

# Of Life and History

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# Of Life and History

The Undergraduate History Journal of the College of the Holy Cross

Volume 2 | August 2019

**Of Life and History**

## Volume 2 | August 2019

*Of Life and History* is a student-run undergraduate history journal published annually at the College of the Holy Cross. The journal seeks to showcase a diverse range of exemplary historical scholarship conducted by Holy Cross students. *Of Life and History* is committed to providing Holy Cross students with experiential learning opportunities through participation in the scholarly process and encouraging them to engage in critical dialogues about the meanings of the past.

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# Of Life and History

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# 1907 - College of the Holy Cross Commencement Parade

Artist Unknown: College of the Holy Cross Archives and  
Special Collections

Brett A. Cotter '19

On the front cover of this issue is an image of Cardinal James Gibbons from June 1907 on his way to Holy Cross from Union Station, flanked by the crowds of cheering spectators. Having arrived in Worcester to speak at Holy Cross that year, Gibbons was perhaps the most famous commencement speaker that the College had invited after President Theodore Roosevelt two years earlier. Comparing the two figures, the late Father Anthony J. Kuzniewski, S.J., historian and former Holy Cross professor, said, “What Theodore Roosevelt represented in the political life of the United States, Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, represented in the ecclesiastical life of American Catholicism.” Born in Baltimore to Irish immigrant parents in 1834, Gibbons returned to Ireland with his family when he was three years old, where he witnessed firsthand the Great Irish Famine. He finally returned to the United States in 1850. After his ordination in 1861 Gibbons rose rapidly through the Church ranks and was at the First Vatican Council in 1868—the youngest bishop in attendance. In 1876 he published a bestselling introduction to Catholicism, *The Faith of Our Fathers*.

The crowd that gathered to welcome Cardinal Gibbons that day in 1907 included exalted guests, as well as representatives of Irish, Italian, Polish, Lithuanian, Syrian, and French-Canadian Catholic communities in Worcester. There was a small number of non-Catholic spectators in the crowd, who reportedly doffed their hats in respect when the cardinal raised his hand in blessing. At commencement the next day, Cardinal Gibbons urged the graduating class to stay committed to their conscience in the face of the world’s uncertainty, to avoid the temptation of expediency that might arise in opposition to what was right. Gibbons, addressing the all-male class, added, “What the times call for is men, sturdy men, endowed with the courage of their convictions... who are guided by principles rather than popularity.”

When Gibbons delivered his commencement speech at Holy Cross, it was already an uncertain time both domestically and internationally. At home, labor strikes and political protests disrupted social cohesion. On the international stage, imperial rivalries and rising tensions were pushing the world closer to a global conflict. Gibbons was quite cognizant of these developments and sought to reassure

his audience that day to abide by their principles, and he encouraged them to do what is right. Though Holy Cross and the world have changed much since 1907, we find ourselves in a yet another uncertain time. It has been a challenging year for our community, nation, and the world. But in the midst of the uncertainties around us, it might be comforting to remember Gibson's inspiring words and draw strength from them in caring about our fellow human beings and the environment. As people of different faiths came together that day to welcome Cardinal Gibbons, might we still find the strength and the same solidarity to do what is right and good.

Especial thanks to *College of the Holy Cross Archives and Special Collections* for letting us access and publish the picture as our journal cover.

Brett A. Cotter is a senior History and Music double major from Sterling, Massachusetts, whose History thematic concentration is Resistance, Revolution, and Reaction. In addition to conducting historical research as part of the Charles Weiss Summer Research Program in 2017, he has also been a cellist in the Holy Cross Chamber Orchestra for his entire college career and has participated in numerous chamber music ensembles. An avid history lover from a young age, Brett studies history in the belief that through a thorough analysis of the past we can come to a better understanding of our place in the present.





# Introduction

## Understanding the Rhythm of History

*Of Life and History* continues to provide a scholarly platform for students to engage in dialogues with the past. At the same time, the journal, owing to its young age, faces many challenges. First and foremost, it is not yet widely known on campus. Second, we are still tweaking policies and timeline for the journal publication hence the delay in publication this year. That being said, these challenges have also allowed the journal to grow and mature and have been a rewarding experience to be a part of this project.

2019 has been a particularly trying year for the students, faculty, and administrators at Holy Cross. In February students organized the largest protest in campus history, staging a peaceful sit-in outside President Borough's office, to demand transparency and the appointment of an external investigator to look into the various sexual misconduct allegations on campus. The faculty added their support to the urgency of an external investigation. In the midst of these *The Spire* regularly produced an impressive student led investigative journalism to further shed light on these difficult issues. As citizens and members of the Holy Cross community, it is important that we take note of these developments around us and speak out against injustice.

The essays in *Of Life and History* touch upon some of these similar issues of politics of gender and prejudice. Taken together, the essays highlight the limitations of understanding the past through a singular lens, particularly when we neglect the voices of the historical actors. *Problematic Modell for Success*, winner of the Edward F. Wall, Jr. Prize, by Joshua Whitcomb, questions the validity of equating the East Germany's communist government with Nazism. Whitcomb argues that such a simplistic plotline not only trivializes the experiences of East Germans, it lumps both communism and Nazism in the same category thereby failing to probe the layered experiences of the people under communism in the East Germany.

Victoria Tutino's *Stay at Home Soldiers*, teases out the intersection of gender and domesticity during the World War II. While historians have viewed the women, who entered the workforce during and after the WWII as pioneering feminists who broke the gender barriers, Tutino using the words of these women, shows they did not view themselves that way. Kiana Cardenas '19 makes a similar observation in her essay, *From "Companionate Wife" to Feminist Pioneer*. Jamaican activist and journalist Amy Jacques Garvey did not consider herself a feminist, even when she spearheaded women's empowerment through Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. It is thus important that we seek to understand historical actors on their own terms.

My work, *Mysterious Moralism*, looks at how a dialectical relationship between action and intention of a historical actor can produce an intended development. Anthony Comstock's attempt to create a moral society through a regulation of sexual mores had an inverse effect, instead creating a more sexually open society that had far reaching consequences.

The pieces by Declan Cronin and the Aaron Wolf further emphasize the urgent need to correct scholarly and common biases in challenging the western centric understanding of progress and how our culture invents the "other". Together the essays in this volume highlight the living aspects of the past and along the way remind us of the constant need to apply corrective lenses if we intend to do justice to its nuances. At the least, they show that even when we think we may already know so much about the past, it still holds surprises and new discoveries once again make us humble about the intricacies of the past.

*Of Life and History* has been made possible by the generous support of History Department. In particular, the professors have been an invaluable resource; advertising the journal in their classes, encouraging their students to submit their works, and working with them during the editing process to fine tune the final drafts. Professor Sanjog Rupakheti, the faculty advisor for *Of Life and History*, has been a tireless supporter of this project since its inception. He has guided us, investigated new ideas with us, and allowed us the space to grow the journal. His professional insights into publishing academic works have been the backbone of our publication. The Editorial Board and their diligent, professional, and creative work ensured the quality of the journal. Without their perseverance, the journal would not have come together in its present form. I would also like to extend a thank you note to all those gave us the opportunity to consider their work for publication. While we could not publish all of them, we read each of them carefully and learned a lot from each submission. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of Lisa Villa '90, Digital Scholarship Librarian, who has played a tremendous role in maintaining *Of Life and History's* online presence.

Gabriella M. Grilla '19  
College of the Holy Cross  
Editor-in-Chief, *Of Life and History*

# Bandera

## (Re) Building Ukraine National History

Aaron R. Wolf '19

### Introduction

In Ukraine, national history is the subject of high stakes political maneuvering, without a specific view that can be agreed upon. Ukraine has long struggled to define itself as an independent nation with a unique national identity, in part because it was historically used as a battleground for the conflicts of far greater imperial powers, because the territories themselves were ethnically diverse. What we know as Ukraine today was for most of its history a collection of multi-ethnic territories divided amongst several empires. Ukrainian history begins with Kievan Russ in the tenth century, arguably the first time Ukraine held its own identity. After the reign of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century, the territories were then divided up between the Russian Empire and the state of Poland-Lithuania. By the twentieth century Ukraine was invaded by the Germans and was eventually incorporated into the Soviet Union. The borders of Ukraine have always been in flux.<sup>1</sup> Ukraine was never truly a nation-state, and since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 it has tried to form its own identity, while still trapped between two competing European powers: Russia and the EU.

At the center of Ukraine's most recent struggles to form a national identity is a man that is remembered as a heroic freedom fighter to some and a genocidal monster to others: Stepan Bandera (1909-1959). An ultra-nationalist Ukrainian partisan, he fought before, during, and even after the Second World War for the creation of an independent Ukrainian nation-state, and was willing to use violent, terroristic methods to accomplish his goal. Whatever their sympathies, most historians agree that he took advantage of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union to begin partisan warfare against the Red Army, while allying himself with the Germans, who many of Bandera's followers saw as liberators. His forces would go on to commit numerous atrocities against native Polish and Jewish populations in the name of creating an ethno-nationalist Ukrainian state. After the war, Bandera fled to West Germany to escape the Soviet invasion and continued working with partisans and other anti-communists to fight against the Soviets until his assassination in Munich in 1959 by a KGB agent.

Thereafter, the cult of Bandera grew amongst the Ukrainian diaspora and spread throughout the West, conjuring him up as a nationalist icon and a staunch

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<sup>1</sup> Ishaan Tharoor and Gene Thorp, "Maps: How Ukraine Became Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, Published March 9, 2015.

enemy of communism. For them the fight for an independent Ukrainian nation outside of the Soviet sphere was still ongoing, as Ukrainian nationalist partisans continued using guerilla warfare against the Red Army in Galicia and Western Ukraine. Since communism was now the next major threat to the West, Bandera and his movement could be packaged in a way that would appeal to Americans and British in need of people to support against the Red Menace. Bandera was emblematic of violent resistance to communism, which, while a positive for the Western powers, was seen rather negatively by the Russians/Soviets. For them, he was still the symbolic leader of anti-communist activity and a supporter of fascism. It is somewhat ironic that during this time both the West and the Soviets emphasized his history fighting against the Red Army, and generally ignored the atrocities that he and his followers committed during the war (or in the case of the Soviets, focused on them insofar as they were crimes against Soviet citizens).

In 2014 a rupture occurred in Ukrainian politics that led to the resurgence of Bandera in the discussion of what constitutes Ukrainian national identity. Some of those in the western territories of the country wanted to use Bandera to try to build up the legacy of Ukraine as being separate from the Soviet Union and Russia. Others, namely members of radical rightwing Ukrainian political parties and affiliations, worship him as a fascist icon while marching through the streets of cities with banners that evoke Nazi imagery. For the Russians (and most eastern Ukrainians), this twofold use of Bandera's image allowed them to cast all Ukrainian nationalists as Nazis or Nazi sympathizers, drawing a direct line back to the partisans fighting in Ukraine during and after the end of WWII. They could argue that the nationalists are just as threatening now as they were back in the 1940s.

This image casts a long shadow over contemporary Ukrainian politics. Bandera has been embraced by many Western Ukrainians and much of the government as a national hero to be honored and glorified. However, in Eastern Ukraine and Russia he is constantly shown as a Nazi collaborator in an attempt to delegitimize the Ukrainian government, the members of which are simultaneously called "Banderites" (a pejorative term meant to signify them as Nazis).<sup>2</sup> The Russians see him as a way to easily write off the post-Maidan Ukrainian government as fascists in the vein of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN – the organization that Bandera would eventually lead during and after the war), calling forth the myth of the Great Patriotic War in Russian culture.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Bandera became a rallying cry for many Ukrainian protesters in the wake of the Maidan revolution to try and counter the Russian government's coverage of the event, which tried to

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<sup>2</sup> "Ukraine Struggles to Reinterpret Its Wartime Past." *The Moscow Times*, Published May 24, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Edele, "Fighting Russia's History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II," *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past*, Published Sept. 22, 2017, 95.

blanketly label the protesters as far-right.<sup>4</sup> The the crux of a fight being held in Ukraine today is over what role the nation will have in the world going forward and whether it will lean culturally and politically towards the East or the West.

How the country will find unity as a nation or gain greater acceptance in the rest of Europe with such a controversial figure at the heart of their new national identity remains to be seen. Yuliya Tsymbal, a twenty-two-year old citizen of the western-Ukrainian city of L'viv, views Bandera in a more symbolic way. To her, he is symbolic of strength and the powerful belief in an independent Ukraine in the face of suffering and death. Though she disagrees with his methods, she stands by his beliefs, seeing in him a kind of spirit of Ukraine and a man that fought for their freedom in a fight that continues to this day. In her words, the Ukrainians fight for their freedom because they are not weak, and those that are weak are on the side of Russia.<sup>5</sup>

There is a risk in trying to build a nation around a controversial figure, and Yuliya's views are certainly not shared by all. In a poll entitled "Nostalgia for the USSR and Attitude to Individual Figures" taken in 2014 only months after the Maidan revolution, almost half of all Ukrainian citizens reported having a negative attitude towards Bandera (48%), while only 31% had a positive one. This gap in public opinion grows wider when divided along geographic lines as 76% of Western Ukrainians have a positive attitude towards him, compared to only 8% in the East (the negative attitudes are 12% and 70% respectively).<sup>6</sup> Based on these numbers, the myth of Bandera, contrary to the stated goals of its propagators, is doing far more to accentuate the divide between East and West Ukrainians than to bridge it. It is being weaponized by both the Ukrainians and the Russians in order to gain sympathy for their cause and justify their political positions. The image of Stepan Bandera as a fighter for a modern Ukraine apart from Soviet influence and the problematic history of Ukrainian nationalism has been and is being shaped today by the politically charged rhetoric and actions of Ukrainian, Russian, and even Western governments and media. The dual image of Stepan Bandera as both a national hero and a Nazi collaborator as depicted by the Ukrainian and Russian governments to shape the geopolitical climate of Ukraine, pushing it either towards the East or the West, begs the question: are Ukrainian Nationalists dangerous?

### **Existing Arguments**

Much of what is said about Bandera, particularly in the last four years since the Maidan revolution and the annexation of Crimea, has been influenced by the

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Bateson, "Ukraine and Poland's History Wars Are a Gift For Putin," *Foreign Policy*, Published Jan. 24, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Yuliya Tsymbal, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> "Interfax: Almost half of Ukrainians have negative attitude to Bandera – poll." *Interfax*, Published May 6, 2014.

political agenda of whoever is saying it. Russian media and sources have continued to parrot lines about him that follow a formula that can be traced back to the Soviet Union. Having been a symbol before, during, and after the war for an independent Ukraine, and having fought the Soviets virulently throughout that time, Bandera and his acolytes were consequently painted as fascists and anti-Semites by the Soviet press in the post-WWII era, responsible for pogroms against Jews and Poles alike in western Ukraine. During the war Soviet Ukrainian newspapers first referred to Ukrainian nationalists negatively as “Banderites,” and Nikita Khrushchev, then first secretary of the Communist Party in Ukraine, called them “Ukrainian-German nationalists” and “Hitler’s Henchmen.”<sup>7</sup> But what was once used for Soviet propaganda has now become another tool in the Russian propaganda machine to incite hatred against the current Ukrainian regime.<sup>8</sup>

Much of this also stems from the way most Russians, particularly President Vladimir Putin, view World War II, or “The Great Patriotic War.” For Russians, their victory over Nazism has become the cornerstone of the kind of “positive nationalism” promoted by Putin that unites citizens through a shared history.<sup>9</sup> It was even enshrined into law in May 2014, most likely spurred on by events in Ukraine, by way of criminalizing certain critical views about the Soviet Union during the war. Known as the “memory law,” any “lies” expressed publicly with the intent to deceive can today land a person with a hefty fine or even jail time.<sup>10</sup> For example, the law was invoked for the first time in December 2014 against a man who shared an article on *Vkontakte*, a Russian social media site, entitled “15 facts about the ‘Banderovtsy,’ or: What the Kremlin is Silent About.” The post claimed that both Germany and the Soviet Union together attacked Poland on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939 and begun WWII. Any historian would recognize this post as being essentially correct, in that it was referencing the Nazi/Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939. However, Russian courts declared it libelous on one technicality: the Nazis invaded Poland on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September from the West, but the Soviets would wait for another sixteen days before invading from the East. As such, the court found the post to be a lie, unjustly tarnishing the USSR with what should remain Germany’s exclusive war guilt. They were also able to prove that he shared this article with the intent to deceive by showing that he had achieved the equivalent of a “B” in his high school history course; therefore, he should have known better. The writer was convicted and fined.<sup>11</sup>

Ukraine, however, can also be accused of promoting certain versions of history. For example, Volodymyr Viatrovykh, appointed by President Petro

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<sup>7</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 363-365.

<sup>8</sup> Josh Cohen, “The Historian Whitewashing Ukraine’s Past,” *Foreign Policy*, Published May 2, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Edele, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, 93-95.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, 90-93.

Poroshenko to the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, is currently attempting, many Western journalists and historians claim, to whitewash the history of the OUN and its militarized wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).<sup>12</sup> Viatrovych and his supporters argue that they are only attempting to rectify the historical record in light of Russian propaganda. But in reality, these measures play into the hands of those claiming that the people running the country are Nazi sympathizers. In May 2015 Ukraine even finally broke with Russia on celebrating the end of the Second World War: rather than celebrating on May 9, or “Soviet Victory Day” with the Russians, the Ukrainian government decided to start early on May 8, celebrating “A Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation” with the rest of their would-be European compatriots. They have even stopped referring to the conflict as the “Great Patriotic War,” with President Poroshenko opting instead to use “Patriotic War” to describe the fight against the eastern Ukrainian separatists.<sup>13</sup> The Ukrainian government have even began legislating history to favor national myth-making, as will be explored later in this paper.<sup>14</sup> They want to recast Ukraine historically as being victims of the Soviet system, as opposed to the mutual partners that the Russians saw them as. In the current political climate and the conflict with Russia, those with an interest in furthering the goals of either side tend to either play up the collaborationist nature of the Ukrainian nationalists or downplay it. Bandera, naturally, plays a central role in these debates.

The historiography on Bandera and Ukrainian Nationalism is shaped by the politics of memory; that is, how World War II and Stepan Bandera are viewed by both Ukraine and Russia alike. As demonstrated above, these views are often in conflict with one another. The work of Professor Tarik Cyril Amar is noteworthy for being decidedly critical of Ukraine’s attempts at national myth-making around Bandera and the OUN/UPA.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, scholars such as Timothy Snyder promote a decidedly pro-Ukraine and anti-Russia view of history, specifically defending the reputation of the Maidan revolution as a popular uprising of people fed up with the corruption of President Yanukovich, and decrying what he claims is Russian propaganda, claiming that it was all a coup by modern-day Nazis.<sup>16</sup> Combine this with the differing journalism on the Ukraine/Russia crisis that is seen as propaganda on both sides and is constantly trying to invoke history to prove the other side is worse, and trying to get a clear picture of the situation becomes mired in politics and “fake news.”

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “Ukraine Struggles to Reinterpret Its Wartime Past.” *The Moscow Times*, Published May 24, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> “Poroshenko Signs Legislation Banning Communist, Nazi Propaganda.” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Published May 15, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Tarik Cyril Amar, “Another Conflict in Ukraine: Differing Versions of History,” *Time*, Published Feb. 12, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Snyder, “Ukraine: The Haze of Propaganda,” *The New York Review of Books*, Published March 1, 2014.

## Bandera and WWII

To be able to understand the current discourse in Ukraine and Russia about Stepan Bandera and Ukrainian nationalism, one must first understand Bandera himself, the OUN/UPA organization(s) that he supported, and how they have divided Russian and Ukrainian discourse on whether they were fascist collaborators or freedom fighters against the Soviet incursion. Stepan Bandera was born on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1909, to Andrii Bandera, a Greek Catholic Priest, and Myroslava Bandera, who would die of tuberculosis when Stepan was twelve.<sup>17</sup> During World War I his father fought for the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state, and due to the death of his mother and the patriotic and religious zeal of his father, Stepan's upbringing most likely had a decided effect on his political outlook, helping form the conservative idealism that would characterize his nationalism.<sup>18</sup> He was a member of various patriotic youth organizations throughout his schooling years, and after graduating high school in 1927 and beginning his college studies in Lviv he officially joined the OUN in 1929. During this time not much studying was to be had, as Bandera himself admitted: "I invested most of my time and energy during my student years in revolutionary national-liberation activities."<sup>19</sup>

Bandera was not one for conciliatory tactics, and this made him appear admirable to some and heinous to others. Evidently his fanaticism for "national-liberation" developed quite early on in his life, as he was prone to push pins underneath his nails, use an oil lamp to burn himself, and crushed his hands between a door and doorframe, all of which he described as preparation for torture sessions by the Polish authorities that he anticipated could be in his future.<sup>20</sup> After rising through the ranks of the OUN in the early 1930s, Bandera, once commander, required that all members attend military training courses, and that the organization as a whole become more effective at distributing propaganda while increasing terrorist attacks. Bandera also ordered the political assassinations of Poles, Soviet emissaries, and even "traitorous" Ukrainians.<sup>21</sup> Shortly after the Nazis fully came to power, Bandera was arrested and put on trial in Warsaw in 1934. Bandera was convicted along with several of his co-conspirators and sentenced to death for his hand in the assassinations of Polish officials, including that of the Polish Minister for the Interior, Bronislaw Pieracki, though this was commuted to life imprisonment. After a second trial in Lviv for acts of terrorism, he remained imprisoned until September 1939 when the Germans occupied Poland and leaders of the OUN were released. Due to the assassination of the former OUN leader in 1938 by the Soviets,

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<sup>17</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 92-94.

<sup>20</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 95.

<sup>21</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 99-100.



and with no overwhelmingly popular choice to replace him, the OUN split into two factions: one under Andrii Melnyk, a diplomatic statesman, and the other under the far more radical and violent Stepan Bandera.<sup>22</sup>

Historical debates continue to rage on Bandera's direct or indirect involvement with the Nazis. The debates in Ukrainian historiography center around two key events: the creation of two Ukrainian military units under the control of the Germans and headed by Roman Shukhevych (the eventual commander of the UPA), and the declaration on June 30, 1941, of an independent Ukrainian state by Yaroslav Stetsko, a comrade of Bandera's. At the time of the declaration, Bandera was in Krakow where the Germans had established the Ukrainian Central Committee to organize youth organizations in the General Government (territory encompassing Poland and its west-Ukrainian lands), which was headed by Volodymyr Kubiivych, who was not a member of the OUN, but shared similar political beliefs and trusted that the Nazis were the best allies the Ukrainians could have.<sup>23</sup> Several historians argue that the OUN-B (B for Bandera's wing) were doubtlessly collaborated with the Nazis during this time which was evident in the declaration by Stetsko claiming that the Ukrainian state would have a direct connection with Germany and that "Adolf Hitler is creating a new order for Europe and the world." Others argue that there are German documents that conclusively show that the OUN-B were fighting the Nazis during this period.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless, what is agreed upon is that after the declaration of Ukrainian Independence on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the Germans had Bandera and most of the leaders of the OUN-B arrested and detained at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp while disbanding the Ukrainian military formations and executing many other members. Unfortunately for them, Hitler and the Nazi leadership still found the Ukrainians to be members of an inferior race of Slavs and allowing them their own totalitarian state in the vein of Croatia and the Ustaše was never in the cards. Consequently, Bandera spent a considerable part of the war living in isolation in a concentration camp (though relatively comfortably) while the UPA was formed under Shukhevych, and ultimately would have little if any control or influence over the OUN during the key years of the war. After the war he remained the nominal leader of the OUN while operating out of West Germany, where he worked with other anti-communist organizations until his death in 1959 in Munich by a Soviet assassin.<sup>25</sup>

After the war, the myth of the Ukrainian nationalists and the cult around Stepan Bandera began to grow. Ukrainian nationalists who had fled to the West created a myth of the Ukrainian national freedom fighters. Interestingly, these Ukrainian nationalist argued that they had always supported Western liberal

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<sup>22</sup> Marples, 559-560.

<sup>23</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 169.

<sup>24</sup> Marples, 561.

<sup>25</sup> Marples, 561-562.

democracy.<sup>26</sup> Because they appeared anti-communist/Soviet at the time, the West overlooked the OUN's previous political track record. As such, he OUN émigrés glossed over anti-Semitism or fascistic tendencies from their Ukrainian nationalist narrative.<sup>27</sup> The death of Bandera in 1959 sent shockwaves through the Ukrainian diaspora and his supporters reinvigorated his memory, printing articles and obituaries in the Ukrainian language newspapers across western countries such as Great Britain and Canada, hailing him as “a true patriot” and “a national hero.” He was shown as “a fearless opponent of both the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.” Any mention of Nazi collaboration or of the war crimes perpetrated by the OUN/UPA were dismissed as Soviet propaganda, or an attack from Poles or Jews.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ukraine After Communism**

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and both Russia and Ukraine found themselves as newly separate nations, the idea of both having separate national identities remained a somewhat alien concept, to foreigners and Ukrainians/Russians alike. Presidents Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine remained very close partners during the late nineties, with both being the political kingpins of the oligarchical cronyism that took over their respective countries. In June 1997, Yeltsin travelled to Kiev to meet Kuchma and finally signed the long gestating “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership,” with the goal of increasing trade and joining their “military, financial, and tax policy.” Most importantly, and at least somewhat ironic considering current events, the treaty was meant to ensure the “territorial integrity and sovereignty” of the Crimean Peninsula for another decade. Yeltsin said afterward that Russia had no intention of claiming any part of Ukraine and that both are independent democracies. This was all done just a week after Russia signed an agreement recognizing that former Eastern bloc countries have the right to join NATO.<sup>29</sup>

However, the figure of Bandera and the OUN/UPA remained a powerful image of resistance in the Ukraine against the view from Russia that regarded Ukraine was no more than “little Russia”. One of the areas that has become a flashpoint in Russian and Ukrainian reading of history is the great grain famine of 1932-1933, known in Ukraine as the Holodomor. Just as recently as October 3, 2018, as US relations with Russia hit a new low, the United States Senate adopted a resolution that unequivocally stated that the famine was an act of genocide on the part of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin against the Ukrainian people. Passed on the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famine, it ostensibly “serve as a reminder of repressive Soviet policies against the people of Ukraine.” This decision on the part of the Senate is most likely a shot

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<sup>26</sup> Kolinitsky Thesis.

<sup>27</sup> Kolinitsky Thesis.

<sup>28</sup> Rossoliński-Liebe, 407-410.

<sup>29</sup> Floriana Fossato, “Russia: Kremlin Chooses Pragmatic Approach – An Analysis,” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Published June 9, 1997.

across the bow intended to provoke Russia, where historians have refused to use the word “genocide” to describe the event. They argue that Ukrainians were not killed for their nationality and both Russian and Ukrainian peasants perished together in what was essentially a war against the countryside to allow rapid industrialization of the cities. Currently the EU only refers to the Holodomor as “an appalling crime.”<sup>30</sup> To get the Holodomor recognized as a genocide, engineered by the Soviets, has been the goal for certain Ukrainian organizations since the Ukrainian parliament ratified the law “On the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine” on November 28, 2006. The website for Holodomor Victims’ Memorial National Museum includes a detailed history of the event, an argumentation on why the Holodomor was a genocide based on the UN Genocide Convention of 1948, and a list of all nations, states, and interstate organizations that have in any way legally recognized the Holodomor as a genocide.<sup>31</sup>

In the Putin era, Russia and Ukraine had a more complex relationship. Russia and the EU became Ukraine’s two primary trading partners (first and second respectively). There were many Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine that wanted a continued close relationship with Russia, but many younger and urban Ukrainians preferred breaking away from Russian influence and gravitate towards Europe. The two competing visions collided in the political event known as the Orange Revolution.

The Orange Revolution attempted to bring Ukraine closer to the West. It was centered around the presidential election in November 2004 between Viktor Yanukovych, the prime minister and hand-picked successor to the previous president, Leonid Kuchma, and the opposition leader and former chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine/prime minister Viktor Yushchenko. Yanukovych was the favorite of the Ukrainian oligarchs and that of the Kremlin. He received massive support in Eastern Ukraine particularly as a result of unanimously positive coverage from the oligarch-owned cable media stations. Yushchenko, as prime minister on the other hand had built a reputation as one of the only few Ukrainian politicians dedicated to honesty and integrity.<sup>32</sup> He drew his support primarily from Western Ukraine, and favored closer ties with Europe, effectively turning the election into a referendum on Ukraine’s geopolitical alignment.<sup>33</sup>

There was a massive voter fraud and Yanukovych won by a margin of 1.1 million votes. Soon the November election and the Orange Revolution (named after the color for the Yushchenko campaign) drew international attention as nations

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<sup>30</sup> Najarian, Mark. “U.S Senate Says Stalin ‘Committed Genocide’ In Famine-Hit Ukraine.” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Published Oct. 5, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> National Museum “Holodomor Victims’ Memorial,” <http://memorialholodomor.org.ua/eng>

<sup>32</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, “Ukraine’s Orange Revoulution,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 2, March-April 2005, 40-46

<sup>33</sup> William Schneider, “Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution,” *The Atlantic*, Dec. 2004.

around the world threw their hats in the ring either in support of Yanukovych or Yushchenko. Europe and the US regarded the election rigged against Yushchenko. Secretary of State Colin Powell went so far as to say: “If the Ukrainian government does not act immediately and responsibly, there will be consequences for our relationship.” Putin backed Yanukovych but when the Ukrainian Supreme Court issued a verdict for a fresh round of voting, he mocked the decision. Putin accused the US exercising a “dictatorial” foreign policy. Many Russians and eastern Ukrainians believed that the Americans orchestrated and financed the Orange Revolution protests.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Maidan Crisis: Russia and Ukraine’s Information War**

2014 became a turning point in Ukrainian-Russian relations. It marked not just the greatest territorial conflict in Europe in the twenty first century and setting in motion the Ukrainian civil war, but also an “information war” between Ukraine and Russia, with the figure of Stepan Bandera playing a key role in defining the political goals of both sides. The post-2014 Poroshenko government ushered in by the Euromaidan protests, and whose support comes primarily from Western Ukraine, have rallied around the “myth” of Bandera and the Ukrainian Nationalists of the Second World War in the face of growing opposition and rhetoric from the Russians and Eastern Ukrainians. The Russian media news coverage has since branded Ukraine as a fascist state run by alleged Nazi sympathizers.

In order to spread their message that Ukraine is in an imminent danger of being a failed state run by fascists, the Russian media collectively, including its international English-language outlet Russia Today, have painted the present Ukrainian government, the Maidan protestors, and West Ukraine in extreme negative a light. Bandera and the Ukrainian nationalists, in particular, have been the easy target of these Russian led media campaigns. In the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea, Putin told the Crimean population that he was rescuing them from the new Ukrainian government, whose members are the “ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler’s accomplice during World War II,” and would be prepared to use violence against ethnic Russians, just like the Nazis and their Bandera collaborators had done.<sup>35</sup> As recently as October 15, 2018, Russia Today posted an article about a left-wing British blogger by the name of Graham Phillips who allegedly travelled to Munich, Germany to desecrate the grave of Stepan Bandera and placed a sign on it that stated: “Ukrainian Nazi Stepan Bandera buried here.” Defending himself, he invoked a German law that prohibits the use of swastikas and other Nazi or fascist symbols. The grave was covered in Ukrainian flags, but as others noted, no such

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<sup>34</sup> Schneider.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Faiola, “A ghost of World War II history haunts Ukraine’s standoff with Russia,” *The Washington Post*, Published March 25, 2014.

symbols. Russia Today used this decidedly small-scale event to remind its readers of the atrocities of Bandera, and the way Ukrainian state elevates him as a national hero, allowing rallies in his name by nationalist sympathizers in numerous Ukrainian cities.<sup>36</sup>

Other than Russia Today no other news outlets reported about the incident. The closest equivalent to be found was a similar report by *Business Insider* about Bandera's grave being desecrated in August of 2014, the night before the German Foreign Minister was to meet with the foreign ministers of France, Russia, and Ukraine to discuss the Ukrainian crisis. In this case the gravestone was said to have been knocked over and soil was removed from the grave. However, the article noted that the local authorities did not believe that the crime was politically motivated.<sup>37</sup> But the lack of reporting, even on something this inconsequential, provide more ammunition to Russian outlets like Russia Today which then use it against the Western media, painting them as willingly ignoring the problematic history of Ukraine while fascists take over the country.

An article by a Russia-based Irish journalist, entitled "Ukraine has a Nazi problem and a Western media problem", published in Russia Today accused CNN, the BBC, The New York Times, and others Western media outlets for not reporting on what it refers to as "Ukraine's biggest Nazi march of modern times," and thereby resorting to double standards in their reporting on Ukraine and Russia. The piece emphatically argued that Ukraine and Russia are linguistically and culturally similar yet they chose different paths. One led Russia to become "an independent Eurasian power," and the other brought Ukraine economic hardship and led it to embrace Nazi collaborators as national heroes.

Generally, media outlets like Russia Today look for any and all opportunities to portray Ukraine being far worse off than it was pre-Maidan revolution, alongside lambasting the West for creating the Ukrainian crisis. One Russia Today article published in November 2018, evaluating Ukraine five years after the "western backed" Euromaidan revolution, swiftly concluded that the revolution was a "disaster" and "left the country teetering on the edge of becoming a failed state." It highlighted rampant corruption within the Ukrainian government, the comparable poverty of the Ukrainian people with the rest of Europe, and its distinct lack of "European values" as the rising wave of neo-Nazism take to the streets of Ukrainian cities with the tacit approval of Ukrainian officials.<sup>38</sup> Russia Today published an article reporting on a sinkhole opening up on a street in Kiev that nearly

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<sup>36</sup> "Nazi buried here: UK blogger places sign on Ukrainian nationalist icon's grave in Germany." *Russia Today*, Published Oct. 15, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Christine Soukenkal, "Grave of Ukrainian Nationalist Stepan Bandera Vandalized in Germany," *Business Insider*, Published Aug. 17, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> "Five years on from Euromaidan: Did ordinary Ukrainians benefit from the Western-backed 'revolution?'" *Russia Today*, Published Nov. 21, 2018.

swallowed a fire engine as it was racing towards an emergency. The article held the crumbling infrastructure of Kiev water pipelines, and an inept Kievan mayor and his government for the incident.<sup>39</sup> The crassness with which the accident was reported on a rather banal event is indicative of the Russian propaganda machine at work.

