



Netherlands American Studies Review

Fall 2020

NETHERLANDS **NASA**
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ASSOCIATION



Welcome

to the second edition of the Netherlands American Studies Review, the bi-annual student journal of the Netherlands American Studies Association (NASA). After the success of our first issue in the spring of 2020, we present to you another collection of excellent student papers written in the field of North American Studies at Dutch universities. Although we did not receive any book reviews this time around, we have assembled a wonderful set of papers that truly embody the outstanding quality of student work in our field.

In this Fall 2020 issue, you will find ten carefully selected pieces that reflect the topical diversity and interdisciplinary nature of American Studies in the Netherlands. Our students cover a wide variety of issues, ranging from intranational queer migration to conservationism and from vinyl burning to foreign policy. These papers were written by students in different stages of their higher education, ranging from the second year of their bachelor's to the final months of their research master's.

We are very thankful for all the students who have sent us their writings, for the editors who have worked tirelessly to select and finetune their papers, and, of course, for the NASA Board, which has supported us throughout the process. We are proud of the final product and hope it will inspire you as much as it did us.

We hope you will enjoy the Fall 2020 edition of the Netherlands American Studies Review!

Debby Esmeé de Vlugt
Editor-in-Chief

On behalf of the Editorial Board
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Protecting the Fountain from Pollution: The Dark Side of American Conservationism

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*This paper was written for the Honoursmodule: History of Environmentalism
in the Honoursbachelor of Laws*

In the summer of 2019, a young man in El Paso, Texas walked into a Walmart where he shot and killed 23 people. His targets were Hispanic immigrants, and in his shoddy and jumbled manifesto he claimed to have targeted them partly because they were “destroying” the American environment, leaving him no choice but to “decrease the number of people in America using resources.”¹ This sparked a foggy debate about the rise of ecofascism, especially since the Christchurch shooter had also described himself as such earlier that year.² This debate is easier to understand if we investigate the historical (American) ties between the ideologies of conservationism and scientific racism.³ We will see that the idea that the environment must be protected from immigrants and ‘lower races’ is not a new idea. On the contrary, it has a long and dark history. In this paper, I will argue that conservationism in the US in the first decades of the twentieth century served to shape racist and anti-immigrant ideologies and policies. I will also argue that conservationist thinking and practice were, in turn, inspired by scientific racism.

To prove the existence of this connection, I will focus on writings and remarks made by early twentieth-century conservationists, as well as on the effects their work had on public policy and debates. In particular, I will draw on the life and work of the patrician Madison Grant, an early pioneer in the conservationist movement. Grant was not just an avid protector of wildlife and nature, he was also one of the most popular and well-read practitioners of scientific racism. His works, including the monumentally influential *The Passing of the Great Race*, were based on the pseudoscientific disciplines of racial anthropology and eugenics. His work on this front was not separate from his admirable conservationist efforts: it was directly influenced by it.⁴ This relationship was already recognized during Grant’s life, to which his obituary in the New York Times testifies:

*The preservation of the redwoods, of the bison, of the Alaskan caribou, of the bald eagle... of the spirit of the early American colonist,... and of the purity of the ‘Nordic’ type of humanity in this country, were all his personal concerns, all products of the same urge in him to save precious things.*⁵

Madison Grant had originally been a zoologist, and his background in working with and protecting mammals helped shape his later scientific racism. The link between the two is not immediately obvious, but Jonathan Spiro posits that Grant and his hunting buddies in the conservationist movement were especially influenced by the work of the racial anthropologist William Ripley.⁶ Ripley wrote grand theories about the different types of human races that populated the earth, distinguishing between ‘more’ and ‘lesser’ developed races. Drawing on studies done on

sheep and pigeons, Ripley argued that “crossing between highly evolved varieties or types, tends to cause reversion to the original stock.” He also relied on research from the botanical world, claiming his theory was based on insights that were “well known to fruit growers and horticulturists.”⁸ Grant’s work with studying and conserving wildlife populations made him amenable to these arguments. He became obsessed with the threat of reversion, which served as the catalyst for his activities in the political arena. He began to abhor race-mixing, describing this as the process of “mongrelization,” a term obviously borrowed from animal husbandry and breeding programs.⁹

