as a wild zone where women can create ideologies and symbol systems they control, where they can inscribe themselves in codes not understood by men.”¹⁷

Support networks were crucial in the frontier community, in part, because life on the frontier was heavily based on survival, especially in the earlier years. Thus, women forged bonds with each other that became a sort of familial extension. Female networks provided material and emotional support, helping families survive and affirming for women their identities. Women shared materials necessary for housekeeping and domestic duties, were present for the birth of a friend’s child, or helped when a friend or friend’s family member was ill. This kind of support is evident in the following excerpt from a letter that Anna Briggs Bentley, an Ohio woman, wrote in November 1826:

¹⁵ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-2.

¹⁶ Brady, “In Her Own Words,” 163.

¹⁷ Brady, “In Her Own Words,” 163.

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Levi's Ann gave me 2 hens and a rooster and Sarah Holland a pair of fowls to begin housekeeping with in the forrest [sic]. Poor Sarah has been ill for 3 weeks with erysipelas in her leg. She is able to sit up a little now. I spent yesterday there. She is such a dear, kind friend, so much dignity, such winning, affectionate manners. And she don't 'my dear' a body all to pieces neither. I think her daughters most amiable, interesting girls, and I love them dearly. Susan is spinning 3lb of stockings for me.¹⁸

Bentley's image of a female network in a frontier community is one of mutual support and affection that emulates familial ties. In the economy of survival that was the American frontier, women assumed the role of heart of the community and sustained frontier society by supporting each other in solidarity with their shared experiences as frontier wives and mothers.

As frontier towns developed, they became epicenters of frontier society and commerce, and many women seemed to enjoy them. In these public spaces, women gathered not only for religious purposes, but also for sewing circles and literary societies where they could share news and confide in each other.¹⁹ This assertion of female collectives at the center of frontier society was incredibly powerful and helped drive a shift in gender perceptions, as well as identities.

With frontier towns developing, women had more opportunities to help build and advance public institutions. Those who lived in them "often ran general stores, managed hotels, worked as dressmakers, or served as postmistresses"; they also "united to organize the town library and support its expansion."²⁰ Along with these new social opportunities on the frontier, women's collective assertion in public frontier spaces helped forge an ever-growing, ever-powerful new political consciousness. Gradually, women began stepping forward to express their views at political rallies, and forged a path to political activism through temperance crusades, and later, the campaign for women's suffrage.²¹ While women were initially worried about maintaining their identities on the frontier, and created communities for support, as they adjusted to their new settings, they found that they could assert themselves in new and powerful ways that were acceptable for the western woman.

As the feminist movement was gaining momentum in the East, women's new values and roles in the West supplemented those of the broader movement. Since perceptions of gender shifted on the frontier, these women could

¹⁸ Anna Briggs Bentley, "Letter to Isaac Briggs, November 10, 1826," in *American Grit: A Woman's Letters from the Ohio Frontier*, ed. Emily Foster (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 51.

¹⁹ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1981), 204.

²⁰ Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 204.

²¹ Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 204.

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maintain their traditional identities as true women while also proving that the very foundation of society would not be threatened if the separate spheres blended and they entered the masculine world. Because women were essential to the survival of the family and civilization, they had more power and value on the frontier, giving them more room for mobility. In Kansas, frontier advances

brought women new opportunities in the political arena ... Increasing numbers of women became active in local affairs, joining campaigns, working in party politics, and running for elective offices. On April 4, 1887, Susannah Medora Salter was elected mayor in the small town of Argonia, becoming the first woman in the nation to ever hold the office.²²

In such ways, the frontier setting aided nineteenth-century feminism, as the success of women holding elected office in the West helped prove that women could not only function in the public sphere, but also excel there without cultural ruin.

With Salter's success as mayor, more Kansas women began to seek public office. Minnie Morgan, for example, was elected mayor in Cottonwood Falls, "along with a council composed of women," her son stated, "because of the determination of the voters to secure better law enforcement. The success of her administration was hailed as an outstanding argument for woman [sic] suffrage," he added.²³ Hence, as public and private blended on the frontier and women became the heart of community strength and success, their value and cultural importance translated into opportunities not just limited to acting in the traditionally "masculine" world. They were also elected and trusted to hold positions of power within it because of their roles in preserving American values.

Such shifts can be attributed to the newfound cooperation among women and men that frontier marriages fostered. The husband was certainly still the patriarch, but given the focus on survival, particularly on the frontier farm, the contributions of the wife played a large part in making the difference between the survival or doom of the family. As a result, gendered boundaries of work became fluid. According to Mary Neth, "On the frontier farm, there were no separate spheres for women and men. The industrial division of wage and domestic work ... had less meaning ... Family space joined economic space."²⁴

²² Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 265.

²³ Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 265.

²⁴ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 17.

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With their work vital to the success of the farm and the family, women on the frontier were no longer directly subordinated to men, and their actions came to carry weight and power. They were thus able to transform their roles and identities from dependents to helpmates, individuals with value.

Frontier women often assisted their husbands with farm work in addition to their domestic duties if there were not enough hands. Once they were old enough, children helped as well. However, as John Mack Faragher asserted, it was “the work of farm wives that made the difference between success or failure of productive strategies” for “women produced an abundance of goods without which a family found it hard to survive.”²⁵ While there were still gendered divisions of labor within farm work, frontier women often assisted their husbands in the fields.²⁶ Mary and David McCoy, who had settled in the Sugar Creek area in Illinois, typified this cooperation between husband and wife. The couple “plowed their fields together—he pushing the plow, she driving the oxen, as their firstborn slept in a box strapped to the plow beam.”²⁷

This cooperation is further illustrated by Rebecca Burlend, who had to tend to the wheat when her husband was injured in a farming accident. Burlend wrote in her memoir,

We had no means of hiring reapers, and my husband could not stir out. I was therefore obliged to begin myself; I took my eldest child into the field to assist me, and left the next in age to attend to their father and take care of the youngest, which was still unweaned.²⁸

Here Burlend provides an image of a family-based economy in which wives had value in a system of mutual support; when her husband found himself in dire straits, Burlend stepped into a traditionally “masculine” world of work to fulfill her duty for her family’s survival.

The life or death environment of the frontier, as well as the way in which it merged family and economic life, fostered the image of the hardworking pioneer woman. For example, the sense of the farm as a family venture, rather than a profit-driven one, further increased the value of women’s work.²⁹ Thus, on the frontier, where women assumed new roles and combined old and new

²⁵ John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 101.

²⁶ Women typically worked in gardens and with poultry, occupations that would produce household goods. See Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 118.

²⁷ Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 101.

²⁸ Burlend and Burlend, *A True Picture of Emigration*, 91.

²⁹ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 31.

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identities, a notion of womanhood emerged that simultaneously preserved traditional ones and asserted a new one imbued with power—one in which women were capable.

At the same time, as their value in their marriages and communities increased, frontier women became a major social force. This is evident in the women's voluntary associations that emerged all over the prairie during the pre-Civil War decades. These groups trained women in business skills, while retaining the power and legitimacy of their morality, thus providing an acceptable context to assert a new notion of womanhood—one that enhanced their cultural roles, at the center of society, without threatening traditional ones.³⁰ Hence, the frontier environment, which at first brought many female migrants fears of identity loss, ultimately transformed their identity in a way that increased their power and social agency. Their new roles served to engender the image of a hardworking, capable pioneer woman, which afforded women more agency in the public sphere without threatening the cultural foundations of America, and which they could use to advocate for themselves. Ultimately, this image would also provide tremendous support to the growing women's movement.