As mentioned above, there is more than just a suspicion in these articles that the Western media has a distinct bias and narrative that they are trying to push. In November of 2018 *Russia Today* reported that the same journalist, Graham Phillips, that had vandalized Stepan Bandera's grave in Munich, had been banned from Twitter despite any evidence of the "hateful content" necessary to be in violation of Twitter's guidelines. Due to his reporting on eastern Ukraine and his perceived bias towards the separatists, Phillips had made many enemies, leading to his detainment in May 2014 by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and subsequent expulsion from the country. RT has compared his removal from the social media giant with the silencing of other "alternative voices" such as Infowars host Alex Jones and leader of the Nation of Islam Louis Farrakhan.<sup>40</sup>

On the other end, Ukraine is manufacturing its own propaganda. This is most evident in the rewriting of history hailing Stepan Bandera and the OUN/UPA as national heroes in order. Such a narrative is inconsistent with the pro-West positions of the Ukrainian government. The Ukrainian government presents the Bandera and his ilk as freedom fighters, while the eastern-Ukrainian separatists are referred to as "terrorists." This revisionist history is exemplified in the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINP), which is responsible for the "implementation of state policy in the field of restoration and preservation of national memory of the Ukrainian people."<sup>41</sup> Under the tutelage of Ukrainian historian Volodymyr Viatrovysh, UNIP has selectively appropriated history to encourage "the development of patriotism and national consciousness among Ukrainian citizens."<sup>42</sup> In May 2015, President Poroshenko signed a law that handed over all of the country's historical archives, including the files collected by the KGB and its Ukrainian successor (SBU) over to the UNIP.<sup>43</sup> Scholars fear that an organization with a clear ideological orientation and interest in preserving a particular version of the past may inevitably lead suppress alternative narratives and sources leading towards censorship.

Another aspect of the Ukrainian attempt to counter Russian propaganda through aggrandizing Bandera has led them to defend their version of history from

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<sup>39</sup> "Oops! Fire engine rushing to emergency FALLS into sinkhole (VIDEO)." *Russia Today*, Published Nov. 19, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> "Liberal journalists rejoice as controversial British blogger Graham Phillips banned from Twitter." *Russia Today*, Published Nov. 21, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen.

<sup>42</sup> Gilley, Christopher. "Is the BBC Posting Fake History?" *History News Network*, Published Oct. 28, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Cohen.

Western scholars, whose critical and nuanced perspectives on the past, are seen to be contributing to pro-Russian interpretation of history. For instance, in February 2012, German-Polish historian Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, author of *Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist*, was scheduled to give talks at academic centers in the various Ukrainian cities. All those talks were cancelled on the eleventh hour. A potential threat of violence from the nationalistic far-right Ukrainian political party Svoboda and their supporters were blamed for the cancellations. Svoboda called Rossoliński-Liebe a “liberal fascist”. Andrii Illienko, one of the Svoboda member, calling the historian a German Nazi and supporting eugenics, stated that; “In the past, the Germans told us that we are of inferior race, that our skulls are not the right shape. Now the Germans say that we are of inferior race (today that is called ‘not real Europeans’) because we honor our heroes...”<sup>44</sup> Protesters labelled Rossolinski “ukrainophobe,” a very politically charged term used by the Ukrainian far-right for those that are critical of Ukraine, and “the lying great-grandson of Joseph Goebbels.”<sup>45</sup> The author was put under the protection of the German embassy in Ukraine.

Ukraine has also been disseminating additional propaganda that paints Ukrainian nationalists in the OUN and UPA in positive light. To some extent Western news agencies have provided platforms for such narratives, lending credence to the Russian claims of western media bias. Take for instance an article published by an anonymous author in BBC Ukrainian, titled “Ten Myths of the Ukrainian Revolution.” The article sought to debunk the ten “myths” about the revolution in Ukraine leading to the founding of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR), the short lived independent Ukrainian state in conflict with Poland and the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1921. However, the refutations were not supported by historical facts and the article ended up whitewashing the leadership of the UNR, particularly its pogroms against Jews and Poles. It turned out that the article drew much of its information heavily from UINP, without distinguishing the views of the author from that of the UINP.<sup>46</sup>

The article is symptomatic of UINP led changes to the public discourse on Ukrainian past. A most recent and notable example of this politicization of past manifested in the passing of new legislation by the Ukrainian parliament known as the “de-Communization Laws.” In May 2015, President Petro Poroshenko signed into law a legislation banning the use of both communist/Soviet and fascist/Nazi symbols in the country. The law also condemned the communist government from

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<sup>44</sup> Per Anders Rudling and Jared McBride, “Ukrainian Academic Freedom and Democracy Under Siege,” *the allgemeiner*, Published March 1, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Christian Ganzer, “Viel Aufmerksamkeit Für Historische Vorlesung in Kiev,” *Ukraine-Nachrichten*, Published March 23, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Gilley.

1917 through 1991 as a “criminal regime.”<sup>47</sup> In Ukraine it is deemed illegal to deny the criminal nature of either the Soviet or National Socialist regimes. It is an irony considering that Ukraine was one of the founding members of the USSR in 1917. The legislation seems directed at gaining US/Western approval and angering the Russians. At the same time, it was only one of the first such laws to be enacted. Another legislation, “On the Legal Status and Honoring of the Memory of the Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” mandated that certain historical figures and the organizations must be honored and made it illegal to insult them. In particular, it made it illegal to deny the “legitimacy of the struggle for Ukrainian Independence.” If Volodymyr Viatrovych and the UINP played key roles in drafting these legislations. Yuri Shukhevych, son of the UPA leader, Roman Shukhevych, ensured that both his father and Stepan Bandera would be enshrined as national heroes.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion

The unofficial conflict between Ukraine and Russia continues to this day, and the outcome of that conflict will have reverberations throughout Europe and the US. It is both shaped by and in turn is shaping the competing ideas of nation, national identity. One of the core debates undergirding these processes remain the competing interpretations of the action and role of Stepan Bandera and the OUN/UPA during the Second World War. While evidence clearly shows that Bandera was an ethno-nationalist willing to use terroristic and even genocidal means to establish an independent totalitarian Ukrainian state in the backdrop of the German invasion of Poland, the Ukrainian government, in seeking to separate themselves from the sphere of Russian influence, has recurrently sanitized that problematic past and turned him into a national hero.

Perhaps the question of whether Stepan Bandera was either a Nazi collaborator or a national hero is a bit too simplistic. He was both. Though he is reduced one dimensionally into a Ukrainian Hitler in Russia and much of Eastern Ukraine, many Western Ukrainians view him as a symbol of national unity and strength in the face of Russia’s increased meddling and belligerence. This is equally informed by global politics. The Ukrainian government seeks to present the ongoing conflict as a part of a new Cold War, while the Russians view it another incarnation of “Russophobia.” US and the Western powers tend to overlook the crimes of individuals or groups like Bandera and his cohorts so long as an effort is made to appear nominally “democratic” in the face of an “undemocratic” Russian foe. Time will tell if the policies of Viatrovych and Poroshenko will bear fruit for the national

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<sup>47</sup> “Poroshenko Signs Legislation Banning Communist, Nazi Propaganda.” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Published May 15, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Gilley, Christopher and Per Anders Rudling. “The History Wars in Ukraine Are Heating Up.” *History News Network*, Published May 9, 2015.



education and patriotism they wish to achieve, or if Russia will succeed in sowing descension whereby any reference to the Ukrainian struggle for national independence will be seen as just dog whistling to fascists.

Aaron R. Wolf is a graduating senior of the Class of 2019 from Tenafly, New Jersey. He is a History and German double major, with the *Resistance, Revolution, and Reaction* history concentration. As a junior he studied abroad in Bamberg, Germany for the entire calendar year. He was motivated in writing this paper from his time studying European history and nationalism/nationalist movements.

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# Meet the New Villain, Same as the Old Villain

## The New Cold War in American TV, Film and Video Games

Declan E. Cronin '19

The Cold War ended in 1991. But, the American imagination of Russians continues to be informed by the Cold War framework. Hollywood movies, in particular, played a crucial role in shaping the public perception of the Soviet Union as an existential threat to the western way of life. Take for instance the film *Rocky IV* from 1985, which was ostensibly a narrative about the victory of America over the Soviet Union, represented through US boxer Rocky Balboa's win against a Soviet boxer Ivan Drago. *Rocky IV* was not an exception. Throughout the Cold War, Russians frequently appeared as villains in many Hollywood movies, who were in the end always defeated by the good American heroes.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent rebuilding of the US-Russian relations, one would imagine a gradual disappearance of Russians as primary villains from Hollywood movies.<sup>1</sup> Especially, in light of new threats posed by Islamic Terrorism after 2001. Yet both Hollywood and television productions continue to present Russians as bad guys. Russians as antagonists are as prevalent in Hollywood movies as they were during the height of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> The continued ideological construction of Russians as villains has since found its way into new media platforms like video games. Russians appear as the second and third-most common adversaries (before or after Latin American and Middle Eastern terrorists) in fifty-seven bestselling games from 2001-2013.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the representations of Russians, as foes in film, television, and video games have undergone significant changes since the 1991.

### Historiography: Cold War, Yeltsin Era, Putin's Russia

Understanding those changes require a nuanced exploration of different but interrelated historical developments. The Cold War divided the world into the ideological opposites between the good West and the evil Soviet Union. For decades, the *New York Times*, writing about Soviet actions across the globe, published articles

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<sup>1</sup> "End of the Soviet Union; Text of Bush's Address to Nation on Gorbachev's Resignation," *New York Times* (New York, NY), December 26, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Spring 2017 Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Survey, Q17a-g. 74% of Americans saw ISIS as a "major threat," while only 47% responded that Russia's power and influence was a "major threat."

<sup>3</sup> Brandon Valeriano and Philip Habel, "Who Are the Enemies? The Visual Framing of Enemies in Digital Games," *International Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (2016).

with dramatic headlines like: “Czechoslovakia Invaded by Russians”; “Russians Open Fire on Crowds in Prague”; “President Demands Explanation for Horrifying Act of Violence”.<sup>4</sup> The “orthodox” school of Cold War historiography placed the West on a moral high ground against the Soviet Union for the entirety of the Cold War. It explained away the cases of Western military interventions as examples of the latter defending democracy and freedom.<sup>5</sup> After 1991, the Cold War historiography shifted its focus to understanding the implications of the fall of Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, the Western media embraced the Yeltsin era. But, by the first decade of the new century, historians and journalists began re-evaluating Yeltsin’s rule. They focused on the problems Russia faced under Yeltsin’s presidency. Influential works like *Godfather of the Kremlin* (2000), *Oligarchs* (2001), and *Piratinization of Russia* (2003) shed light on the widespread corruption of the Yeltsin-era. Uncontrolled corruption and organized crime as central aspects of the post-Soviet Russian society continue to shape the narrative arcs of various literary works on Russia. Ben Mezrich’s many best-selling works, some of which have also been developed into popular movies like *The Social Network* and *21*, have further aided in disseminating such narratives through the mainstream media.

When Vladimir Putin assumed power after Yeltsin, Western scholars yet again sought to understand the new ruler and the trajectory of Russia under him. In 2007, Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, Moscow bureau chiefs for the *Washington Post*, published one of the first major works on Putin’s Russia titled, *Kremlin Rising*. Baker and Glasser argued that under Putin’s presidency (2000-2004), Russia moved towards authoritarianism with an uncertain future. Apart from Putin’s meticulously curated biography titled, *First Person*, it is hard to find a scholarly and literacy work that views Russian through a different lens. All influential works on Putin, such as, *The Strongman* (2011), *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (2012), *The Man Without a Face* (2012), *The New Tsar* (2015) draw similar conclusion of him as an authoritarian ruler and Russian society further sliding into deeper organized crime under his rule. While scholars disagree over Putin’s ultimate goals (self-enrichment, a return to Soviet glory, or to undermine the West), they all seem to agree that his political ambitions and decisions pose real risk in de-stabilizing the existing international order.

Notably, in the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea, scholars and politicians alike began describing the West-Russia relation as “New Cold War.” Many argue that the thawing of the conflict after 1991 between the West and Russia is hardening again. But, some disagree with the choice of the phrase “New Cold War.”

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<sup>4</sup> NYT, August 21, 1968; NYT, September 2, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Crapol, “Some Reflections on the Historiography of the Cold War,” *The History Teacher* 20, no. 2 (February 1987): 253-254.

<sup>6</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-4.

to describe the emerging conflicts between Russia and the West.<sup>7</sup> They particularly argue that it inaccurately conflates two distinct historical periods and ideologies into one. The Cold War was a geopolitical and ideological battle between the communist Eastern bloc and the capitalist Western bloc from 1947 till 1991. Currently, neither the West nor Russia is involved in a world domination based on such ideological differences. Robert Legvold argues that unlike the Cold War, the ‘New Cold War’ does not “pit one ‘ism’ against another”. Rather it is largely based on Russia’s perceived alienation from the contemporary West.<sup>8</sup> Despite these conceptual and historical differences, scholars continue to use the term “New Cold War’ to describe the ongoing tension between Russian and the West.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Cold War: A World of Moral Clarity**

Cold War ideology reached the American households through popular television shows like *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends*. While films also played an important role in propagating the good vs evil narrative, their time format of ninety to hundred twenty minutes made them less effective compared to the television shows. The latter unrestricted by the time format of a film, reached American living rooms for years, allowing viewers regular, as well as, prolonged opportunity to develop opinions on characters. Media philosopher Lars Lundsten calls this power of television programming “generated state of affairs.” For example, frequent “images of mutilated corpses in Chechnya may serve as ground for condemnation of the Enemy or as ground for identification of a remote and suffering nation.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, what viewers experience regularly on screen can have a profound impact on how they view the world. In a long-running television show, these effects are further amplified.

*The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends*, which aired for five seasons from 1959 to 1964, featured two Russian-accented villains named: Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale. Both, Natives of Pottsylvania, a fictitious Eastern-bloc country, Boris and Natasha were the nemesis of Rocky and Bullwinkle. Badenov’s name is a play on the name of late sixteenth century Russian czar called Boris Godunov. Over the course of more than one hundred fifty episodes, viewers saw the two Russian villains constantly trying to kill the lovable flying squirrel and moose and carrying out attempts at world domination. It is worth nothing that the Russian villains were presented as cartoonish figures. In the immediate aftermath of the McCarthyism, the

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<sup>7</sup> Aurel Braun, “Tougher Sanctions Now: Putin’s Delusional Quest for Empire,” *World Affairs* 177, no. 2 (July/August 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Legvold, “Managing the New Cold War: What Moscow and Washington Can Learn from the Last One,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 4 (July/August 2014): 75.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Gedmin, “Beyond Crimea: What Vladimir Putin Really Wants,” *World Affairs* 177, no. 2 (July/August 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Lars Lundsten, “Modal Ontology of Television: How to Create Social Objects,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 58, no. 2 (April 1999): 239.

media took a cautious approach in presenting a less militant version of Cold War. The cartoonish caricatures of “diminutive Boris and the vampy Natasha” as the face of the looming Soviet threat” convinced the viewing audience “that there’s really no need to panic.”<sup>11</sup> Yet it was imperative to remind American viewers who the enemy was.

Cold War-era popular entertainment presented Western audiences with a Manichean view of the world in which Russians represented the evil side. The Hollywood movies played an equally important role in further propagating such worldview. Between 1963 and 1987, *Bond* franchise films featured Russian characters as main villains.<sup>12</sup> One of the Russian characters, who appeared in six of those seven movies is General Anatol Gogol. As the fictional head of the KGB, Gogol embodied as a stone-cold, conniving and ruthless character.

The second installment of the *Bond* franchise also explored the idea of the difference, in Western perception, between good violence and bad violence. In *From Russia With Love*, James Bond is pitted against Rosa Klebb, the former head of SMERSH (a formal Russian agency used by Ian Fleming in his novels) who defected to SPECTRE (the fictional, villainous organization largely used as a placeholder for SMERSH in the film series). Klebb, a short-haired, cold woman whose rolled R’s are supposed to imply a Russian accent, is equally determined to both obtain the Lektor (a decoding device) and kill James Bond. Her signature weapon is a lethally-poisoned knife embedded in the toe of her shoe, a Bondesque gadget that reveals itself at the end of the movie when Bond narrowly escapes laceration by its blade. When Q, MI-6’s own inventor, designs a deadly contraption for James Bond, audiences are expected to marvel at the good guys’ ingenuity. Yet, when the villain has their own special weapon, the audience is supposed to see its use as illegitimate or cheating in the pursuit of killing Bond. Consider the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, where the Soviets secretly installed missile bases in Cuba, near the U.S. mainland. This was interpreted as aggressive and incendiary by many in America, but the United States had missiles placed close in Turkey.<sup>13</sup> Rosa Klebb, playing the role of aggressive Russian, is devious in her concealment of her poison-tipped shoe knife, but James Bond, as the heroic West, is admired for his clever attaché case that conceals knives, a rifle, tear gas, and ammunition.

The political end of Western Cold War rhetoric originated from a place of moral superiority, deeply rooted in the idea that the West sought to restore peace in opposition to a belligerent Soviet Union. U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who

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<sup>11</sup> David Klion, “Russia, Hollywood’s Mirror,” *Coda Story*, September 2018.

<https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis/rewriting-history/russia-hollywood-mirror>.

<sup>12</sup> *From Russia With Love* (1963), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *Moonraker* (1979), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), *Octopussy* (1983), *License to Kill* (1985), *The Living Daylights* (1987).

<sup>13</sup> Mark L. Haas, “Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 2001): 263-265.

thoroughly enjoyed Tom Clancy's book *The Hunt for Red October*, recognized the importance of culture during the Cold War. He was also fond of establishing the U.S.'s ethical advantage over the USSR. In what has popularly come to be known as his "Evil Empire" speech, U.S. President Ronald Reagan clearly outlined the moral superiority of the United States as grounded in "the greatness of America in her people, families, churches, neighborhoods, communities—the institutions that foster and nourish values like concern for others and respect for the rule of law under God."<sup>14</sup> The last, and most unapologetically evil Russian villain in the *Bond* franchise is General Orlov, who appears in the 1983 film *Octopussy*. The movie released three months after Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech, through filming having taken place before Reagan delivered his speech, echoes a similar discourse on Russia. The film shows Orlov attempting to rally the members of the military commissariat to support his proposed full-fledged invasion of the West. In doing so, Orlov challenges the détente that had been in place since the early 1970s. General Gogol, thankfully, is there to prevent Orlov realizing his goal. But Gogol represents the good but long past Russia. Orlov, on the other hand, represents the present and future Russia. *Octopussy* was produced in the backdrop of the 1980 Summer Olympics boycott, a time when many Americans thought that the Soviet Union was resorting to violent measures to preserve and advance communism around the globe. Similar to General Orlov's push for a large-scale military invasion, the major reason for the 1980 boycott was the Soviet's December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. A *Daily News* headline in January, 1980 emphasized that the "Soviets must leave Afghanistan in a Month" to avoid an international country boycott. The *New York Times* described, "The War of the Games," stating that "for the games to proceed as if nothing has happened would confirm the Soviet Union in its contempt for world opinion—the more so as the violence in Afghanistan grimly mounts. A boycott is one of the few ways to reach past *Pravda* with a clear message to the Soviet people."<sup>15</sup> The U.S. was leading a global charge to show the oppressed Soviet people the truth. The percentage of Americans that felt Russia was seeking "global domination and will risk a major war to achieve that domination if it can't be achieved by other means" jumped from 18% to 39%.<sup>16</sup>

By 1985, American attitudes of the USSR as a total aggressor, willing to achieve dominance by any necessary means, was well established.<sup>17</sup> The fourth installment of the *Rocky* franchise offers the clearest portrayal of the Cold War, and U.S.-Russian relations, as a fight between good and evil. Ivan Drago, a Russian boxer portrayed by Swedish actor Dolph Lundgren, represents all American fears and

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<sup>14</sup> Ronald Reagan, speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> *Daily News* (New York, NY), January 21, 1980; "The War of the Games," *NYT*, March 28, 1980.

<sup>16</sup> Tom W. Smith, "The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (Summer, 1983): 281.

<sup>17</sup> Roper Poll in Alvin Richman, "Poll Trends: Changing America Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 141-142.

misgivings about the USSR. Before fighting Rocky Balboa in *Rocky IV*, Drago was an Olympic gold medalist (perhaps at the boycotted 1980 Games) and an undefeated (100-0-0 with 100 KO) amateur boxer in the USSR. Born in Moscow, Drago was groomed to be a top fighter in the world, training with the best machines and technology (compared to Rocky, who trained by running up and down the Philadelphia Museum of Art's steps). Director Sylvester Stallone exposes that Drago achieved much of his superhuman ability and stature illegitimately via years of anabolic steroid use. Essentially Drago embodies a fear and perception that many Americans held about Soviet science experiment. From 1981 to 1990, ABC/Washington Post poll showed that more Americans thought the USSR was superior to the U.S. in terms of military strength.<sup>18</sup>

*Rocky IV*'s good-vs-evil motif was built around the idea that the virtuous United States, was fighting the behemoth "Evil Empire," and it was not at all subtle. As a *New York Times* review points out, Sylvester Stallone makes it clear that Rocky's bout with Drago is a Cold War battle of "international diplomacy."<sup>19</sup> Before fighting Rocky, Drago duels Apollo Creed. Creed, dressed in his stars and stripes shorts, is pulverized by his vastly superior opponent. In the end, Drago lands a punch to the head killing Creed. Standing over the lifeless body of Creed in canvas, Drago remarks: "If he dies, he dies". When Rocky, the hard working, all-American fighter, takes on Drago, the film becomes a raw fight between good and evil, between the U.S. and USSR. The boxing ring becomes a Cold War proxy battlefield. As a David like figure, not only is Rocky defending his fallen friend and country, he is fighting against the seemingly goliath Drago who declares that "the defeat of this little so-called champion will be an example of how pathetically weak [American] society has become."

### Post-USSR Russia: A World Without Laws

The Berlin Wall nominally fell on November 9, 1989 four years after *Rocky IV*'s release. By Christmas Day in 1991, the Soviet flag was removed from the Kremlin, never to fly again. A new white, blue, and red flag of the Russian Federation took its place. What changed for Russia was far more than a flag makeover. A massive conglomeration of multiple nation-states, different constellations of governments and institutions that had survived for decades was gone all of a sudden, creating a big void. Rose Brady, the Moscow bureau chief for *Business*, argued this void "provided fertile ground for organized crime," as the Russia mafia grew increasingly powerful in the early-1990s during the uncertain transition period.<sup>20</sup> At the end of January 1996, the head of President Boris Yeltsin's human rights commission, Sergei Kovalev, resigned in disgust. In an open letter published domestically and abroad,

<sup>18</sup> ABC/WP Polls in Richman, "Poll Trends,"143.

<sup>19</sup> Janet Maslin, "Screen: 'Rocky IV,' vs. the USSR," *NYT*, November 27, 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Rose Brady, *Kapitalizm: Russia's Struggle to Free Its Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 149.

Kovalev rebuked Yeltsin and current state in Russia. He explicitly noted that “criminals continue to roam freely,” referring to the mafia’s increasing control over the economy and society.<sup>21</sup>

The USSR’s collapse left in its wake a damaged, seemingly lawless Russia left to fend for itself. When the command economy ceased to exist, all hitherto state-society connections were lost. The large majority of the population who had lived under the command economy felt helpless. According to Marshall Goodman, the mafia gained prominence because their system of connections was not reliant upon or accountable to the government.<sup>22</sup> Because Russian law-enforcement had virtually no control over Russia in the 1990s, the mafia employed extra-legal means of accomplishing their goals.<sup>23</sup> As Paul Klebnikov explains, murder became their preferred form of doing business whereby “Businessmen, instead of deciding their differences in the market or in court, are hiring professional killers and deciding their differences with guns.”<sup>24</sup> This Russia mafia did not go unnoticed in the West. As early as 1992, American and British press began to cover the growing role of organized crime in a newly-capitalist Russia. Reestablishing the moral high ground, western media characterized Russia as a chaotic, lawless hotbed of criminal activity.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, the prototypical Russian antagonist underwent an ideological makeover from an evil enemy to a morally corrupt foe. Perhaps nowhere was this picture of Russian infested with organized crime clearer than in the 2007 film *Eastern Promises*. Set in London, the film explores, as Doris Toumarkine of *Film Journal International* puts it, “a particularly venal branch of the Russian mob...a gang specializing in human trafficking, drugs, and killing on a dime (or ruble).”<sup>26</sup> The Russian mafia members are vory v zakone (thieves in law), an elite echelon of professional Russian criminals born out of Soviet Gulag prison-camps. The vory have always held “hallowed place in Russia’s criminal lore,” but recently have gained Western attention. This is in part due to the notoriety of the post-Soviet diaspora in Western cities, where they continue to engage in crime. But in a much larger sense they “symbolize opposition to the country’s often arbitrary political and legal practices.”<sup>27</sup> In *Eastern Promises*, dialogue between two Vory reveals their contempt for the West, as one expresses frustration over the fact that “the Americans...f\*\*\*\*\*g

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<sup>21</sup> Sergei Kovalev, “The Case Against Yeltsin,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Marshall I. Goldman, *The Privatization of Russia: Russian Reform Goes Awry* (London: Routledge, 2003), 170-171.

<sup>23</sup> Anders Aslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), 167.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin: The Decline of Russia in the Age of Gangster Capitalism* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 2000), 32.

<sup>25</sup> John Rockwell, “Russia’s New Culture Begins to Emerge from Soviet Rubble,” *NYT*, November 11, 1992; “In Ex-Soviet Lands, Gangs Fill Vacuum,” *NYT*, October 25, 1992; Michael Brinyon, “Capitalism gone wild, anarchy and crime fire forces of opposition,” *Times* (London, England), October 5, 1993.

<sup>26</sup> Doris Toumarkine, “Eastern Promises,” *Film Journal International*, September 10, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Vory v Zakone has hallowed place in Russian criminal lore,” *July 29, 2008*.



NATO” interfere with their smuggling supply lines from Russia to the West. In a surprising plot twist, the protagonist, a newly promoted vor named Nikolai Luzhin, reveals himself to be an undercover FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation) agent who has infiltrated the London arm of the mob. With this, *Eastern Promises* establishes that the Russian state is not the enemy; rather, the state is attempting to curtail the rampant Russian organized crime, the true adversary, both at home and abroad.

In 2014, a blockbuster hit, *The Equalizer* starring Denzel Washington continued the Russian mobster trope. The new Russian movie villains focused more on their moral corruptions than the Russian (or communist) identity. Like *Eastern Promises*, *The Equalizer* features ultra-violent Russian mafia members. The two main antagonists, Vladimir Pushkin and Nicolai Itchenko, both reflect the Western perception of Russia as the land of gangster capitalism born in the 1990s. By the late 1990s Americans began to take note that the Russian mafia had extended its reach into Western cities.<sup>28</sup> Both *Eastern Promises* and *The Equalizer* take place in major Western metropolises, London and Boston, respectively. Pushkin and Itchenko are not ideological enemies or purely evil (although they have few to no redeeming qualities), instead the Russians that audiences encounter in *The Equalizer* are mobsters involved in a prostitution ring and other illicit smuggling operations. Unlike *Bond* villains or the ruthless Ivan Drago, these Russian characters are not after world domination. They are not confrontational, or trying to disrupt most people’s day-to-day goings-on. At the end of the day, Pushkin and Itchenko engage in their criminal activity to make money.

A *New York Times* review of *The Equalizer* written by A. O. Scott calls into question where to draw the line on Russian bad guys. “I can’t help feeling a little bit sorry for some of the bad guys,” Scott confesses, “not Puskin and [Itchenko]...but what about the lower-ranking muscle, the bald dudes with tattoos who have to open the doors of the black S.U.V.s and throw first punches at a man they have no way of knowing is really an elite super-assassin? Were they warned about this in the job interview? Do they have health insurance? They’re really just working stiffs, too, and the way they’re treated seems a little unfair.”<sup>29</sup> With his tongue-in-cheek commentary on how some Russian villains are worse than others, Scott plays the role of judge, arbitrating from his place of ethical high ground. It appears, then, that while portrayals of Russian antagonists changed from the Cold War to post-Soviet-era, the Western assertion of moral superiority continues.

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<sup>28</sup> Alison Mitchell, “Russian Emigres Importing Thugs to Commit Crimes in U.S.,” *NYT*, April 11, 1992; Alan Lupo, “A New Breed of Comrades in Arms,” *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), December 10, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> A. O. Scott, “The Equalizer: Heroically Handy With a Corkscrew,” *NYT*, September 25, 2014.

### New Cold War: Same as the Old One?

The New Cold War, a term recently coined by scholars to describe current West-Russia conflict, must be framed differently than the original Cold War. Nonetheless, its use has some benefits, especially when studying the various secondary battlefields that are active today. In recent years, a new kind of Russian adversary has developed in the West given palpable fears of Russia. While the Russian mob is real and certainly active around the globe, Westerners are beginning to see a different side of Russia as a main threat. Contemporary Americans view Russia as a powerful enemy. Between 1999 and 2018, the percentage of Americans that described Russia as an enemy rose from 5% to 29%.<sup>30</sup> While ISIS is currently perceived as the greatest danger to national security, nearly half of America sees Russia as a major threat to the United States.<sup>31</sup> This is partly a product of Russia's ongoing military involvements in Georgia and Ukraine, including its meddling in the 2016 US presidential election. Under Putin, Russia has not shied away from flexing its military muscles to achieve its objectives. The new Cold War, in no small part, is rooted in the Russian military actions in the former republics of the Soviet Union. In August 2008, U.S. President George W. Bush called the Russian invasion of Georgia “unacceptable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” and “jeopardize[d]” its relationship with the West.<sup>32</sup> Six years later NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow stated that “[NATO] must begin to view Russia no longer as a partner, but more as an adversary.”<sup>33</sup>

In the last decade, Russia has extended its reach and interventionist power across the globe via a different kind of warfare. In the mid-2000s, Russia began utilizing cyberwarfare. Before invading Georgia, Russia launched cyberattacks on Georgian servers and hacked the accounts of prominent political figures and financial institutions.<sup>34</sup> Similar attacks were carried out in Estonia in 2007. According to Brian Mazanec, an Acting Director with the U.S. Government Accountability Office's International Affairs and Trade team, “Russia's early cyberwarfare activity... indicate that it is largely unconstrained by restrictive cyber norms and is preparing to use cyberweapons in a wide range of conflicts and against a variety of targets.”<sup>35</sup> In 2011, largely in response to Russian use to cyberwarfare, the Pentagon termed cyberattacks against the United States a potential act-of-war.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gallup Poll, “Please say whether you consider Russia an ally of the United States, friendly, but not an ally, unfriendly, or an enemy of the United States,” April 1999-July 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Spring 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Q17c.

<sup>32</sup> “Moscow threatens Georgia regime, says Bush,” *Financial Times* (London), August 12, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Matishak, “NATO Diplomat: Russia now more an ‘adversary’ than an ally,” *The Hill* (Washington, D.C.), May 1, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> John Markoff, “Before the Gunfire, Cyberattacks,” *NYT*, August 12, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*; Brian M. Mazanec, “Why International Order in Cyberspace Is Not Inevitable,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 87.

<sup>36</sup> Siobhan Gorman and Julian E. Barnes, “Cyber Combat: Act of War, Pentagon Sets Stage for U.S. to Respond to Computer Sabotage with Military Force,” *Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY), May 31, 2011.

Russian cyberwarfare has not been limited to Eastern Europe though. In 2016 the United States experienced firsthand the effect of Russia's newfound method of nonmilitary attacks. In January of 2017, the United States Intelligence Community found that Russia had interfered in the presidential election. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence stated that Vladimir Putin had ordered the use of "cyber tools and media campaigns to influence US public opinion."<sup>37</sup> The campaign launched against the United States was just another attack in a string of non-linear offensives that the Kremlin has launched in recent years. Journalists have begun to call this new hybrid, nonmilitary warfare: Gerasimov Doctrine. Named after General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russia Armed Forces and first Deputy Defense Minister, the phrase is linked to the article, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight," published by Gerasimov in 2013. Molly McKew, summing up the doctrine in *Newsweek*, wrote it is "a vision of total warfare that places politics and war within the same spectrum of activities...guerrilla, and waged on all fronts with a range of actors and tools—for example, hackers, media, businessmen, leaks, and, yes, fake news."<sup>38</sup> It is generally acknowledged that Russia is a demonstrable technological threat.

Even the Marvel comic universe has picked up on the this new fear of Russia's capacity for and willingness to engage in technological warfare. In *Iron Man 2*, a 2010 blockbuster hit, audience encounter a vengeful Russian engineer, Ivan Vanko. Played by Mickey Rourke, Vanko is cold and machine-like who designs suit and drones superior to that made by the protagonist Tony Stark. As a representative of the new breed of Russian antagonists, Vanko is not an ideologically motivated villain.<sup>39</sup> While Vanko's thirst for revenge stems from Stark's role in his father's deportation, which led to his death at the hands of the Soviet Union.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is fond of emphasizing the victimization of Russia at the hands of the United States. James Goldgeier, particularly examines Putin's contempt for the United States' role in Russia's restructuring after the fall of the Soviet Union. He writes, "[Putin] sees the 1990s as one long period of humiliation."<sup>40</sup> Putin seeks to correct that past injustice and re-establish Russia as a major global power. In a speech made following the annexation of Crimea, Putin demanded that the world "accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected."<sup>41</sup> In many ways, Vanko

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<sup>37</sup> United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Intelligence Community Assessment 2017-01D," January 6, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Molly K. McKew, "The Gerasimov Doctrine: It's Russia's new chaos theory of political warfare. And it's probably being used on you," *Newsweek* (New York, NY), September/October 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Lisa Schwarzbaum, "Iron Man 2," *Entertainment Weekly* (New York, NY), June 16, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Crowley, "Putin's Revenge: Humiliated by the 1990s, Russia's strongman is determined to win Cold War 2.0. He may be succeeding," *Politico* (Arlington County, VA), December 16, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Masha Lipman, "How Putin Plays with the Law," *The New Yorker* (New York, NY), March 19, 2014.

perfectly embodies this notion: he displays not only technological proficiency, but also brute force without restraint, justified by serving his own interests and carrying out his personal revenge.