Grant’s political work was widely respected and highly influential. I already mentioned his *Passing of the Great Race*, a nonsensical book in which he claimed that Europe was inhabited by three races of which the Nordic race was the most developed. It did not take long before Grant became a leader of the anti-immigration movement by weaponizing his conservationist ideals. A perfect example of this is an article he wrote for the *Journal of the National Institute of Social Sciences* in 1921, in which he warned against admitting new immigrants from Southern Europe on the grounds that it would be a frontal assault on America’s natural world.¹⁰

In the years following, the article was used by politicians as a justification to severely limit the influx of non-Northern European immigrants. Congressman Albert Johnson, who was the architect of both the restrictive *1921 Emergency Quota Act* and the *Immigration Act of 1924* (also known as the *Johnson-Reed Act*), entered the article into the Congressional Record and echoed the above-cited themes in his defense of the acts. Johnson cloaked himself in the language of the conservationist movement by opposing immigration on the grounds that new arrivals from Europe would deplete the nation’s natural resources. Sounding just like Grant, Johnson argued that “a restrictive immigration act is as truly a conservation measure as any dealing with natural resources.”¹¹

Clearly, this language served only as a rhetorical ploy, as Grant and his allies were only opposed to a specific kind of immigrant: the one that hailed from non-Northern European countries. But it does prove something else: the conservationist movement did not operate outside of the political sphere. There was a clear link to the political arena and the immigration debate. This is also the argument of historian Philip Pauly. Pauly argues that political debates around 1900 about the desired level of immigration perfectly mirrored the debates in the botanical community about how stringent the US should be in protecting its borders from foreign plants, animals, and other organisms. Ecological and demographic borders were patrolled with the same intensity, as the US alternated between periods of isolationism and cosmopolitanism. It is no coincidence that in both cases, the nativist isolationists ultimately won out.¹²

We see this also in the way conservationists that supported stricter immigration laws, excluding non-“Nordic” immigrants, spoke about these groups: in the exact same way they spoke about invasive species that threatened forests and wildlife populations. A book by Leon Whitney and Ellsworth Huntington, who served as President of the Ecological Society of America, and which was edited by Grant, characterized unwelcome immigrants as human weeds: “Genuine human weeds, whole shiploads of them, from almost every nation in Europe.”¹³ Henry Fairfield Osborn, Grant’s best friend and fellow conservationist, was outraged that while “there is no port in this country through which you can bring in a diseased animal or a noxious animal or weed,” it nevertheless remained possible for “noxious human beings” to enter the country.¹⁴

This rhetoric proved very effective, and it was copied by anti-immigration activists without a background in conservationism. The US Navy's Surgeon General E. R. Stitt pointed to the existence of quarantine laws that prevented the importation of dangerous plants and animals and called for the implementation of similar rigid measures to repel dangerous immigrants from American shores. Activist Prescott F. Hall warned that immigrants from Southern Europe would "pollute" the blood of the Yankee and compared Jews to "germs of infectious disease" that should be treated exactly like "noxious weeds" and "insect pests." Similarly, writer George Creel wrote in influential magazine *Collier's* that "defective" immigrants had poisoned "the wells of our national life."¹⁵

This type of rhetoric, used to oppose new waves of immigration, is clearly reminiscent of conservationist efforts to protect natural organisms from invasive species. What is also important to note is that, in these debates, the threat is not really that the immigrants carry diseases that will harm the native inhabitants. Rather, the immigrants themselves were the disease. Their mere presence weakens the body politic. This makes perfect sense if you think back to the popularity of Ripley and the principle of reversion: the lesser developed races will, over time, begin to dominate and replace the more developed races.¹⁶