In the larger traditions of American culture, women were socialized from early in their lives to be morally competent, but physically weak and passive. Nineteenth-century women were taught to perceive themselves as frail and helpless victims and were constantly reminded of the strength of their morality at the expense of their physical being.³¹ As women migrated west with their families, however, a change in notions of womanhood began. This is evident, for example, in literary depictions of women, which became more complex. Here, even as the supposed "fact" of women's physical inferiority was emphasized, the capable woman emerged.³² This female type made her literary debut at a time when pioneer women were coming into their new identities, and it was noted by observers and became sentimentalized.

Sentimentalism was being employed by the mid-19th century as a means of adapting to ever-changing urban development and market capitalism. Firmly embedded in American culture, it dictated social norms and behaviors. As these shifted on the frontier, pioneer women used sentimentalism to adapt to their new setting and reconceptualize their identities, merging old with new. Within it, a predisposition toward emotionality enabled women to be more expressive

³⁰ Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 160.

³¹ Glenda Riley, *Confronting Race: Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1815-1915* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 33.

³² Riley, *Confronting Race*, 35.

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than men, and to bear the brunt of the emotional labor of the family. As they settled into their identities out west, frontier sentimentalism came to support the value women assigned to themselves as capable women.

Pioneer women's frontier narratives were packed with emotion, usually beginning with an identity crisis as they migrated west. Initially, fearing the loss of womanhood, women found that the longer they spent on the frontier, the more they became redefined, while still maintaining acceptable parts of traditional sentimental womanhood. Such was the case with the aforementioned Sarah Bayliss Royce. Her narratives showed initial fear, but eventually projected the image of a courageous woman possessing great fortitude. Like many other women, Royce found that the frontier environment enabled her to still be a woman in the traditional, sentimental sense that valued her moral superiority through her relationship with God and the rhetorical sanctity of the domestic sphere, but that also allowed her to express strength. Her writings reveal a woman who asserts herself, but without undermining her role as a virtuous woman. As Royce wrote during an initial night of homesickness, "in the morning there was a mildly exultant feeling which comes from having kept silent through a cowardly fit, and finding the fit gone off."³³ This expression of euphoria upon surviving a "cowardly fit" sets the stage for her new self-definition as a capable and courageous frontier woman. Hence, as women migrated to the frontier, from the ashes of their identity crises arose new identities as emotionally and physically strong, courageous and capable, without moral or social declension, and a new brand of sentimentalism, all of which they mediated through their writings.

The arc of frontier self-definition is illustrated also by Louise Smith Clappe. In her letters to her sister Molly in Massachusetts, Clappe's journey into her ideal sentimental frontier self unfolded through the letters she wrote between 1851 and 1852. In 1854, Clappe published these letters in San Francisco's literary monthly, *Pioneer*, under the pseudonym "Dame Shirley," establishing both a private and public image of herself as "an educated woman of authority."³⁴ By the end of her narrative, as laid out in her letters, she describes her transformation, which sentimentalized the new strength and fortitude the frontier had awakened in her:

Here, at least, I have been contented. The 'thistle seed,' as you called me, sent abroad its roots right lovingly into this barren soil, and gained an unwonted strength in what seemed to you such unfavorable surroundings. You would hardly recognize the feeble half-dying invalid, who drooped languidly out of sight, as night shut down between your straining gaze and

³³ Lawrence, *Writing the Trail*, 39.

³⁴ Lawrence, *Writing the Trail*, 65.

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the good ship *Manilla*, as she wafted her far away from her Atlantic home,
in the person of your now perfectly healthy sister.³⁵

Using vivid language to describe her past self, Clappe illustrated her transformation from a woman embedded in nineteenth-century traditional norms of weak and passive womanhood, to a new self that she sentimentalized—the strong, capable, healthy woman she was molded into on the frontier.

While many frontierswomen wanted their writings to remain private, a substantial amount of frontier literature written by women was published and read. For example, memoirs and diaries like those of Elizabeth Dixon Smith were published in the periodical *Transactions* of the Oregon Pioneer Association.³⁶ The diary of Sallie Hester was serialized in *The Argonaut*, in a series titled “The Diary of a Pioneer Girl, The Adventures of Sallie Hester.”³⁷ Perhaps the most popular of pioneer writings are those of Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the *Little House on the Prairie* books. Wilder provided a fictionalized autobiographical account of frontier life that sentimentalized her childhood, framing it “as a frontier fairytale.”³⁸ She began her narrative as follows: “Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs.”³⁹

Wilder subsequently became a great cultural force in spreading a new brand of sentimentalism that solidified an idyllic frontier image in the minds of many Americans. Her characters embodied frontier ideals and shifts in qualities in women that came to be sentimentalized—beauty, courage and intellect. As her daughter Rose Wilder reflected in a tribute to her parents: “My mother loves courage and beauty and books; my father loves nature, birds and trees and curious stones, and both of them love the land, the stubborn, grudging, beautiful earth that wears out human lives year by year.”⁴⁰

When writing about the West in periodicals, Wilder sentimentalized the frontier as the cultural heart of America and a place of growing opportunity for women. Writing for the *Missouri Ruralist*, Wilder penned a message to other women stating, “I must say if there are any country women who are wasting their time envying their sisters in the city—don’t do it. Such an attitude is out of date. Wake up to your opportunities ... the real cultured, social and

³⁵ Lawrence, *Writing the Trail*, 81.

³⁶ Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters From the Western Trails, 1840-1849* (Bison Books, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 111-155.

³⁷ Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women*, 231-246.

³⁸ Sallie Ketcham, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: American Writer on the Prairie* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.

³⁹ Ketcham, *Laura Ingalls Wilder*, 1.

⁴⁰ Ketcham, *Laura Ingalls Wilder*, 85.

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intellectual life will be out in the country.”⁴¹ Wilder’s sentiment that city life and the traditional values of womanhood associated with it were “out of date” shows how embedded frontier sentimentalism came to be in western culture. That the “land of opportunity” was not just a masculine construct, but a place out in the country where women could go, have a social and intellectual life in their communities, and be valued—this was the sentimentalism now in vogue.

These perceptions that frontier women cultivated and wrote about for themselves came to be sentimentalized in the larger American culture with the emergence of the capable woman image. As Glenda Riley noted, contemporary observers generally agreed that “frontierswomen, shaped by the crucible of the western environment, were exceptional among women. Seemingly liberated and freed by the frontier setting, these women were considered by many as a distinct and even superior breed of female.”⁴² European observers remarked that frontier women “received more respect from men than did women anywhere else in the world,” and that they “wielded more power in their homes and in society than did women in other parts of the world.”⁴³

That American and European observers alike were noticing these changes in how western women defined womanhood, and the greater power they enjoyed—all without threatening sentimental norms of traditional nineteenth-century womanhood—shows how prominent these women were at the heart of frontier culture. Periodicals such as *Harper’s Bazaar*, for example, were noting that pioneer women were both asserting new values and preserving republican virtue and traditional sentimentalism. An 1877 article highlighted frontier women’s ingenuity in “civilizing” the wilderness and noted that while Americans in the East were living in their comfortable urban worlds, women on the frontier were hearkening back to republican simplicity and cultivating a new world with their industriousness and creativity. According to *Harper’s Bazaar*, these women could “supply themselves with civilization out of their own resources. While we flutter around the flowers and enjoy ourselves, they meet and conquer all the stern realities of life and found States and peoples.”⁴⁴

Alongside presenting an image of frontier women embodying traditional republican virtue and sentimental ideals, periodicals like *Harper’s Bazaar* also emphasized emerging qualities of frontier sentimentalism. For instance, they depicted frontier women as still adhering to the conventional sentimental

⁴¹ Ketcham, *Laura Ingalls Wilder*, 95.

⁴² Riley, *Confronting Race*, 63.

⁴³ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 75.