Just as Russian antagonists underwent change in films, their portrayal on television has similarly transformed. Premiered in 2013, *The Americans* has been telling Cold War spy stories from a Russian perspective, offering a nuanced and unique insight on Russian agents carrying out espionage on American soil.<sup>42</sup> *The Americans* follows the story of two Soviet KGB spies, Elizabeth and Philip Jennings, living in the Washington D.C. area with their family during the presidency of Ronald Regan. Set during the Cold War, the show offers a new, current perspective on Russia through a historical lens. Elizabeth and Philip are extremely complex characters that challenge existing notions of stereotypical Russian enemies. They lead very normal American lives. Their deep-cover makes them, even to their FBI counterintelligence agent neighbor, appear American. On the surface, there is no difference between Elizabeth and Philip, two Soviet agents, and any other American citizens. The show humanizes Russian adversary and raises an interesting question as to how different are our enemies from us?

Notwithstanding the show's humanization of Russian characters, it unapologetically reminds and reassures its audience that the U.S. is morally and materially superior to the USSR. Elizabeth is a hardline Soviet operative who is completely bought in on the idea that the USSR is good and America is pure evil. Philip, on the other hand, enjoys his life in America and admits that it is far better than anything Russia can offer. *The Americans* intricately blurs the lines between friend and foe, calling the previously accepted bi-polar morality of the Cold War into question. Elizabeth and Philip are shown to be a cog in the Soviet machine. They are Russian spies. But, they are humans too. Even though Elizabeth is a staunch communist with numerous ideological misgivings about America, she is capable of embodying an archetypical American suburban life.

One could argue that the changing global politics explain some of these developments. Today, majority view both American and Russian leadership to be morally weak. Though U.S. is still the most popular global power, the difference between Russian and U.S. favorability is not as stark as it used to be. A polling data from thirty-three countries reveal that the U.S. favorability has seen a fourteen percent drop between 2014 and 2016.<sup>43</sup> U.S. favorability of fifty percent is not too impressive compared to the second-place China at forty-eight percent and third place Russia at thirty-five percent. As the ideological lines between the once-righteous-superpower United States and once-deplorable Russia continue to blur, American

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<sup>42</sup> I refer to Elizabeth and Philip Jennings as "antagonists" because, despite being the main characters of *The Americans*, they are KGB agents carrying out covert actions against the United States in a U.S. television show.

<sup>43</sup> Spring 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, Q12a, c, e.

media has understandably adjusted its portrayal of Russians.

Video game developers and designers have developed an interesting image of a twenty first century Russian. One of the bestselling video games, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, pits the user against current-day Russian ultranationalists. A major plotline in the 2007 narrative of the game was the rise of the Russian ultranationalist movement. At the outset of the game, a civil war breaks out between a failing Russian Federation government and the ultranationalists, who seek to restore Russia to its former Soviet era glory. The ultranationalists are led by Imran Zakhaev. *Modern Warfare* though fictional touches upon the rising threat of ultra-nationalism in a nuclear armed country, and is perhaps a more accurate reflection of the contemporary Russian politics.

Many argue that “Vladimir Putin is trying to restore the Soviet Union.”<sup>44</sup> This is consistent with several data set that indicate that ethno-nationalism and imperial nationalism are on the rise in Russia. The latter is tied to the growing perception that Russia is no longer a part of Europe.<sup>45</sup> Russians, now more than ever, view themselves as their “own civilization.” The growth of ethno-nationalism is gaining traction due to factors such as illegal immigration from the South Caucasus. Many trace its roots back to Soviet times when “Russia became a state dominated by ethnic Russians.”<sup>46</sup> The 2014 annexation of Crimea, it appears, helped the Kremlin corral the ethnonationalists, as it allowed Putin to “ride two horses: since the population of the peninsula is primarily ethnic Russians it was possible to present this act both as an ingathering of Russian lands in a strong Russian state and as a defence [*sic*] of ethnic Russians abroad.”<sup>47</sup>

*Modern Warfare* takes place where pat the present where players encounter Russian army personnel more than individual Russian characters. In both *Modern Warfare 2* and *Modern Warfare 3*, the ultranationalists seize control of the Russian Federation and launch terrorist attacks across the globe, including a mass shooting in a Moscow airport. Vladimir Makarov, the ex-KGB operative who carries out the shooting does so with the aid of an undercover CIA agent. Aware of the CIA operative’s identity, Makarov kills him and leaves his body in the airport as evidence that the event was U.S.-sponsored. At the end of *Modern Warfare 2*, Ultranationalist-led Russia declares war on and invades the United States. *Modern Warfare 3* opens up in New York City, where the Russian forces have almost completely taken control

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<sup>44</sup> Sam Frizell, “Ukraine PM: Putin Wants to Rebuild Soviet Union,” *TIME*, April 19, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> NEORUSS survey data, 2013 -2014. Russians were asked “Do you consider Russia to be part of European civilization or something else?”

<sup>46</sup> Mikkel Berg, Aadne Aasland and Olga Tkach, “Compatriots or Competitors? A Glance at Rossiyskaya Gazeta’s Immigration Debate 2004-2009,” *Social Sciences Bulletin* 2, no. 11 (2010): 7; Richard Arnold, “Surveys show Russian nationalism is on the rise. This explains a lot about the country’s foreign and domestic policies,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 30, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> *The New Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000-2015*, ed. Pål Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 6.

of the U.S.'s largest city. As video games play a major role in attitude formation, millions of people fighting against modern-day Russian enemies on their Xboxes or PlayStations will have an impact on how they view Russia in real life.<sup>48</sup> Again, culture and politics are intertwined.

### The Villain Speaks

The persistence of Russian adversaries in the Western media has not been lost on the Kremlin. The latter has offered varied response to such Western trope. Putin has made fun of them, embraced them, and at times angrily rejected them. He has admittedly become more comfortable with poking fun at his own regime in efforts to degrade his international rivals. Take, for example, the Russian primetime television show, *Once Upon a Time in Russia*. As the only state-sanctioned political program of its nature, it portrays Putin as a slightly devious character. The show pokes fun “at contemporary Russian life, but in a way that justifies rather than attacks widespread Russian corruption.”<sup>49</sup> Arguably, Putin has realized that a more effective way to diminish the impact of Western criticism of his regime, is to adopt some form of self-deprecation. So, while the West criticizes Russian corruption and prevalence of organized crime, carried out by sex-trafficking mafia thugs in *Eastern Promises* or *The Equalizer* Russian, Putin neutralizes them through comedy.

Neither Putin nor Kremlin are strangers to using state-produced films and to build political legitimacy. Often used to distract the population from negative realities, Russian television shows are hugely popular and deployed by the Kremlin to push a pro-Putin regime agenda.<sup>50</sup> Russian state uses comedy shows to criticize foreign countries and their leaders. In addition to the bumbling Donald Trump impersonator on *Comedy Club*, other state-run programs also use satire to bolster the Putin regime and disparage the West. In 2017, the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence released a 157-page report on Russian state-sponsored comedy shows. It used a case study of *KVN*, a national comedy competition as an example of “a ready-to-act tool of strategic political communication” through its “special relationship with the Kremlin.”<sup>51</sup>

The humor on *KVN* is crafted intricately that both self-deprecates Russian state and legitimizes Putin while degrading America and the West. *KVN* tackles many Western criticisms of Russian by giving its own spin to them. Once such case involves the criticism of Russia for its homophobic legislation. In its 2015 episode, a

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<sup>48</sup> Brandon Valeriano and Philip Habel, “Who Are the Enemies? The Visual Framing of Enemies in Digital Games,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>49</sup> Amie Ferris-Rotman, “Primetime Politics: How the Kremlin Shapes Russian Television,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 12, 2017. Accessed December 8, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Ferris-Rotman.

<sup>51</sup> NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, “StratCom Laughs: In Search of an Analytical Framework,” 2017, 97.

large rainbow U.S. flag comes up on the screen and Russian comedians quip that “the best country in the world is where it will be possible to marry a plant.”<sup>52</sup> *KVN* is particularly fond of comparing Putin to other world leaders, especially American presidents. In 2015, photos of U.S. President Barack Obama and Putin were shown side by side: President Obama riding a bike, polo tucked into his khaki shorts, next to Putin, shirtless on a bear. *KVN* does not shy away from poking fun at the Russian government. This is used to legitimize the Putin regime. In another episode, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov appears and reads his reaction to post-Crimea annexation sanctions. While the words he speaks are serious, the way he delivers them are “overtly sexual, demonstrating that the sanctions against Russia were totally inconsequential, that Russia was standing above them.”<sup>53</sup>

In addition to poking fun at Western criticism and villainization of Russia, another way in which Russia has adopted Western portrayals of Russians, especially in film and television, is through an embrace of the *femme fatale* character. The *femme fatale*, a woman whose seduction ensnares her lover-victims, has been a constant staple of Western depiction of Russian women since the Cold War. In *Rocky and Bullwinkle*, the female Pottsylvaniaian’s name, Natasha Fatale, is a not-so-subtle nod to this notion. The *Bond* films, however, are where *femme fatales* get their most screen time. For decades, Western audiences met various females who, by lowering 007’s guard through seduction, manage to make attempts on James Bond’s life. For example, in *From Russia With Love*, Tatiana Romanova lures Bond from their first meeting, telling him “you’re even nicer than your photograph,” to which Bond replies, “you’re the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen.” From their first exchange to her naked waltz across Bond’s hotel room, Romanova sets up Bond to be entrapped by her commanding officer, Rosa Klebb. Even contemporary television shows as complex as *The Americans* fail to expunge *femme fatale* characterization of Russian women. Less than two minutes into its first episode, audiences witness Elizabeth Jennings seducing an FBI bureaucrat for information.

In 2010, Russia enthusiastically embraced the idea of a Russian *femme fatale* when thousands of fans gave Angelina Jolie the reception of a lifetime at the Moscow premier of *Salt*.<sup>54</sup> *Salt*, which was released in English and Russian and interestingly features both a character Orlov and a shoe-knife, follows the story of a CIA agent who is accused of being a Russian spy. The truth is, however, that *Salt* is a Russian spy, a part of a Cold War-era sleeper cell. Interestingly, the *Salt* character that thousands of Russian fans rallied around was selected to kill the President of the United States. Named the “sexiest woman alive” in 2004 by *Esquire*, Jolie’s portrayal of *Salt* embodies the idea of a *femme fatale* character. The same year that *Salt* was

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<sup>52</sup> NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 113.

<sup>53</sup> NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 110.

<sup>54</sup> Amie Ferris-Rotman, “Angelina Jolie spurs Russian patriotism at ‘Salt’ Moscow show,” *Reuters*, July 26, 2010.

released, the Russian public and the Kremlin celebrated *femme fatale*, who *The Week* called the “real-life” Salt.<sup>55</sup> In June of 2010, eleven Russian sleeper agents, members of the Illegals program, were arrested, accused of “gathering information on American policy and politics.”<sup>56</sup> *The Americans* was loosely based on the Illegals who operated in the United States without diplomatic cover, assuming everyday identities and embedding themselves nondescriptly in various communities. One member of the program, Anna Chapman, gained prominence as many in the U.S. saw her fit the *femme fatale* mold perfectly. In an interview with CNN, an independent producer John Palacio described how Chapman “understood the power of her sexuality.”<sup>57</sup> When Chapman and the other Illegals were exchanged for prisoners held by Russia, Chapman rose to fame overnight. Chapman was personally invited to the Moscow premier of *Salt* by Angelina Jolie. Russia has embraced her *femme fatale* persona. She has become a darling of the tabloids, appearing in racy photo spreads, one of which recently involved her posing with a pistol.<sup>58</sup> Vladimir Putin, who welcomed the Illegals back by singing patriotic songs, is certainly mindful of how Russia can spin and weaponize Chapman’s *femme fatale* to the global audience.

Aside from turning Western depictions of Russia into comedy to lessen their blow, Putin regime has, at times, angrily rejected the West’s criticism. In 2014 when Russian politician and former KGB operative Nikolai Patrushev remarked that “US policy became reminiscent of the Cold War”.<sup>59</sup> As a member of Putin’s inner circle, Patrushev’s interpretation of the current U.S.-Russian relationship likely lends insight into opinion of the leadership. Putin, adept at painting Russia as the innocent victim of Western hypocrisy, has often negatively reacted to how the West continues to see Russia as an adversary. In terms of Russian action in Crimea, Putin wielded a powerful rhetoric when he remarked: “they like us only when we are poor and standing there with a beggar’s bowl...As soon as we start talking about our interests and they start feeling some element of geopolitical competition, well, they don’t like that.”<sup>60</sup>

Putin’s outrage stems largely from his feeling of Russian exclusion, contempt for NATO, and his perception of Western led spread of Russophobia. While Western perpetuation of Russian adversaries may seem benign to some, to Putin it is a sign of increasing global ostracization of Russia. In a June 2017 interview

<sup>55</sup> “Salt: Anna Chapman, the movie?” *The Week* (New York, NY), July 23, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Ellen Barry, “Illegals’ Spy Ring Famed in Lore of Russian Spying,” *NYT*, June 29, 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Bridge, “Western Media Goes Gaga Over Russian ‘Femme Fatale,’” *RT* (Washington, D.C.), July 1, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Russian Spy? Maybe So. TV Darling, Absolutely,” *NYT*, December 30, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Walter Laqueur, “Détente Plus? How Should the West Deal with Russia?” *World Affairs* 178, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 76.

<sup>60</sup> Evan Osnos, David Remnick, and Joshua Yaffa, “Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War: What lay behind Russia’s interference in the 2016 election—and what lies ahead?” *The New Yorker* (New York, NY), March 6, 2017.



with Oliver Stone, Putin's emotions ran high when he asserted: "There is no more Soviet Union, no Eastern Bloc. In my view, NATO needs an external enemy to justify its existence, so there is a constant search for one, and provocations to create adversaries where there are none." For Putin, the continued demonization of Russia serves a vital Western ideology.<sup>61</sup>

### What Now?

In light of new, larger threats and shifting global dynamics, the Russian villain cliché seems to have lost its Cold War gusto.<sup>62</sup> The New Cold War has indubitably brought about a new antagonist in Western media, but the villain remains, nonetheless, Russian. The familiarity of a decade-old enemy—and one that conveniently continues to justify its evolving, but steadfast, role as villain—may have done just enough to keep the Russian antagonist in Western cinema, television, and the newer video game market.

New Cold War battlefields exist today in household televisions, in movie theaters, and on mobile phone. They inescapably surround us, oftentimes without our conscious awareness of their presence. It will be interesting to witness the evolution of the Russian characters in our cultural landscape in the coming years. Will a new enemy replace them eventually? In recent years, countless journalists have called attention to the way Hollywood conjures up enemies. Can we hope to see a reevaluation of this need to constantly construct foreign enemies from within the entertainment industry soon? May be not so easily. After all portrayal of adversaries is of the utmost cultural and political significance because it is through these cultural artifacts deeper beliefs about politics and identities are disseminated in a society.

Declan E. Cronin is a senior history major, with a thematic concentration in *Resistance, Revolution, and Reaction*, and a minor in philosophy. Declan is from Woodland Park, New Jersey, and he is a member of Alpha Sigma Nu (the Jesuit honor society), Phi Alpha Theta (the national historical honor society), Phi Sigma Tau (the international honor society in philosophy), Delta Phi Alpha (the German national honor society), and a Patrick L. McCarthy '63 scholar. Declan is also a pitcher on the Holy Cross baseball team, and, in 2018, wrote an article that was published in Time.

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<sup>61</sup> *The Putin Interviews*, directed by Oliver Stone, written by Oliver Stone, Showtime, June 12-15, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Steven Kurutz, "Russians: Still the Go-To Bad Guys," *NYT*, January 17, 2014.

# Stay at Home, Soldiers

## An Analysis of British and American Women on the Homefront during World War II and the Effects on Their Memory Through Film

Victoria K Tutino '19

Over the past twenty years, stretches of “The Year of the Woman” in 1992 and “The Pink Wave” have infiltrated national dialogue concerning the role of women in society and politics. These periods demonstrated that modern-day women have once again started to rise up as a unit and demand equality. Yet, as political science professor Kelly Dittmar noted back in October, these cycles lead others to believe they represent all women and have urged society to reexamine the role of women in previous eras such as the women of World War Two.<sup>1</sup> However, just like the films about the women of WWII, these cycles only tell part of the story and society needs to examine them cautiously.

While today's society values women's stories more than during the 1940s-1960s, the producers and directors at the time believed their selective decisions portrayed the reality of women. *Mrs. Miniver* (1942) and *Since You Went Away* (1944) attempted to highlight the truth of the Homefront, but propaganda penetrated the script and has led to a misleading depiction of how the war affected women. By 2006, *Housewife, 49* delved into the diaries of Nella Last and the Mass Observation (MO) Archives in a pursuit to showcase the strains of war and the potential emancipatory qualities it possessed. Still, this film leaves the viewers believing they know the entire picture. Society needs these films in order to understand the context of the wartime era, but society must be wary as this medium only explores one side of women's multi-dimensional roles in the public and private spheres of society. Although they captured parts of women's wartime experiences and the societal complex of the time, these films about women and the Homefront in Britain and the United States created the illusion that the viewers knew and now know what the war meant and was like for these women.

In order to get a full sense of what women experienced during the war, a quick look at their various roles and responsibilities will reveal why the three films mentioned above serve as faulty depictions of these women's realities. The Homefront allowed the military to fully engage in war with the male population fighting overseas. Due to labor shortages and women needing money to support

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<sup>1</sup> CBS News, "Looking at 2018's "Pink Wave" - and an Uphill Run for Women," *CBS News*, October 14, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pink-wave-2018-midterm-elections-hillary-rodham-clinton-jahana-hayes-kimberlin-brown-pelzer/>.

their families as men were off fighting, women took on wartime jobs.<sup>2</sup> These women in both the United States and Britain responded to their government's call for aid and support.<sup>3</sup> In Britain early into the war, the government started conscripting women under forty to war work and placed them into mobile and immobile categories.<sup>4</sup> Women volunteered for the Women Voluntary Services, worked in factories, served in the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) or Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), or remained in the home taking care of the family and local duties. However, these women received conflicting advice from their governments which told women to stick to their jobs in the home and to only volunteer and work in their spare time.<sup>5</sup> Also, magazines and advertisements urged women to remain feminine in everything they did and that maintaining a proper household would help defeat Nazism and Fascism.<sup>6</sup> These requests by the state shined through in the 1940s films and even in the diaries of Nella Last in *Housewife*, 49. Moreover, the propaganda of the period and this inconsistent advice engulfed films, leading to oversimplified and overdramatic depictions of women's realities as they coped with wartime traumas such as death and loneliness while maintaining a smile and the image of domesticity.

### Historiographical Understanding

Since the end of the Second World War, historians and writers have published a prolific amount of literature on WWII women and on the Homefront. Discoveries in attics, newfound appreciation of the Mass Observation Archives, and the Feminist Movement of the seventies and nineties inspired individuals to investigate women's experiences and perspectives at home during the war. However, as sociologist Pauline E. Parker points out in her book *Women of the Homefront: World War II Recollections of 55 Americans*, a majority of the women from the period have passed and all that remains of their experiences are their letters and memories of their memories.<sup>7</sup> Their deaths mark both a loss of the WWII Generation and the beginning of a transition from primary accounts to a form of retrospective memory in which people today form memories of the people of the past.<sup>8</sup> The only problem with this –

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<sup>2</sup> John Mack Faragher et al, *Out of Many: A History of the American People*, vol. 2 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994), 810-811.

<sup>3</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mother's War: American Women At Home and At the Front during World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 39-71.; Raynes Minns, *Bombers & Mash: The Domestic Front 1939-45* (Virago Press: London, 1999), 31-42.

<sup>4</sup> Minns, 7-9, 13, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Minns, 10.; Yellin 5-31.

<sup>6</sup> Yellin, 25-31.; Minns, 9-14. James J. Kimble, (2018) "Mrs. Jekyll Meets Mrs. Hyde: The War Advertising Council, Rhetorical Norms, and the Gendered Home Front in World War II", *Western Journal of Communication* 82:1, 1-19, DOI: 10.1080/10570314.2017.1294707.

<sup>7</sup> Pauline E. Parker, ed., *Women of the Homefront: World War II Recollections of 55 Americans* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Carrol, "Retrospective memory," *PhotoReading*, accessed November 24, 2018, <http://www.readfast.co.uk/retrospective-memory/>.

acknowledged by all the historians and writers that will be discussed in this paper – is that the history of women in WWII and diaries selected and written about only detail part of the story, as not all classes, backgrounds, and races penned their experiences or not enough documentation is available to offer a comprehensive analysis.

Furthering that, Parker, journalist Emily Yellin, author Raynes Minns, archivist Dorothy Sheridan, and historian James Hinton all tackled the complex topic of women on the Homefront in their own distinctive way. They did so to pay homage to the recollections of the women both in the United States and Britain who experienced the war first hand and deserved a voice in the conversation. As Parker reflected upon American women's experiences during the war in her 2002 *Women of the Homefront: World War II Recollections of 55 Americans*, she emphasized the need to publish the words of World War II women in order to capture their experiences rather than allowing the Feminist Movement's influence to revise their actual sentiments.<sup>9</sup> Yellin follows a similar path to Parker, but expands the narrative to provide a comprehensive look at American women during WWII in her 2004 *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* to demonstrate that men were not the only soldiers.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Raynes Minns points out in her 1999 *Bombers & Mash: The Domestic Front 1939-45* about the British Homefront, these women's experiences need to be stripped of the propaganda of the period in order to examine the impact of the war on women, but, even then, a comprehensive look of their experiences cannot be complete.<sup>11</sup> Hinton's *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* and Sheridan's *Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-45* echo this as they delved into the diaries of the Mass Observers and, like Parker, they put the women at the center of their work in order to tell the history. Overall, these five works detail the moves historians made in the 1990s and 2000s in order to illuminate the memory of these women and their overlooked impacts during the war and in depictions in film.

Leading up to the early 2000s, various American historians and writers started to produce work about women's roles during the war. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in 1995 and influences from the Feminist Movement sparked new interest in forming different narratives about who fought in the war abroad and at home. This moment urged historians and writers to examine the role and histories of the individual and the nontraditional actors. Whether it was women in the armed forces, in the factories, or in the home, these writers set the precedent for how modern-day historians tackle WWII subjects like the housewife. They worked with the discovered diaries and untold stories that the women of the era kept tucked away

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<sup>9</sup> Parker, 1-4.

<sup>10</sup> Yellin, x-xiv, 5-19.

<sup>11</sup> Minns, 1.

and hidden because their generation focused on the men's viewpoints of the war. Although historians and writers generated many works in the early 2000s, two stand out due to their unique approaches to addressing the topic of women on the Homefront: Pauline E. Parker's 2002 *Women of the Homefront: World War II Recollections of 55 Americans* and Emily Yellin's 2004 *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*. While Yellin opted to do a comprehensive look at women on the Homefront and abroad, Parker went a different route and decided to let the women's reflections of their experiences during WWII tell the narrative of the Homefront. These two works, although focused on the same topic, diverge in both their views on what the war did for women and on who tells the story. Their works are essential to gain even a glimpse of what women's wartime lives looked like, sitting opposite the narratives enforced through film.

Throughout Parker's book, her attention to the voices and recollections of the women of the 1940s illuminates women in WWII in a profound way. She not only focuses on housewives, but compiles the voices of women in the military, at home and abroad, and in laboratories, capturing how the war affected them emotionally, personally, and as a community. She argues that by allowing the women to speak "it captures the experiences and feeling of young women living through the turmoil and upheaval of World War II before our stories are lost forever."<sup>12</sup> This decision is profound. Not only does she recognize the ravages of time, but as a trained sociologist, she understands the power of comprehending society through raw and contemporary eyes. The women's actual accounts undermine the narrative construed by the Feminist Movement and reinforce the importance of accurate voice representation. Additionally, she acknowledges that these women need to be heard because they endured different hardships and experiences than the women in the heart of the conflict, as American women carried it in their minds and imaginations.<sup>13</sup> This note shines through in each section of the collection. In the "Voices from Military Dependents" and "Voices from Daily Life" sections, readers get a sense of what the Homefront actually was like and what these women endured.<sup>14</sup> Rather than only getting one side of women's experiences as viewers get in the films, these accounts offer a personal window into the lives of these women. Given that modern historians did not experience WWII, these recollections permit historians to take a step back from Feminist teachings and theories in order to engage in an authentic conversation with the women who withstood the war.

Diverging from Parker's take, two years later, Yellin expanded the narrative of women by taking the diaries and accounts of these women and crafting a comprehensive view of them in WWII. This might be due to her background as a

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<sup>12</sup> Parker, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Parker, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Parker, 153-218.

journalist, but she is able to capture the entire scope of a story. Throughout her book, Yellin's attention to the diversity of women in the war illuminates the importance of documenting their history. She started investigating this unwritten history after she discovered her mother's wartime diaries and letters tucked away in a box in the attic.<sup>15</sup> They illustrated the various issues and people Yellin highlights throughout her book. She not only focuses on the white, married housewife, but digs deeper and examines the narratives of factory workers, nurses, WAVES, WACs, and African American women. In chapters such as "Jane Crow" and "A Question of Loyalty," she analyzes the war through the lenses of African American and Japanese American females.<sup>16</sup> This decision opens up the conversation about women's experiences and expands upon Parker's collection of recollections by showing that white women of European descent were not the only people who struggled. She provides the necessary space to show viewers of films to understand that individuals like Fidelia in *Since You Went Away* went through the exact same situations as Mrs. Hilton and other women. The privilege of time permitted Yellin to do this and her mother's diary entry about her fellow nurses and her serving African American soldiers in the Pacific urged Yellin to consider this history.<sup>17</sup> The interesting part of her inclusion lies in her ability to track down first-hand accounts and the diaries of these women. Without these, she would not have been able to chronicle these sentiments. Also, she reveals that these diaries and accounts permitted her to start to understand the emotions women felt and the sacrifices they made.<sup>18</sup> Overall, they gave her insight into the courage and determination they had to never give up.

Additionally, Yellin breaks down the different roles and statuses of women in order to give her readers the necessary basis to understand what the government expected of women and their reality. With subsections of "War Brides," "War Wives and Their Children," "Rationing," and "Women's Magazines," she delves beneath the surface of the portrayals of women like Mrs. Miniver, Mrs. Hilton, and even Mrs. Last, who are the main characters of the three films.<sup>19</sup> These sections detail not only the traditional image of the perfect housewife, but the journal entries and letters of these women bolster Yellin's argument that these women were soldiers. It illuminates that even though they did not fight on the front lines, their daily efforts positioned them in situations that required them to remain feminine and keep up the domestic lifestyle while providing for the needs of their family. Even though Yellin goes too far by falling into the Feminist trap of arguing that WWII provided a revolution for

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<sup>15</sup> Yellin, ix-xvi. Her mother served as a Red Cross nurse in the Pacific from 1944-1945. Also, her mother said that she was part of the generation that kept their tales to themselves while men's stories like her husband's became the national narrative.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 199-224, 253-277.

<sup>17</sup> Yellin, xii-xiii.

<sup>18</sup> Yellin, xi-xii.

<sup>19</sup> Yellin, 6-16, 19-31.

women in their emancipation of traditional roles, she holds some merit in detailing the possibilities for women in a time when their country needed them the most.<sup>20</sup>

Although these two wrote about the same topic, offering a glimpse into the lives of women at this time, they diverged down two different paths. This divergence occurred because of how the war touched them. Parker notes that she endured the war, while Yellin is the daughter of the woman who endured it. This distinction matters because it reflects in their analysis. While Yellin argues that WWII provided a revolutionary space for women to come into their own, Parker urges caution to this argument by stating that the women of the time did not hold a Feminist view and all they wanted to do was their best to get through it so they could get back to their lives.<sup>21</sup> Parker's experiences during the war made her realize the importance of memory and preserving the authenticity of other female voices. Her decision to publish the words of the women of the time deserves praise. She gave the women back their forgotten voice. Yellin agrees with this to an extent, but she was born after the war and the Feminist Movement influenced her thought processes. This shows that even though she chronicles what the women did and felt, she did not fully stay true to what the women of the time wanted and felt about their roles.

Although Yellin's work is crucial to understanding the story of women and war, readers must be prudent just like viewers of the films like *Housewife*, 49. These pieces skew the audience's understanding that this time period started the revolution for women to break from the traditional realm of the house by suggesting that all women yearned to be independent instead of the reality that most women wanted to do their part until men came home. Even though these two authors differ in this and their approaches, they both pay close attention to the various groups of women.<sup>22</sup> They break women down into categories based on marital status, age, profession, and in Yellin's case, race. By doing this, they both give their readers the best possible way of viewing the full picture of women in the United States and in some cases, Britain, during the period while the three films at issue here fail at accomplishing this.

Transitioning from the American Homefront to the history of the British Homefront and housewife, Raynes Minns' 1999 *Bombers & Mash: The Domestic Front 1939-1940* captures the sentiments of the Britons behind their stereotypical stiff upper lip. Minns had a fascination with wartime cooking after the birth of her daughter and wanted to dig deeper in order to understand how women made these meals during wartime.<sup>23</sup> Her book overall does not offer a comprehensive narrative of the domestic lives of these women. Rather, it strips back the propaganda of the time, to examine the fear, loneliness, and anxiety that these women grappled with as their homes were bombed, their children evacuated, and their loved ones shipped

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<sup>20</sup> Yellin, xiv, 383-383.

<sup>21</sup> Yellin, xiv, 377-384; Parker 2-4.

<sup>22</sup> Parker, vii-xi, 3-4.; Yellin, vi-vii, 3-37, 109-303.

<sup>23</sup> Minns, 1.

off to battle.<sup>24</sup> She heavily uses images, ads, and posters to demonstrate the conflicting advice these women would receive from the government.<sup>25</sup> In each chapter, she explores the calls from the government in the propaganda posters to unpack the realities of the women. She argues that these images need to be included because women encountered these forms of propaganda daily and by stripping the propaganda away, her readers cannot start to understand the real strains on these women.<sup>26</sup> This matters because it reveals to viewers of films like *Mrs. Miniver* and *Since You Went Away* that these films captured only one side of the women and that source material like Minns allows them to see what women experienced.

Additionally, rather than offering a comprehensive look at women in the war like Yellin does, Minns opts to hone in on the domestic responsibilities of women in order to illuminate the struggles these women endured as they fought the war at home. She alludes to the notion that a comprehensive look at women in the war cannot get at how women coped with the war and adapted to it.<sup>27</sup> Even though Yellin's format is similar to Minns, following different age groups and marital statuses of women and how those aspects affect their experiences, Yellin's book fails to recognize Minns' point that the government wished to keep these women in their place and only volunteer when they completed their domestic duties.<sup>28</sup> This note might be due to these women writing about two different countries. However, historians should value Minns' points because she gets at the crux of the matter in which these women held multi-dimensional roles in the public and private sphere regardless of their country and have a complex history.

In addition to Minns' attention to the domestic front, Dorothy Sheridan's 1991 *Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology* and James Hinton's 2010 *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* delve deeper into this front by narrowing the analysis to the women volunteers in Mass Observation (Mo). MO was a social research organization that sought to form an "anthropology of ourselves" and to have a more democratic look at the social and political views of the populace in order to report back to the government with policies more in line with the people.<sup>29</sup> Sheridan and Hinton tackled this angle of the Homefront because of their previous work as an archivist for MO and a social historian respectively. However, their different paths for chronicling the voices of the people of the period and how

<sup>24</sup> Minns, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Minns, 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Minns, 1, 10-15.

<sup>27</sup> Minns, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Minns, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Sheridan, 4-5; Hinton, 2-3. This organization had both volunteer and paid Mass Observers. Most of the volunteers were from the upper and middle classes because women and men in the working class either did not have time to write down their thoughts as they needed money to survive. Also, this organization recognized the limitations in its base, but with the consent of its base, published its findings in books and articles. These people wrote in because they felt they added something to the war effort and the MO valued their contributions.



the war affected them and what their role was during it shows how their gender influenced their decisions. While Sheridan follows a similar route as Parker, Hinton isolates himself by forming biographies of nine individuals to offer a partial comprehensive look at the Homefront through the lens of MO.

Sheridan's move to form an anthology of selected female diaries reveals the importance of making historians and viewers of WWII Homefront films cognizant of the words of the women. She argues that her book is unusual but must be written in this form because it was the writing done at the time and the individuals wrote their accounts in the hopes that someone would value their work and use it to understand their thoughts and opinions.<sup>30</sup> As an archivist, she knew the value of these diaries. Her decision informs readers both about the existence of these women's experiences and the benefit of encountering their original work in order to allow women to put forth their own memory. Additionally, Sheridan argues that historians must be careful to not fall into the Feminist trap of believing that the period was fully emancipatory for all women. She claims that she agrees with other feminist historians, like herself, that the war was limited in its emancipatory qualities and progress because women of the time made choices.<sup>31</sup> Those choices shaped the way they lived and thought. Only those women can tell their story. Overall, Sheridan aligns with Parker's decision to let the women speak in order for a memory to be formed about them. Yet, she differs by recognizing that these MO diaries only tell part of the story of those on the Homefront as they do not include everyone.

Then, almost twenty years later, Hinton deviates from all of the historians and writers above by investigating the issue of interpreting the voices of the past with the discovery and formation of the modern self. This is an interesting move because in the 1940s films of *Mrs. Miniver* and *Since You Went Away*, the use of propaganda dissuades the forming of the individual as war called for the strength of the community. It adds to the history and memory of women in war because it gets deeper into their thoughts and feelings at the time. Hinton recognizes that the diarists he focuses on, including Nella Last, crafted their own concepts of self, but only for themselves and the MO.<sup>32</sup> He argues that the MO "offered a discipline and a context which transcended the purely private, meeting a need to frame individual quests in relation to larger public purposes."<sup>33</sup> Even though his point centers on MO, this claim showcases the complexity of the memory of these individuals. It explains the intricate nature of women and war because they had to both adhere to the call of their governments and to maintain a functioning home while forming their identity.

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<sup>30</sup> Sheridan, x.

<sup>31</sup> Sheridan, 2-4.

<sup>32</sup> Hinton, 5-8. This insight can be made due to Feminist theories focusing on individuality and the twenty-first century historians turning their attention toward people's memories rather than the nation's memories.

<sup>33</sup> Hinton, 6.