While the language of the conservationists invaded the political debate, conservationists also employed racial language in their conservationist efforts. We see this clearly in the "Save the Redwoods"-campaign. Grant and his ally Henry Fairfield Osborn are nowadays mostly remembered for this successful campaign to save the spectacular California redwoods from lumberjacks and industrialists. Alexandra Stern has convincingly argued that the fight to save the redwoods was actually one big metaphor for the conservationists' political goal of defending the "Anglo-Saxon race" and protecting the supremacy of the old white patrician families.¹⁷ John Muir, the co-founder of the Sierra Club, wrote in 1920 that protecting the redwoods was a worthy endeavor because these trees were "the noblest of a noble race."¹⁸ Grant and his allies used similar racial language to describe their efforts. For them, the splendor, magnificence, and power of the redwoods made it tempting to portray their struggle for survival as analogous to that of the white race in America. For the conservationist Charles M. Goethe, the redwoods represented a "superior race" that found itself facing an increasingly hostile environment and risked being overrun or exterminated. He also warned the redwoods were undergoing a process of "race suicide."¹⁹ Once again, the parallels are obvious.

We also see these parallels in the earliest proceedings of the National Conservation Congresses. These Congresses were annual events that were organized between 1909 and 1915. Attendees included many conservationist activists as well as (prominent) political figures and representatives of government agencies. The Congresses served as prestigious fora for speeches and discussions about the best way to conserve the country's resources. Studying the proceedings of the earliest Congresses, before they were beset by internal strife, shows that the conservationist leaders of this period were not just concerned with preserving the nation's natural beauty and conserving the nation's natural resources. They were also concerned with preserving and conserving the race.²⁰

One of the speakers at the first Congress, A.F. Knudsen from Hawaii, started by warning against mixing the races, since "the half-breed" is weak, unmanly, unbalanced, and of no use to anyone. Racial conservation was therefore just as important as material conservation. Knudsen said he hoped the focus on conservation would "herald a new civilization and a new race."²¹ A similar

address was given by Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot was a noted conservationist who had chaired the National Conservation Commission the year prior and served as the first head of the US Forest Service. Like Knudsen, Pinchot told his audiences that the principles of conservation should apply outside of the natural world as well. He specifically mentioned the need to conserve “the body politic.”²²

To give a military perspective on the importance of conservation, General Marion Maus was also invited to address the Congress. Maus argued that conserving resources was less important than conserving the race. He warned his listeners that, should the race deteriorate, it “matters not whether we conserve all the other resources of the country; for the race becomes a prey to any other nation.”²³ This language, while revealing, is downright subtle compared to some of the speeches at the Second Congress in 1910. Especially telling is the address by the conservationist Mrs. Matthew T. Scott, the President-General of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution, who focused on the patriotic aspect of conservationism.²⁴

In her speech, Mrs. Scott echoed General Maus’s belief that conserving the purity and position of the white race was at least as important as conserving nature, but she was even more explicit: “We, the mothers of this generation, [...] have a right to insist upon the conserving not only of soil, forest, birds, minerals, fishes, waterways, in the interest of our future home-makers, but also upon the conserving of the supremacy of the Caucasian race in our land.”²⁵ One paragraph in Mrs. Scott’s speech stands out in particular, and it deserves to be quoted in full because paraphrasing it would disguise the meaningful metaphorical language she employs:

*But not merely the cup whence flows the stream of human life, must we guard and cherish; we must look to the ingredients which are being cast into the cup. We must protect the fountain from pollution. We must not so eagerly invite all the sons of Shem, Ham, and Japhet, wherever they may have first seen the light, and under whatever traditions and influences and ideals foreign and antagonistic to ours they may have been reared, to trample the mud of millions of alien feet into our spring. We must conserve the sources of our race in the Anglo-Saxon line, Mother of Liberty and Self-government in the modern world. I would rather our coming census showed a lesser population and a greater homogeneity. Especially do I dread the clouding of the purity of the cup with color and character acquired under tropical suns, in the jungle, or in paradisiac islands of the sea alternately basking in heavenlike beauty and serenity and devastated by earthquake and tornado and revolution.*²⁶

Notice how much of the language that Mrs. Scott uses here relates to (the threat of) environmental damage and disasters: the race has to be conserved, just like the fountain has to be protected from pollution. The arrival of new immigrants is portrayed as the “trampling of our spring.” The purity of the cup through which life streams, like a river, is threatened by a danger – a “color and character” – that hails from exotic and treacherous environments. Also present at that year’s Convention was President Theodore Roosevelt, a passionate conservationist, who undoubtedly agreed with Mrs. Scott’s speech as he himself stressed it was both “our duty and our desire to make this land of ours a better home for the race.”²⁷