⁴⁴ Of course, such assessments also reflected broader nineteenth-century anxieties about cultural declension in the midst of market capitalism and urbanization. “Frontier Women,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (1867-1912), August 11, 1877, 498, <http://libproxy.lib.ilstu.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/125678442?accountid=11578>.

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notion that virtuous character and beauty is cultivated not through excessive ornamentation, but by showing one's authentic and genuine self. At the same time, they emphasized women's intellect and fortitude, presenting these as enhancing their ability to perform their duties as wives and mothers, and contributing to their traditionally sentimentalized roles as caretakers. As *Harper's Bazaar* observed:

As a rule, the minds of the women of the frontier are great and strong minds, well-fed and constantly active ... These women are eager and assiduous readers; they find time to attend to all their duties, and more than all—for they are constantly exercising their inventive ingenuity in little ways in order to enhance the comfort of their households—and to attend to their reading too.⁴⁵

Such characterizations of pioneer women and their pursuits as imbued with power, but not threatening to nineteenth-century society, altered definitions of sentimentalism to create a frontier version of this cultural phenomenon. Again old and new merged: women were still sentimentalized as moral caretakers, but their capability, courage, ingenuity, intellect, and agency were also sentimentalized as the cultural adhesive of the frontier.

While frontier sentimentalism came to permeate popular American culture, it did encounter the conflicting idea that adherence to the capable woman values of the frontier would somehow strip women of their femininity. Popular novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper stereotypically presented women as weak, passive, and docile, as prizes for men to “win.” In the event that one of Cooper's characters asserted agency or power, she was masculinized and “unsexed.”⁴⁶ Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the popular *Godey's Lady's Book*, warned her fellow women that they “would not advance by becoming like man, in doing man's work, or striving for the dominion of the world.”⁴⁷ Clinging to notions of traditional womanhood, not all nineteenth-century Americans were supportive of the change that the frontier was bringing.

Yet some writers appreciated frontier sentimentalism and adopted it in their own writings. Catherine Sedwick, for example, in her popular 1836 novel *A Poor Rich Man and a Rich Poor Man*, presented a heroine who embodied the capable woman at the core of frontier sentimentalism; she “supported a large family on an impossibly small income and, in her spare time, engaged in charitable endeavors.”⁴⁸ Thus, she was not defeminized, for while supporting

⁴⁵ “Frontier Women,” *Harper's Bazaar*.

⁴⁶ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 34.

⁴⁷ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 34.

⁴⁸ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 35.

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her family, she also participated in the moral labor associated with women, in this case, charity. Hannah Lee, in *Elinor Fulton*, similarly portrayed a heroine capable of supporting her family when needed—in this instance, amid a bankruptcy—while also engaging in moral labor in the traditional sentimental sense; she provided her father “unwavering inspiration” as he worked his way back to financial stability and reestablished himself as a productive citizen.⁴⁹

Ironically, in the 1840s, *Godey's* also took on the mantle of frontier sentimentalism. The popular publication suggested that “women could perform their moral duties only if they were healthy and strong. Women therefore needed to learn to take proper care of themselves.”⁵⁰ It thus adopted the sentimentalized ideals of frontier womanhood that valued women as capable and strong, yet still able to perform their duties as moral and cultural conservators, preserving the foundation of the nation. In fact, Glenda Riley noted that as early as 1841, *Godey's* dared to suggest that “the delicate young lady was becoming quickly passé” and advised young women to

go forth into the fields and woods, if you live in the country—take long walks in the cool morning and evening hour, if you are in ‘populous cities pent’—let the minimum of these daily excursions average at least two miles.⁵¹

Godey's even incorporated the capable woman into a revision of its fashion plates, launching a campaign to replace its “stiff and pudgy” figures with “healthy, graceful” ones.⁵² Thus, even in popular culture, through ladies’ publications like *Godey's*, the image of the sentimentalized frontier woman was being adopted as that of the “delicate” lady was exchanged for the strong and capable woman that could be a better moral conservator without being defeminized.

When looking at conceptions of womanhood throughout American history, the frontier woman and the sentimentalism through which her contemporary culture perceived her cannot be ignored. Pioneer women expanded nineteenth-century feminism, proving through shifts in their roles and value that the movement was a valid one that could be successful without threatening the very fabric of society. Not only could women hold power, they indicated, but the roles they had long been assigned as moral gatekeepers made them even more fit to hold positions of social, cultural and even political power.

⁴⁹ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 35.

⁵⁰ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 36.

⁵¹ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 36.

⁵² Riley, *Confronting Race*, 36.

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Essentially, on the frontier, women used to their advantage their role as moral conservators of American culture that had long been sentimentalized, in order to advocate for themselves.

Initially worried about losing their identity, women who moved westward found themselves holding new value and importance on the frontier. In an unfamiliar terrain that blended traditionally separate spheres, they were able to prove themselves worthy actors in “masculine” spheres, even as the domestic one retained its rhetorical sanctity. They “washed clothes on the Sabbath, listened to oaths, came into contact with gambling, drinking, and polygamy” and could handle weapons, make economic contributions, and participate in important decisions—all indicating that their value to society as women was not declining, but rather was changing.⁵³ Thus, women of the West found that instead of becoming less significant, they gained new power, and as they traveled in a new direction, their identities both remained intact and were transformed.

When studying the history of the American West, it is not enough to look only at masculine narratives of expansion, for these do not tell the whole story. At the heart of cultural formation in the West, and the preservation of “civilization,” women had a vital part in forming the modern conceptualization of the frontier that is still idealized to this day. Whether represented in Laura Ingalls Wilder’s literature on frontier childhood or Sallie Hester’s “Diary of a Pioneer Girl,” women were the driving force behind the sentimentalized image of the frontier in American memory because they were designated as the heart of culture. Additionally, for those seeking the origins of the feminist movement in the United States and images of the strong capable woman and the assertion of a female-centered consciousness, one might look to frontier women. As Riley stated, “Numerous cases of western women who grew strong, assertive, and confident in their own talents and skills disproved the existence of female inferiority. Such women believed they could play a role in shaping their own lives, in protecting themselves and their children, and in determining their survival in the West.”⁵⁴ In the frontier setting, women found that traditional perceptions of gender did not have to dictate their lives and that they themselves were central in their own narratives. Fulfilling new roles and proving themselves valuable to survival and family life, women who braved the nineteenth-century frontier were therefore anything but ordinary. They were an extraordinary power.

⁵³ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 153.

⁵⁴ Riley, *Confronting Race*, 153.

Soviet Bodies, Feminine Ideals: Soviet Women in World War II and Female Soldiers' Relationship to Gender and Femininity

By *Therese Rapp*

The history of women and war is long and winding, impacted by place, time, and culture. In many instances, women did not have a place in the military owing to their perceived lesser physical and psychological fortitude. During the Second World War, however, the Soviet Union proved an exception. With its transformation into a socialist state beginning in 1918, the Soviet Union began to implement the ideals of gender equality and Soviet women became involved in all aspects of society. Their participation was particularly high in the workforce and in organizations like the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), which provided access to military-adjacent activities.¹

The idea of women being tied solely to the domestic sphere had completely shifted, as evident in the media. The state newspaper *Pravda*, for example, “contrasted the alleged status of Soviet women with the fate of their counterparts under capitalism and fascism.” These systems, it argued, “imposed an increasingly ‘intolerable’ burden on women: ‘degrading inequality, dirt-cheap pay for forced labor or unemployment, prostitution, the tragedy of the mother whose children are dying from hunger.’”² Soviet commitment to gender equality laid the groundwork for women’s involvement in the military. Thus, when the Soviet Union was drawn into the Second World War in June 1941, women were prepared and eager to fight for their “Motherland” (*Rodina mat’*, as evoked in Russian) alongside men.