Also, his decision to use the diaries as a way to construct biographies of the six women and three men he selected highlights the value in placing these individuals and MO in the context of wartime Britain. He grasps what constitutes the memory of MO and contemporaries' reality and sentiments even if, as both Sheridan and Hinton note, MO only received diaries from their upper and middle class volunteers.

Despite Sheridan and Hinton honing in on the MO, their works leave their readers with a sense of not knowing the entire story and limit their influences on the historiography of women on the Homefront in Britain and the United States. They do acknowledge early on that their works only examine part of British society as the MO was limited in their collection of entries. By only including some perspectives of what domestic life was like in Britain, they lose the sentiments of the women in Minns' book.<sup>34</sup> With Minns, Parker, and Yellin including different marital statuses, classes, and backgrounds of the women, they put Sheridan's and Hinton's books into perspective in order to unpack the illusion that film creates about women on the Homefront. Overall, these five works permit viewers of the films to be aware of the complicated nature of the women on the Homefront and to realize that film only captures one side of the story.

#### Film as a Source and a Means for Information

As these historians and writers debate on how to characterize the women on the Homefront and who ought to tell the story, the films *Mrs. Miniver*, *Since You Went Away*, and *Housewife*, 49 dealt with similar questions. They too struggle with the questions of who tells the story and what aspects of everyday life and the war they should show. Regardless of the critical reception these three films received, they fail to tell the whole story just like some of the written sources above. They captured the women's experiences, but from the director's and producer's viewpoint, similar to that of what the authors and historians thought was best instead of entirely through the women's voices. These films focused on depicting a distinct group of upper and middle class women, a selection that might be due to the propaganda of the period inclined to project the best images of the countries.

Additionally, the tension between President Roosevelt's "interventionist policies" and American's wish to remain neutral caused the film industry to try to ease this tension and find a way to detail to the American people the struggles abroad.<sup>35</sup> Roosevelt believed that Hollywood held the best method to get information to the public due to the high numbers of people going to the cinema in the 1940s.<sup>36</sup> His belief reveals the freedom filmmakers had to portray the Homefront

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<sup>34</sup> Sheridan, 1-12.; Hinton, 17-19.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Todd Bennett, "Anglophilia on Film: Creating an Atmosphere for Alliance, 1935-1941," *Film and History* 27 (1997), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), 9.

in the way they best saw fit. This can be seen in Nella Last's April 20, 1948 diary entry when she describes seeing *Mrs. Miniver* again and how she wondered "again just why futile silly pictures [were] made" and that it came out during a time when people were frightened but still had the hope and courage that they could do something for peace.<sup>37</sup> Her reflections in the post war period showcase both the popular reception of the film and her insight into realizing that this film, while enjoyable, did not truly depict what they went through. Her words allow readers of her diary to grasp the value of film to provide entertainment, not reality. Furthering this, film historian Bernard A. Dick's notion that Hollywood took history and turned it into a plot and in some cases, invented it entirely illuminates the limits of film to illustrate reality.<sup>38</sup> The three films that this paper focuses on embody this inventing of reality that cause viewers to leave with a false sense of women in war. This is not to disparage these films, but to make historians and viewers aware that these films only provide them with a snapshot of women's experiences. Overall, both written sources and film have had challenges conveying the whole story and accurate portrayals of women in WWII. However, those problems cannot be overlooked and historians need to return to the voices of the women in order to scratch the surface of what women endured throughout and after the conflict.

### Homefront Films and Their Illusory Deceptions

#### *Mrs. Miniver*

Numerous critics in 1942 characterized William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* as "excellent," capturing the strength of humans and "human courage," and one of the best of the film season in 1942.<sup>39</sup> These notes truly capture the emotional, dramatic and propagandist elements throughout the film and how critics of the day received them. Set in the quiet, upper middle-class village of Belham, UK, *Mrs. Miniver* follows the Miniver family through the summer of 1939 before World War II into the bombings of London and the surrounding areas in 1940. This look into the family led by the matriarch, Kay Miniver, offers the viewers an inside glimpse into British family life during the early years of the war. Wyler's ability to depict both the stereotypical roles of women shopping or organizing the Flower Show and in women's quiet strength to remain calm for the children is important for American viewers to see. It instills in the viewers a sense that Britain needed their support: this

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<sup>37</sup> Nella Last, *The Diaries of Nella Last: Writing in War and Peace*, Patricia and Robert Malcolmson, ed. (London: Profile Books, 2012), 330.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard A. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), viii.

<sup>39</sup> "Mrs. Miniver, Excellent Picture of England at War, Opens at the Music Hall," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1942, 23.; "Tribute to Human Courage: 'Mrs. Miniver' Expresses the Inspiring Strength and Dignity Of Ordinary Civilians Under Total War," *The New York Times*, June 14, 1942, VII 3.; "Mrs. Miniver's War," *Newsweek*, June 15, 1942.

family was like theirs and everyone had a role to play in the war effort.<sup>40</sup> However, with Wyler working for MGM at this point in his career, it makes sense why he wanted to galvanize American support for its allies by depicting their family life and humanity because the studio was devoted to depicting the family.<sup>41</sup> This position of the studio matters because it demonstrates what view they had of women at the time: housewives. This is not to discredit the popularity of the film, but to acknowledge that films like this one put forth the message that women ought to remain in the home. It embodied the mixed messages women received from the government that Minns demonstrated above. Even though this film helped make Americans aware of their responsibilities and obligations to the war effort after Pearl Harbor, it crafted a false depiction of the realities British women endured up to 1942.

As Wyler depicts the Miniver family, the opening scenes capture the illusion of the Homefront. Kay's worry about a hat potentially being sold, Mr. Miniver's indulgence in a car, and the Americanized house structure of "Starlings" transports Americans to a Britain that resembles America.<sup>42</sup> These scenes chronicle the lives of the upper and middle classes of British society and not what the traditional British woman went through in the lead up to and beginning of the war. Dick's notion that the Minivers were a privileged family in which their atypical characteristics led to a mythical family reveals the meaning of these scenes.<sup>43</sup> It showcases that although Americans might identify with some of the materialistic and family aspects of the Minivers, this fictitious portrayal of a British family only creates a sense for the viewers that women were carefree and that their help took care of their basic needs. Churchill might have called it "propaganda worth 100 battleships," but this film and these scenes demonstrate how propaganda offered a hazy image of women by altering their memory as only Mrs. Miniver-like people.<sup>44</sup>

Furthering this, Wyler's scene half way through the film when Vin gets called up to active duty highlights the realities of war, but in a melodramatic fashion. His decision to show an empty table with empty chairs in the Miniver's dining room when Vin leaves urges the viewers to pause.<sup>45</sup> These five seconds of just the table and chairs on the screen is eerie and horrifying. Although their voices drift off in the background, it makes war all too real for the viewers. The emptiness that is felt when looking at the screen with no life visually present reflects the immense strains and pressures that fell upon families during the war that Minns details in her book.<sup>46</sup> It is as if Wyler attempted to tell the viewers that if they do not do anything and do not

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<sup>40</sup> William Wyler, dir., *Mrs. Miniver* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1942), 1:57-3:56; 1:39:02-1:40:56.

<sup>41</sup> Dick, 88-89. Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Mrs. Miniver*, 1:47-15:47.

<sup>43</sup> Dick, 182.

<sup>44</sup> Yellin, 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Mrs. Miniver*, 57:50-57:55.

<sup>46</sup> Minns, 1-15.

support America's entry into the war, then this image foreshadowed their future. This might be extreme, but it illuminates the note that "the personal impact of war is carefully examined [by motion pictures]."47 Yet, this scene fails to show how women internalized their emotions. The long stares by Mrs. Miniver and Carol foster this soap opera-like saga that over dramatizes women's sentiments and plays up emotions in order to pull at the heartstrings of viewers. Even though film had this leeway, viewers must heed caution in believing all send-offs were like this.

In addition to this highly dramatic scene, the moments the Miniver family takes shelter in their bomb shelter solidify the illusion this film crafts about the Homefront. Wyler films this cramped space for almost ten minutes in which the viewers see Kay knitting, reading to the children, and acting like an all-protective matriarch that shields her family from danger.<sup>48</sup> This scene demonstrates the fear of the bombs and attempts to depict what these families endured during the Blitz. Wyler's decision to hone in on the immense courage and responsibility that women like Mrs. Miniver took on in these moments emphasizes what the "people's war" actually meant.<sup>49</sup> However, as Fyne put it, scenes like this "glamorized" the heroism of women and overshadowed the realities they faced in the city.<sup>50</sup> His point holds merit because in most cases, women were on their own in London with their children evacuated to the countryside or huddled in bomb shelters throughout London.<sup>51</sup> The realities of the Minivers were not the realities of all the women of Britain. Although this film captured the spirit of Britain, it causes viewers who loved the film to hold a false understanding of what their allies across the pond actually endured.

### *Since You Went Away:*

Two years after *Mrs. Miniver* in 1944, David O. Selznick gave the American public the most melodramatic, emotional, and mythical epic of the American Homefront in *Since You Went Away*. Critics held mixed reviews with some characterizing it as emotional and the "definitive home-front movie...until a realist comes along" while others stressed that most people only went to see it due to it being Shirley Temple's first grown-up role and its all-star cast.<sup>52</sup> These reviews illuminate how Selznick's showman qualities overpowered the film and led to a dramatized depiction of an America that did not fit the average woman's experiences.

<sup>47</sup> Gary Hoppenstand, et al. "Bringing the War Home: William Wyler and World War II." *Film and History* 27 (1997), 111.

<sup>48</sup> *Mrs. Miniver*, 1:30:00-1:40:48.

<sup>49</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969).

<sup>50</sup> Fyne, 94.

<sup>51</sup> Minns, 6-9, 187.; Susan Briggs, *The Home Front: War Years in Britain 1939-1945* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1975).

<sup>52</sup> Marjory Adams, "NEW FILM REVIEWS," *Daily Boston Globe*, Sept. 22, 1944. 17.; *Commonweal* 40, Aug. 4, 1944, 374-75.; "Jennifer Jones Drops Saint's Role in 'Since You Went Away,'" *Daily Boston Globe*, July 30, 1944. 1.; *New Republic* 111, July 17, 1944, 77.; *Newsweek* 24, July 10, 1944, 85-86.; *Time* 44, July 17, 1944, 94, 96.

Rather, by buying the rights to Margaret Buell Wilder's 1943 book *Since You Went Away: Letter to a Soldier From His Wife* and then kicking her off the writing of the screenplay, he crafted his own interpretation of the Homefront and what women went through.<sup>53</sup> This move matters because it more accurately details Selznick's desire for acclaim than his wish for an accurate wartime depiction. Additionally, his decision to make the film like a Dickens novel that depicts the day to day lives of a few characters reveals that this film might have been loosely based on the letters a wife wrote to her husband, but in the end, it only captured "an average American dream."<sup>54</sup> Selznick's "epic" turned into a melodramatic soap opera highlighting the upper and middle classes in America instead of what the average housewife experienced.

The film directed by John Cromwell focuses on the American Homefront during WWII and "the unconquerable fortress: the American home."<sup>55</sup> This depiction of the home is interesting because Yellin highlights that by this point in 1943, most Americans viewed the home as America itself.<sup>56</sup> Essentially, Selznick made a point at the opening by stating that nothing could bring down the American home. This attempt to bolster the American spirit three years into the war seems like an overextension of propaganda because by this time, Americans had settled into a routine and were already doing their part for the war effort. In addition to this, it follows the Hilton family as they navigate life without Mr. Hilton, who is a captain in the Army. Anne and her two daughters, Jane and Brig, project an image of what women ought to do during the war almost like an instructional video for female viewers, such as taking in a roomier, rationing, and forming a Victory Garden. As the family finds out that Mr. Hilton is missing in action, they also cope with the loss of Jane's fiancé, Bill. Overall, this epic details the loneliness and loss the women at home felt as war took place thousands of miles away.

Right from the beginning, Selznick's transportation of his viewers into this unconquerable fortress leads them to believe that Anne's world is everyone's world. As Anne leans against the wall appearing defeated as she looks at her husband's bed and pictures, the dramatic music in the background creates empathy in the audience.<sup>57</sup> They see her as a vulnerable individual who buckles under the absence of her husband in the privacy of their room. Even though this scene captures the emotions and sense of loneliness women felt once their husbands went off to war like Parker and Yellin point out, it causes viewers to believe this is how it was all the time. Parker and Yellin note that in most cases, women who were married with children moved back in with their parents during the war or moved in with other

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<sup>53</sup> David Thomson, *Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 394-395.

<sup>54</sup> Thomson, 402-403.; *Time*, 44, July 17, 1944, 96. Selznick wanted to outdo *Gone With The Wind*.

<sup>55</sup> John Cromwell, dir., *Since You Went Away*, David O. Selznick, prod., (United Artists, 1944), 1:32-4:00.

<sup>56</sup> Yellin, 36.

<sup>57</sup> *Since You Went Away*, 3:10-5:27.

families to get by and afford the cost of living.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Chad Newsom argues that scenes like this one “creates a feeling of home” in a melodramatic manner by pushing forward a moral agenda in everyday life.<sup>59</sup> His point illuminates that film crafts what viewers wish their reality was. It demonstrates that this soap opera, emotional music, and acting offered an escape for the viewers of the forties. It allowed them to witness what they fought daily to protect even it was from their homes.

However, viewers need to be hesitant to avoid falling into the trap of believing this fantasy actually occurred in the average women’s life. Selznick brings in the character of Fidelia, an African American servant, a few minutes later and makes it appear that most Americans have help at this time.<sup>60</sup> As Yellin illustrates to her readers, African American women went through the similar struggles as characters like Anne in addition to living in a racist country with segregated communities and working environments.<sup>61</sup> These forgotten realities of the Homefront fed into the idealized vision of what the Homefront ought to look like. By doing this, Selznick leaves his viewers with an inaccurate and glorified Homefront.

As the melodramatic tropes and over exaggerated depictions of the Homefront continue, the scenes of Bill’s emotional departure suggest some sense of how women felt about their separations from their loved ones. This instructional aspect of the film matters because it reveals that even though it depicts an illusory Homefront, it succeeds at making the viewers aware of the realities they faced with their loved ones shipped off to war and the potential of receiving a telegram telling them their loved one was either missing in action or killed. Before Bill heads off and Jane says goodbye, the montage of the different people in the train station presents one of the few looks throughout the film into what people experienced.<sup>62</sup> Clayton R. Koppes’ notion that these scenes depict “the dichotomy between individual selfishness and patriotic sacrifice” embodies this scene because the extras in the background grapple with not wanting their loved ones to go while still wanting to do their patriotic duty.<sup>63</sup> It shows that even though Selznick wanted to dramatize the Homefront, these scenes make it seem like the life of the Hilton women were a universal reality. Then, with the goodbye scene as Bill’s train departs, the director’s decision to only focus on Jane’s face and then a long shot of her alone on the platform captures the message

<sup>58</sup> Parker, 1-4; Yellin, 6-16.

<sup>59</sup> Chad Newsom, “Feels like Home: Since You Went Away and the 1940s Melodrama,” *Screen* 58. No. 4 (Winter 2017), 285-286.

<sup>60</sup> *Since You Went Away*, 7:48-10:09.

<sup>61</sup> Yellin, 199-224.

<sup>62</sup> *Since You Went Away*, 1:55:42-1:57:30. The others are when Anne and Emily go to the bar and various voices in the bar detail their feelings about the war and then when the Hiltons are on the train going to and from trying to see Tim.

<sup>63</sup> Clayton R. Koppes, “Hollywood and the Politics of Representation,” in *The Homefront War: World War II and American Society*, Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, eds., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 28-29.

of loneliness and anxiety Selznick aimed for.<sup>64</sup> It depicts the actual reactions of people. It showcases the emotions of what women felt, similarly to what Yellin, Parker, and Minns detail in their books, even if it is in a dramatic fashion. It informs the viewers that this outward emotion of what Jane expresses was what women of the time felt internally. Even if Fyne feels that these scenes could not save the film from its melodramatic aspects, they provide viewers with a more realistic sense of what the women left behind endured.<sup>65</sup> This is not to suggest that it does not add to the illusion of the Homefront, because it does, but to acknowledge that it details how the women at home felt about men living and the realities they faced.

Despite this attempt to showcase an authentic moment in the lives of the women at home, the final scene at Christmas cements the mythic depiction of the Homefront. This conclusion illustrates the lengths Selznick went to sell the American dream and depict women in a stereotypical light. As Fidelia places the gifts under the tree from Mr. Hilton and Anne receives a phone call, the audience witnesses a happy ending when they find out Mr. Hilton is coming home.<sup>66</sup> The audience gets caught up in the heartwarming, happy ending, but it leaves them with a false sense of reality. Rather than end the film with Anne going to work and showing women that their country needs them, Selznick takes a different route. This conclusion details to the viewers that in the end, women ought to stay in the home and await the return of their husbands. It instructs them to stay in their place as Minns articulates in her book above. Koppes argues that this scene neatly ties up the story of “personal sacrifice and growth” for an anxious public, while Fyne claims that it was the only possible ending to keep up the act of family wholesomeness and the upper-middle class image.<sup>67</sup> Yellin’s section on the anxieties surrounding the telegram reveals how unrealistic this scene is, as most women receiving a telegram or call meant their loved one had died.<sup>68</sup> Overall, this film, while it interprets a universal American wish for this reality, leaves the viewers with a blurred memory of women at the Homefront. It causes viewers to get swept up in the melodrama and forget what the average American woman endured during the war.

### *Housewife, 49.*

Over sixty years after the forties films, comedian Victoria Wood brought Nella Last’s MO diaries to life in 2006. However, like its predecessors, *Housewife, 49* creates an interpretation of what one middle class woman endured and not what the average Briton experienced. Wood wanted to develop a project inspired by Last’s diaries because in Wood’s eyes, Last was an extraordinary woman and her diaries needed to

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<sup>64</sup> *Since You Went Away*, 2:01:00-2:03:00.

<sup>65</sup> Fyne, 207.

<sup>66</sup> *Since You Went Away*, 2:38:30-2:43:13.

<sup>67</sup> Koppes, 31.; Fyne, 121-122.

<sup>68</sup> Yellin, 31-36.



be brought visually to the public.<sup>69</sup> Critics wrote mixed reviews about this made-for-television film as women felt it depicted a woman ahead of her times and a relatable film for modern day women, like Nella, as they seek a new purpose.<sup>70</sup> Men on the other hand found this depiction of the Homefront “unusual” and interesting enough to stay up for the entire film.<sup>71</sup> These gendered reviews and language reveals how these individuals remember women like Last. First, with the men’s view, it demonstrates that people in the post-war period believed that society needed to catalogue and remember the men who fought the war and their memories.<sup>72</sup> It showcases that even in the twenty-first century, women’s roles during the war continue to be an afterthought or a footnote in the national memories of the war in Britain and even in the United States. On the other hand, with the women’s reviews of the film, their language reveals how periods like the Feminist Movement and “The Year of the Women” have skewed people’s perceptions and memories of women on the Homefront during WWII. Rather than examining the war through the eyes of contemporaries like Last, they used modern language and views to retrospectively view Last and women like her. This is not to criticize their critiques, because Last’s diaries do reveal that some of her thinking and writing did allude to her breaking from the constraints of marriage as she used language like “slavery.”<sup>73</sup> Rather, it is to show that their language fell into the Feminist trap that Yellin, Parker, and Sheridan warned their readers about. Additionally, their critiques reveal that these views of the film cast women on the Homefront in a role that they themselves did not identify with for the most part. They cause the memory of women like Last to appear to be revolutionary and as the beacons of womanhood instead of depicting the multi-dimensional roles they took on in both the private and public spheres of British society during the war.

The film, directed by Gavin Miller, chronicles Last’s life from 1939-1945. It opens with her contemplating writing for MO and her recovery from a recent nervous breakdown. She struggles with finding a purpose in her role as a mother to Arthur and Cliff when it comes to an end with Arthur getting a job and Cliff enlisting in the war. It showcases the everyday life of mostly middle-class and upper working-class individuals in the shipbuilding town of Barrow-in-Furness. Her work at the Women’s Voluntary Service gives her a position in which she finds her voice. This

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<sup>69</sup> "Victoria Wood, Writer and Star of 'Housewife, 49'." NPR. March 8, 2008.

<https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript.php?storyId=88008129>; Gavin Miller, dir., *Housewife, 49* (Acorn Media, 2006), Interview with Victoria Wood.

<sup>70</sup> Helen Weathers, “The True Story of Housewife, 49,” *Daily Mail Online*, May 21, 2007.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-457077/The-true-story-Housewife-49.html>; Stephanie Billen, “You Review: Housewife, 49” *The Guardian*, December 11, 2006; Natasha Tripney, “Housewife, 49 Review at Old Laundry Bowness-on-Windermere,” *The Stage*, September 16, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Billen, “You Review: Housewife, 49.”

<sup>72</sup> Yellin, ix-xiv.

<sup>73</sup> Hinton, 28-35.

part of her work at the WVC suggests that this was the first time she ventured out of the home and became her own individual. While it is true that she started to find her voice in her diaries, Hinton's biography of Last reveals that during WWI, Last volunteered and was involved in various political meetings and other organization when she was younger.<sup>74</sup> Although the length of the film limited Wood from examining Last's past, viewers of the film need to have this information at their disposal. Without it, they get a false sense that the war liberated women from the house and provided the space for them to come into their own. Although that might have been true for some of the younger generations of the period as Sheridan points out, it fosters an invalid depiction of Last and women like her.<sup>75</sup> With the film ending with Last trying to figure out what is next for her after 1945, it allows the reviewers and viewers to make these assumptions if they had not previously read Last's diaries or understood that the diaries inspired the film rather than it being an accurate depiction of Last's life.

Right from the beginning, Cromwell and Wood's introduction to MO and Last shape the viewers into thinking that MO represents the entire British society and women like Last. The MO office and individuals portraying the MO workers present an image that this organization actually represented the opinions and views of the populace and in the case of this film, only women.<sup>76</sup> This scene brings the viewers into the mindset of the organization, but leaves them with a false pretense of what they actually did and the people who reported to them. Minns, Sheridan, and Hinton reveal that MO only represented the upper and middle classes of Britain during the war due to working class people not having time to write down their thoughts.<sup>77</sup> Their points expose the limitation of this scene. While it gives viewers who have never heard about MO a generalized understanding of its work, it leaves them with the belief that that was what it did. It fails to illuminate the purpose of the organization and the different people who wrote to it.<sup>78</sup> This glossing over of reality limits the film as helping the public understand this organization and Last's place in it. Furthering this, Wood's depiction of Last in the opening scenes as flustered and confused and questioning whether she ought to write for MO creates an image of Last as only a woman who had a nervous breakdown.<sup>79</sup> This might not have been Wood's intention, but it casts Last and women like her as one-dimensional figures rather than delving into the multi-dimensional roles they held at this point in time. Even if Wood and Miller made this decision to build up her character, it leaves the

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<sup>74</sup> Hinton, 29-34.

<sup>75</sup> Sheridan, 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> *Housewife*, 49.

<sup>77</sup> Minns, 3, 32.; Sheridan, x, 5.; Hinton, 2-3, 16-20.

<sup>78</sup> "History of Mass Observation," 2015, *Mass Observation*, <http://www.massobs.org.uk/about/history-of-mo>.

<sup>79</sup> *Housewife*, 49.

viewers with a false perception of Last. It causes viewers to remember her and other women as the women who needed the war in order to come into their own. Hinton's critique of the title and depictions of Last in the opening as showing only one side of her identity proves the illusion film makes about women on the Homefront and the limiting qualities of this film to depict what women went through during the early years of the war and the Blitz.<sup>80</sup> With the opening setting the scene for the rest of the film, viewers must be careful to not believe that this film and Last embody the totality of women during the war.

As the film continues and viewers see Last navigate the private sphere of her home life with Mr. Last and the public sphere of her work at the WVS, two scenes in the middle of the film reveal Last coming into her own and why she wrote for MO. These scenes, while dramatic, recreate the diary entries of Last in such a way that she appears like a powerful and independent woman. First, in the scene when Nella and Mr. Last argue over Cliff enlisting in the Army, Nella stands her ground and tells Mr. Last when he states that Cliff is his son and does she want him killed that she was the one who raised him and that she wants him to have a life.<sup>81</sup> This scene and the one following it at the cabinet meeting for the WVS make it appear that Last and women like her held immense autonomy at this point and were independent women. The scenes generate a memory of these housewives as not needing men to survive. However, Hinton urges viewers of the film and readers of Last's and other Mass Observers' diaries to be aware that this selfhood and independence was limited.<sup>82</sup> His point illuminates the disadvantage of these scenes as being an unrealistic depiction of these women. Although Last stood her ground and came into her own at this point in her life, it does not mean the war created the space for women to become independent. Rather, it simply happened that this traditional coming of age of women realizing their worth and the realities they live in just so happened to take place during the war.<sup>83</sup> In addition to this, once the Lasts finds out that Cliff was missing in action, Mr. Last's questioning of why Nella continues to write elicits a response from Nella that embodies the feeling of most women of the period regardless of class: "I am alone. I have no one to talk to."<sup>84</sup> Her words transcend time and align with the sense of loneliness and exhaustion women felt during the war that Minns captures in her book.<sup>85</sup> It permits viewers to remember the immense strains war took on women and why they felt alone. However, viewers must remain guarded as they watch this scene. Nella might personify women's sentiments in this scene, but her response to why she writes and chronicles the war

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<sup>80</sup> Hinton, 23.

<sup>81</sup> *Housewife*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Hinton, 5.

<sup>83</sup> Hinton, 28-35.

<sup>84</sup> *Housewife*, 49.

<sup>85</sup> Minns, 1, 187-200.

only provide one side of why women wrote and their experiences during the war. Sheridan's inclusion of women's responses to why they wrote for MO expands the narrative and causes readers to realize Last only casts one memory of women's experiences.<sup>86</sup> Overall, this film, while it matters to keep MO's and Last's memory alive, skews its viewers' recollection of women's realities during the war.

Even though these three films portrayed the real-life experiences the women of WWII faced, they left the viewers of the 1940s and today with a false memory of the realities of the women of WWII. They lead viewers to have what Michael C.C. Adams calls "selective recall."<sup>87</sup> Given that they are films and they tell stories, it does not mean they should have had free range in their depictions of women. The prominence of film as both an entertainment outlet and a source of what was happening overseas serves as a reminder to viewers today that these films played an important role in what British and American society perceived and understood about these women. The directors' and producers' judicious depictions of women cultivated a memory of one side of these women's stories. With each film only depicting the upper and middle class experiences of war, they cast these fictitious and real characters as representing all women's struggles during this period. They inhibited the housewives of WWII from speaking their truth and kept the soldiers of the Homefront in the home.

Additionally, the illusory portrayal of these women has profound impacts for today's viewers. These films, particularly the ones from the forties, transport the viewers back in time to different views and morals that might counter today's view of the place of women in society and in times of war. They lead the average viewers to accept that these films were accurate portrayals that placed women in traditional, inferior roles. If viewers do not have access to these women's testimonials and diaries, they either hold a false outlook of the Homefront or enter into a Feminist Movement mindset of believing this period offered an emancipatory channel for these women. This is not to suggest that some of these women did not experience freedoms. However, it is a plea to viewers to pause and to reflect. Modern viewers must understand the war from the viewpoint of the women of the forties and not allow the second- and third-wave of the movement to cloud their view of these women. While new research aids a better look at the period, an introduction of modern feminism into this analysis overshadows the complicated history of these women. Their multi-dimensional roles in the public and private spheres need to be cherished for what they actually were in order for society to reclaim their history and to enter the women's actual perspectives into the national narrative in order to restore the women's memories.

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<sup>86</sup> Sheridan, 15-23.

<sup>87</sup> Michael C. C. Adams, "Home Front Change," in *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 115.

Victoria K. Tutino is a senior History major from Taunton, Massachusetts. Victoria concentrates in *War and Memory* and has done research on the effects of memory and roles of women during World War II. While at Holy Cross, she was involved in a slew of activities, some of which include: Summer Gateways Orientation, Liturgical Ministry, the Hanify-Howland Lecture Committee, the Charles Carroll Program and the Student Advisory Committee for History.

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# From “Companionate Wife” to Feminist Pioneer

## Amy Jacques Garvey’s Feminist Prowess Liberates Women in Restructuring the UNIA

Kiana Cárdenas ‘19

The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), established by Marcus Garvey and Amy Ashwood Garvey in 1914, sought to remedy the desperate institutional situation of African descendants from all over the world. Although the political organization guaranteed support for all African descendants, men and women, rooted at the heart of the organization was a masculine ideology that generated constricting gender roles, to the disadvantage of a large number of women. The structure of the UNIA solidified black men as the essential instruments for the uplifting of the race while establishing the role of women as supporters of the race, particularly through motherhood.<sup>1</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, the second wife of Marcus Garvey and the second-most important person of the UNIA, would become a leading feminist figure within the male-dominated organization, promoting women to the forefront of the black nationalist struggle.

This research seeks to answer the question: How did the contradictions between Amy Jacques Garvey’s political and personal life transform her feminist platform? Amy Jacques Garvey’s augmenting endorsement of feminist projects challenged the masculine ideology permeating the UNIA in a concurrent course that followed her dwindling marriage to Marcus Garvey. As she grew more distant with Garvey, Jacques Garvey more readily criticized men and became more outspoken in challenging the UNIA and Marcus Garvey, in support of women’s progress. Although Jacques Garvey would deny herself the feminist label, her efforts within the UNIA guarantees her position as one of the most significant early contributors to black feminist and women’s movements that would emerge during the later years of, and even after, the waning UNIA movement.

Amy Jacques Garvey was born into an educated middle-class family in Kingston, Jamaica in 1895.<sup>2</sup> Her father, a white English farmer, was her mentor, instilling a masculine essence within her. Instructing her in her education, on Sundays, Jacques Garvey’s father would have her read foreign newspapers and study

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<sup>1</sup> Philip McCormick, “Healing Colonial Trauma: Marcus Garvey, Cargo Movements, and Symbolic Empowerment,” *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 2 (Nov. 2008): 262, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40282559>.

<sup>2</sup> Keisha N. Blain, “Women Pioneers in the Garvey Movement,” in *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 25.

the words with a dictionary at hand to learn to pronounce the words correctly.<sup>3</sup> Jacques Garvey's middle-class status provided her with greater opportunities than most Jamaicans. As Karen S. Adler shares, "Amy attended high school during a time when less than 2% of Jamaican youths received a high school education."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, "[h]er middle-class status allowed her to develop the verbal and intellectual skills necessary for becoming an effective movement leader."<sup>5</sup> Jacques Garvey herself acknowledges the advantages of her education and her father's instruction, declaring that it "made [her] learn to think independently on world affairs and to analyze situations."<sup>6</sup> Her father's early training was undeniably influential in the development of her own personal political, racial, and social views, as were the gender-classified expectations for his daughter.

Although Jacques Garvey's middle-class status granted her many opportunities that a lot of other women, and Jamaicans in general, were excluded from, her status as a woman nevertheless imposed certain expectations and limitations that challenged her individual growth. Growing up, her father, relying on a masculine framework, taught her all sorts of different things, such as how to use a gun. But, Jacques Garvey's father still had certain expectations that he deemed appropriate for his daughter. During high school she was "taught to play the piano, because music and music appreciation were [...] a cultural finishing to a girl's education."<sup>7</sup> Her father expected her to become a nurse and train in a school in England after her completion of the Cambridge University School Certificate Examination. This ultimate goal was the solid reason why her father allowed her to take typewriting and shorthand courses instead of music.<sup>8</sup> Upon graduating, however, Jacques Garvey received an offer to work in a legal firm to which her father refused because he did "'not want any daughter of [his] to be exposed to the wiles of men in an office'."<sup>9</sup>

Amy Jacques Garvey's opportunities began to expand after the death of her father. Her family's lawyer and her mother encouraged her to work as a clerk in the lawyer's office to help manage her father's estate. She spent four years there, managing all legal stages of the task.<sup>10</sup> By this time she had decided to travel to England, but certain factors did not allow her to do so. She opted for the United

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<sup>3</sup> Ida B. Lewis. "Mrs. Marcus Garvey Talks with Ida Lewis." Interviewed by Ida B. Lewis. *Encore* 2 (May 1973), 68.

<sup>4</sup> Karen S. Adler, "'Always Leading Our Men in Service and Sacrifice': Amy Jacques Garvey, Feminist Black Nationalist," *Gender and Society* 6, no. 3 (Sept. 1992): 349, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/189992>. 350

<sup>5</sup> Adler., 350.

<sup>6</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, "The Role of Women in Liberation Struggles," *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no.1/2 (Winter-Spring 1972): 110, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25088207>.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (Kingston, Jamaica: A. Jacques Garvey, 1963), 106.

<sup>8</sup> Garvey, 106.

<sup>9</sup> Garvey, 106.

<sup>10</sup> Garvey, 106.

States instead and, despite the many objections she faced, she traveled to the United States in 1918. These actions reveal Jacques Garvey's strength of character, as well as "independence of mind, courage, and thirst for knowledge."<sup>11</sup> The experiences of her young life are critical, shedding light on the origins of her feminist ideology and furthering the understanding of her feminist evolution before, throughout, and after the UNIA.

Considered as "the largest pan-African movement history has ever seen," the Universal Negro Improvement Association sought to alleviate the many "problems faced by people of African descent [through] the achievement of economic, social, political, and religious independence from Whites."<sup>12</sup> Founded by Marcus Garvey and his first wife Amy Ashwood Garvey in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1914, the UNIA, at its pinnacle stage during the early 1920s, had drawn millions of followers from over forty countries.<sup>13</sup> During this time, the political organization recorded more than 800 chapters, almost a third of them situated in Central America.<sup>14</sup> Garvey's movement generated heavy support from West Indians and African Americans upon the relocation of the UNIA's headquarters from Kingston to Harlem, New York.<sup>15</sup> A "separatist organization," the UNIA objectified "the development of black economic independence through enterprise and production; industrial education; social and moral uplift; and self-reliance."<sup>16</sup> Behind these efforts lay the ultimate goal of achieving full "repatriation [of] an African homeland [for] the descendants of members of the African diaspora;"<sup>17</sup> a notion he so greatly expressed with the declaration: "'AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS', [for] those at home and those abroad."<sup>18</sup>

Marcus Garvey's ideology, or Garveyism, was indeed based on such "espousing [of a] worldwide liberation of all descendants of Black Africa,"<sup>19</sup> an extension of the concept of black nationalism, or the "expression of resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, central to Garveyism was the notion of African redemption. In this context, African redemption signified the "complete liberation of Africans and peoples of African descent from racism,

<sup>11</sup> Adler, 351.