There is one more way in which the racial and natural conservation movements interacted and influenced each other, which relates to “the Trouble with Wilderness.” In this foundational essay, environmental historian William Cronon shows how, in the nineteenth century, the concept of wilderness was given a new meaning under the influence of Romanticist thought. He described how it became embedded with moral values and cultural symbols. There was no place for humans in this particular conception of wilderness, and it was presented as pristine and pure, unsullied, and untouched.²⁸ Of course, this notion is wildly ahistorical. It is, however, not surprising that this is how the conservationists of Grant’s era conceptualized wilderness. They bought into the myth. Grant, Osborn, and Goethe’s obsession with maintaining the purity of the race and the need to ward off dangerous invaders can directly be compared to their efforts to protect the pristine wilderness from any filthy foreign influences. Their ideal of the human race was that of the tall, blond, broad-shouldered, and lily-white Nordic superman that was as clean and pure as their faux-pristine conception of wilderness.²⁹

All this goes to show that conserving nature and conserving the purity and supremacy of the white race were not just vaguely related. They were, in effect, two sides of the same coin, and the two movements used very similar language and metaphors. This paper has focused on the first decades of the twentieth century, but the connection does not end there: the post-war years offer us additional examples of the connection. We can find those in *Road to Survival* (1948) and *Our Plundered Planet* (1948), the apocalyptic works of William Vogt and Henry Fairfield Osborn jr., environmentalists with close ties to the eugenics movement.³⁰ These books, as well as Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* (1968) a few decades later, helped popularize the concepts of overpopulation and population control in such a way that these concepts were later weaponized by reactionary movements to combat and demonize immigrants.³¹ This way, the connection also helped shape the ideologies of contemporary far-right terrorists like the one in El Paso. As mentioned at the start, his manifesto is incoherent at best, but this does not mean the words are meaningless. It shows the connection between conserving the land and conserving the race still exists, even though we may not always be able to see it.

Notes

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/04/whats-inside-hate-filled-manifesto-linked-el-paso-shooter/>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/two-mass-murders-a-world-apart-share-a-common-theme-ecofascism/2019/08/18/0079a676-bec4-11e9-b873-63ace636af08_story.html; <https://theintercept.com/2019/08/05/el-paso-shooting-eco-fascism-migration/>

³ Scientific racism is, essentially, the by-now discredited belief that racism has a scientific basis and can be justified by empirical interdisciplinary research.

⁴ G.E. Allen, ““Culling the Herd”: Eugenics and the Conservation Movement in the United States, 1900–1940,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 46 no.1, (Spring 2013): 39-45; G. Brechin, “Conserving the Race: Natural Aristocracies, Eugenics and the U.S. Conservation Movement,” *Antipode* 28 no. 3, (July 1996): 234-235.

⁵ As quoted in Allen, “Culling the Herd,” 45.

⁶ Many of the conservationists of this era were passionate hunters. Of course, Grant and his conservationist friends, such as Theodore Roosevelt, only hunted for sport. They looked down on the “pothunting” that was common in many immigrant communities. See for more on this A. Rome, “Nature Wars, Culture Wars: Immigration and Environmental Reform in the Progressive Era,” *Environmental History* 13 no. 3 (July 2008): 434-437; for the influence of William Ripley’s work, see J.P. Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington: University Press of New England, 2009), 92-96.

⁷ W.Z. Ripley, “The European Population of the United States,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38 (July – December 1908): 234.

⁸ Ripley, "The European Population," 234.

⁹ Allen, "Culling the Herd," 44.

¹⁰ M. Grant, "Restriction of Immigration: Racial Aspects," *Journal of National Institute of Social Sciences* 7 (August 1921): 51, also located at <https://archive.org/details/1921Grant/>. One passage is especially remarkable: "We unquestionably do need [non-Nordic immigrants] if our ideals are the development of the country in a single generation, the slaughter of all mammals for food, trophies or fur, of all birds for sport or feathers, the cutting of all forests for timber and grape stakes, the opening of all coal mines, the draining of all oil wells, the harnessing of all waterfalls for power. If all the valleys of the Sierras are to be drowned to irrigate deserts, if all rich bottom lands must be needlessly exhausted, if all our rivers and streams must be stripped of their fish and turned into sewers to carry off waste materials for factories, if fine land must be gridironed with railroads and highways, — all in a few decades — then it is obvious that we must have a servile class to do the work."