With a million male soldiers already lost (dead, wounded or captured) by fall 1941, women were brought into the army *en masse*.³ Over the course of the war, roughly one million Soviet women would find themselves in all levels of the military, serving in every capacity—from nurses and radio operators to dive bombers in regiments like the 588th Guards Bomber Regiment, which came to

¹ Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ilstu/detail.action?docID=990167>.

² Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 8–9.

³ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 36–37.

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be known colloquially as the “Night Witches.”⁴ Although men drastically outnumbered them, women played an integral part in the operation of the military and its successes.⁵ Still, the war took its toll on women’s bodies, as injury and trauma often met with amenorrhea and malnutrition.⁶ In addition, the return to civilian life offered little recognition for the sacrifices of women who had fought in the war. The postwar period offers insight into not only their changing status, but also changing perceptions of their time in the military. What did it mean for a woman to return to traditional female roles when her perception of self and gender had been altered by war? This is shown in sources from during the war, and after, through the lens of hindsight.

The scholarship on women in the Soviet military has largely covered the ideological roots of their involvement, the training that they went through to enter the military, and the experiences that they had on the battlefield. Perhaps the most well-known study on the subject is *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front*. In this book, Anna Krylova detailed the experiences of Soviet women spanning from the militarization of culture in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, through to the beginning of the postwar period. What Krylova found in her research was a culture that primed women from childhood to fight and die for the Motherland. This created gender identities and expectations that differed from previous ones.⁷ Krylova described a time when women who had been eager to go to war lived up to the challenges placed in front of them. Indeed Soviet women came to participate in both combat and non-combat roles—in ways that were unmatched among the other allied forces—and made their participation in war something wholly their own. Krylova’s work is an important study on Soviet female soldiers, but it does not cover every angle. While discussing gender identity, *Soviet Women in Combat* approaches the subject more from the perspective of Soviet culture than from that of individual accounts.

Nevertheless, Krylova’s research was fundamental in delineating the subject of Soviet female soldiers in World War II, leading other scholars to draw on it. Roger Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, who published another significant work, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War*, are a notable example. Their book expanded on the topic by contradicting many of Krylova’s claims. Principally, while looking at Soviet women’s involvement in the war, Markwick and Cardona kept in mind the difficulties

⁴ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 1. The 588th was later renamed the 46th Taman Guards Night Bomber Aviation Regiment.

⁵ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 2.

⁶ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 80.

⁷ Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13.

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they experienced due to their gender, including disregard, sexism, and sexual harassment. This contrasts the idyllic patriotism often described by Krylova.⁸

Other scholarship examined women's relationship to the war and their gender. Works such as those by Anja Tippner, Ludmilla Turkevich, D'Ann Campbell, Alice Schuster, and Kerstin Bischl each contributed to this topic by addressing how the war shaped elements of Soviet womanhood.⁹ All these studies drew from journals, oral histories and other records left by women and by the Soviet government, to understand the trials that women faced and how the war impacted their connection to gender and femininity. Although typical tenets of femininity like softness, non-confrontational behavior, concern over appearance, and interest in crafts like sewing or embroidery seemed at odds with the aggressive masculinity of war, women still had a place in the Second World War and were keen to fight in it.

Overall, the existing literature has focused a great deal on the image of Soviet women and their role in society, and has less sufficiently covered the relationship between women, their gender identity and the military. As this article will demonstrate, by participating in the war and still maintaining their femininity, Soviet women were able to process and redefine conflicting ideas about their gender identity. They accomplished this by bringing certain practices into the military and carving out spaces where they could define their own experiences.

Examining narratives driven by women, one can better understand what the war meant to them and how they defined themselves during an intensely traumatic point in human history. Although the military was rife with danger, trauma, and gendered expectations, such sources reveal that it also became a space that offered women more autonomy regarding gendered expectations and where they could interact with their femininity on their own terms. Outside their personal experiences, beliefs about women held by men, changing opinions among women themselves who had served in the military, and representations of female soldiers in postwar publications, also played a role. These, too, were recorded in women's journals, letters, and testimonies—a complex network of personal thoughts crossed with bias and circumstance. This article draws on such materials, which have been collected and

⁸ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 23.

⁹ Anja Tippner, "Girls in Combat: Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia and the Image of Young Soviet Wartime Heroines," *Russian Review* 73, no. 3 (July 2014): 371–388; Ludmilla B. Turkevich, "Russian Women," *Russian Review* 16, no. 1 (January 1957): 24–36; D'Ann Campbell, "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Military History* 57, no. 2 (April 1993): 301–323; Alice Schuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality," *Russian Review* 30, no. 3 (July 1971): 260–267; Kerstin Bischl, "Female Red Army Soldiers in World War II and Beyond," in *Gender in 20th Century Eastern Europe and the USSR*, ed. Catherine Baker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 113–126.

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contextualized in texts like the following: Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*, Cynthia Simmons's and Nina Perlina's *Writing the Siege of Leningrad*, and Ann Noggle's *A Dance with Death*.

While humans and their memories are fallible, the information captured in these records bears important discoveries with careful analysis. First, Soviet women used their spaces within the military to define their gender and femininity for themselves. Second, the "typically feminine" habits—hair curling and embroidery, among others—women continued during the war acted as responses to trauma and to a new environment, rather than simply as a means of maintaining their womanhood. Finally, juxtaposing appraisals of women by men, women themselves later in life, and popular publications, shows variations and change over time. For example, looking at what others considered improper for women highlights the new traits that they assumed. Examining testimonies recorded during the war or provided after offers a portrait of the war as it was experienced. From recollections of private moments taken to understand the self, to ones about the reactions of others, much can be derived—even in an account as simple as that noting a male officer complaining about a female soldier picking flowers.¹⁰

To fully comprehend the image of the Soviet woman in the Second World War, it is essential to understand the ideals of the state. The ideal female soldier was devoted to the state and able to perform her duties competently, as represented in propaganda of the period. One piece that illuminates this is a 1942 film depicting a women's anti-aircraft brigade. The short movie starts with a field where female soldiers are collecting flowers to help disguise the anti-aircraft artillery on the ground. The women are shown diligently performing their duties dressed in military skirts. The music at the beginning is a lush, peaceful, orchestral arrangement. When enemy aircraft is spotted, however, it becomes fast-paced and urgent. At this point in the film, the women begin rushing to fire shells as the narrator applauds them and the ability of one Maria Ivanova to fire thirty-two shells—more than the required twenty.¹¹ This scene shows women diligently working to defend the Motherland, but retains a sense of their femininity with the images of flowers and the style of the soundtrack. It thus connects military competence and femininity. There is

¹⁰ Tamara Illarionovna Davidovich, in *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, comp. Svetlana Alexievich, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Random House, 2017), 52.

¹¹ *Na strazhe sovetskogo neba* [Guardians of the Soviet Sky] (Leningrad Kinozhurnal, 1942), embedded in "Women's Anti-Aircraft Brigade," Seventeen Moments in Soviet History, video, 1:29, originally from Russian State Film & Photo Archive at Krasnogorsk, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1943-2/love-and-romance-in-war/love-and-romance-in-war-video/womens-anti-aircraft-brigade-1942/>.

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violence in the shelling of the aircraft, but it is reduced by the cleanliness of the soldiers and the sun-soaked field of flowers.