<sup>12</sup> McCormick, 257.

<sup>13</sup> Blain, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Adler, 347; Blain, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Bair, "True Women, Real Men: Gender, Ideology, and Social Roles in the Garvey Movement," *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History: Essays from the Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women* (Ithaca, New York; Cornell University Press, 1992), 154.

<sup>16</sup> Bair, 154.

<sup>17</sup> Bair, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Or, Africa for the Africans* (London: Routledge, 1967), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Adler, 348.

<sup>20</sup> Mark D. Matthews, "'Our Women and What They Think,' Amy Jacques Garvey and 'The Negro World,'" *The Black Scholar* 10, no. 8/9 (May/June 1979): 10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41163844>.



European colonization, and global imperialism.”<sup>21</sup> But, Garveyism was much more complex and sophisticated, garnished, to a great extent, with a masculine essence. As a black nationalist, Garvey promoted black liberation through a masculinist conception, prioritizing black men’s roles as leaders in the liberation movement. Women, in his view, would contribute significantly in the black liberation struggle but only by dedicating themselves to raising children.

In light of such masculinist view, Beryl Satter classifies Garveyism under “race purity”, rather than “race pride”. As Satter helps elucidate, “race pride may unify African [descendants] politically,” in contrast, “race purity [...] encourages protective attitudes toward women [restricting] women’s behavior.”<sup>22</sup> Garvey called for the collective effort of African descendants to elevate the race, demonstrating and, at many times inspiring, a great sense of racial pride. But, in classifying many of the organizations’ positions by gender and imposing a specific role on women, the maternal role, Garveyism, as Satter warned, falls into the trap of race purity. It is this ideology, Garvey’s masculinist and, therefore, sexist ideology that saturates and shapes the structure and overall organization of the UNIA.

Satter’s claim that “Garvey’s UNIA appears to have been a predominantly male organization” is substantiated by the political organization’s framework.<sup>23</sup> As Keisha N. Blain contributes, “Garvey sought to maintain a patriarchal model of leadership in the UNIA.”<sup>24</sup> It is important to clarify that there were some leadership opportunities for women; many women attained leadership positions both at the local and executive levels. For example, positions were reserved for “Lady President and Lady Vice-President” of local divisions who were in charge of supervising the local female auxiliary.<sup>25</sup> In this light, although women were not offered as many “equal opportunities [as] men,” the UNIA “was, in some ways, one of the most progressive black political organizations of the period.”<sup>26</sup> Still, not only were leadership positions mainly reserved for men, women fortunate enough to attain high positions found they had no full control, but were subject to the direction of male leaders; they “held restricted leadership positions and were always accountable to men in the organization.”<sup>27</sup> These leadership opportunities were not enough. In the larger scheme of things, Blain is accurate in concluding that “opportunities for a handful of women to hold positions of prominence could not remedy the patriarchal

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<sup>21</sup> Blain, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Beryl Satter, “Marcus Garvey, Father Divine and the Gender Politics of Race Difference and Race Neutrality,” *American Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 1996): 67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30041521>.

<sup>23</sup> Satter, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Blain, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, “Women and the Garvey Movement in Jamaica,” *Garvey: His Work and Impact* (Trenton, N.J.; Africa World Press, 1988): 78; Blain, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Blain, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Blain, 30.

leadership structure of the UNIA, in which women lacked full autonomy and equality.”<sup>28</sup>

The UNIA’s “structure [...] and [...] philosophy that guided its purpose were laden with culturally constructed concepts of gender that in turn helped define highly gender-specific social roles.”<sup>29</sup> The roles of men and women within the UNIA exemplify the dichotomous “model of gender relations” that establishes the “organizational pattern” not as “separate and equal but separate and hierarchical.”<sup>30</sup> To elucidate, “the wife/woman sphere [...] was deemed important but secondary to and supportive of that of the husband/man.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the favoring of men over women was of a rather conspicuous nature: men being offered more positions meant they more readily garnered representation in the UNIA. Black male Garveyites, as supporters of Garveyism were referred to, were highly revered in the organization, particularly as soldiers, leaders, and rulers. In fact, the Universal African Legions (UAL), the male auxiliary, was so greatly admired for its militarism, the main value that represented the male side of the “dichotomous sets of genderized values.”<sup>32</sup> Members of the UAL were critical in that “[t]hey represented the ideas of power and dominance and the military might necessary to achieve and maintain Negro nationhood.”<sup>33</sup>

Women Garveyites, on the other hand, symbolized motherhood. Referred to as “mothers of the race,” women were expected to contribute in the uplifting of the race by having children and becoming supportive wives.<sup>34</sup> “Garveyite women were literally to produce a ‘better and stronger race’ through the quality of their childcare.”<sup>35</sup> This dichotomy between the qualities of militarism and motherhood of the roles of men and women emphasize the supportive and secondary nature of women’s status in the UNIA. More extensively, the “hierarchical sexual division of labor” granted men the positions of businessmen, statesmen, and diplomats while women were positioned in “clerical, cultural and civic support services.”<sup>36</sup> The most illustrative example is that of the Black Cross Nurses (BCN), the UNIA’s female auxiliary.

If the UAL equated to militarism, the Black Cross Nurses (BCN) were synonymous with motherhood. A woman presided over the BCN alongside a trained and well-experienced nurse. These nurses offered many social and organizational services such as taking care of the sick, providing clothing, managing food banks and

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<sup>28</sup> Blain, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Bair, 155.

<sup>30</sup> Bair, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Bair, 155.

<sup>32</sup> Bair, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Bair, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Satter, 48, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Satter, 50.

<sup>36</sup> Satter, 49.

supper kitchens. The BCN was not only important to the local communities; it played a significant role in the UNIA as it was the second-most successful fundraising enterprise.<sup>37</sup> The Black Cross Nurses were also significant to the larger movement in that they “personified the benevolent, nurturing, and uplifting aspirations of the UNIA and the communitarian principle of black survival and mutual care.”<sup>38</sup> “Viewed pragmatically,” as Philip McCormick summarizes, “the BCN aided in healing physical ailments; viewed symbolically, they were healing their communities from the traumatic effects of colonial domination.”<sup>39</sup>

But, although the BCN was critical to the UNIA, its members were not treated with such high regards. In fact, for young women Garveyites, participation in the auxiliary was mandatory.<sup>40</sup> More seriously, women had no control over their bodies as they were prohibited from using birth control and were, therefore, subject to reproducing and having Black children who would, consequently, produce a strong Black race.<sup>41</sup> This condition is not unique to Garveyism but rather characteristic of “race purity” organizations for, as Satter points out, “ideologies of race purity have [...] led to male control of women’s bodies.”<sup>42</sup> Evidently, women played a significant role in the UNIA but had no autonomy. Their participation in the female auxiliary reveals that women’s overall participation in the UNIA was of a submissive nature, but not necessarily by consent. The sexist ideology that pervaded the organization’s structure maintained women in a secondary position where “they were to live in strong patriarchal families, have babies, and be supported by the earnings of men” without much self-determination.<sup>43</sup>

This idea of women Garveyites as secondary members is furthered by the UNIA’s promotion of public roles for men and private roles for women. Because of the gendered roles, positions, and responsibilities, men came to be associated with “public roles and the constructions of independence, authority, and power” while women were associated with “private roles and the qualities of cooperation, nurturing, and uplift.”<sup>44</sup> Women were expected to comply with the duties imposed on them and when they did not, they were looked down upon, as portrayed by a UNIA official who remarked that “if ‘you find any woman- especially a black woman- who does not want to be a mother, you may rest assured she is not a true woman.’”<sup>45</sup> This denouncement stems from Garvey’s ideology in which, as mothers of the race, women were expected to have children so as to strengthen the black race.

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<sup>37</sup> McCormick, 261.

<sup>38</sup> McCormick, 261.

<sup>39</sup> McCormick, 264.

<sup>40</sup> McCormick, 261.

<sup>41</sup> McCormick, 261.

<sup>42</sup> Satter, 47.

<sup>43</sup> McCormick, 262.

<sup>44</sup> Bair, 155.

<sup>45</sup> Satter, 48.

In fact, this was so central to Garveyism that “black women [were urged] to cede public roles to their men in order to devote themselves to their offspring and so strengthen the race.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, “[t]he UNIA was thus committed not to promoting the dignity and power of black women” but rather to “regaining black women’s reverence and respect for the black man” for the realization of the cause.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as secondary members, women’s progress was hindered by Garvey and other male Garveyites in the UNIA.

However, despite their shortcomings, women were integral to the UNIA and found means of expressing themselves, in large part, by the efforts of female activists like Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey. As a co-founder of the organization, Amy Ashwood Garvey was essentially the first female activist of the UNIA. It was Ashwood Garvey’s efforts that opened up opportunities for women to become involved in the organization. For example, she organized a women’s division that later developed into the Black Cross Nurses.<sup>48</sup> She is also accredited with promoting the positions of female president and vice president of local divisions.<sup>49</sup> Even though, despite her efforts, the UNIA would develop into a sexually hierarchical organization, it is unquestionable that Amy Ashwood Garvey’s efforts in defending women at the outset of the UNIA “provided invaluable opportunities for many black women to participate in the rapidly expanding Pan-Africanist organization.”<sup>50</sup>

Amy Ashwood Garvey had founded the organization when she was seventeen years old in 1914; Marcus Garvey had convinced her with the words: “we can conquer the world [...] together we can help to awaken the Negro to his sense of racial insecurity!”<sup>51</sup> Her strong personality, however, assured a rather short membership in the UNIA and an even more brief marriage with Marcus Garvey. Ashwood Garvey married Marcus Garvey in 1920 and was separated months later, with an official divorce in 1922. She states that the divorce was due to the “the clash between Garvey’s dominating ways and her own forceful and extroverted personality.”<sup>52</sup> While Amy Ashwood Garvey was unwilling “to meet Garvey’s expectations of a wife who would sacrifice her own goals to devote herself to the career of her husband,” Amy Jacques Garvey, on the other hand, was more than capable of doing so.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Satter, 52.

<sup>47</sup> Satter, 52.

<sup>48</sup> Ford-Smith, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Blain, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Blain, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Amy Ashwood Garvey, “The Birth of the Universal Negro Improvement Association,” in *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond*, ed. Tony Martin (Dover, Mass.: Majority Press, 1984), 225.

<sup>52</sup> Bair, 165.

<sup>53</sup> Blain, 165.

How Jacques Garvey became acquainted with Marcus Garvey is unclear. Adler argues that, after arriving in New York, Jacques Garvey attended a meeting in Liberty Hall in 1919 in which Garvey gave a speech. She supposedly approached “him afterward to congratulate him on his fine oratory and to ask him questions.”<sup>54</sup> Even more obscure is how they formed a formal relationship. It is uncertain whether they began their relationship while Garvey was still married to Ashwood Garvey, or after the divorce. What is certain, however, is that Garvey’s marriage to Jacques Garvey in 1922 had a profound and lasting effect on the relationship between Amy Jacques Garvey and Amy Ashwood Garvey. Blain suggests how close these ladies once were in implying that “Amy Ashwood [...] may have [...] played a significant role in Jacques Garvey’s decision to join the UNIA.”<sup>55</sup> Although the latter would come to deny it, Jacques Garvey and Ashwood Garvey had indeed been friends as teenagers in Jamaica, as is evidenced by the fact that Jacques Garvey had taken part in Garvey’s first wedding ceremony as Ashwood’s maid of honor.<sup>56</sup> Garvey’s divorce to Amy Ashwood and marriage to Jacques Garvey surely tarnished the friendship between two of the most important women of the UNIA.

Jacques Garvey’s early relationship with Marcus Garvey was defined by mutual respect and admiration.<sup>57</sup> In its inception, their marriage was strong, especially since Jacques Garvey supported Garvey heavily, successfully becoming, as Bair interprets, “the ultimate example of the companionate wife.”<sup>58</sup> Adler echoes, “Amy was one of Marcus’s staunchest supporters and portrayed herself publicly as his companion and helpmate.”<sup>59</sup> In this regard, Jacques Garvey was different from Ashwood Garvey. Whereas the latter was unwilling to abandon herself and completely devote herself to her husband, the former was, in the beginning, readily inclined to do so. Jacques Garvey’s portrayal of the perfect wife and brief endorsement of Garvey’s views on women’s role in the liberation movement developed in tandem with their initially strong relationship. Jacques Garvey, in fact, had believed it was Black women’s responsibility to get behind their men and encourage them forward.<sup>60</sup> Ford-Smith contributes that “she did not question her role as wife or mother, combining these duties with her responsibility as a tireless supporter of Garvey.”<sup>61</sup> She coincided with Garvey so well that those who interacted with them believed she was perfect for him, to the extent that “she was almost always viewed as an extension of Garvey’s identity.”<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, Jacques Garvey embodied

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<sup>54</sup> Adler, 351.

<sup>55</sup> Blain, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Adler, 352; Blain, 25.

<sup>57</sup> Adler, 352.

<sup>58</sup> Bair, 163.

<sup>59</sup> Adler, 352.

<sup>60</sup> Adler, 364.

<sup>61</sup> Ford-Smith, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Bair, 163.

Garvey's position on women exceptionally, being characterized "as a woman 'doing her full share as a good wife and helping him to accomplish his task as a Negro leader'."<sup>63</sup> She was, as people proclaimed, "the better half of Marcus Garvey."<sup>64</sup>

However, although Jacques Garvey exemplified Garvey's outlook on women properly, she amply exercised independent leadership and independent thought throughout her membership in the UNIA. Jacques Garvey contributed to the organization significantly; there was no question that "her importance was second only to Marcus Garvey."<sup>65</sup> Although concealed, it was Jacques Garvey's efforts that paved the way for Garvey to become acknowledged for his great speeches. In reality, "a significant portion of the speeches [and] writings [...] was the result of her efforts."<sup>66</sup> Jacques Garvey recounts that it was she who went through newspapers and magazines, formed her ideas and opinions, and then presented her findings to Marcus Garvey.<sup>67</sup> Her ideas and materials would form "the basis for 'his' speeches and front-page articles."<sup>68</sup> Adler expands that Garvey "also incorporated information from Amy's own articles in the *Negro World* into his speeches," justly interpreting that "Amy [...] had a profound impact on Marcus's thought and was undoubtedly a cocreator, if not *the* creator, of aspects of Garveyite philosophy."<sup>69</sup>

One of Jacques Garvey's most significant contributions to the UNIA was the establishment of the women's page of the *Negro World*, the UNIA's main newspaper. Jacques Garvey's introduction of the page, "Our Women and What They Think," "propelled UNIA women into greater political visibility and influence."<sup>70</sup> Although years later Jacques Garvey would proclaim that the page "wasn't feminist at all," the Women's Page served as a platform for her and other women to express themselves, oftentimes about their dissatisfaction with women's roles and men's performance of their roles both within the UNIA and in a larger social context.<sup>71</sup> It is imperative to understand that Jacques Garvey had already been forming her own ideas about women's roles and about the black liberation movement, even before she became involved in the UNIA. Adler clarifies that "[h]er feminist consciousness was [...] fueled by, and became more fully articulated through, her relationship with Marcus."<sup>72</sup>

Her experiences before joining the movement and during her membership certainly influenced her ideological formation. Satter supplies that "Garvey expected

<sup>63</sup> Bair, 163.

<sup>64</sup> Bair, 163.

<sup>65</sup> Matthews, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Adler, 353.

<sup>67</sup> Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Adler, 353.

<sup>69</sup> Adler, 354.

<sup>70</sup> Blain, 36.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis, 68.

<sup>72</sup> Adler, 356.

her to be the perfect wife, while also serving as his secretary, legal adviser, fundraiser, editor, and fulltime propagandist.”<sup>73</sup> And yet, despite her huge efforts in supporting Garvey she, like many other women, was caste to a secondary position: Jacques Garvey “exercis[ed] great authority but never [held] an official office in the organization.”<sup>74</sup> Her experience in the movement was different to other women who held official positions in the UNIA, but only to a small degree. Successful female leaders like Henrietta Vinton Davis and Maymie Leona Turpeau De Mena, like her, were seen “as Garvey’s representatives” and not as “‘real’ leaders in their own right.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, Garvey hindered Jacques Garvey’s progress and that of many other female UNIA members. Adler analyzes that although “Marcus relied on Amy’s emotional support and tactical ingenuity for his well-being,” she, on the other hand, was not fully supported by Marcus Garvey. He intended to keep her stagnant for “selfish reasons [because] as far as he was concerned, Amy’s main role in life was to save *him*.”<sup>76</sup>

The “Our Women and What They Think” page was introduced at a very significant time in the organization. In 1920, Jacques Garvey became business manager of the UNIA headquarters, but it was not until 1923 that she was truly able to flourish when Marcus Garvey was charged and convicted of mail fraud, leaving the organization without it’s admired leader.<sup>77</sup> With Garvey in jail, it became easier for women, including Jacques Garvey, to express themselves. The “Our Women” page would serve as their preferred medium to voice their opinions. In fact, “Jacques Garvey used the pages of ‘Our Women’ to articulate her proto-feminist views, openly denouncing what she described as the ‘antiquated beliefs’ of men in the UNIA.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the challenging of Garvey’s ideology and, therefore, the ideology of the UNIA did not occur abruptly; for years she cultivated her own ideas and became increasingly outspoken, in support of women, as she became more and more critical of Garvey and Garveyite men.

As Mark D. Matthews contemplates, “Amy Jacques Garvey heralded the feminists’ struggles that were broadening the activities of women.”<sup>79</sup> With its main themes of “social justice and nationalism,” the “Our Women” page discussed various topics including “‘third world’ and national liberation struggles, feminist struggle, modernization and [...] the contribution of black women to the black movement.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Jacques Garvey was a strong advocate of women’s participation in the liberation movement. She strongly believed that women had many skills and should,

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<sup>73</sup> Satter, 51.

<sup>74</sup> Bair, 162.

<sup>75</sup> Bair, 163.

<sup>76</sup> Adler, 355.

<sup>77</sup> Bair, 162; Blain, 33.

<sup>78</sup> Blain, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Matthews, 5.

<sup>80</sup> Mathew, 4.

therefore, not be restricted to private duties. She expressed “women’s responsibilities were ‘not limited’ to homemaking and childcare, but included ‘tackling the problems that confront the race.’”<sup>81</sup> Her articles were very progressive, implying “a vision of motherhood that entailed community activism as well as private domesticity.”<sup>82</sup> While Garvey confined women to private roles, Jacques Garvey liberated women, providing a great deal of support and encouragement, and working to promote women in the black liberation movement, as well as, in the UNIA.

Indeed, Jacques Garvey strongly believed that the “Negro woman [was] the backbone of the race,” and that black women were the “primary movers of the race.”<sup>83</sup> She proposed that women possessed many skills including the ability of paying attention to details which allowed them to “contribute greatly to big projects in the community, state, and nation.”<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Jacques Garvey understood the ambition of women of taking a greater part in the liberation of the race: “‘Yet she [the black woman] has suffered all with fortitude, and stands ever ready to help in the onward march to freedom and power.’”<sup>85</sup>

Jacques Garvey’s views form part of a larger, historical understanding of women and their social positions. Adler elucidates that “[b]lack women have historically been forced to adopt the roles of wife, mother, and worker simultaneously in response to their experiences of racism, sexism, and classism.”<sup>86</sup> This trio is what Deborah King refers to as “multiple jeopardy,” or the interaction between “racism, sexism, and classism [...] three, interdependent control systems” that have long characterized the experiences of so many black women.<sup>87</sup> Jacques Garvey defended “that poverty, poor health conditions, child welfare [...] and racial segregation were women’s issues as much as women’s suffrage and women’s higher education were strategies for racial advancement.”<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, she believed that “[b]lack women’s experiences of ‘multiple jeopardy’ compelled them to cultivate inner strengths that rendered them natural leaders in the fight for equality.”<sup>89</sup> Black women’s experiences guaranteed their positions as leaders of the black liberation movement. Conclusively, “her feminism and Black nationalism were inextricably linked.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Satter, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Satter, 49.

<sup>83</sup> Adler, 363, 362.

<sup>84</sup> Jacques Garvey, “The Role of Women,” 110.

<sup>85</sup> Amy E. Jacques Garvey, “Women as Leaders,” *History is a Weapon*, accessed October 3, 2018, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/garveywomenasleaders.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Adler, 362.

<sup>87</sup> Micheline R. Malson, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Jean F. O’Barr, and Mary Wyer, eds., *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 270.

<sup>88</sup> Adler, 357.

<sup>89</sup> Adler, 362.

<sup>90</sup> Adler, 371.



Jacques Garvey's growing support of women paralleled her growing criticism and resentment of Garvey and Garveyite men. Blain provides, "Jacques Garvey insisted that women in the UNIA were determined to have equal opportunities and were unwilling to allow male Garveyites to hinder their progress."<sup>91</sup> Actually, Jacques Garvey expressed the same disapproval many other Garveyite women felt. While women concurred with men in the cause of racial solidarity and uplift they questioned the gendered structure of the UNIA that limited their roles.<sup>92</sup> Angered that women were relegated to an inferior position, she "strongly reprimanded Black men for their old-fashioned, tyrannical attitudes toward Black women."<sup>93</sup> More seriously, Jacques Garvey strongly believed that men retarded racial progress by being lazy and lethargic, "failing to provide for their women, children, their own future, and moreover, the posterity of the race."<sup>94</sup> These were some of the grievances expressed in the "Our Women" page, underlining the significance of it for women in the UNIA.

Garvey's incarceration certainly provided Jacques Garvey with the opportunity to strengthen her voice. She increasingly expressed her pro-feminist views not only at a chaotic time for the UNIA, but, more significantly, as her marriage with Marcus Garvey began to collapse. In actuality, Jacques Garvey and Marcus Garvey's relationship began to change considerably when they began to have children. As Ula Yvette Taylor depicts, "their home eventually became a repository for more tension than ease and more distance than familial warmth."<sup>95</sup> Jacques Garvey was no longer able to perform the many duties Garvey assigned her once she had children and, to complicate matters, "[t]heir births occurred during a period when Garvey was travelling frequently, desperately strapped for money, and entirely preoccupied with reviving the UNIA."<sup>96</sup> It seemed "Garvey had submerged 'the roles of husband and father' and sacrificed 'his family on the altar of African redemption'."<sup>97</sup> In consequence, Jacques Garvey felt Garvey neglected his family. In fact, a lot of her discontent arose from the fact that Garvey concerned himself more with his work than with his family. He would make great and lavish arrangements for matters of the organizations while, at home, she and her children were suffering great deprivations. Financial issues were a consistent burden for Garvey and, conversely, Jacques Garvey: in *Garvey and Garveyism*, she recounts how Garvey had used some of their firstborn son Junior's gift money for his own affairs.<sup>98</sup> In the same

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<sup>91</sup> Blain, 34.

<sup>92</sup> Bair, 160.

<sup>93</sup> Adler, 363.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 363.

<sup>95</sup> Ula Yvette Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 125.

<sup>96</sup> Satter, 51.

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, 138.

<sup>98</sup> Taylor, 207.

book she details several instances where she had to resolve many financial matters on her own because he would not provide assistance, claiming that “there were more urgent matters there that had to be met.”<sup>99</sup> Her experiences with Garvey did not initiate her feminist development, but rather contributed to it, as did her activities in the UNIA. Thus, her dwindling marriage signified the strengthening of her feminist voice.

Jacques Garvey’s feminist efforts in the UNIA certainly helped women strengthen their own feminist voices. Although the UNIA hindered women’s progress, it served as a catalyst for feminist and women’s movements after their involvement in the political organization. Honor Ford-Smith evaluates that the UNIA “offered black women a concrete experience in organization and leadership.”<sup>100</sup> Garveyite ideas were embedded into the organization of women’s movements; it can be concluded that “the Garvey movement facilitated the struggles of women of different classes for political rights and on labour issues in the 1930s.”<sup>101</sup> Indeed, “the UNIA was [...] the training ground for black feminists of the 1930s.”<sup>102</sup> Women’s experiences in the UNIA, although frustrating, proved beneficial since they were able to acquire and develop certain skills they were then able to harvest in later feminist movements. Ultimately, Jacques Garvey’s efforts in the UNIA validate her status as a very important figure of black feminism and women’s movements.

Kiana Cárdenas, from Worcester, MA, is a senior History major with a focus on *Race and Ethnicity*. She has been a Dining Services Captain for three years and is currently serving as a Co-Chair for the Pre-Nurse Practitioners Club.

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<sup>99</sup> Taylor, 219.

<sup>100</sup> Ford-Smith, 73-74.

<sup>101</sup> Ford-Smith, 74.

<sup>102</sup> Ford-Smith, 82.

# Mysterious Moralism

## Anthony Comstock's Crusade against Female Sexuality and Society's Resistance to Censorship and Enforced Christian Values

Gabriella M. Grilla '19

### A Need for Morality

When asked to create parameters defining pornography during the *Jacobellis v. Ohio* case in 1964, Justice Stewart could not provide one, claiming only to “know it when I see it.”<sup>1</sup> This quote summarizes the struggles that the Crusader of Vice, Anthony Comstock, faced 50 years prior. As a devoutly religious man, Comstock dedicated his life to eradicating vice in American society and attempted to do so by targeting forms of sexual obscenity, such as pornography. The first major roadblock in Comstock's crusade came from his inability to depict or discuss vice, even when on the stand during trial, for fear of spreading obscenity through his descriptions. This inability to provide a clear definition of obscenity and pornography, the same issue that arose during the *Jacobellis v. Ohio* case, would prove damning in Comstock's quest for societal purity.

Comstock believed the end of vice started with women; women either perpetuated vice, knowingly or maliciously, and needed an education, or they fought its infection. The movement viewed women who spread vice unknowingly as victims of vice as well as perpetrators. They needed both protection from their infantile ways and education concerning the dangers of obscenity. The women who made a conscious choice to lure and corrupt young men and children with her sexuality, on the other hand, did not deserve saving or acceptance in society. It became the responsibility of the newly educated, no longer naïve women and the devout to put an end to the spread of vice. Comstock believed these women, and their traditional values, would prove essential in the struggle to put an end to the epidemic of lust. The framing of women in Comstock's personal world appeared to completely disregard the new found roles of women in society as the culture began to change.

Comstock noticed the female form becoming increasingly sexualized in the public sphere as society slid deeper into sin. Nude art offended him, classics such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* only had merit as long as they remained inaccessible to the wider public, and the gauche nature of birth control scandalized him.<sup>2</sup> Society appears to have grown more comfortable with women in the public sphere as well

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<sup>1</sup> 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964) (Stewart, J., concurring).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Comstock, “Vampire Literature,” *The North American Review*, Vol. 153, No. 417. (Boston, 1891), 166.

as more accepting of small shows of female sexuality. The rise of consumerism also began to turn the female body into a commodity, eliciting more widespread unabashed public desire than seen in society before. Comstock believed, as a self-appointed and government sanctioned Crusader of Vice, the responsibility for the defeat of obscenity fell upon him alone as much as upon women. He wished that women would not allow for such deviant portrayals of their bodies to exist in society and that they would leave the public sphere to return home to watch over and educate their children.<sup>3</sup> Although depicted as an effort to protect American youth, Comstock's crusade to suppress and censor vice was born from his beliefs that public female sexuality would continue to degrade and erode society, and in order to maintain the class system a reconstitution of the elite identity needed to take place. Through publicly and aggressively shaming and harassing citizens, arresting vice dealers, and passing legislature, Anthony Comstock attempted to return women to a Puritanical way of life and stunt the upward mobility of the lower classes.

### A Crusader Finds His Cause

Born in New Canaan, Connecticut to a fervently religious family, Comstock learned the perceived value of gender roles early on. His mother attended all-day sermons on Sundays and spent a large amount of time teaching her children the dangers of vice as well as the virtues of righteous living. In their home, Mrs. Comstock as a matriarch, expressly in charge of rearing her children, made sure that they learned the word of the Lord and followed them to the letter. Comstock took this domestic and religious education very seriously. His mother's role in the home, as well as, her Christian teachings would later shape his dislike for the changing society. By the time he turned seventeen he had shut down the local saloon and would pour out his ration of whiskey at each dinner during the Civil War. When he pursued a career as a merchant and moved to New York he dealt with the death of a fellow clerk who "had been led astray and corrupted and diseased" after he encountered pornography.<sup>4</sup> He could not stand to see the rampant vice polluting the streets: sex workers, penny and dime books, and birth control all encouraging hedonistic behavior. Comstock decided to take action. After arresting a few citizens and confiscating a substantial amount of obscene material he started running out of money. Upon visiting the Young Men's Christian Association, one of its founders, Mr. Morris Jesup, provided funding to cover his past expenses and continue his quest to eradicate vice. From there, Comstock convinced Associate Justice William Strong to help him write a bill that passed in 1873. He took up the mantle of Assistant

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<sup>3</sup> Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, *Anthony Comstock, Fighter: Some Impressions of a Lifetime of Adventure in Conflict with the Powers of Evil*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 51.

Postmaster General, created the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, and dug his heels in against the tide of lust.

Comstock did not expressly provide clear distinctions of how to determine obscenity. Yet Comstock's Law strictly prohibited the mailing of "vile and immoral goods" and allowed officials to apprehend anything "obscene or immoral."<sup>5</sup> These vague words put Comstock and the court judges in extraordinary positions of power to dictate public morality. Only a select few men could decide what constituted obscenity by law, and thus it made the hunt for vice arduous and uncertain. Comstock believed objects should adhere to the standard of the Hicklin test, a definition for obscenity created in the English courts. Comstock's Law, while centered on censoring the mail, would extend the Hicklin test to any possible pornographic object, mailed or otherwise. Some mailed items that he apprehended included medical textbooks, pamphlets on birth control, advertisements for raucous theater, and ads or information about sexuality. The standard for vice would slowly become understood as the decisions from different court cases became accessible to the public. Society eventually discerned which sins of lust would result in their arrests and jail time, and which would most likely only result in a fine. Besides not having clear criteria for determining lasciviousness or lewdness, Comstock would also not comment to newspapers about the nature of confiscated items.<sup>6</sup> He would neither describe the offensive material nor print excerpts from it. His secrecy about what determined obscenity prompted two reactions from the public; committing small acts of protest by printing more subtle ads or immediately searching for the offending item to see for themselves what level of lust warranted removal from society. The latter had the unintended consequence of exposing women and children, the focus of Comstock's campaign, to the very material Comstock hoped to hide from them.

The morality movement focused as much on suppressing class as it did on suppressing women. Comstock used women to manipulate the public, children to manipulate the women, and the elites to manipulate the middle and lower classes. Middle class parents treated virtues as something akin to currency, given that they believed that by being virtuous their children would naturally succeed in life. Parents wanted to advance their children's social standing and they believed that through education, virtuousness, and an advantageous social network that their children could attain upward mobility.<sup>7</sup> Comstock recognized that the elite did not like the nouveau riche and did not intend to mix with the upwardly climbing middle class families, so they supported Comstock when he came looking for benefactors. Given the elite concern with raising their own virtuous children, and their understanding of the

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<sup>5</sup> Comstock Act from Andrea Tone, "Black Market Birth Control: Contraceptive Entrepreneurship and Criminality in the Gilded Age," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 439.

<sup>6</sup> "Comstock Heckled At Labor Temple," *New York Times* (New York, 1910), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Beisel, 5.

middle class as riddled with sin, they threw their support behind Comstock's campaign in an effort to maintain their social class and to limit the interactions their children had with the lower class.<sup>8</sup> Comstock would target the middle and lower class distributors and consumers through arrests and ideological warfare, aggressively publishing and highlighting works and advertisements that aligned with his worldview. He shamed lower class women for having to work outside of the home to provide a comfortable life for their family. He blamed women leaving the home and the erosion of family on "the spread of immoral sexual practices and materials."<sup>9</sup>

Comstock showed his elite favoritism when arresting Mme. Restelle, a known abortionist, for a second time. At the time of her arrest, Restelle's home housed many elite women recovering from their recent procedures, all of whom Comstock did not arrest given their status, even though having an abortion was punishable by law. Similarly, Comstock opposed nude art and would have taken on the MET given the chance, but the elite loved art museums and the new exclusivity they provided. Instead, he attacked famous art in a more general sense and seized any copies made and distributed, further enforcing the exclusivity of art museums and the "otherness" of the lower classes. Comstock would eventually concede this fight and decide that the audience viewing the art would determine the nature of its morality. According to Comstock, middle and lower class citizens who viewed nude art or provocative works would not understand the overall moral implications of the work, and thus could and would be polluted by its vice.<sup>10</sup>

Charles Goodyear and the successive President of the NYSSV, Samuel Colgate, further exemplify Comstock turning a blind eye to the behavior of the elites. Colgate owned Vaseline and a year after becoming the president of the NYSSV he executed a campaign to increase sales centered on the spermicidal nature of Vaseline. Rather than attacking Colgate and Vaseline, Comstock ignored his patrons' trespasses as Colgate gave money and time to the organization. Another example is the Stuart Rubber Company of Milwaukee. Comstock arrested Morris Glattsine, a poor immigrant, for selling condoms to individual buyers, which he purchased from the Stuart Rubber Company, but not the company itself for manufacturing condoms – even though they sold condoms in bulk through the mail.<sup>11</sup> These elite men and untouchable companies infuriated Comstock but since he could not prosecute them he took his energies out on the working classes, especially on working class women. Comstock did not fit with the middle or lower classes, but also did not fit in with the elite. He belonged to a class of his own. Eventually the elite class would turn on him, finding him tiresome as he continued to target the theater, art museums, and saloons.

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<sup>8</sup> Beisel, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Beisel, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Beisel, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Tone, 444.

### Contraceptives, Consumerism, and Conventions

Comstock's very existence bred contempt. In the midst of a booming economy and cultural shifts, many people did not appreciate his direct attempt to censor them and limit their right to free expression. Social markers of the Gilded Age include anarchy, Free Love advocates, and stretching artistic boundaries – all individuals and organizations who valued freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Comstock's vigorous and tireless campaign against vice did not cause vice to dissipate but instead forced it underground and into common conversation; "When Mr. Comstock started out the main business this society opposes was carried on openly. Now it is stealthy and afraid."<sup>12</sup> Sellers and distributors of vice would describe their products in secretive and humorous ways in pamphlets and circulars to show that they took the law seriously enough to try and avoid detection, but not seriously enough to stop selling contraceptives.