Soviet film also defined Soviet women in the war in portrayals of members of the partisan movement. This is a subject that *She Defends the Motherland* touched on, but the following government statement on its “ideological flaws” is also telling:

In the film, some scenes are not plausible. For example, two young people flirting during an important diversionary operation; a wedding in the forest headquarters of the partisan detachment, Praskovia Ivanovna's rhetorical monologue in connection with the false news of the capture of Moscow, the prop-like stage for Praskovia Ivanovna's execution, and several other scenes. Germans are portrayed as a bunch of simpletons that the guerrillas can easily smash, armed with clubs and sticks. The film does not portray the harsh conditions of the partisans' struggle against the Germans.¹²

The report suggests that ideas about women were combined with the broader goals of the state. Amid the possible capture of Moscow and German military activity, flirtation and romantic events like a wedding were deemed inappropriate. The woman at the center of the film, however, was represented by commitment to the cause, rather than participation in these more pedestrian activities. In defining Ivanovna by her commitment to the partisan movement and the struggle for victory, the goal of defending the Motherland was shown to supersede her other identities.

Posters were another propaganda tool used for defining Soviet women during the war. These images worked not only as recruitment tools but also as means of presenting the motivations behind participating in the defense of the Motherland. One such image, titled “We Shall Have Our Revenge!,” depicts a mother kneeling before her dead child while clutching a rifle above her head, with a landscape of fire and barren trees behind her. The taglines on the poster read “vengeance” and “destroy the fascist cannibals.”¹³ The intention of this image is not subtle; it was to drive women to fight in this war that was killing

¹² G. F. Aleksandrov, “Report on the Film *She Defends the Motherland*, May 11, 1943,” Seventeen Moments in Soviet History, trans. James von Geldern, reproduced from *Kino na voine: dokumenty i svidetel'stva*, ed. V. I. Fomin (Moscow: Materick, 2008), 352, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1943-2/women-in-war-films/women-in-war-films-texts/ideological-flaws-in-she-defends-the-motherland/>.

¹³ Isaak Rabichev, *We Shall Have Our Revenge!: Destroy the Fascist Cannibals*, 1941, poster, reproduced in “Love and Romance in War,” Seventeen Moments in Soviet History, from *Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives*, ed. Peter Paret, Beth Irwin Lewis, and Paul Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1943-2/love-and-romance-in-war/love-and-romance-in-war-images/#bwg111/668>.

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children and destroying their homeland. This poster thus attempted to appeal to women's sense of protection of their children. It did not, however, remove women from the violence of war, for the image of the rifle, the cry of "vengeance," and the dark motifs implied that women could be actively involved in it. Propaganda like this went beyond patriotic symbols and aimed for an emotional appeal, suggesting that to bring women into the war required more than allusions to patriotic values; it needed messaging that cut to the core of what society associated with women.

The use of propaganda in defining the Soviet female soldier therefore worked in three ways. It depicted war as something in which women could be competent, it made the protection of the state a worthy and principal goal, and it connected to ideals associated with women. Protection of the state and of one's children were connected and used to invite women into the war. By showing the war as something in which women could be involved without sacrificing feminine traits, the Soviet government could call on more of them to enlist. Still, this war would impact women in more ways than propaganda suggested. Although the state appealed to women already before the war, once they had joined the military, they would interact with their sense of gender identity in ways that no one expected.

When Soviet women joined the war effort *en masse* in 1941, they also entered the highly masculine space of the military. In addition, the expectations set for them were contrary to their lives before the war. As noted by machine-gun platoon commander Liubov Ivanovna Liubchik, "You feel like a horse. It's night. You stand watch and listen to every sound. Like a lynx. Wary of every rustle ... In war, they say you're half man half beast. It's true. There's no other way to survive."¹⁴

The violence and danger inherent in war made the community with which soldiers surrounded themselves imperative to their survival. Although shaped by location, time, and the individuals within them, female-exclusive regiments offered a place within the larger male space of the military where women could find camaraderie. These communities of women in the war were often remembered for their close bonds, mutual support, and friendship. As stated by a member of the 125th Guards Bomber Regiment, "when I joined the regiment everyone was so friendly, so helpful—they loved each other. Even though I came to the regiment for only the last year and a half, I cherish the friendships I made for all my life."¹⁵

¹⁴ Liubov Ivanovna Liubchik, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 46.

¹⁵ Yelena Kulkova-Malutina, in *A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II*, ed. Anne Noggle, trans. Margarita Ponomaryova (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1994), 130.

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The community and camaraderie of these groups also comprised an essential space for processing the trauma of the war. This is evident in the following, in which Lieutenant Yekaterina Musatova-Fedotova of the 125th recalled an emergency landing:

I had but a fraction of a second to decide what to do, so I chose the only course: to belly-land in the beetroot field. So down we went into the field. The aircraft came to a stop, and we were all alive and all right. At that moment the ambulance, fire truck, and people came running. I felt absolutely empty, drained; all I could think was, this is the way pilots crash their aircraft. At this moment Tonya (Antonina Khokhlova), our tail-gunner, got out of the plane, sat on the tail, and began powdering her face. She said to me, "Yekaterina, you dusted my face!" The earth was dry and dusty, and our landing stirred up the dust. Klara Dubkova, my navigator, turned to Tonya and said, "We could have exploded when we landed, and now you are making merry!" Tonya replied that with our commander as pilot that would have never happened. With humor she said to me, "You could have landed at the village where they would feed us fried potatoes, and now we are hungry!"¹⁶

This quote reveals much about the nature of women's spaces. Khokhlova, especially, brought a levity to the situation that the navigator Dubkova did not appreciate. One could brush off her remarks as vapid, but they were filled with practicality; although powdering one's nose after crashlanding a plane might be considered tone-deaf, in doing so, Khokhlova brought humor and relief to a harrowing situation.

The regiment in which Musatova-Fedotova, Khokhlova, and Dubkova served was comprised mostly women.¹⁷ Thus, they endured the frightening and traumatic experiences of war in a space of like people. As another member of the 125th recalled, "my navigator (Brok-Beltsova) was nearly hit also, and she was so frightened that even after the mission her mouth was screwed up in a funny way. It was her nerves; she had seen the shell go over, and her face remained distorted for some time. War is war, and life is life."¹⁸ Nina Raspopova of the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment made a similar comment. "After the bombing and having escaped the enemy's fire," she stated, "I

¹⁶ Yekaterina Musatova-Fedotova, in *A Dance with Death*, 148.

¹⁷ As Lieutenant-Colonel Valentin Markov remarked, "there were some men in our regiment. Some were gunners, but the pilots and navigators were all women. The majority of the ground personnel were also women." Valentin Markov, in *A Dance with Death*, 104.

¹⁸ Antonina Bondareva-Spitsina, in *A Dance with Death*, 108–109.

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couldn't pull myself together for ten or fifteen minutes. I was shivering, my teeth were chattering, my feet and hands were shaking, and I always felt an overwhelming striving for life. I didn't want to die."¹⁹

As these examples show, the community in their regiments enabled women to weather trauma. For processing it, they also relied on their femininity. For instance, like the aforementioned Khokhlova, women might engage in activities like applying makeup to help cope with the fact that they survived a crash landing. With access to a largely female community, these kinds of practices could be recreated in a space of like-minded people.

Outside of women's regiments like the 125th and 46th, women needed to create their own space in the male-dominated military. As shown in their testimonials, their presence in mostly male spaces necessitated that they prove their worth. According to a radio operator, "we tried hard ... We didn't want people to say of us, 'Ah these women!' And we made greater efforts than men did. We had to prove that we were no worse than men. For a long time, there was this haughty, condescending attitude to us: 'Some warriors, these women...'"²⁰ This attitude was mired in sexism and the assumption that women could not adequately fulfill military roles.

For women in leadership roles, carving out their space meant performing at a high standard while facing sexist and misogynistic assumptions about their capabilities. Appolina Nikonovna Litskevich-Bairak, the commander of a sapper platoon, was put at the center of a quarrel in an active minefield because an artilleryman outside her platoon had called her a derogatory term. "Thus I learned that the word 'chassis' was very offensive for a woman. Something like 'whore.' A frontline obscenity...," she recalled.²¹ Yet while Litskevich-Bairak was the subject of sexist language, those in her platoon were willing to defend her. When the artilleryman initially insulted her, a member of her platoon asked to step away to slap him and a fight broke out.²² Thus, although Litskevich-Bairak was subjected to sexual harassment, the people over whom she had earned authority were willing to come to her aid.

This indicates that alongside misogyny, there was true respect for Soviet women, especially for those in leadership positions. Olga Lisikova, a pilot in and then commander of the 1st Regiment, recorded her experiences with male superiors as follows:

I was stopped by the commander of the division. I understood that the general wanted to bed me down. Yes. I was only a lieutenant, but apart

¹⁹ Nina Raspopova, in *A Dance with Death*, 26.

²⁰ Maria Semyonovna Kaliberda, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 199.

²¹ Appolina Nikonovna Litskevich-Bairak, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 219.

²² Litskevich-Bairak, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 218.

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from that I was Olga Lisikova, and it was impossible to bed me down. His pressure was persistent. I had to think very fast, because he was in all respects stronger than me, and I know well that nobody would dare come to my rescue. In desperation I said, "I fly with my husband in my crew!" and he was taken aback. He didn't expect to hear that. He released me; I immediately rushed out and found the radio operator and mechanic of my crew. I didn't make explanations. I, as commander of the crew, ordered that one of them was to be my fictitious husband and gave them my word of honor that nobody would ever learn the truth! Then I released them.²³

Beyond sexism and the threat of sexual assault, Lisikova's story also shows that although men felt a claim to her body because she was a woman, she still commanded the respect of those in her crew. She had attained the status of a commander and was able to exercise her authority as needed. Lisikova's femininity had been used against her during the harassment, but the masculine authority that she had as a commander enabled her to escape it.

Overall, the difference between experiences in majority-female and majority-male regiments was startling. For women in majority-female regiments, community and friendship defined their space and provided a place where they could process traumatic experiences. For those in majority-male regiments, even women in positions of authority could face instances of sexual harassment and threats to their bodily autonomy. In these cases, they had to emphasize the attributes that made them good leaders and these could, as in the case of Litskevich-Bairak and Lisikova, earn them respect from the men they had command over.

At the same time, while actively defying traditional gender roles by participating in the military, Soviet women became more in tune with traits that were connected to their gender, and also created new definitions of themselves—shaped by the communities in which they found themselves or out of necessity. Such gender expression was tied in large part to the actions that women took off the battlefield. Attention to hair, hygiene, and "feminine" arts served as practical means of caring for physical and mental health, but it took on another function, defining the experience of war. Women and their day-to-day practices actively challenged the assumption that war was a purely masculine space, solely characterized by violence, death, and trauma. Teacher Mariia Viacheslavovna Kropacheva remarked that during the siege of Leningrad, "at the forward positions units of women volunteers [were]

²³ Olga Lisikova, in *A Dance with Death*, 242.

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camouflaging the trenches artistically, masterfully, femininely.”²⁴ The implication was that women’s work and artistry played equally important roles as anything coded masculine.

Besides challenging and expanding the definition of a war experience, women’s everyday actions in the military also redefined ideas of womanhood. One pivotal experience for many Soviet women entering the military was the loss of their braids. One woman recalled, “I had long braids down to my knees, and I received an order to cut my braids because we had to look like the male cadets. We girls went to the hairdresser, and he said that he couldn’t cut off such gorgeous braids; his hands wouldn’t perform such a sacrilege.”²⁵ The association of young women with their hair is palpable across female experiences and, as this quote shows, even crossed gender lines. But the loss of a central feminine attribute opened a new way to perceive women’s relationship to gender. Hair could be tied to femininity, but its loss could also signal freedom. According to one woman, “in my childhood my father used to give me a crew cut with an electric hair clipper. I recalled it when we got our haircuts and suddenly turned into young soldiers. Some girls were frightened ... But I easily got used to it. My element. Not for nothing did my father say, ‘it’s a boy I’ve got here, not a girl’.”²⁶

For some women, the story of their connection with their hair would end at this point, but many others mentioned it again, once their hair grew back, for example, in references to curling it. As one woman in the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment explained, “our ... regiment was unique, for it was purely female. There wasn’t even a shabby male mechanic to rest a glance on. Nevertheless, after a night of combat we never forgot to curl our hair.”²⁷ This practice was important to maintaining a day-to-day structure. Routines can generally ground a person, but in times of instability, having a set task to complete can help individuals process their experiences. In taking the time to maintain practices like curling their hair, women were actively cultivating a culture that addressed their concerns amid the uncertainties of war.

Of course, not all women assumed such tasks on a daily basis. This speaks to the diversity of women’s experience, one that extended to other “traditionally feminine” practices. As one woman recalled of her fellow female soldiers,

²⁴ Mariia Viacheslavovna Kropacheva, in *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women’s Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose*, ed. and trans. Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 54.

²⁵ Marta Meriuts, in *A Dance with Death*, 135.

²⁶ Litskevich-Bairak, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 214.

²⁷ Yevgeniya Zhigulenko, in *A Dance with Death*, 56.

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Tanya was a serious girl, she liked neatness and order. And Marusya liked to sing and dance. She sang naughty couplets. Most of all she liked to put on makeup. She'd spend hours sitting in front of the mirror. Tanya scolded her: "Instead of painting your face, you'd do better to iron your uniform and tidy up your bed." We also had Pasha Litavrina, a very feisty girl. She was friends with Shura Batishcheva. This Shura was shy and modest, the quietest of us all. Liusya Likhacheva liked to have her hair curled. She'd put her hair in curlers and take her guitar. She went to bed with the guitar and woke up with the guitar. The oldest of us was Polina Neverova; her husband was killed at the front, and she was always sad.²⁸

Each of these women had an individual approach to coping with the war and to their femininity. For some it took the form of fastidious regulation of their environment; for others, it meant spending time on familiar activities that brought them comfort. The diversity of those experiences, however, shows how women could interpret their femininity differently during the war. For some, holding onto rituals that they had before the war brought solace; others now felt free to take on rituals not coded as feminine.

Habits like curling one's hair and putting on makeup were also connected to hygiene. An essential part of maintaining health that is not necessarily a feminine trait, hygiene was nevertheless important to women in the Soviet military. A first consideration related to keeping hair clean—especially long hair, which is a challenge to maintain. As one woman remarked, "I ... had braids around my head ... But how could we wash it? Where to dry it? Suppose you've just washed it, and there's an alarm, you have to run."²⁹ A telephone operator showed similar concern, noting, "I had no time to wash my hair, so I asked: 'Girls, cut off my braids...'"³⁰ The difference between having one's hair forcibly cut and taking the initiative to cut it speaks again to the diversity of female experience in the military. For some women, their conception of gender was not strongly tied to such outward signifiers as their hair.

Other concerns related to hygiene affected all women, in particular, that associated with their menstrual cycles—when the stress of wartime did not cause amenorrhea—for which there was a startling lack of official consideration. Illuminating the challenge that menstruation posed during long marches, Maria Semyonovna Kaliberda remarked, "we march, and leave these red spots behind us in the sand ... red traces ... The women's thing. How can you hide anything here? The soldiers come after us and pretend that they don't notice anything ... don't look under their feet... Our trousers got dry on us and

²⁸ Elena Ivanovna Babina, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 174.

²⁹ Klavdia Ivanovna Terekhova, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 55.

³⁰ Galina Dmitrievna Zapolskaya, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 26.