The black market contraceptive industry thrived.<sup>13</sup> Many women turned to selling preventative measures and passing along the names of underground abortionists by word of mouth. This network of women emphasized their ability to make the male dominated system work for them; their gossip did not register to men as something worth their time, leaving them relatively undetected. When it came to light that women also dealt in selling preventative measures and spread information about abortionists, the Society for the Suppression of Vice adjusted their scope to include women as well.<sup>14</sup> Women who sold birth control exclusively as a way to make money, such as the case of Sarah Chase, faced frequent arrests. Disinterested judges, however, turned these cases over quite frequently because selling birth control would only amount to a small infraction and given the gravity of many serious crimes brought before the court, did not seem like a valid way to spend the courts time, money, or energy. The turnover incensed Comstock and he attacked working class women with increasing fervor.

While Comstock prosecuted both men and women engaged in the sale and dissemination of vice, he focused most of his energies on women. Men bought photos of pornography because women posed for them, they had to purchase birth control because women slept with them, and so on. He placed the dissemination of lust squarely on the shoulders of women and did not call the character of men into question. Again, while he would pursue individual dealers of vice and criticize American society as a whole, he felt men underwent continuous barrages of vice temptation that threatened their morality within this dangerously obscene society. The dangers of vice permeated society so deeply that women, on the other hand, needed protection from the sinful public sphere. That, or they perpetuated vice and

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<sup>12</sup> John S. Sumner, "Comstock and Sumner," *Journal of Education Vol. 82, No. 17* (Boston: Boston University, 1915), 458.

<sup>13</sup> Tone, 437.

<sup>14</sup> Tone, 437-8.

society should shun them as the true sorceresses of lust they are. In Comstock's moral society only men who exhibited excessively deviant behaviors, like La Grange Brown, experienced his legendary rage. A true Gilded Age sexual predator, Brown had over 300 pornographic photos of young, elite women posed on his lap locked away in a private room in his home, which he booby-trapped to explode should anyone unwanted attempt to enter.<sup>15</sup> Comstock would scorn Brown along with the women who posed for the photos, but still he would not place any blame on the customers of the photos who kept Brown's services in need. This poses an interesting dichotomy because if Anthony Comstock truly understood Gilded Age men as the victims and not equal perpetrators of vice, then that places a large amount of power firmly in the hands of women. By that token, given the apparent dangers of obscene things, women could single handedly funnel society into a completely salacious and immoral environment and all men would be under their control.

While Comstock held many women in contempt his cruelty knew no bounds when it came to Ida Craddock and Mme. Restelle. Their cases turned into spectacular shows of Comstock's cruelty, highlighting his ferocity and lack of remorse when attempting to prosecute women, their sexuality, or their reproductive agency. Restelle's case also emphasized the disparity between the upper and lower classes in the morality movement. Abortionists in the Gilded Age, both Restelle and Craddock ran secretive clinics to help women in unsightly situations. Craddock received medically training and Restelle learned the procedures through experience. Both women advocated for the education and open discussion of female sexuality but "even if Comstock could have tolerated Craddock's arguments for the propriety of sexual impulse, he could not permit her to argue it publically."<sup>16</sup> Comstock impersonated someone in need of help and approached Restelle and Craddock. Both women offered him aid. After being tried in court, Restelle's verdict came back guilty, sentencing her to jail for the second time.

Craddock, also found guilty, did not entirely understand what led to her arrest, even after Comstock found abortion implements in her home. As a trained medical professional, Craddock wanted to help women in unfortunate situations. Craddock, like Restelle, received jail time. Both women would commit suicide after their trials, and Mme. Restelle left a letter citing Comstock as the reason behind her most egregious sin.

Comstock fluctuated wildly from holding women up on a platform of moral righteousness to portraying them as the center of vice and lust. Women could defeat immorality by shunning vice, resisting changes in society, and returning to the

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<sup>15</sup> Amy Werbel, *Lust on Trial: Censorship and the Rise of American Obscenity in the Age of Anthony Comstock*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Shirley J. Burton, "Obscene, Lewd, and Lascivious: Ida Craddock and the Criminally Obscene Women of Chicago, 1873-1913" *Michigan Historical Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University Press, 1993), 5



home.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Comstock did not find moral fault with men because they largely controlled the money in America and acted as his benefactors, even if elite women supported him. Simply put, he could not survive without their contributions. He also believed that men should act as the patriarch of the family and the sole source of economic income, meaning he would not have wanted to engage with his benefactor's wives. In Comstock's ideal world, the family depended solely on the salary of the father and the mother cared for and nourished the souls of the children. His aggressive push for a return to a more rigid, moral society did not receive much support. While the more prominent members of the anti-morality movement, such as Margaret Sanger, would agree that the protection of women and children deserved more attention and care, the majority of people did not agree that a return to a Puritan way of life would inherently create that protection. Sanger and others "believed that the answer lay in women's economic, political, sexual, and reproductive empowerment, which would only be possible with free speech rights."<sup>18</sup> Like most political issues, passionate outliers such as Anthony Comstock and Victoria Woodhull and the Free Love Movement obtained the most visibility, but mainly the average American fell in the middle.<sup>19</sup> They enjoyed slightly scandalous books or theater time and again, but also did not want to contribute to the disintegration of American society.

Comstock's attempt to not only target women's control of their bodies but also the woman's role in the family disregarded the fact that some families might need two incomes, or as in the case of Sarah Chase, that the woman provided the only source of income. His refusal to accept the overwhelming shifts in society towards rendered him unable to understand the benefits of working women and how they provided for their families in this time of tremendous change.<sup>20</sup>

Rent, education and general goods rose in cost and the popularity of department stores increased, putting pressure on lower class women to adapt to the new consumerism and changing expectations of homemaking.<sup>21</sup> At this time, expectations of women centered on pursuing motherhood, first and foremost, and guiding their children through life. That being said, a new set of expectations surrounding homemaking and working outside the home began to appear, demanding even more of woman and their time than before. Women needed to showcase their perfect, respectable home and family while also working a fulltime job. Men, on the other hand, did not experience familial pressures the same way and

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<sup>17</sup> Beisel, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Werbel, 303.

<sup>19</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, "Victoria Woodhull, Anthony Comstock, and Conflict over Sex in the United States in the 1870s," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University 2000), 428.

<sup>20</sup> Beisel, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Beisel, 14.

did not face new expectations when it came to rearing children, even as an opening developed for equal sharing of household work given the fact both the men and women worked full time.

The existence of department stores developed an additional layer of expectation and material excess advertised as luxury. It became the matriarch's job to shop and decorate the home beyond practical items. "Social identity was established through new possibilities of consumption," so a correlation formed between women who presented a clean, decorated home and the moral worth and values of the family that lived within. Through Comstock's general shaming of consumerism and the disapproval of male society when it came to decorative home items "women were condemned for a role they were increasingly required to play."<sup>22</sup> This sparked the stereotype that shopping is a vapid and wasteful women's hobby.

Comstock did not recognize this new societal expectation. He wanted women to stop all activities outside of the home and resist the pressures of a corrupt and immoral society. He condemned women for having jobs and for shopping in excess. This complicated the elite support for Comstock's cause. While elite women agreed with him that excess and mixing with lower class women would introduce their children to vice and potentially harm them, they also believed that by buying new and expensive things that they contributed to homemaking. If they had steady and remarkable homes then their children would be virtuous by default. But shopping did not remain exclusive no matter how much the elites wished for it. Their children who attended the department stores with them mixed with the lower classes. This mixing had potential to bind women more closely together as they spent more time in the presence of each other but Comstock used the intermingling as another way to split women apart. In the eyes of Comstock and the elite, if lower class women had time and money to shop then they did not need to hold jobs or work outside the home. Women should dedicate their time more usefully to the home, such as by teaching their children Christian values.

While Comstock found fault with excess shopping and department stores, the Ladies' Mile, a stretch of New York from W. 15th to W. 23rd street filled with shops, theaters, salons, and debauchery, scandalized him to an even greater degree. This area became a new stomping ground for elite and lower class women alike to enjoy public society and show off new fashion items. The area gained popularity among single and married women. The saloons sold pornography to drunken men, brothels and prostitutes dotted the streets at night, and the theater buzzed with crude shows, including burlesque. Again, the elite wanted to create a socially privatized commodity, so they removed the brothels and raised prices for the theater.

Comstock fought hard to remove racy shows from the theaters, believing that they made vice even more accessible to the masses due to their consumable and

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<sup>22</sup> Beisel, 14-15.

digestible nature. He went so far as to pursue Jacob Schonberger, the author behind a racy burlesque variety show.<sup>23</sup> When Comstock could not find Jacob he instead arrested all of the female dancers in retaliation, only letting them leave once Jacob had shown up. While the courts deemed the show filthy and unwatchable they did not take any direct action. A year later the courts convicted Jacob of obscenity when another organization complained. Comstock believed the women who participated in these shows exhibited questionable moral characters and spread the infection of vice to the masses. At the same time, he believed the women attending the theater did not understand that they fell victim to commercialized lust by watching the improper shows. The Ladies' Mile and all of its indecencies would continue to agitate thorn Comstock's until his death.

Birth control, women's sexual pleasure, and dissemination of sexual information also continued to pose a deep problem for Comstock. Many jurors, who hailed from the middle and lower classes, were sympathetic to those selling birth control and preventative literature. In one particular instance, Comstock posed as someone in need of birth control and bought a syringe from Ezra Heywood, which he sold as the "Comstock syringe for Preventing Contraception."<sup>24</sup> Heywood, self-represented his case in the court. He convinced the jury that since he did not know the exact reason someone would buy a syringe, and could only speculate, he could not possibly be in business of vice. The jurors could not prove that Heywood knew Comstock would need a syringe for preventative measures given their commonality and innumerable uses.

Above all else, Anthony Comstock believed in the values of evangelical Christianity, sex for reproduction only, and traditional gender roles. He did not understand why women would take preventative measures because to him, sex should only occur when trying to conceive a child, and should not happen otherwise. Accordingly, he faulted women for having sexual desires that had nothing to do with children. This belief led him to focus on criminalizing women when prosecuting vice. While Comstock found fault in men who bought pornography or sold birth control he did not actually blame them, and instead tracked that fault back to women and believed if they had not posed for the photographs or if they practiced good Christian values then family planning would not be a concern of theirs. Confronted with changes in society that made him uncomfortable, such as the production of sex toys, nude art, and burlesque theater, Comstock found it hard to understand why society prioritized vice and sexual pleasure. For example, when dealing with objects of female lust, specifically dildos, he did not understand, beyond the tantalizing allure

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<sup>23</sup> Werbel, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Ezra Heywood, *Free Speech: Report of Ezra H. Heywood's Defense* (Princeton, Mass., c. 1883), 6, 14-18; Martin Henry Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism: the Biography of Ezra Heywood* (Urbana, 1989), 144-45; Andrea Tone, "Black Market Birth Control: Contraceptive Entrepreneurship and Criminality in the Gilded Age," in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2000), 44.

of lust, consumerism, and loose morals, why such objects needed to exist. He concluded that women who sought out pleasure from objects besides their husbands, or sought sexual pleasure at all, posed an unfathomable threat to society.<sup>25</sup> Their bodies, their sexuality, and the new liberties they took in society led to the shift in American culture from piousness to lascivious.

### **Sexuality in Art Challenging Comstock's Morality Movement**

As the theater became more risqué and celebrated women and their sexuality, the world of art also began to evolve. In one of the biggest blunders of Anthony Comstock's career he confiscated all of the printed journals from the Art Students League of New York, receiving an incredible amount of push back and negative media coverage. The students held protests, drew cartoons of him onto public walls, and comic artists started submitting pieces of Comstock in sexually compromising positions. Comstock had noticed that the *American Student of Art* circulated ads and solicitations through the mail and went to investigate its contents for obscene things. He found two photos he did not like and arrested the clerk selling the journals. After being released the clerk remained in a state of shock for quite some time, which meant nothing to Comstock given she disseminated vice. He did not relent, and neither did his critics.

After Comstock's attempted raid, where he did actually procure almost all copies of the journal, he could never again obtain the same level of substantial footing for his crusade. Public opinion had turned firmly against Comstock. The director of the MET, Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke remarked:

Really, I can't understand it. Is this man serious or is he indulging in a joke? I trust that it does not mean all of the art schools will be taken away. All the art schools employ models in the nude. A nude figure is not indecent unless it was made to offend morals.<sup>26</sup>

In response to Sir. Clarke, Comstock claimed that "nobody but me knows what he is talking about on this subject. What if he knew that one those libidinous and lascivious books had fallen into the hands of an innocent child?"<sup>27</sup> By calling the moral authority of successful artists into question while affirming his own authority Comstock attempted to assert himself as the only moral authority on obscenity. In this he predated Justice Potter Stewart's comments on pornography by about five decades. Comstock demonstrated time and again that his crusade had nothing to do with American children and everything to do with the control of women. By centering his crusade on the rhetoric of protecting children from vice it provided

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<sup>25</sup> Werbel, 79.

<sup>26</sup> "Art Students Jeer at Comstock's Raid," *New York Times* (New York, 1906), 7.

<sup>27</sup> "Art Students Jeer at Comstock's Raid," 7.

him with enough support that should someone like Margaret Sanger or Emma Goldman point out his oppression of women he could then pivot and retaliate by claiming to only be taking the necessary measures to protect the children. He tried to stamp out depictions of female nudity and sexuality in the arts believing they influenced society and culture. He used publicity and children to manipulate the elite into funding his crusade when, at its core, Comstock's morality movement wanted to control and censor women.

The two paintings in the *American Student of Art* that Comstock had a problem with showed nude women in the woods and a group of nude men "at play," thus exhibiting homosexual behaviors.<sup>28</sup> The court did not support his objections. Many students and artists argued that the natural human form did not have inherent obscenity but when people project their own judgments and desires on the human form then it becomes obscene.<sup>29</sup> Comstock's elite benefactors became increasingly uncomfortable with his encroachment into the arts, and given their support for his crusade, it forced him to change his argument about suggestive art. He instead argued that "the female form is beautiful, a young girl may be nude in her room and there is no wrong attached to it; but if a lascivious eye looks through the keyhole, then it is wrong for her to be stripped of her clothing."<sup>30</sup> This quote illustrates Comstock's hypocrisy regarding responsibility for immorality and vice. He does not hold men responsible for the degradation of society, just as he does not blame a man for peering predatorily into the private room of a nude young woman. Comstock and the artists agreed that obscenity in nude art comes from the judgments of the viewers, but he also believed that any art that encouraged obscenity should be destroyed. If the art contained markers of obscenity to any one viewer then it should not be allowed to exist as it will spread and corrupt the population.

The elite liked the exclusivity of art museums, theater, and saucy reading materials, so they did not appreciate Comstock's censorship of those institutions. "Tensions over what it meant to be upper class ultimately impeded censorship efforts, particularly efforts to censor art" because the elite intended to distinguish themselves from the lower classes and they attended art museums as a way to assure that separation.<sup>31</sup> Comstock only took issue with nude artworks if created and disseminated prints reached the general public, similar to the works of the old literary masters. If their works did not reach the public through reprinting in English, and instead stayed in their own language, he considered it art and not obscene.

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<sup>28</sup> "Art Students' League Raided by Comstock and it's Magazine seized by the Purifier as "Indecent."" *New York Times* Vol. LV, No.17,732 (New York, 1906), 1.

<sup>29</sup> White, Elliot, "The Nude in Art – Is It Immodest?" *Boston Daily Globe* (Boston, 1911), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Alyssa Picard, "'To Popularize the Nude in Art': Comstockery Reconsidered," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 205.

<sup>31</sup> Beisel, 17.

This idea led to a new standard in determining the obscenity of art through the social status of the people who viewed the work.<sup>32</sup> If an upper class woman looked at a nude piece of art in a museum, with all the gilding and expense that came with it, then the painting is considered art. If a middle or lower class woman looked at the same work as a re-print, given that she most likely did not have the time or the money to get to a museum, then it was obscene. Comstock believed that the lower classes would not comprehend the overall moral in the work and would only take it at face value and understand it for a baser, pornographic feature. He made the same argument about a lot of great literature, claiming that its sexual scenes overshadowed the overall moral of the work, and that the hedonistic quality consumed young men and women, rendering them unable to search for the moral meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Edward Stokes, owner of the Hoffman House hotel, hung a painting in his bar by William Bouguereau. It depicted three naked nymphs in the woods forcing an unwilling satyr into a lake. *Nymphs and Satyr* not only contained sexually charged nudity, but its undertones of female sexual domination and retribution sparked much interest among the elite and the lower classes.<sup>34</sup> Men visited the bar just to look at the painting and soon elite women also made the trip to see the work with their own eyes. Comstock wanted to remove the art but could not, given the vast attachment many people had to the piece. He once again bowed to pressure from the elite and allowed the painting to remain, even though it became a public mixing place of the classes and genders. Comstock and David Scobey, the author of the article “Nymphs and Satyr: Sex and the Bourgeois Public Sphere in Victorian New York” speculated as to how women could find the painting interesting but it seemed rather apparent; women enjoyed the reversal of roles.<sup>35</sup> The painting supposedly tells the story of a satyr caught spying on nymphs as they bathed. As retaliation for his indecency the nymphs knowingly dragged him into the water, aware that he could not swim, as punishment for his act of lust. The painting relates almost painfully to Comstock’s theories on men and sexuality. Given how he, and society in general, forced women to bear the burden of men’s sexual desires it made sense that women related to this painting. They wanted to emulate it, imagining themselves in a position of power and dominance in society. The painting also contained a rape narrative, should one read it that way, where after being subjected to male desires against their will the nymphs exacted their retribution on the spot.

*Nymphs and Satyr* acted as an obvious example of a subtler problem Comstock faced, the changing nature of what people find sexually attractive. At this point in time a few popular actresses and models, such as Annie Sutherland, used their sexuality in shows and advertising. Growing consumerism and

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<sup>32</sup> Beisel, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Comstock, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Scobey, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Scobey, 52.

commercialization lead increasingly to the use of the female form as commodity. Women posed for advertisements in suggestive ways, but also, more alarmingly, in selling men's clothing. They wore pants in cigarette ads, which appears to be a unique satire given how the men of the Gilded Age did not feel threatened by this reversal of roles. The fixed social hierarchy reassured men that their authority would never be overturned, allowing them to feel aroused by a woman in pants or a suit, instead of threatened; "the torrent of provocative pictures of women with tights, loops, and shadows now barreling across the country at unprecedented speed also brought copious images of gender-bending women to the attention of male consumers."<sup>36</sup> In one particular case, a young woman stands on a man's back, a ribbon in his mouth, appearing to dominate him. This sparked interest because;

Presumably, in the privacy of his own home, the purchaser could enjoy the amusing sight of a grown women, dressed as a girl, riding her male companion like a horse and guiding him with gauzy reins held in his mouth like a bit... All of this made more dramatic through the technology of the stereoscope, which of course could be passed along to share intimate and piquant view with a partner, as proposal to play along... is a good reminder that then, as now, men's sexual inclinations were enormously varied.<sup>37</sup>

The point is not to assume to understand the sexual desires of the people of the Gilded Age but to acknowledge that they had started to evolve and allow more diverse interests to come through. Comstock believed in dispassionate sexual relationships that only practiced sex for reproduction alone. Changing sexual mores and their use as marketing tools should have caused him to attack and slander every ad agency in town. But, just like with Goodyear and Vaseline, Comstock tended to leave the advertising agencies alone.

Walt Whitman and Mark Twain quietly but publicly opposed Comstock's Law and his crusade to quell sexual expression. When Whitman's collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, came under fire by the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, his publisher cancelled the contract to publish it. Twain wrote a scathing satirical essay in support of the NESSV:

We surely do not make laws against intent of obscene writings, but against probable effect. If this is true, it seems to follow that we ought to condemn all indecent literature, regardless of its date. Because a book was harmless a hundred years ago, it does not follow that it is harmless today. A century or so ago, the foulest writings could not soil the English mind, because it was already defiled past defilement.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Werbel, 159.

<sup>37</sup> Werbel, 160.

<sup>38</sup> Werbel, 131.

The works published in the Gilded Age appeared harmlessly sexual. They were celebrating sexuality not advocating vice. They did not intend to harm or defile society, and it is unlikely that anything written in the Gilded Age could defile a mind already so corrupted. Censoring more than intent offended many artists. If any artist made a piece intended to offend and defile the morals of the audience the piece would face censorship. If the artists did not intend to offend, but society nonetheless took offense at artworks society not art was at fault. Comstock's crusade limited artistic creativity through strict censorship. In retaliation for these acts of censorship, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Ezra Heywood, and many other artists began their exploration into writing, painting, or publishing sexually explicit art.

Comstock and the NESSV found the poems "A Woman Waits for Me," "To a Common Prostitute," and "Dalliance of the Eagles," so offensive because they glorified sex, especially female pleasure. Comstock took issue with these poems for the same reason he found Boccaccio's *Decameron* offensive, because the narrative depicted "male and female (and even avian) lust celebrated and satisfied, rather than penalized."<sup>39</sup> While "To a Common Prostitute" was counted as offensive because one should not admit to hiring a prostitute or express gratitude because they exist, "A Woman Waits for Me" depicted a willing female sexual partner and emphasized pleasure for both sexes. The appreciative language in which these poems discussed sex, and depicted pleasurable sexual relationships were controversial. While society had grown sexually liberal, the idea that a man openly and expressly wanted a woman who ensured and expected her own pleasure shocked many citizens. The public still clung to many deep Puritan values, as evident in Comstock's ideology and "his assumption of respectful female "passionlessness,"" which "was a normal element of evangelical discourse."<sup>40</sup> Comstock accused the authors of making deliberate attempts to pollute the minds of Americans and encouraging them into lascivious behavior. Whitman wanted to celebrate the pleasures and beauty of sex as an act of love and life, despite the moral values society assigned to it. He did not believe in suppressing or being ashamed of natural sexual urges or sexuality. Whitman "trusted that honest discussion of sexuality would liberate Americans; Comstock believed it would condemn them to hell."<sup>41</sup>

In his efforts to condemn certain pieces of art and literature, Comstock ended up sensationalizing them and inadvertent opening up new conversations about the definition of art within the art communities. When he raided the Art Students League of New York, people flocked to the streets to try and get their hands on a copy of the *American Student of Art*. Similarly, *Nymphs and Satyr* grabbed the attention of many citizens. Comstock unsuccessful attempt to have it removed only succeeded

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<sup>39</sup> Werbel, 132.

<sup>40</sup> Werbel, 78.

<sup>41</sup> Werbel, 11.



in turning it into a tourist attraction and a selling point for the Hoffman House hotel. Comstock also gained many enemies within the art community. They did not like having their work censored, especially when no clear parameters of what constituted vice was every outlined. They played a large part in ending Comstock's career through media portrayal of him as a villainous, senile old man who could not keep up with modernity. Artists also sexualized Comstock in their caricatures. Simply put, Gilded Age Americans did not appreciate any sort of censorship when it came to their actions, thoughts, or words.

The newspapers presented much more moderate and objective opinions about morality than Comstock or his opponents. Newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* printed stories about Comstock and the morality movement with titles such as "Nation's Most Crying Needs," "Mr. Comstock's Censorship," and "Licentious French Art." They described Comstock, as someone trying to protect American citizens from the dangers of vice but also as someone unconstitutionally imposing his individual views and restrictions onto the general population. "Most middle-class adults agreed with Comstock that the literature of sporting men posed a threat to morality, but far fewer believed as he did that all element participating in the discussion of sexuality were morally dangerous."<sup>42</sup> The general wanted to protect their children from the dangers of obscenity, but also did not believe in the corrupting nature of things like nudity in art and slightly "spicy" theatrical shows and literature.<sup>43</sup> Individuals enjoyed more freedoms and wealth as women left the home to get jobs, and the average working class family did not feel as though their children experienced neglect with two working parents but instead lived happier, more comfortable lives given their ability to better provide for the children.

CES Wood was highly critical of Comstock. Wood wrote:

But the evil seed he is sowing may continue. Self-consciousness is bad – be it self-conceit or shelf-shame. There is one thing all great men envy in the animals – the utter lack of self-consciousness, that calm accord with nature which is the highest manhood or womanhood. IT can be reached not only by the ignorance of brutes, but also by the gracious intellect of man. Anthony Comstock destroys this. He makes nature a blunderer because we are born naked... He suggests evil where there is none. He makes noble vulgar and the pure impure... The person who sees impurity in nakedness dishonors himself with an impure suggestion.<sup>44</sup>

In this, Wood echoed ideas of people like Whitman and Twain. Nudity is only obscene if the person looking upon the art brings a salacious view with them.

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<sup>42</sup> Horowitz, 420

<sup>43</sup> Comstock, 161

<sup>44</sup> CES Wood, "Comstock, St. Paul, Et. Al," *Liberty (Not the Daughter by the Mother of Order, American Periodicals*, (Boston, 1907) 35

By condemning women and men for their natural urges and their naked bodies, Comstock himself created an impure society and attributed to the continuation of vice.

### **Conclusion: Comstock's Social Degradation Present in Modern Society**

As the Crusader of Vice, Comstock targeted women and the lower classes in an attempt to stem what he believed to be degrading moral values in society. In doing so, he limited women's agency in both the public and private spheres. His attempts to push back against the flow of socio-cultural-economic changes had the opposite effect. His refusal to discuss materials he deemed obscene, and the negative press surrounding the deaths of Mme. Restelle and Ida Craddock drew more media scrutiny to the topics he wanted the public to avoid seeing or reading. In the end, his efforts at establishing a new moral order had the inverse effect. Contemporary society, according to Comstock's definition, would be the foulest one in existence. Women having sexual partners outside of wedlock, the accessibility of birth control and abortions, and LGBTQ visibility are among a few examples of what Comstock would consider degradations of society. While Comstock, theoretically, was right in his assumption that participation of women in the public sphere would lead to a breakdown of conventional social order, given his standards for conventional society, a loosening of specific morals did not endanger the whole society. Expecting homogeneity of values across an entire nation leads to dangerous consequences. So where, then, is a middle ground? Is it possible to have morally loose values but still an upstanding, non-eroding society? What would that look like?

The current society embodies everything Comstock aggressively tried to prevent, and his fears and beliefs have some validity. Women are the infectious spreaders of vice, but acting as if that is due to agency and not projection is shortsighted. Women spread vice because society assigns vice to them. Women's bodies are commodified and consumed at an alarming rate, their images plastered on every form of media in hyper-sexualized forms. Constant images of naked women in sexual and revealing positions could inspire a lustful response from the audience, but this is orchestrated by societal institutions, not individual women. The female body becomes a sex symbol from the moment she enters puberty, and this endangers her immediately. Comstock foresaw this corruption, although he would not agree that men had any influence in the creation of vice. He believed women would corrupt society with their bodies and sexuality, when in actuality society corrupted women. Comstock understood people as creatures of base instincts who, when their urges are validated by those in power, would denigrate women and society. A hero to some or a hero to none, Anthony Comstock failed in his crusade to prevent society from being publicly exposed to sexual urges and desires.

Gabriella M. Grilla is from Worcester, Massachusetts and a senior History major with a concentration in the *Resistance, Revolution, Reaction*. Together with Prof. Stephanie Yuhl and Director William Wallace, she was involved in a research project *Worcester in 50 Objects* to curate a physical and online exhibit for the Worcester Historical Museum. She was a founding member of *Of Life and History* and a standing member of the national history honors society, Phi Alpha Theta. She is also a co-chair of WCHC 88.1 FM, the college's radio station, a senior member of the Writer's Workshop.

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## ★ *The 2019 Edward F. Wall, Jr. Prize Essay* ★

*The Edward F. Wall, Jr. Prize is awarded annually to a fourth-year College of the Holy Cross student whose research essay in any field of history is judged by the Department of History to be exemplary. The prize is in memory of Edward F. Wall, Jr., a former Chair of the Department and Class Dean, who was a member of the faculty for thirty-four years. Each year, Of Life and History publishes the essay to which the Wall Prize is awarded as part of our mission to showcase the very best history research and writing by Holy Cross students. The prize-winning essay for 2019 appears below with only minimal revisions made for clarity.*

# **Problematic *Modell* for Success**

## **East German Nostalgia and Identity in Modern Germany's Attempt to Come-to-Terms with its DDR Past**

Joshua H. Whitcomb '19

### **Introduction: Two Pasts, One *Modell***

In late 2000, a few days shy of the 20th anniversary of Germany's Tag der deutschen Einheit (Day of Unity), *The Chicago Tribune* released an article titled "German Reunification Truly a Success Story." The article, written by conservative Georgie Ann Geyer, praised the political experiment that brought together East and West Germany, claiming it was "working" and "already one of the great accomplishments of recent history."<sup>1</sup> Peter Voss, a German Radio executive that Geyer interviewed, applauded the former East's "speed of normalization" and reported that he was happy to see that the old communist ideology found "a substitute" in the "better ways of the West." However, the piece did more than simply celebrate the rise of Western consumer culture, it incorrectly equated the East's communist dictatorship with that of the Nazi Third Reich. Geyer specifically emphasized how "They [Germans] had been wrong in their Nazism and wrong in their communism." Declaring both regimes illegitimate, Geyer believes that the commonality makes communism comparable to Nazism.

Furthermore, Geyer combined the two governments not only in her condemnation but in her praise. This tactless journalism revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of the different processes Germany underwent when moving away from Nazism verses away from Communism. In the height of her praise Geyer discusses the German Jewish population and made a point about the substantial

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<sup>1</sup> Georgie Anne Geyer, "German Reunification Truly a Success Story," *The Chicago Tribune*, (Chicago; *The Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 2018)

growth, “now 100,000, up from 30,000 when the wall fell (and down from 500,000 before Hitler).” Continuing her praise, she claims that Germany only has “friends as neighbors,” and that their acts of reparations, such as paying “enormous sums to the survivors of its terror,” qualifies Germany’s movement away from Nazism a success. These statements, though, have nothing to do with moving beyond East Germany’s Communism and suggest that there is a single interpretation needed to come-to-terms with the history of both regimes. Geyer’s American, capitalistic perspective is focused on the idea of quantitative success and fails to acknowledge the fundamental and categorical differences between the two regimes, erasing the important historical differences.

In 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power within the German *Bundestag*, and Germany’s democratic Weimar Republic soon gave way to a fascist totalitarian state as Hitler consolidated power. With improved economic stability and expansive infrastructure projects, Hitler’s Nazi Germany promised to restore the glory of Germany’s past empires - ‘to make Germany great again.’ However, the Nazi totalitarian state soon came to represent a regime of terror, oppression, and extermination for dissenters and individuals who fell outside the Nazi racial ideology of the Germanic, Aryan master-race. As early as 1933, prisons and concentration camps were filling up with “undesirables” such as communists, homosexuals, people with disabilities, Jews, and Gypsies. By 1939, Nazi Germany had declared a war of expansion and ethnic cleansing; by the war’s end in 1945, 15-20 million people had been systematically murdered by the Nazi regime.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, the German Democratic Republic, or the *die Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR)*, was a socialist nation-state and Soviet, Eastern-Bloc satellite state. The DDR lasted from 1949 to 1990. Following the Yalta Conference of 1945, which divided the territories of the defeated Nazi Germany amongst the Allies, Soviet premier Joseph Stalin began turning over control of the Soviet occupation zone to the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)*, or the Socialist Unity Party. Despite its lofty goals of overcoming Nazism through the creation of socialist utopia, the ‘democratic’ part of the German Democratic Republic seemed to quickly give way to Cold War pressures and corrupt leaders. During its 40-year history, the *DDR’s SED* party went on to impose a dictatorial communist regime which suppressed dissenters through censorship, intensive Stasi (secret police) surveillance, and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. In 1989, this wall separating Germany’s two nations fell in a non-violent “Peaceful Revolution” and in 1990 the *BRD* and *DDR* were reunified.

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Lichtblau, “The Holocaust Just Got More Shocking,” *The New York Times*, (New York City: *The New York Times*, March 1, 2013)

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen two distinct forms of German dictatorship rise and fall, each with varying aims and degrees of wrongdoing. However, assumptions like those in the *Chicago Tribune* article which compared genocidal, Nazi dictatorship with SED dictatorship as equal ‘evils’ are by no means unique. Rather, they largely reflect the mainstream Western approach to German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – literally, “coming to terms with the past.” By the early- and mid- 1990s, West Germany’s willingness to come to terms with its Nazi past was “increasingly seen as a model for other countries” to overcome troubled histories. *Modell Deutschland* received international praise and was, at the time, instilling a new kind of pride in both sides of the political spectrum in Germany’s former West. Whether it be the gold-plated cobblestones scattered throughout German cities commemorating Holocaust victims, the indoctrinations of *Erbschuld* (inherited guilt) in textbook, or monuments with the slogan *Nie wieder!* (never again), by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany was the undisputed *Weltmeister im Erinnern* (world-champion of remembrance).<sup>3</sup> In the 1990s, Princeton’s Jan Werner-Müller establishes that “it was then generally assumed that coming to terms with the East German [DDR] past...would come to fit the same success story.”<sup>4</sup>

Two decades later, however, there is no evidence to suggest that mainstream Western notions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* have changed significantly. A German friend I knew once made a comment to me regarding the nature of academic discourse about the DDR period from his experience in the Bavarian school system: “you always find the *DDR* period and the Nazi period linked together in some form or another in those colorful little text boxes on the side of textbook pages. It’s always something about Germany’s two great evils and all that...” This view is even reproduced to a larger degree inside Germany by official regime voices. According to the German Government’s *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship) the reality of “coming to terms...with the communist past in United Germany” is still very much a process measured in the same terms as (West) Germany overcoming Nazism. In the foundation’s 2011 brochure, the *DDR* and Nazi periods are immediately juxtaposed in an introduction which considers the “obvious contrasts” and common “structural elements” of Germany’s “two dictatorships.” Furthermore, features of the “program” presented in the brochure outline how Germany “coming-to-terms” with its communist past (decommunization, if you will) closely resembles the “denazification” and the still-present post-Nazi *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Similarities can be seen in the purges of political elites, widespread trials, financial restitution and memorializing of victims, the restructuring of education and above

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<sup>3</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, “Just another *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? The Process of Coming to Terms with the East German Past Revisited,” *Oxford German Studies*, 38:3, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009) 334-344.