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became sharp as glass. They'd cut us."³¹ Klara Semyonovna Tikhonovich similarly stated, "during a long march we searched for soft grass. We tore up some grass and rubbed our legs ... You see, we used the grass to wash off the [blood] ... We were girls, we had our special needs ... The army didn't think about it ... Our legs were green."³² To maintain hygiene during menstruation, women not only made do with grass to keep clean; they also risked their safety to do so. In addition to the marches and the grass, Kaliberda recounted the following reaction among women who were menstruating during an attack: "They call us ... And we don't even hear the shelling, we can't be bothered, we quickly run to the river. Into the water ... Water! Water! We sat in it till we soaked it off ... Under the shrapnel ... That's it, we were more afraid of shame than of death. Several girls were killed in the water."³³ Such concern for keeping clean stemmed not from a desire for femininity or for maintaining outward appearances, but rather, from a genuine need to accommodate a bodily process, one that was inevitable for many of the women serving in the military.

Alongside the lack of consideration for women's bodies during the war, the demands of basic comfort and survival also necessitated the introduction of "feminine skills." Ones like sewing and embroidery were essential not just to women, but to all troops. The skills that women brought to the war thus had a practical purpose, as well as allowed them to exercise their femininity in ways that supported their mental well-being. Among these, sewing was especially important for tailoring uniforms. As Olga Lisikova found, "we were issued flying uniforms. I put mine on, and it was terrible—I looked like a monster! It was so awfully oversized that I couldn't move in it. I cut it drastically, as well as the high boots. Out of the remainder of the overcoat, I stitched a beret."³⁴ By tailoring and making what they needed out of uniforms, women asserted a practical form of traditional femininity.

This practicality extended to the art of embroidery. According to one recollection, "our whole regiment took to embroidering. We had no threads, no real cloth, but we had underwear, usually of blue material, and we had cloth ... We embroidered flowers on those cloths with thread made out of the blue underwear."³⁵ Embroidery was not only a personal endeavor, but a symbol of friendship. Yekaterina Chujkova, who was in the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment, shared her own memories of this practice in the following: "Our friendship has been preserved until the present day. Youth is youth. We made pillows out of our foot cloths and embroidered the PE-2 [a Soviet dive bomber plane] on them. When it came time for our last farewell at the end of the war,

³¹ Maria Semyonova Kaliberda, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 200.

³² Klara Semyonovna Tikhonovich, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 197.

³³ Kaliberda, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 200.

³⁴ Lisikova, in *A Dance with Death*, 238.

³⁵ Irina Rakobolskaya, in *A Dance with Death*, 28.

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we could not imagine how we could go on living without each other.”³⁶ By embracing femininity in the masculine space of war, the gendered assumptions of what a soldier was changed. The time spent on embroidery worked in the same way that curling hair could. It was a routine pastime that allowed women to exercise creativity and bond with others. While some could consider the skill frivolous, it also acted as an expansion of what made up a soldier’s life during the war. By practicing such overtly feminine arts like embroidery in Soviet military life, women carved out space and time to bring their traditions and practices into a place that was traditionally deemed masculine.

Hair, hygiene, and feminine arts represented to women forms of self-expression and reprieve from the war, while allowing them to define their connection to femininity. They played a role in communities of women and allowed them to expand what the life of a soldier meant. For women, hair could be a signifier of femininity, but without it, some would also find comfort in a more masculine appearance. The inclusion of fiber arts like sewing and embroidery was not only a practical way to alter ill-fitting uniforms, but also a means of exercising a skill that usually did not have a place in such masculine spaces. Embroidery, in particular, allowed women to create art and process their experience. Overall, by bringing feminine-coded practices into military life, women helped to define that life, while also interpreting their gender—picking and choosing which attributes and practices they would maintain.

Reactions to Soviet women’s routines in the military offer interesting insight into their nature, as well as into contemporary interpretations of gender identity. The reactions of men, for example, highlight the cultural expectations that women changed or broke, as well as the disparity between state proclamations about equality and the opinions of individuals. Those of women who maintained more traditional female practices reveal how those who did *not*, acted contrary to the status quo. The testimonies of women in the military written during and after the war also indicate how women defied expectations—with the especially reflective postwar ones indicating opinions about their military experiences that were affected by their lives *after* the war. In turn, women’s own postwar reactions, and the goals that women embraced after the war, offer insight into the culture into which women reassimilated and by which they were affected. Overall, the space between their actions and reactions defined their experience.

The masculine-coded space of war was a product of the assumptions of those inhabiting it. Of the 34.5 million Soviet soldiers fighting in the war, the majority were men, and they set the precedents for the military.³⁷ However, the introduction of women into the military helped to redefine what military

³⁶ Yekaterina Chujkova, in *A Dance with Death*, 145.

³⁷ Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 2.

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experience meant. Men's reactions to women are particularly telling in this regard. One man who worked with women during the war recalled, "I met many pretty girls at the front, but we didn't look at them as women. Though, in my view they were wonderful girls. But they were our friends, who dragged us off the battlefield. Who saved us, who took care of us ... How could I have bad feelings about them? But could you marry your brother?"³⁸ He continued, "after all the dirt, and lice, and death ... We wanted something beautiful. Bright. Beautiful women."³⁹

This account implies several things. First, the women who went to war were not viewed as *women*. Second, they earned a position distinct from what was typical of womanhood. Third, the presence of women in war did not line up with traditional expectations of femininity. By participating in World War II, Soviet women assumed a masculine status that truly made them "brothers in arms." As the above recollection suggests, however, this status was gained over time as women proved the importance of their role in the war and in the regiments in which they served—and as women changed their own relationships to femininity. Spending time in the dirty, violent space of war, dragging their comrades off the battlefield, forged strong bonds.

Writer Vasily Grossman noted a similar trend in *A Writer at War*, stating, "That's how the life of women is going, in the rear and at the front—two currents, one that is clear and bright, and the other a dark military one."⁴⁰ This was accompanied by a change in expectations of women. As the sniper Klavdia Grigoryevna Krokhhina recalled, her commanding officer even expressed doubt upon hearing female soldiers speak about future marriages. "Eh, you girls! You're good all around," he stated, "but after the war men will be afraid to marry you. You've got good aim; you'll fling a plate at his head and kill him."⁴¹ The gender of the commanding officer is not clear, but what *is* evident is that Soviet women had gained a strength and ability to commit violence in this war that had not been previously attributed to them. By assuming masculine skills and traits, and redefining their relationship with their gender, they defied society's expectations.

Women's experiences in the war, as well as their unique perspectives on it, also challenged the narratives of men to redefine what the experience of a soldier was. In one instance, in which a married couple who had both gone to

³⁸ Anonymous, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 76.

³⁹ Anonymous, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 76.

⁴⁰ Vasily Grossman, *A Writer at War: A Soviet Journalist with the Red Army, 1941–1945*, ed. and trans. Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 120.

⁴¹ Klavdia Grigoryevna Krokhhina, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 14.

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war were asked to recount their experiences, the husband repeatedly tried to keep his wife from sharing her story. According to the interviewer, Svetlana Alexievich,

After my repeated requests, he reluctantly relinquished his place, saying: "Tell it the way I taught you. Without tears and women's trifles: how you wept when they cut off your braid." Later she whispered to me: "He studied *The History of the Great Patriotic War* with me last night. He was afraid of me. And now he's worried I won't remember right, not the way I should."⁴²

The moment captured here is extremely telling. For the husband, the introduction of his wife's own story added a side to the war that conflicted with his own. To account for that, he created a narrative for her to follow that did not threaten his own. Mentioning her braid being cut off kept her story in line with many others, but it also reinforced a stereotype that did not challenge his experience. For the wife meanwhile, highlighting her husband's fear that she might remember the war "incorrectly" implies that her experience did not match his expectations. Thus his interjection, or attempt to alter her memory of the war, of which she was fully aware.