<sup>4</sup> Müller, 335.

all, a kind of penitence through guilt and acknowledgement of past evils – the *Erbschuld* (inherited guilt).<sup>5</sup>

Few can deny the fundamental and holistic moral failure of German society which culminated in the totalitarian *Unrechtstaat* of the Third Reich. It is largely a black and white issue: Nazism was illegitimate and wrong and democracy is legitimate and good, therefore Nazism and its associations were naturally to be purged from German society through denazification and replaced with democratic values. We are then, according to this *Modell Deutschland*-formula, to assume the same was true for East German communist dictatorship. Capitalist democracy won because it is good and communism lost because it was evil and illegitimate, therefore the faulty *DDR* naturally gives way to the freedom of enlightened, capitalist society. However, the success of this *Modell* was not initially obvious to many and continues to be viewed by some with great uncertainty, and even hostility.

It has been nearly three decades since Germany's historic *Wende* and to some the reunification still resembles a work in progress, not a finished product. During the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, the question of reunification's success was still a hot button topic as polls revealed that schoolchildren in former Eastern states were vastly misinformed and uneducated about *DDR/SED* oppression and had some "rosie-faced" impressions of the former communist state. Many western politicians and conservatives, including Angela Merkel, raced to condemn these eastern states and remind the nation that the *DDR* was an illegitimate *Unrechtstaat* like the Nazi *Unrechtstaat* before it.<sup>6</sup> But her conclusion was not the absolute consensus; various western and eastern politicians alike argued that the *DDR* should not be condemned as having been entirely illegitimate. Furthermore, many more Eastern voices have emerged in the time since reunification to remind a modern, unified Germany that *Ossis* (a pejorative for Eastern Germans) and the old East were not a collective evil. While the mainstream West has continued to assess East German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* along the same black and white good vs. evil terms as denazification, various alternative accounts, indirect memoirs, debates, and primary sources complicate this clear-cut, success-story image and suggest that attitudes towards East Germany's 40 years under *DDR* communist rule are, in fact, quite complex and do not share the kind of consensus which holds the Nazi period as illegitimate and evil. Above all, this complication is exemplified through the socio-cultural trend of *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia for the *DDR*, which emerged in the two decades following reunification. *Ostalgie*, in a broad sense, is a term which entails both a sense of longing and the memorialization and legitimization of various positive aspects of *DDR* life and culture which were lost in the context of West German, capitalist

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<sup>5</sup> "Coming to Terms: Dealing with the Communist Past in United Germany," *Bundesstiftung Zur Aufarbeitung Der SED Diktatur* (Berlin: *Bundesstiftung Zur Aufarbeitung Der SED Diktatur*)

<sup>6</sup> "Was Communist East Germany Unjust or Just Corrupt?" *Reuters*, May 22, 2009.

takeover. However, the aims and legitimacy of *Ostalgie* have become polarizing topics in modern Germany and have raised complicated questions of how the DDR should be remembered. This essay will attempt to analyze how the trend of *Ostalgie* evolved in the decades following reunification and furthermore, how *Ostalgie* complicates the West's simple, good vs. evil success-story-narrative of coming-to-terms with communism.

### Historiography

The historiography of *Ostalgie* and reunification has been shaped largely through political institutions and cultural forces. In years following reunification, American media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Economist* and *The Chicago Tribune* were quick to label reunification a success and hold *Ostalgie* as naïve and fleeting – a trend supported by backward, unenlightened, commie-Easterners.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these American mainstream media outlets have consistently drawn parallels between the DDR and the Nazi period in their assessments of *Ostalgie*, labeling it as dangerous and antagonistic to the democratic goals of reunification.<sup>8</sup> They are not alone in their assessment as West German outlets, such as *Morgenpost* and *Tagespiegel*, and German political parties, such as Merkel's CDU, have done the same. More recently, certain publications and academics within Germany, including the news magazine *Der Spiegel* and political scientist Klaus Schroeder, have been more hesitant to hail reunification an absolute success.<sup>9</sup> Schroeder's scholarship largely blames *Ostalgie* for the East's slow *Aufarbeitung* (reconstruction/catching up) and dismisses the phenomenon as futile and self-destructive. However other scholars, historians, and Germanists have recently vouched for the value of analyzing *Ostalgie*, both as it relates to Eastern identity constructions and also how its manifestations in cultural texts such as film, music, and consumer markets inform East/West reunification narratives.<sup>10</sup> These scholars include historian Delores L. Augustine,

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Zeitchik, "German Ostalgie : Fondly Recalling the Bad Old Days," *The New York Times*, (New York City: *The New York Times*, October 07, 2003); "Ostalgie," *The Economist*, (London: The Economist Group, September 11, 2003); Geyer

<sup>8</sup> Hans Christoph Buch, "Schönen Gruß von Charlie Chaplin," *Tagespiegel*, 9 (Berlin: *Tagespiegel*, November 1999); Felix Müller, "Jetzt Wächst Zusammen, Was Zusammengehört," *Morgenpost* (Berlin: *Morgenpost*, February 05, 2015)

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Neubacher and Michael Sauga, "Germany's Disappointing Reunification: How the East Was Lost," *Spiegel Online – International*, July 01, 2010; Julia Bonstein, "Homesick for a Dictatorship: Majority of Eastern Germans Feel Life Better under Communism," *Spiegel Online – International*, July 03, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Dolores L. Augustine, "The Impact of Two Reunification-Era Debates on the East German Sense of Identity," *German Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); John T Littlejohn and Michael T. Putnam, "Rammstein And Ostalgie: Longing for Yesteryear," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 1 (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010); Roger F Cook, "Good Bye, Lenin! : Free-Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 43, no. 2 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Paul Cooke, "Performing Ostalgie: Leander Haussmanns Sonnenallee," *German Life and Letters* 56, no. 2 (Wiley Online Library, 2003).



music historians John T. Littlejohn and Michael T. Putnam, and Germanists Roger F. Cook and Paul Cooke.

### I. Finding an Eastern Voice in a “Decidedly Western” Reunification

Firstly, we must consider how reunification was framed by political and cultural actors within the context of those pivotal *Wende*-years of 1989 and 1990. By October 1989, hundreds of thousands of DDR residents were taking to the streets to peacefully protest for reforms within the communist SED government. As East Germans marched through Leipzig and Berlin chanting, “*Wir sind ein Volk!*” (we are one people), “*Demokratie, that’s what I need*” and “*Freie Presse,*” public pressure for East Germany to reform and reunify was increasing.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, behind the walls of the *Palast der Republik*, Gorbachev and Honecker were raising a toast to 40 years of the DDR. Then, on November 9<sup>th</sup>, a single media blunder occurred – a premature announcement that East Germans were free to cross the border – and the Berlin Wall was, at least metaphorically, toppled. In the following weeks, the Wall was physically toppled and thousands of East Germans took to the streets of a now borderless Berlin, celebrating deep into the night to the tune of David Hasselhoff’s “Freedom” with their long-lost West German brothers and sisters. In the following months, thousands more abandoned their homes and fled to the West for good. The Berlin Wall’s collapse was met with an incredible surge of both Eastern and Western euphoric emotion, both sides becoming easily swept up in the reunification-fever. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl standing before Dresden’s *Frauenkirche* in 1989 bellowed out to a crowd of impassioned East German rally-goers that the “historical hour” had come “for the unity of our nation.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, SPD party leader and former West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt echoed the romantic, pan-German atmosphere present in late-1989 when he asserted, “what belongs together will grow together.”<sup>13</sup> Even 1990’s World Cup of Soccer hosted in Italy seemed to be playing into the hands of *Schicksal* (fate) as East and West Germans collectively celebrated a memorable German win, albeit technically a West German one.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the collective enthusiasm, there was not consensus about what a reunified Germany would look like. In the years of 1989 and 1990 there existed a legitimate hope for a new alternative; a pan-German community. This community would be based on the cooperation and integration of East and West Germany

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<sup>11</sup> Mal Te, “1989 Demo Während Der Feier Zu 40 Jahren DDR - Protests during Celebrations 40 Years GDR,” *YouTube*, November 30, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> “Helmut Kohls Rede in Dresden,” *MDR Sport | MDR.DE*, July 14, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Felix Müller, “Jetzt Wächst Zusammen, Was Zusammengehört,” *Zur Startseite*, February 05, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> “Germany: When East and West Became One,” *FIFA*, November 22, 2010.

extending beyond the Communist vs. Capitalist entrenchments of the Cold War.<sup>15</sup> However, with the ousting of *SED* communist hegemony during the *DDR*'s free elections of early 1990, the East German planned economy sharply plummeted, ramping up pressures to unify quickly. In August of 1990, the *Wiedervereinigungsvertrag* (Reunification Treaty) was signed, but the nature of the agreement itself was perhaps not the kind of West-East integration many East German citizens had been longing for. The treaty was a declaration of East German accession, in which West German Law, effective immediately, became East German Law. The former *DDR*, with the stroke of a pen, became West Germany. The parameters though which the Reunification Treaty was framed would become symbolic of the West's "paternalistic attitude" towards Easterners in the years to follow. In time, the framework of West German-conquest proved those earlier hopes for an alternative to be inconsequential. East German achievements, ideals and personal histories, not to mention consumer products and culture, soon became not only irrelevant but entirely non-existent in unified Germany. These were the illegitimate fruits of a failed system. By 1991, the East German voice had all but disappeared from the Western-dominated reunification discussion. However, throughout the two decades following Germany's *Wende* a new kind of platform for alternative dialogue emerged in opposition to the Western status quo which served to give East Germans a voice again: *Ostalgie*.<sup>16</sup>

As the reality of reunification shifted away from East/West integration and towards capitalist, Western conquest, some in the East developed a certain sense of nostalgia as the products and lifestyles which they were familiar with disappeared. East German food products like *Kaffee Mocha Fix* and *Spreenwaldgürken* were suddenly absent from supermarket shelves, the *Trabant* automobile factory in Zwickau ceased its production, jobs were lost, and companies were dissolved.<sup>17</sup> Economic uncertainties in the face of a changing social landscape had left many Easterners longing for simpler, securer times when work and their pensions were guaranteed by the communist state. Layoffs, unemployment and homelessness now threatened many Easterners whose concept of work within a socialist, planned economy-framework was not equipped for the rapid "shock therapy" transition to competitive markets. Communist party members and state officials were blacklisted by the West, but so too were many of the East's best-and brightest; intellectuals and even the mildest socialist sympathizers suddenly became social pariah.<sup>18</sup> In 1991, former director of the East German State Bank, Edgar Most, watched as Easterners were

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<sup>15</sup> "Chapter 5. Views of German Reunification," *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*, September 24, 2018; Augustine, 563.

<sup>16</sup> "Merkel to Mark 20th Anniversary of German Reunification Treaty," *Deutschland Online*.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine; Craig Whitney, "Germans: 5 Years Later: Bitter and Still Divided," *The New York Times*. (New York City: *The New York Times*, January 24, 1995)

<sup>18</sup> Augustine.

thrown “to the wolves of the West” and became “poorer, older and dumber” through this sudden juxtaposition with the Western society and its norms.<sup>19</sup> Former East Germans were becoming increasingly alienated in this new Germany, as their achievements, competencies, and basic social norms regarding work and community were discarded by the dominant West. Shortly after the *Wende*, eastern women began noticeably expressing nostalgia towards the liberation they enjoyed in the socialist system. Official Communist-State ideology had held women and men as equals and *DDR* women held full time positions as early as the 1950s right up until reunification.<sup>20</sup> Women’s emancipation in the *DDR* was by no means perfect and shared criticisms from women both domestically and abroad. These criticisms called East German women *überemanzipiert* (over-emancipated). They were now responsible for both work and domestic life, or were relegated to only lower-rung positions. Nevertheless, with the new reality of dominant, western gender norms, some female East-Berliners claimed they felt “discriminated against” since reunification and reminisced about a better, freer *DDR* where they “felt more respected as a woman.”<sup>21</sup>

More than just grow pains, the nostalgia shared by many East Germans in the early 1990s contained critiques of the new status-quo, expressing their frustrations with West German social values and a refusal to “whole heartedly” accept the framework of reunification. Surveys at the time showed that few Easterners would have had legitimately hoped for a return to communist SED dictatorship or Stasi oppression.<sup>22</sup> Rather, these expressions of nostalgia represented dissatisfaction about the loss of East German agency and voice in the new, West dominated *Bundesrepublik*. However, not all East Germans were so quick to express such nostalgic tendencies. The Christian Science Monitor reported in 1994 that, despite the growing disillusionment amongst many East Berliners in the years after reunification, many were nonetheless largely impatient with *Ostalgie*, such as the Alliance '90 Party which aligned itself with the West’s Green Party and viewed Eastern nostalgia as a “hindrance”.<sup>23</sup> Although a physical wall no longer separated East and West, it seemed a new, ideological wall was taking shape: *Die Mauer im Kopf*. In her 2004 study on East German identity, historian Dolores L. Augustine of St. John’s University exhibited that even the pejorative terms *Ossi* and *Wessi* did not emerge until the years after reunification. It was at that point that it became clear to

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<sup>19</sup> Neubacher and Sauga.

<sup>20</sup> Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, “After the Fall of the Wall: The Impact of the Transition on East German Women,” *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (Lund, Sweden: The International Society for Political Psychology, 1998) 98.

<sup>21</sup> “Five Years After Fall of the Wall, Few East Berliners Celebrate,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 02, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Pew Research Center.

<sup>23</sup> “Five Years After Fall of the Wall”

many Easterners and Westerners that some form of group “othering” was necessary to establish identities in an ideological struggle of Eastern v. Western Germany.<sup>24</sup>

Some critics have concluded that such constructions of East German collective identity and community through nostalgia are illegitimate and only stand to obstruct reunification’s aims. Political Scientist Klaus Schroeder of Berlin’s Humbolt University envisions *Ostalgie* as a kind of East German coping mechanism, through which disenfranchised East Germans strive to defend their own “biographies” and achievements by selectively glorifying certain aspects of their bygone DDR culture while deliberately downplaying other negative ones. For Schroeder, *Ostalgie* is nothing more than a distorted view of the past which “whitewashes” the evils of a totalitarian communist regime and stands in the way of true reunification-via-Western democracy from being realized.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Schroeder constrains the successes of reunification along the terms of *Modell Deutschland*; Germany’s singular path to successful reunification lay in the relinquishment of the DDR-*Unrechtstaat*’s legitimacy by *ostalgic* Easterners and the absolute victory of Western values. The devaluation of *Ostalgie* is encouraged by more recent critics who contend that “downplaying the dictatorship” is a dangerous “price people pay to preserve their self-respect.”<sup>26</sup> They depict *Ostalgie* as nothing more than an East German, psychological ‘comfort-blanket’ or delusional hindrance that stunts successful reunification. Such Western critiques of *Ostalgie* suggest that evil, SED, communist dictatorial rule tainted the DDR as a whole, rendering any and all East German alternatives, critiques of the West, and positive DDR memories as equally illegitimate

These early manifestations of *Ostalgie* came at a time of both disillusionment and great economic uncertainty for once optimistic Easterners. However, with time, western optimism would, too, give way to more pessimistic attitudes toward reunification efforts. After the euphoria of the early 90s wore off, the harsh realities of reunification emerged as various logistical challenges in the democratization and privatization of the East German economy became drastically apparent. The demands of de-industrialization, the privatization of Eastern companies, and the loss of millions of workers who left the East once the Wall fell put those orchestrating the “sudden political birth” of the new, eastern German states “under a great deal of pressure.”<sup>27</sup> However, the harshest of these realities was perhaps reunification’s price tag. Billions in Western investment and taxes “flowed” into the *Aufarbeitung* of East German historical areas, infrastructure, education and businesses during the 1990s as West Germans began to experience what financial burdens unification actually entailed. These logistical and economic challenges to reunification, with time, seemed

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<sup>24</sup> Augustine.

<sup>25</sup> “Ostalgie: Romanticizing the GDR,” *Deutsche Well*, October, 3, 2014

<sup>26</sup> Bonstein.

<sup>27</sup> Neubacherand Sauga.

to have a significant effect on western psyches and Westerner's certainty of the promise of the reunification-success story they saw themselves financing. In 1991, 77% of Westerners believed that the East would match the West's standard of living in a 5-10 year time frame – these estimates proved overambitious.<sup>28</sup> By the early 2000s, the triumphalism of democratizing the East and romantic, pan-German motives seemed to be losing momentum as many Westerners came to resent the very thing which they had, only a decade earlier, so fervently set out to do. A Sept. 2004 Pew Center poll revealed nearly a quarter of all Germans wanted the Berlin Wall rebuilt.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, market uncertainties brought about through a currency shift to the Euro in 2002, the EU expansion in 2004, and the increasing trends of economic globalization left some Westerners longing for simpler, more stable times. These new economic tensions and uncertainties were in fact altering many western attitudes towards the triumphalist-aims and promises of reunification as they were initially framed by the West. If western, capitalist liberation from the evils of the DDR was the path to success, then by the early 2000s it was becoming an increasing disagreeable, or imperfect, one for many Westerners.

## II. *Ostalgie* for All: The Emergence of Commercial Nostalgia

While the economic uncertainties of the new century and globalism had brought about a pessimism in western German attitudes towards their own government's reunification aims, many Easterners were seeing the dawning of a new age and their identities and *ostalgic* practices were changing as well in the years after 1989. By 2000 East Germans were far better off than they had been a decade prior, either in the DDR times or during the transitional phases of early reunification. East Germans reported themselves not only as being financially better off, but as having greater personal well-being compared with 1991. Even life expectancy has continued to steadily increase in the nearly thirty years since reunification.<sup>30</sup> By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, former East Germans had grown very much immersed in Western culture. Furthermore, many former East Germans had moved to the West and a new generation was growing up in a reunified, capitalist Germany. Ironically, as differences between East and West diminished, a new type of East German nostalgia emerged – largely amongst a new generation of *Ossis* many of whom were too young to remember actual life in the DDR. This second wave of *Ostalgie* was uniquely characterized by its manifestation in popular culture and ability to operate within a Western commercial framework in order to garner mainstream-Western and even international attention.

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<sup>28</sup> "Chapter 5. Views of German Reunification,"

<sup>29</sup> "20% of Germans Want the Wall Back," *The Guardian*, September 09, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> "Germany: Life Expectancy Has Risen in East Since Reunification, Study Says." *The New York Times*, (New York City: *The New York Times*, December 21, 2017); "Chapter 5. Views of German Reunification;" "Chapter 1. End of Communism Cheered but Now with More Reservations;"

One area in particular where this new kind of *Ostalgie* emerged was in the German film industry of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Around the time of reunification, German cinema was dominated by two trends. One trend was what Roger F. Cook calls “catch up” comedies. These were comedy films made by wealthy West German filmmakers which trivialized the lesser developed *Ossis* through plots which poked fun at the “errors” and “struggles” for East Germans to literally catch-up with the West. These films include *Go Trabi Go* (1991), *Das war der wilde Osten* (1992), and *Wir können auch anders* (1993). The other, less dominant trend in early 90s German cinema was characterized by former East German filmmakers who created *autener* films exposing the harsh realities of DDR life or post-reunification struggles in the East.<sup>31</sup> Not only were western filmmakers reinforcing paternalistic, West German attitudes towards reunification and the othering of the silly *Ossis* through these blockbuster hits, but moreover, they had a monopoly on the entire German film industry. East German filmmakers who were less affluent and also less experienced in “working within a film industry geared for commercial success” simply could not compete to have their voices heard.<sup>32</sup> However, that changed when eastern director Leander Haußmann’s 1999 *ostalgic* hit-comedy *Sonnenallee* broke through the Western dominated market.

*Sonnenallee* tells a witty coming-of-age story set to the backdrop of 1970’s East Berlin and presents a rather normalized and charming image of daily life in the DDR, an obvious divergence from portrayals of the DDR in earlier German cinema. The film revolves around teenage Micha and his friends who, in their final year of school, are preoccupied hunting down Western contraband such as Rock n’ Roll records and pornography and clumsily chasing after girls. Daily life for these characters revolves around *Sonnenallee*, the Berlin street on which they live and which also so happens to be intersected by the Berlin Wall with a border crossing at one end. This leads to countless absurd and humorous encounters with Stasi agents and border police who are portrayed more-so as buffoons or loveable idiots than intimidating agents of an oppressive totalitarian state. Haußmann notably utilizes a kind of self-deprecating humor when looking at everyday life in the East, as if to detach the ordinary experiences of Micha and his friends’ social lives from the goals and actions of the communist party which rules them. A notable example of this is Micha’s encounters with local *Freie Deutsche Jugend* leaders whose zealous devotion to communist ideals is portrayed as campy and naïve. Furthermore, Marxist indoctrination in Micha’s school appears equally ridiculous and is experienced as a harmless kind of going-through-the-motions routine by these teens. In the end, Macha finally wins over the heart of his “dream girl,” Miriam, and the story culminates when its characters and a crowd of East Berliners take to the *Sonnenalle*

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<sup>31</sup> Cook, 206-19.

<sup>32</sup> Cook, 208.

for a delightful song and dance number – a happy ending guaranteed to bring smiles to the faces of German movie goers. However, the German press was less than won-over by Leander Haußmann's charming, sun-shiny representation of *DDR* life.

Reviews of *Sonnenallee* in the western, German-language press were nothing short of scathing. Hans Christoph Buch of West Berlin's *Tagespiel* published a review titled, "*Schönen Gruß von Charlie Chaplin*," shortly after the film's release in November of 1999. Buch wrote, Haußmann "turned the *DDR* into a musical with Erich Honecker as the "Fiddler on the Roof" and glossed over "real conflicts" with "cheap *Ostalgie*."<sup>33</sup> Further critics drew comparisons between the films' representation of *DDR* life with that of the *Politikomödie* genre of film produced under Joseph Goebbels' Nazi *Reichministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*.<sup>34</sup> Some critics even filed lawsuits claiming "that *Sonnenalle* was nothing short of an insult to the victims of the former East German regime."<sup>35</sup> Western critics responded to Haußmann's *ostalgic* film with the kind of ferocity one might expect if he had instead produced a sing along comedy set in Auschwitz. The critiques themselves represent a Western evaluation of Haußmann's *Ostalgie* along *Modell Deutschland's* parameters; delegitimize *SED* communist dictatorship through the same success-proven *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that delegitimizes Nazism. Therefore, if the communist state was evil like Nazism was evil, then, as German Minister of Justice Klaus Kinkel claimed in 1991, "not only the *Unrechtsstaat* must be delegitimized, but the everyday culture practiced in the *DDR* must be held as real, lived crime."<sup>36</sup>

*Sonnenalle*, like various other strains of *Ostalgie* before it, takes issue with the way the West's *Modell* has framed reunification and complicates notions of the *DDR's* absolute illegitimacy by validating various 'good' aspects of East German culture – the sense of community on *Sonnenalle* or scenes of Micha playing air guitar to Rolling Stones records surely do not constitute "real, lived crime." However, Historian Paul Cooke believes Haußmann's 1999 box office hit represented the dawning of a new productive kind of *Ostalgie* – one that attempts to break down the *Mauer im Kopf* (Wall in Head) between *Ossis* and *Wessis*, rather than provoke greater alienation and othering. Cooke notes that Haußmann, through his introspective, satirical take on the *Ossi/Wessi* relations, "de-exotifies" East Germans precisely by mocking the comical and naïve ways in which Westerners in the film observe and comment on the Easterners on the other side of the fence as if they were observing animals at the zoo – "Hey, Ossi, gimme a little wavel!" says one western tourist.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>33</sup> Hans Christoph Buch, "Schönen Gruß von Charlie Chaplin," cited in Paul Cooke, "Performing Ostalgie: Leander Hausmanns Sonnenallee," 156-67.

<sup>34</sup> Thorsten Stecher, "Sexy DDR," *Die Weltwoche*, (Zürich: *Die Weltwoche*, November 18, 1999), 49, cited in Cooke, "Performing Ostalgie."

<sup>35</sup> Jens Bisky, "Beleidigend," *Berliner Zeitung*, (Berlin: Berliner Verlag, January 29, 2000), 13, cited in Cooke, "Performing Ostalgie," 159

<sup>36</sup> Stecher, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Cooke, 163

Cooke notes that the themes Haubmann utilizes, such as teenage romance and music, represent universal aspects of the human experience which function to normalize the East German experience and de-bunk *Wessi* myths about the *blöde Ossi*s. However, what makes Haubmann's *ostalgic* production so revolutionary for Cooke, is that it achieves this de-exotification and normalization of East German daily life within the framework of a commercial product which is both desirable and easily digestible for western pop culture markets. Simply put, *Sonnenallee* is a representation of *Ostalgie* which reaches Westerners through a platform they can understand. Despite the moral reservations held by some critics and opponents, *Sonnenallee* was a widespread commercial success throughout all of Germany, not just the East, charting as the highest grossing German-language film of 1999.<sup>38</sup>

However, it was soon to be out done by a film, which in using Haubmann's same recipe, would bring *Ostalgie* in cinema to the world stage. If *Sonnenallee* was to *Ostalgie* in western commercial markets what Karl Benz was to the invention of the automobile, then Wolfgang Becker's 2003 international hit *Good-Bye, Lenin!* was Henry Ford. *Good-Bye, Lenin!* far surpassed the commercial success of *Sonnenallee* and was wildly popular among Germans, East and West, as well as reaching international audiences. The film tells the story of Alex Kerner, an East German twenty-something year old who becomes largely disenchanted with life in the DDR. In October of 1989, days before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Alex takes to the streets to join the protests parading through Berlin. When Alex's mother, Christiane, who was an ardent communist party member and community leader, sees her son being seized by the *Volkspolizei*, she has a heart attack and falls to the ground. While Christiane spends the following eight months in a coma, the Berlin Wall comes down and Germany reunifies. When she awakes, doctors warn Alex that any kind of major excitement could cause another, this time fatal, heart attack. Fearful that the colossal news of reunification will inevitably mean his mother's sudden death, Alex concludes that he must recreate a fictional, mini version of the now extinct DDR within the confines of his mother's small apartment. However, this endeavor becomes impossibly challenging (and increasingly comical) as Alex, his girlfriend, and coworker are constantly rewriting history through fake, homemade, news programs and fabricated alternative storylines to the events of 1989 and 1990. In one notable scene, Alex's mother escapes from her room to find western advertisements and automobiles in her neighborhood. Alex reacts by doctoring news footage to make it appear that "disillusioned" Westerners are flooding into the "more virtuous" East.

Many western critics responded to *Good-Bye Lenin!* with negativity, echoing past critiques of *Sonnenallee*. In the U.S., *The New York Times*' Steven Zeitchik labeled the film as "fondly recalling the bad old days." Zeitchik even draws the same old parallels between *Ostalgie* and post-Nazi *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: "Did we have

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<sup>38</sup> Reinhard Wengierer, "Vertracktes Leben," *Die Welt*, (Berlin: Axel Springer SE, 21 December 1999) 29.



movements in the 1960's singing songs about how great the Nazis were and all the roads they built?"<sup>39</sup> However, Becker's masterpiece did more than simply paint a rosy, far-fetched image of East German social life. Through Alex Kerner's creation of an ideal, alternate version of the *DDR* in his mother's apartment, *Good-Bye Lenin!* functions as a microcosm for the entire trend of *Ostalgie* in that it constructs an East German identity through those promises of what the *DDR* could have been and not what it, in its entirety, actually was. Furthermore, Alex's imagined, alternate-*DDR* represents as a kind of idyllic, "third way" alternative between actual *DDR* life under the corrupt *SED* regime and the reality of shallow western, capitalism. This is demonstrated when Alex finds himself delving deeper into the myth he has created and begins to find a kind of refuge in this alternate reality: "Somehow my scheme had taken on a life of its own. The GDR I created for her increasingly became the one I might have wished for." Lastly, as moviegoers 'escape' from the 'real' world and lose themselves in Becker's story, the film *Good-Bye, Lenin!* itself serves as a kind of imagined space where both eastern and western Germans could participate in alternatives to the reality of a "decidedly western" reunification."<sup>40</sup> This space extended beyond the *Mauer im Kopf* and beyond *Modell Deutschland's* one-sided path to success as it invited Easterners and Westerners alike to consider Alex Kerner's idyllic, and caring "real, living" socialist society as a potential alternative to individualistic, consumption-driven western culture.

This "imagined space" for alternative discourse *Ostalgie* proved was not only highly appealing to disillusioned Easterners, but to Westerners as well who, by the early 2000s, were reflecting new doubts about German, European, and global capitalism. Following the release and commercial success of *Good-Bye Lenin!*, a demand for *ostalgie* goods and experiences was causing a market-boom in commercialized *Ostalgie*, with western Germans being among the biggest sellers and consumers. Furthermore, this *Ostalgie*-wave was emerging at a time when Western politicians and journalists were leading a new crusade to condemn *DDR* injustices by digging up or even piecing together shredded *Stasi* surveillance files.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, countless new markets for East German items and brands that disappeared after *Wende* were popping up in the wake of *Good-Bye, Lenin!* offering socialist, *DDR* "clothes, music, films, food, and even original banknotes and medals" all for a marked-up price.<sup>42</sup> Even a market for genuine *DDR* experiences began emerging, offering alternatives to Western "lifestyles or vacationing" such as *DDR* themed

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<sup>39</sup> Steven Zeitchik, "German Ostalgie: Fondly Recalling the Bad Old Days," *The New York Times*, (New York City: *The New York Times*, October 07, 2003)

<sup>40</sup> Cook, 165

<sup>41</sup> "Stasi Files Return to Germany," *BBC News*, April 5, 2000; "Picking Up the Pieces," *The New York Times*, (New York City: *The New York Times*, July 17, 2003)

<sup>42</sup> "Ostalgie: Romanticizing the GDR"

hotels.<sup>43</sup> In September of 2003, *The Economist* reported that in Germany's East and West, "*Ostalgie* is all the rage" as the popularity of "Goodbye Lenin" had "swept the nation." However, *The Economist* warned of not only a potential economic "bubble-burst," but suggested that through this "wild repackaging of German history," Germans are "kidding themselves" that the *DDR* was "a sort of Utopia."<sup>44</sup> Other critics seemed to highlight the paradox represented by a commercial market for nostalgic, some might say fetish, goods that belonged to a society which, in theory, ascribed no value to such consumerism. However, *Ostalgie* was inevitably shifting into a western commercial framework, offering a means for Easterners and Westerners alike to critique, resist, or escape competitive and shallow capitalist consumer culture through participation in socialist alternatives. *Ostalgie* in the wake of *Sonnenallee's* commercial appeal, as Robert Julien Hartmann notes, was becoming streamlined, or some might say hijacked, through a Western commercial framework, "crafted" in "West German marketing departments, advertising agencies and even film studios: Wolfgang Becker's *Good-Bye, Lenin!* was after all, written and produced by *Wessis*.<sup>45</sup>

The music industry represented yet another commercial market into which the trend of *Ostalgie* was expanding by the early 2000s. In 2001, eastern German pop artist Kai Niemann released his single *Im Osten* (In the East) which proved to be a hit success throughout Germany. In the lyrics, Niemann humorously tells listeners of all the things *Ossis* do better than *Wessis*. According to Niemann "men in the East kiss better", "the girls in the East are prettier," "that the Wall in the East held better," and that "actually, practically everything is somewhat better in the East as in the West."<sup>46</sup> The *Tagesspiegel's* Rüdiger Strauch, in a scathing critique of the song, called Niemann "the dumb *Ossi* with the big hit," and labeled the song as nothing more than a satisfaction of an *Ossi* "need for revenge" against the West. However, the song received considerable playtime on Germany's Munich based MTV station and one western MTV producer defended the song, remarking that MTV's fans are largely oblivious to the song's message, but rather, enjoy the song's upbeat style.<sup>47</sup> The debate surrounding the song did not stop in 2001. Viewer comments under the Niemann recording of "Im Osten" on YouTube reflect the continued debate around the issue of East German identity and Germany's pattern for coming-to-terms with the *DDR* past. One reviewer wrote, "Good that I'm an *Ossi!* Go ahead and laugh at me," while another commented, "With songs like these one doesn't achieve a

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<sup>43</sup> Katja H. Brunk, Markus Giesler, and Benjamin J. Hartmann. "Creating a Consumable Past: How Memory Making Shapes Marketization," *Journal of Consumer Research*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

<sup>44</sup> "Ostalgie,"

<sup>45</sup> Brunk, Giesler, and Hartmann.

<sup>46</sup> "Kai Niemann - Im Osten," YouTube. October 03, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> "Kai Niemanns Ost-Hymne: Der "dumme Ossi" Mit Dem Riesen-Erfolg." *Der Tagesspiegel*, (Berlin: Tagesspiegel, March 14, 2001)

common identity, but rather the opposite. How sad that so many in the East find this song so great.”<sup>48</sup>

By 2004, Grammy nominated, German metal band Rammstein was reaching the zenith of its commercial success with the release of their fourth studio album *REISE, REISE* and the group was, too, riding *Ostalgie*'s commercial wave. The band's six original members were all born and raised in the *DDR* and formed Rammstein shortly after reunification in the early 1990s. Rammstein has been one of Germany's most successful musical acts both at home and abroad since reunification and currently holds the crown as the most successful German language music act in US history. However, their strong politically driven lyrics and shockingly grotesque, live-show spectacles have long been criticized in the Western media, notably Rammstein's use of pyrotechnics and sexual, sadomasochistic themes. During one 1998 US tour, lead singer Till Lindemann was arrested after simulating anal-sex at a show in Worcester, Massachusetts.<sup>49</sup> However, Rammstein has ignited perhaps the most controversy through its deliberate use of *ostalgie*, anti-reunification, anti-Western lyrics and themes.