While such testimonies reveal the experience of Soviet female soldiers in the war, and their personal interaction with gender and identity, those given decades after the fact also indicate that as women entered the postwar period and lived for decades more, their opinion of their military service could change. One such example comes from Mariya Smirnova of the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment. "What did we all think then, the girls from the flying regiments? Was the war a woman's business?" she asked. "Of course not. But then we didn't think about that. We defended our fair motherland, our people whom the fascists had trampled."⁴³ This statement implies a change of opinion in the work that women did in the war. The regiment to which Smirnova belonged was known for brave dive-bombing missions against German soldiers. However, the bravery and patriotic drive to defend the Motherland through violent means was contrary to feminine identity.

For Nina Yakovlevna, revealing the details of the deeds of her service would undermine the narrative she had crafted around her experience. "I am a heroine for my son. A deity! What is he going to think of me after this?," she wondered.⁴⁴ To bring women's wartime experiences to light would mean upsetting the idea of purely feminine and perfectly patriotic female soldiers.

⁴² Anonymous, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, xxiv.

⁴³ Mariya Smirnova, in *A Dance with Death*, 37.

⁴⁴ Nina Yakovlevna, in *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 88.

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Besides, women who had experienced the war were themselves trying to process its violence and trauma, and to define themselves as individuals, while figuratively covered in its blood and grime. Galina Brok-Beltsova of the 125th Guards Bomber Regiment, who would ultimately earn a doctorate in history studying the “Great Patriotic War” noted,

There were cases during the war when some Soviet planes did drop bombs on our troops when they had to turn back. That was a very good lesson: for the rest of my life, I swore that if I took up something and was determined to do it, I must do it until the very end. This part of my character led me all my life up to the present moment. Only when I fulfill the mission do I feel content.⁴⁵

This reaction to the past greatly differs from that of Smirnova and Yakovlevna. Here the actions of war are not a shameful or misplaced experience. In the life of Brok-Beltsova, the war was an experience that instilled in her a drive to complete her goals. In this interpretation of the past, the actions of defining the self in the war are a welcome memory, not an aberrance.

The juxtaposition of experience and memory can be analyzed also through the lens of the postwar Soviet media, in publications like *Soviet Woman*, a magazine that addressed issues of Soviet womanhood and was even circulated outside of the Soviet Union. While examining the general concerns of women, the 1952 issues also presented an image of the postwar Soviet woman that was focused on education and success. One article in this vein highlighted the story of “Vera Berednikova of Leningrad, one of the many Soviet girls whose education was interrupted by the war.” It explained, “In the grim winter of 1941, she joined the army, later becoming an officer. But she never gave up her dream of continuing her education, and as soon as the enemy was hurled, she returned to her studies.”⁴⁶ The image created here focused on studiousness, and treated the war as an obstacle, despite Berednikova’s accomplishment of becoming an officer. Overall, the story suggested that the drive to be successful in education superseded sacrifice in war, and that new interpretations of the self that arose during that time could be dismissed as just another bump in the road.

In another piece from *Soviet Woman*, the image of mother was presented as the ideal of Soviet womanhood. “‘We must glorify the mother,’ said [the writer] Maxim Gorky. In our country mothers with large families enjoy truly nationwide respect,” the article declared. “The honorary [sic] title of Mother-Heroine has been instituted for them and they are decorated with Orders and

⁴⁵ Galina Brok-Beltsova, in *A Dance with Death*, 134.

⁴⁶ “Three Years Later,” *Soviet Woman*, April 1952, 26.

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medals.”⁴⁷ Here the idea of womanhood focused on mothers—namely those with many children, who were honored with medals in a way that mirrored those honored in the military. The image of the female Soviet soldier of the Second World War was thus framed as adverse to that of women in the postwar period. Now the duty of women turned from fighting for the Motherland toward the ability to reproduce.

This idea of duty extended beyond reproduction, however. In a collection of letters to a Soviet delegation for a disarmament commission, one French writer declared,

Mr. Chairman of the Soviet Delegation to the U.N.O. [the United Nations Organization]

I hereby have the honor of requesting you to do everything possible that the world may avoid another war.

I, an old woman, do not want my children and grandchildren to experience a new war and horrors such as we have lived through ...

Madame Béraud, widow of a soldier killed in the war of 1914-1918.

I join my mother in the above Béraud, a participant in the war of 1939-1945.⁴⁸

Signed by veterans of both world wars, this letter provides special insight into the effects of the postwar period on women. Although the authors were French, the choice to publish their writing in a Soviet magazine signaled shared views. In particular, the women focused on avoiding war to spare children. The ideas of motherhood extended into military concerns, but the focus shifted away from the experiences and memory of those who had fought in previous wars.

Analyzing Soviet women's experiences in the military during and after the Second World War reveals that as women navigated the war, they looked beyond the assumptions of what a woman was expected to be. They also used and celebrated traits associated with masculinity, like violence and individuality. Thus, entering the war, female Soviet soldiers found opportunities not only to defend the Motherland, but also to define themselves

⁴⁷ L. Grechishnikova, “Care for Mothers of Large Families,” *Soviet Woman*, June 1952, 43.

⁴⁸ Madame Béraud, “Letters from Mothers,” *Soviet Woman*, June 1952, 58.

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and their relationship to femininity. These new identities were found in spaces that women cultivated, their interpretation of acceptable behaviors, and opinions of their experiences during the war, as well as the opinions of outsiders—including their future selves. The result was a unique interpretation of female soldiers within a highly masculine space.

For Soviet women of majority-female regiments, the military became a space where they could bring in practices traditionally associated with them. This allowed women to redefine what it meant to be a soldier on their own terms, thus enriching the grand narrative of the war. Women in majority-male regiments faced a different set of challenges because they were women: sexual harassment and a general dismissal of their abilities. Women were sometimes able to counter these by achieving higher positions of authority, but their connection to this space was challenged nevertheless. At the same time, by working with men, and through the need to survive, women found themselves more closely associated with masculine traits.

During the war, women's practices like the maintaining their hair, hygiene and traditionally feminine arts functioned to help them cope with the constant threat of violence and death, and to process trauma and assert self-identity. By bringing their habits and arts into the military, they redefined what being a soldier meant. Embroidering during the war did not take away from the masculine-coded environment but it did add new elements to it.

Finally, the juxtaposition between the voices of women and those of others reveals the impact of Soviet women on the military. Men during the war held more traditional views of women's place in society, and associated women with beauty, brightness, and motherhood in direct opposition to the ugliness, darkness, and death of the war. They did not view female soldiers in the same way that they viewed male ones. Yet women at war could take on masculine traits and become brothers in arms, and even at times, authority figures. In such ways, women defied expectations.

After the war, some Soviet women saw serving in the military as unwomanly. This is revealed in sources produced after the war, including by women themselves who appear to have been affected not only by general postwar opinions of female soldiers, but also by changed opinions of themselves. The contrast in views between the wartime and postwar years suggests that some women simply put aside gendered assumptions for patriotism. They were willing to cut their hair and take up the rifle, to enter a highly masculine space for the sake of the Motherland. After the war, they were expected to become studious and successful mothers raising the next generation of good Soviet citizens—and some complied, in apparent opposition to their time in the military, when they could be violent and put their lives at risk.

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Women then, as now, are not monolithic. The experiences of the individual Soviet woman were as unique as the actions that they took during the war. Some certainly maintained an air of expected femininity, spending time to curl their hair and apply makeup. Others brought their curlers, their embroidery, and habits from their lives before, to provide welcome reprieve from the horrors during the war. However, there were also women who shunned these practices, who—whether for patriotism or personal reasons—felt comfortable taking on a more masculine appearance and behaviors. Understanding the breadth of experiences and analyzing women's connection to femininity and gender—here, for the Soviet case—helps to expand the view of women in history.