As Germany celebrated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the West's great victory over communism, Rammstein was busy in the studio, conjuring up powerful critiques of the West, capitalism, and the *BRD*'s framing of reunification. As authors John T. Littlejohn and Michael T. Putnam point out in their 2010 study “Rammstein and *Ostalgie*: Longing for Yesteryear,” the band's 2004 album *REISE, REISE* revolves around a contrast of East and West highlighted by back-to-back songs “Amerika” and “Moskau” located in the middle of the album's track-list.<sup>50</sup> “Amerika” achieved widespread commercial success in Germany and the US, but its lyrics depict a highly negative view of US cultural imperialism and capitalist consumerism. In the song, the United States is depicted as “dance master” who wants to lead or “*führen*” the dancers (nations of the world) as violins play to the tune of freedom and music “comes from the White House.” The chorus then repeats the lines “We're all living in Amerika, Amerika, it's *wunderbar*.” Furthermore, the song tells of Santa Claus coming to Africa, of Coca-Cola and Wonderbras, and that “in front of Paris,” Europe's cultural center, “stands Mickey Mouse,” a direct reference to Disney World Paris. “Amerika” represents a strong critique of the dominant, US-led western consumer culture which enveloped the East after reunification's lopsided, “decidedly western” outcome. “Amerika” is then juxtaposed with the album's next track “Moskau,” in which the singer confesses his mixed emotions, but nevertheless, undying love for the Soviet capital city: “This song is about the most beautiful city in the world. Moscow! This city is a prostitute...she's fat, yet so

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<sup>48</sup> “Kai Niemann - Im Osten.”

<sup>49</sup> Scott McLennan, “Rammstein Brings Flames, Graphic Antics to Worcester Amid the Fire and Testosterone,” *The Boston Globe* (Boston: *The Boston Globe*, May 01, 2012)

<sup>50</sup> Littlejohn and Putnam, 35-44.

lovely...she is old and nevertheless beautiful.” Littlejohn and Putnam argue that these songs represent the antagonistic factors at play in *ostalgic* East German identity constructions; Rammstein is dissatisfied with western culture and opts to fondly reflect on the socialist east, despite “her” obvious imperfections.<sup>51</sup> In exposing their flaws, the album rejects both “Amerika” (the U.S.) and “Moskau” (the old East) as being ideal models while simultaneously expressing nostalgia for the latter, the implication being that nostalgia and criticism are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

In an interview regarding the *ostalgic* themes present in Rammstein’s 2004 international best-selling album, lead guitarist Paul Landers remarked, “Nobody who’d ever lived there liked the *DDR* very much. That was true for me as well. [But] then I saw the entire polished surface of the West and thought it needed to be destroyed.”<sup>52</sup> This tension present in East German identities simply does not fit nicely into the West’s *Modell Deutschland* success story of good overcoming evil – particularly when the good-guys do not seem so good anymore. Rather, some Easterners have been critical that in the “victor’s writing of history” and in the “public’s perception,” there only exists “victims and perpetrators” and “winners and losers,” with the “masses” of average citizens who led legitimate lives being herded into these binary categories.<sup>53</sup> Many Easterners acknowledged the imperfections of the *DDR*, but reflected dissatisfaction with a mainstream society, which in its attempt to come-to-terms with the *DDR*, has held western capitalism to be the be-all-end-all perfect substitute. One East German recounts to *Der Spiegel*’s Julia Bonstein in the article “Homesick for a Dictatorship,” “I’m better off today than I was before [the *Wende*],” “but I am not more satisfied.”<sup>54</sup> Rammstein’s *ostalgic* music engages its listeners in alternative discourse which refutes the simplified success story of good capitalism and bad communism. This is achieved through Rammstein’s tarnishing the West’s “polished surface” and reminding listeners, that despite its imperfections, the *DDR* did do a few things right – and those ‘things’ should not be defeated through the West’s absolutist, yet problematic, success-story narrative. Like *Sonnenallee* and *Good-Bye, Lenin!*, Rammstein’s *ostalgic* music, through its commercial framework and appeal in the West, proved to be an outlet through which many dissatisfied eastern and western voices could explore alternatives to what an increasing number of people found to be the unappealing reality of capitalism’s status-quo.

### III. Conclusion: Off of the shelf and into the political spotlight

Lastly, we should consider Berlin’s relatively new *DDR* Museum and how in recent years some attitudes towards *Ostalgie* have changed. The museum officially

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<sup>51</sup> Littlejohn and Putnam, 41-43.

<sup>52</sup> Littlejohn and Putnam, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Bonstein.

<sup>54</sup> Bonstein.

opened in 2006, but began as a project started by Westerner Peter Kenzelmann who “grew frustrated during a visit to Berlin after searching in vain for a museum dedicated” to the former East.<sup>55</sup> Accumulating its collections through public donations, the museum gathers the pieces and artifacts of 40 years of *DDR* history and “assembles” them into a family-friendly, educational, and thematically organized consumer experience. According to Kenzelmann, the museum was designed to make museum-goers feel as if they were “discovering” a lost world. Exhibits involve a high level of interactive experiences in which the museum-goer smells, feels, and tastes the *DDR*. Furthermore, the tone found throughout the inscriptions and videos in the exhibit rooms is a rather playful and joking one, guaranteeing an enjoyable consumer experience for the museum’s, and any museum’s for that matter, target audience: tourists – specifically western tourists. Even the *DDR* themed restaurant located at the end of the exhibits seems to cap off a perfect consumer experience. The museum makes sure, however, not to shy away from the *DDR*’s dark side; one can simulate a *Stasi* interrogation or listen in on *Stasi* surveillance. Nevertheless, Berlin’s *DDR* Museum has attracted sharply negative criticisms by those in the West and East for presenting too “soft” a picture of communist Germany. Spokesman of the German Historical Museum, Rudolf Trabold, “dismissed the *DDR* Museum project as shallow *Ostalgie*” when he stated, “There’s really no need for this museum...it’s on the level of ‘Goodbye Lenin’...sort of like saying, ‘Oh, wasn’t it all nice?’”<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, some Easterners were rather displeased with the museum’s western triumphalist undertones which suggest the “comical” East German practices, products and lifestyles were now as defunct and antiquated as the *DDR* itself.<sup>57</sup>

For the public activist group *Dritte Generation Ost*, or “Third Generation East,” which was founded in 2009 by both eastern and western Germans, the *DDR* is not yet ready to be put in a museum. Memorializing something through a history museum presumes that thing to be, more-or-less, finished business. However, these young Germans have grown frustrated with the West’s channeling of *Ostalgie* into commercial markets. They, themselves are not ready to be *ostalgic*. For them, reunification still represents unfinished business and participation in alternative, *Ostalgie* consumption, only serves to emotionally alleviate real, legitimate, political criticisms of German capitalist society.<sup>58</sup>

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009, world leaders gathered before Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Berlin Wall’s collapse. The event was a truly incredible televised spectacle as hundreds of

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<sup>55</sup> Susan Stone, “*DDR* Living: Museum Offers ‘Ostalgie’ Look at East Germany” *Spiegel Online – International*, July 20, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Stone.

<sup>57</sup> John Feffer, “Back in the GDR: Berlin’s East Germany Museum,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Brunk, Giesler, and Hartmann.

thousands watched as 1,000 massive, graffiti laden domino pieces set off a chain reaction along a two kilometer stretch which the Wall once followed. Angela Merkel called the event a “celebration for the whole of Europe” and U.S. President, Barack Obama, stated, “Human destiny is what human beings make of it.”<sup>59</sup> The event’s message was clear – western democracy has triumphantly succeeded in overcoming communism. As *Dritte Generation Ost* founding member and westerner, Adriana Lettrari, watched the event unfold on her television, she could not help but become angry as the same, old “one-sided narrative” which has dominated reunification discourse for the past two decades played out before her eyes once again.<sup>60</sup>

Since reunification, mainstream German society and western journalism has framed coming-to-terms with its communist past largely through the same *Modell* West Germany has used in overcoming the Nazi past. This form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* constrains its successes within a good vs. evil narrative – just as the Nazi’s illegitimate *Unrechtsstaat* must be disavowed and substituted with ‘good’ capitalist, western democracy, so too must the *DDR*’s illegitimate *Unrechtsstaat* be disavowed, replaced and regretted through some kind of post-communist *Erbschuld*-guilt. Thus, this framework suggests that in order for Easterners to come-to-terms with their communist past, they must recognize its illegitimacy and embrace the West’s morally superior capitalism. *Ostalgie*, since its emergence among Easterners in the early 1990s to its widespread commercial manifestations in the 2000s, has complicated this “one-sided” narrative by creating alternatives, or “third ways” between the reality of *DDR* dictatorship, and Western capitalist conquest – even if these alternatives arise out of nostalgic, imagined reconstructions of the *DDR* past. Furthermore, *Ostalgie* has highlighted the West’s problematic framework of ‘good’ capitalism overcoming ‘evil’ socialism through its appeal to the West as an outlet for critiques and alternatives to capitalism’s assumed ‘goodness.’ However, as *Ostalgie* has evolved to appeal to a wider audience through commercialization, we find that *ostalgie* films, music, and products have only functioned to create hypothetical alternatives and emotional pacifications of capitalism’s real social and political shortcomings – *Ostalgie* merely illuminates this problem with *Modell Deutschland* rather than remedying it. In moving beyond the *Ostalgie* fixations of their parent’s generation, *Dritte Generation Ost*, through political activism, is attempting to bring these alternative perspectives out of the imagined realm of Alex Kerner’s idealist *DDR* in *Good-Bye, Lenin!* and into modern political discussions of redefining East/West conciliation.

Joshua H. Whitcomb ‘19 of Littleton, Massachusetts is a History, German double major with a History concentration in *Resistance, Revolution, Reaction*. Joshua is an editor for *Of Life and History* as well as a member of the national history honors

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<sup>59</sup> “The World From Berlin: ‘The Official Ceremonies Simplify History,’” *Spiegel Online – International*, November 10, 2009

<sup>60</sup> John Feffer, “Germany’s Third Generation East,” *The Huffington Post*, December 01, 2013.

society Phi Alpha Theta. During his junior year, Joshua studied abroad in Bamberg, Germany where he also taught a weekly English conversation course at the local university. After graduation, Joshua intends to return to Germany to pursue a Master's degree in International Business.

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## *Dialogue*

# The Human Element

## An Interview with Professor Lorelle Semley

Brett A. Cotter '19 and Joshua H. Whitcomb '19

The student work featured in *Of Life and History* is made possible by the extremely talented History Department faculty and their indefatigable mentorship. In every issue we feature a faculty member and share their insights on the value and importance of historical inquiry with our readers. This year, Joshua H. Whitcomb '19 and Brett A. Cotter '19 spoke to Professor Lorelle Semley about her intellectual trajectory, her award-winning book, including her future projects. The interview appears below with only minimal revisions made for clarity.

Professor Semley, an Associate Professor in the History Department at Holy Cross, teaches broad inter-disciplinary courses that contribute to several programs, including Africana Studies, Peace & Conflict Studies, and Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies. She received her doctorate in History from Northwestern University. Prof. Semley has written extensively on the French empire, the African diaspora, and the Atlantic World. Her recent monograph *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) won the 2018 World History Association Bentley Book Prize. She is also the author of another highly acclaimed book, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town* (Indiana University Press, 2010). Prof. Semley is currently working on two new projects connected to the African and Caribbean populations in Bordeaux, France.

**When did you discover your passion for history? Did you make that decision as an undergrad, or was it earlier than that?**

I was a French major in college. I definitely did not know that I was going to be a historian then. In fact, I was initially introduced to history through my French studies and African Studies. I spent my senior year of high school in France and I achieved a pretty proficient level of French, so when I started as an undergrad at Georgetown, I immediately placed into the typical French literature classes. However, I really was not a big fan of those. There were some African Studies courses being offered in the department, so I actually took those instead of the literature ones. At the time, I really did not know what graduate school was. I had not thought about it much and I did not really understand how people even became professors. Regardless, I had the notion in my head that I wanted to study history in grad school, even if I had only taken two history courses in college. Then one day, I got a wonderful piece of advice that I should do a Master's program in African Studies. So that's what I did, at Yale. There I was able to get some



background in history, like learning what historiography was for the first time and so forth. Yet at the same time, I was debating whether to specialize in political science or history within the program. I was pretty sure by that time that I wanted to be a historian, but I was still considering being a lawyer, or ‘international lawyer,’ whatever that means. After grad school, I worked for two years in D.C. One day, on my lunch break, I took a walk to the Museum of African History. It was that day, in that museum, that I thought to myself, “yeah, I think I want to do this.” “This” being African history.

**I would like to ask you a little bit about your professional journey as a historian. Could you describe the work that went into achieving your PhD and also what various steps in your professional journey led you to where you are now?**

Doing the Master’s in African Studies at Yale was really important because it impressed upon me the idea that to study African history I would always have to do so in an interdisciplinary way. I always assumed it would involve interviews, it would involve field work, it would involve looking at literature and religion and art. You know, all of these different things and all of these different connections. When I was looking at PhD programs, I chose Northwestern because it had an African Studies program. Well it had a ‘center,’ and did not necessarily have the language component like some places. I chose this program because it allowed me to focus on African history, while simultaneously introducing interdisciplinary components like anthropology, political science and literature which, in turn, informed my historical research. But being in a history PhD program, I also became very quickly aware of how I was defining myself as a historian, through my coursework. At Northwestern they had a pretty robust African history cohort. There were a few of us in my year, but in any given history course, you could easily be the only African history PhD candidate. Now that can be very lonely and difficult because you are kind of marginalized when everyone else thinks the way you are doing history is different from them. We [African Studies students] would talk about going into the field to do summer research and we would say, “oh, I have to get a summer research assistant,” and everyone goes, “huh, what?” You know, you need help with interviews and stuff like that in our field, it is just a little bit different and not always so focused on the archive. The other thing about my graduate work was that I had specifically gone to Northwestern to work with an advisor who had recently been at Johns Hopkins, Sara Berry. Within the first half of first semester at Northwestern, however, she said, “you know what, I think I am going to go back to Johns Hopkins”. There I was, at this school where I came specifically to work with her and here she is leaving. She has remained an important mentor to me though. I always tell students do not go to a school just to work with this one

person because they could just up and leave you. Rather, you go for the whole program. This change forced me to take different kinds of courses, like some gender history courses taught by Europeanists. Many of the core courses in the programs were taught by Europeanists and Americanist scholars and that exposed me to many new things. I ended up doing a lot more on African diaspora for example. But I am glad I took these courses because I believe these influences made me a stronger historian, especially in my approach to history. I do not exclusively read Africanist scholars. I feel like I have to read everyone, right? Whereas there are some scholars who will just focus on the scholars in their subfield.

Another important part of my graduate school experience, especially in the particular field that I am in, is that in the summers, you have to get a head start on your fieldwork -like finding the place where you will do your dissertation research. I had the fortune of doing an internship with the State Department in the US Embassy in Senegal the year between my Master's and my PhD. It was clear at this point that I was not going into the Foreign Service, but whatever, I was able to do it. Then, because I had been in the program, I applied again and was able to get an assignment in Benin, which was where I wanted to do my field work. Grad school, at both places [Yale and Northwestern], was again, really about this interdisciplinary kind of thing. Like, knowing scholars in my fields, but also knowing scholars in other departments as well. Even many of my friends were working in vastly different fields. This kind of intersection of peoples and disciplines in graduate school is really interesting and it really can inform your scholarship.

**What has your experience at Holy Cross been? Do you have any memorable moments? Has anything surprised you? And how has teaching impacted your research or understanding of history?**

There is a way in which students at any school are stereotyped - by the way their professors talk about them; by the way they talk about themselves in relationship to schools where their friends go. There is an idea that Holy Cross students are somewhat quiet, less gregarious and very polite. I have found that students of this college, of your, era, this century, are similar in a lot of ways. I have interviewed at different places. I have taught at different liberal arts colleges, and I see the ways in which students present themselves or the ways in which students think through things. I have given talks at big state institutions and I notice similar things. I think there is a little bit of reluctance to put oneself out there or do/say something risky. That really forces you as a professor, in general, to try and be creative about drawing things out of your students. Especially in a place where you have such small classes. I am used to teaching small classes because I have only taught at

liberal arts colleges. I was just at an event Monday for graduate students interested in teaching liberal arts colleges. When I went on the market, I did not even really know what a liberal arts college was. When I was at Yale, I did not even know where Wesleyan was and I ended up teaching there [laugh]! My first job after my PhD was at Bryn Mawr and then I kind of figured out what this whole liberal arts thing was. That really opened the doors to later jobs at liberal arts schools like Holy Cross. And I really like them [liberal arts colleges].

What I really like about them and the thing that is particular about Holy Cross and other small colleges is that your research really has to be informed by your teaching. That has been my theory at least. If you are no longer doing research, then your teaching is not going to be as good as it could be. Teaching and forcing yourself to explain technical things or very convoluted things can help you write things more clearly. People tend to think, “oh yeah history, you just talk about people and throw out some dates and what not.” Yes, it is not a chemistry problem set, but sometimes you have to explain really complicated things, especially when you are talking about African history as you have to translate it and make it seem approachable to students. Students can sometimes be very intimidated by the newness of it. Also, sometimes I am teaching outside of my area of expertise, and I have to do additional research on that topic and think about how it relates to other things we are discussing in the course. You know, some of my best ideas in my writings have come from class discussions. I once taught a seminar at Wesleyan called “Women’s and Gender History” and during a class discussion a student brought up the term “public motherhood.” Well, that term became the key thematic point of my first book. Another example that I particularly liked came in a Human Rights course I was teaching. We were talking about the story of King Leopold’s Ghost and Belgian colonization in Africa. A student said something like, “well it seems that the people who were the most vulnerable and the poorest where the ones who were the most mobile and travelling. Leopold never went anywhere.” We tend to think of mobility as being something that only the most powerful people in history had access to, but this point by the student, led me to this idea that perhaps enslaved people are in fact the most well-travelled people of the modern era. They travelled great distances and in multiple directions and that sort of made me think differently about how I conceptualize African history particularly in relation to an Atlantic world.

**To follow up on the student-professor dynamic at small liberal art colleges: what has it been like for you as a professor of race and African diaspora in predominantly white universities?**

I have always attended predominantly white institutions from high school onward, so I am used to that kind of dynamic. That being not many people of color in a room talking about an issue. But I have to say that my classes, especially my classes here at Holy Cross are some of the most diverse classes I have had. For both those students and for me, having many students of color in a room can yield extremely fruitful conversations on issues of race without any one student feeling singled out and having everyone turn and look at them to get their opinion on the matter. The histories I bring up in class however are not just histories about people of color for people of color. They are for all of us and there are lessons within them that concern every student and not just the student with whom those histories are concerned.

**Historians spend a lot of time doing research and research can lead to unexpected discoveries. Are there similar pivotal moments related to your research experience?**

The two books I have written were very different. The first book, *Mother is Gold, Father is Glass*, is derived from my dissertation research. It involved heavy fieldwork, living in this town in Benin for ten months in one clip and then spending several summers subsequently. The field work was punctuated by archival research both in Benin but also in France. I had to navigate and move between those two spaces and spent a large chunk of time living in West Africa. With that kind of research, the pivotal moments come when you are talking to people, and you interview people and they do not say the things you expected them to say, and you cannot get them to say things that you want them to say, and it can be very frustrating. And really, I was kind of young. I had taken some years off so I was a slightly older graduate student, but at that age you do not know anything, you are in your twenties! And I had a research assistant who was from the town, and she was a middle-aged woman, and we spent a lot of time together.

We were interviewing people every day. That can get tiring sometime. My research assistant was very invested in the process. She shaped things in terms of how she began a conversation. I spoke to her in French and then she translated into Yoruba, and then I was writing the field notes in French. She refused to speak English to me even though she could speak English because she said, “your American accent is so gentle and nice!” My whole time in Africa was in a foreign language, particularly African language—which I was definitely not fluent beyond

casual conversation. I could order tomatoes at the market but that was about it. I could hear what people were saying, I could greet people, I could do those things, but there was no way I could carry on a conversation or an interview by myself. We went through this point where we were interviewing people and she said we should interview this person, and I said, "They are going to say the same thing when we ask them this question." She replied "yeah, you are right, it is really frustrating." Then we went to have the interview, and the person says the thing that we expect them to say, and she said, "See? That wasn't worth it." But then I said, "you know what? Now that I think about it, maybe that's the point. The point that people keep saying the same thing, in this kind of repetitive way and in the same kind of language, maybe that is the point, and I need to pay attention to the story that they are telling and the words that they are using. The repetitive nature of it – that's the clue into how people feel about these particular issues."

The questions I was asking people were about family and kinship, about the towns their families came from, their religious practices, their marriage practices and all kinds of things like that. And people would always say the same thing, saying that "we never would marry Muslims" and that "we are a Christian family." And then my assistant would say "but I was just at your Muslim baby naming ceremony like three weeks ago!" and they would respond, "oh yeah, well of course". There was this way in which people would say one thing, but then there would be this underlying thing that was much more complex. And I could not get at that unless I had done a hundred or so interviews with people and lived in this place for several months. Because, there are things that you see because you are an outsider and they are remarkable to you, and there are things that you do not see or assume because you are an insider. Some things that she thought were not important I thought, "wait a minute I think that is important." It was an interesting back-and-forth, I was not expecting that. When reading about how you do fieldwork, you read about how that relationship with your research assistant is important, but the kinds of ways you have to think differently about the language that people use is vital.

And then one of the last interviews I did was really important and I actually brought it up in class the other day. I was talking to a woman who was a mayor of the town that I was in, and she was the first woman to ever be elected or appointed mayor. We were talking about development issues and how to bring new opportunities to this town, which is sort of marginalized in the country of Benin. It is on the border, they speak Yoruba which is mostly spoken in Nigeria so it is not the main language. And she said, "well we have our international partners," and she kept using this word, "partners," and I asked her, "what do you mean, like, donors?" But she kept insisting on this word, "partner." And, at the time I had

enough sense to realize that that was really important for her to use that word, and what she was trying to do was to create a language that was not a dynamic of being in need and accepting gifts, but about this idea that “we are together, and we are working out this problem, and we are going to work it out together.” And I was just talking about it in my class when we talked about aid agencies and humanitarian aid and the sort of dynamic in which people sort of view relationships with African countries and how Africans can try to rewrite that language. That is a very different book.

The second book, *To Be Free and French*, was very different because it was archival based. I had so many documents, I could not believe how many documents I had! I had fragments of documents too, and I had to build a narrative out of it. But this book, because it was about French empire and citizenship and it was about France, Africa, the Caribbean, I had a whole host of archival documents. I downloaded entire books and archives off of the national library of France. I mean, it was a completely different project. I took all of these pictures of documents, and it was just completely different, with almost no interviews, maybe five, that I did myself.

The surprise came with reading documents that many people had read many times before, but just seeing something different in them, reading them closely. I mean, everyone has read these letters from the Haitian revolution, everyone has seen this letter from Toussaint Louverture. But I am reading it somehow, with the experience I have or the interests and questions that I am asking. I am seeing something different. And it was interesting to have a very different research project but realize how even when you are in the archive it is a moment of discovery, even when it is something that has been trod over many, many times. The other moment that was really important was, I had all these different chapters on port cities and how they dealt with questions of citizenship and belonging, and I had a colleague who said, “you cannot just have a chapter on Haiti, since it is a very different case.” They broke away from the French empire, they became independent in 1804. I needed another French Caribbean colony, so I decided to do Martinique. I did not know I could go to Martinique but I did get to go! The town that I had chosen had been one of the premier colonial cities in the French empire in the nineteenth century, especially once Saint-Domingue, now Haiti, was no longer part of the French empire. But this particular town had suffered a volcanic eruption at the beginning of the twentieth century from which it never recovered. It is not the same place that it was. It might have been twenty or thirty thousand people who were killed in minutes, you cannot re-inhabit a place like that, because, you know, it is haunted! They have all these places, and you are reading about these places from the nineteenth century, and you go there. And to go to the landmark and see the opera house, for example, which is not the opera house

anymore, it is just some stairs and then nothing. But then to see what it is next to, and to physically visit the place. Even when I was doing a very archival based research project, I still had to do fieldwork. And the archive is also like a form of fieldwork, the conversations that you have with people, the sort of way in which a set of documents is organized in a file, the little pieces of paper that are sort of in there and you do not know why they are in there. There is always this moment of discovery, even if your project is created in a very different way.

**In your recent talk you at the History Honors Ceremony, we could not help but notice how drawn you were to certain people or ‘characters’ from your research. In our own research, we have had an experience where we felt like we knew a historical figure we were studying personally. Has this ever happened to you?**

Oh yes! In my second book, each chapter had a lot of different people in it. The only way I could make the different port cities matter and make sense together was to have people who connected them. And I did not know I would have these people that connected them, but in the few interviews I did, I stumbled upon connections between the places. This is the best example. I was interviewing someone in Benin in West Africa and this was a sort-of elite family who are known as “bersilien” or “Brazilian” (in Benin they were known more specifically as aquda). “Brazilians” were people that returned to West Africa in the 19th century and sort of made their home there. Oddly, the women who I was interviewing from this family had an English name, Patterson. I really did not think too much about why her name was Patterson at that time, but later, I was interviewing her son and he says, “well my grandfather was from Senegal.” I was like what?? His grandfather had actually been a Senegalese man who was in the French Colonial service and he was one of the first administrators in Benin. And the son said, “well you know he was on the website Senegal-métis,” the mixed-race Senegal studies site. There are a large number of mixed-race people all over the west coast of Africa, but they became particularly powerful in Senegal, especially the women and I talk about that in the book. Turns out Patterson gets his British name when the Brits briefly took over that part of Senegal where he was living. Well I thought “this is amazing!” I have my Senegal-Benin connection. I can talk about this Patterson guy. Well it turns out he was a descendant of a Martinican who had gone to Senegal in the 18th century after a war and rose to become mayor of one of these two towns I was looking at. Therefore, I had found a person who could connect three of these port cities I was researching. It seemed crazy, but it convinced me that this idea to talk about French Empire was not really crazy at all, but that people were really circulating, in a trans-Atlantic way, between all of these places.

**Would you describe yourself as a social historian? What does that mean?**

I do usually describe myself as a social historian because it is something of a general term. I understand social history to have emerged out of the 1960s, and it is usually thought of history from the bottom-up where you are concerned with the people. You are no longer writing this history that is from the gaze of the colonizer but from the colonized, for example. And for me, it is not just about in either of my books being attached to one or two individual people. Every single person whom I wrote about in any detail I felt a sort of attachment, but also a responsibility that I had to somehow excavate that story and humanize that person.

**Do you still have to consider political history to make sense of the social one?**

Yes, definitely, it is not like I do not talk at all about French colonial administrators. In my first book, those were the documents I had and I did talk about them quite a bit, and I also humanized them to the extent that they are characters in the story. I talk about the ways in which they are interacting with people and imagine what their thoughts are as they are making certain demands or writing down certain things. And definitely colonial administrators played a role in the second book as well. It is about French ideas of citizenship, so I have the lawyers, the attorneys, the colonial administrators, various other people who are in the story. I name them, I talk about them, I contextualize them. But the idea for me is instead of leading with these stories, I wanted to talk about the Senegalese guy who was from Martinique, I could have talked about the British guy from which his name came, but I did not want to talk about him. I talked about the Martinican ancestor and the Senegalese and Beninois descendants.

**Recently you spoke at Columbia University, a presentation on Bordeaux, correct?**

It was actually a museum.

**It was through Columbia then?**

Yes, Columbia has this art gallery that is affiliated with it, and I was invited to do a talk. There was an art historian student who had written a book about the image of the black model in nineteenth century art, and particularly around Paris. They had speakers coming in and scholars coming in and talking in different ways about their own research in ways that connected with this art exhibit. A colleague of mine at



Columbia had mentioned me because I work on Bordeaux—I had been on a panel with her—to give a different perspective because my next project is going to be about African and Caribbean communities in Bordeaux from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. I talked about Black Bordeaux, which is something that people are beginning to know a little about, to just destabilize the focus that people always have on Paris, and so it was really interesting. The art exhibit was gorgeous, it was all of these beautiful paintings and then the audience was so different from the audience that I normally have. It is usually other historians, academics. These were just really exuberant people that go around to art exhibits and go to talks. People came up and told me these stories, one woman was from Bordeaux, another black woman's family had grown up in one of the towns around Bordeaux as a military family, and she said that “there were tons of people like us!” It was this really amazing opportunity. And it also forces you to write and talk in a different way, to a general audience, it is funny that you ask if I would consider myself a public historian, which is not a term I would actually use, because I think of public history and public historians as the people who put up art exhibits and do digital art, and I do not do that that much. I never put together an art exhibit, though I did sponsor one when we did the Afropolitan Conference.

### **That was my next question!**

Right, but we were putting on an academic conference, but we wanted to have other events to serve the community more broadly. I had noticed that my colleagues when they were putting on academic conferences they would invite high school students, or they would have music. We did it all, we had an art exhibit, a musical performance, and this academic conference as well. And I think some of the musicians actually went into some of the schools in Worcester as part of the conference.

But the other kind of historians that I would suggest, the kind of history that I do, is I try to do narrative history, I try to do more of that—writing a history that is more narrative, more readable, in an attempt to reach a broader audience that is not just academic.

### **Is that something you had been considering for some time now? Or were you inspired by your experience at the Colombia-talk?**

In the second book I tried to write it in a more narrative style, I tried to tell more stories and I was very conscious of that. And the next project I have, though there is a book I am writing that is a historical study of Bordeaux, but I am also writing a piece of historical fiction at the same time. Going really far with the storytelling to

the point where you are writing fiction. I think along your intellectual itinerary, you go down this road and you wind up in this other space. And the thing that probably inspired me was when I wrote my first book I worked very closely with a retired editor who had been a journalist, and she was highly critical of jargon-filled writing. And she would just rip my chapters apart, “Explain everything, do not assume anyone knows anything.” And it is literally the best advice I have ever had, because one of the profound pitfalls of historical writing is that no one else can read it and understand it except someone who is not only an historian but is someone who is in your field. And I think that is terrible.

**You had mentioned that you were starting new research soon, correct?**

Yes, and already doing it!

**Are you taking research leave for it?**

In 2021, yes. It is through the Yale Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration.

**Could you tell us about this your new research project?**

My new project on Bordeaux grew out of the second book [*To Be Free and French*], so with this book I was looking at all of these different people from different points in the French Empire. Many times—randomly in a document— something would come up where the person would say that they were going to see their family in Bordeaux, or that they have family in Bordeaux. And this would be people from the Caribbean. The man I mentioned in my talk at the honor society, Tovalou Houénou, was a student in Bordeaux. He was a high school, university and law student there. And I was like: what is going on in Bordeaux! I wanted to find out more information, so I decided to do this project.

I have presented it in a variety of ways, and one of the arguments that I make is, I may be doing a project on Bordeaux, but I am approaching it as an Africanist. I am following African and Caribbean communities to Bordeaux and trying to understand how they live there, and trying to piece together the lives that they lived, as opposed to just thinking that they were marginal or incidental to this city, when there were thousands of people who were passing through Bordeaux in the eighteenth century alone. And I thought about what that means. The way that I worked in the second book was the same way that I am working on this one. I have been doing different conference papers and trying to force myself to write different chapters. I have done several summer research trips to Bordeaux, I am trying to go

again this summer, producing these chapters, and I drafted an article that I am writing. At the same time, when I decided to do this book project, one of the things I noticed in it was the same problem I had with the first book. I do not have consistent information. I have a lot of information in some ways but I do not have consistent information. I will find an interesting person but I do not know anything about what happened to them before or what happened to them after. So that is when I decided that I would, and I could as a tenured professor, write a piece of historical fiction, to imagine how to fill in those gaps. If I find that – and I have seen this – evidence that an eight-year old child arrived from Martinique in Bordeaux in the 1770s, and I want to imagine that she stayed there—because later I see people who had been living in Bordeaux for thirty or forty years later on in the eighteenth century—then what story could I tell about her life? That is why I got the idea to do the historical fiction.

The fellowship that I have is through the ACLS, the Frederick Burkhardt Residential Fellowship for Recently Tenured Faculty. It is a fellowship with a designation for faculty at liberal arts colleges, and it is an opportunity to pair up with an institution or center of your own choosing. You ask them if they will sponsor you. The idea is that you go will there, you will do your research. I am familiar with Yale because I went there for graduate school, I know that the library there has everything you could possibly ever want [laughs], so it is a non-issue. And I actually live in Connecticut, so there is a variety of reasons. This opportunity to have this space where I could reach all of these different kinds of people: intellectuals working on different kinds of topics. While I am there I will be working on trying to write up chapters of the book. I have written a proposal, one chapter and drafted some others, had ideas for others, but this is really an opportunity to write up as much of it as I can, and then see if I can secure a relationship with the publisher so that I can finish it.

**We noticed in our earlier email exchange with you that your email signature contains an interesting quote from the novel *Ghana Must Go*: "They were dreamer-women. Very dangerous women. Who looked at the world through their wide dreamer-eyes and saw it not as it was, 'brutal, senseless,' etc., but worse, as it might be or might yet become." Taiye Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* (2013)**

**It stuck out to us as it seems simultaneously optimistic, empowering, but also a little foreboding. What did you find attractive about this quote?**

I have a very long commute. It is an hour and twenty minutes each way, and so I started listening to books on tape. What I noticed about listening to books on tape is that they are performances, and the person is really conveying a lot of

information with their voice. The best ones are—it runs like a movie in your head, and the reader for *Ghana Must Go* was a phenomenal. In this case, it is a thick novel, and she assumed all of these different voices in the novel, and so it was just a pleasure and a joy to read, and is a beautifully written novel. I remember listening to it and hearing that quote. I did not read it, I heard it, and it stuck out to me. And I was like, “I need to find out what page that is on.” I found the quote, and it is really interesting because when I read the quote-- I see the quote as being quite hopeful. That women are dangerous because they see what is in front of them, but the reason why they are dangerous is that they can imagine a different possibility. The danger is in imagining what the world could become. But I have asked a couple of people, “do you read that to mean that the world could become worse?” For me what makes them dangerous is that they have this capacity to imagine other possibilities that would threaten the status quo—as opposed to, they are dangerous because they know how bad it is going to get. I am feeling like when you read it, you thought there was something ominous about it because what the world might become might become worse, right?

**Exactly, “dangerous” does not necessarily have to be negative, right?**

Right. Because in the context of that, the larger context of that part in the novel she was describing a particular woman character who was not particularly powerful, if I remember correctly. You know, she was like a younger woman, she was not a wealthy, powerful woman or anything like that, but she had this insight into how the world worked. Playing with this idea of how you can both be empowered and vulnerable at the same time, and that goes to the core things that I have always written about. At any time when you are talking about people of color and especially ones that sort of managed to rise up to a more elite status, or assume some position of power, there is a way in which you can enjoy some power and enjoy some status but there is always this vulnerability that is there. And I think that is the most complex kind of historical question when you are looking at these kinds of issues: How can people be all these things at once!