¹¹ Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, 207 and as quoted on 231.

¹² P.J. Pauly, "The Beauty and Menace of the Japanese Cherry Trees: Conflicting Visions of American Ecological Independence," *Isis* 87, no. 1 (March 1996): 70-73.

¹³ Spiro, *Defending the Master Race*, as quoted on 187-188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; G. Creel, "Melting Pot or Dumping Ground?" *Collier's* 68, no. 10 (September 1921): 25, also located at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015056079554>, scan 287.

¹⁶ The tendency to equate immigrants with diseases is still visible in our society and our mainstream media, just remember de Telegraaf's headline from January 2017 that warned of the arrival of an 'asylum plague': <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/37563/kansloze-asielplaagongehinderd-verder>.

¹⁷ A. Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 145-148.

¹⁸ J. Muir, "Save the Redwoods," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (January 1920): 4, also located at <https://archive.org/details/sierrachubbulet1123sier>, scan 19.

¹⁹ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 145-148.

²⁰ More information about the Congress can be found on the website of the Library of Congress at <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/cnchron5.html>. The entire proceedings of the First National Conservation Congress at Seattle, August 26-28, 1909 can be found at [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(amrvvg55\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field(DOCID+@lit(amrvvg55)))

²¹ [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(amrvvg55div30\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field(DOCID+@lit(amrvvg55div30))), 62.

²² [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(amrvvg55div36\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field(DOCID+@lit(amrvvg55div36))), 76.

²³ [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(amrvvg55div43\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrv:@field(DOCID+@lit(amrvvg55div43))), 115-119.

²⁴ The entire proceedings of the Second National Conservation Congress at Saint Paul, September 5-8, 1910 can be found at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36031/36031-h/36031-h.htm>

²⁵ Proceedings of the Second National Conservation Congress, 276.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ W. Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* ed. W. Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 5 and 10-14.

²⁹ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 10-14; Allen, "Culling the Herd," 64-65.

³⁰ Osborn Jr. was, of course, the son of Madison Grant's greatest ally. I did not have the space to fully incorporate the eugenics movement into my narrative, but obviously eugenicists were also concerned with conserving the race and eliminating the undesirables; K. Schlosser, "Malthus at Mid-Century: Neo-Malthusianism as Bio-political Governance in the Post-WW II United States," *Cultural Geographies* 16 no. 4 (October 2009): 473-474; Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 149-151.

³¹ T. Clark, "But the real problem is....': The Chameleonic Insidiousness of 'Overpopulation' in the Environmental Humanities," *Oxford Literary Review* 38 no. 1 (May 2016): 13-14.

“Marshall’s Advice Makes Sense”:

Ambassador Marshall Green and US Policy Towards Indonesia, 1965-66

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This paper was written for the course The US and Human Rights in the MA program in North American Studies.

When Marshall Green arrived in Jakarta in July 1965, he was greeted with signs saying: “Green Go Home.”¹ Having previously served as crisis manager for Secretary of State John Dulles, as deputy head of mission in Korea, and as consul general in Hong Kong, Green had just been appointed as the new American ambassador to Indonesia. This was his first posting as ambassador and it would not be an uneventful one.² Shortly after his arrival, Indonesia underwent major political changes. In the five months following October 1965, the army under the leadership of General Suharto would take power and install the authoritarian regime known as the New Order. Responding to a communist-inspired ‘coup attempt’, Suharto unleashed a campaign of mass violence against the Indonesian Communist Party, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), ousting President Sukarno in the process.³ This would cost half a million PKI members and leftists sympathizers their lives and left a million more imprisoned, destroying the world’s largest non-governing communist party.⁴ This paper deals with US policy-making towards Indonesia in 1965-66 and, specifically, considers Marshall Green’s role in it.

The events of 1965-66 have recently been the subject of the International People’s Tribunal 1965 (IPT), which found Indonesia guilty on ten counts of human rights violations, including mass killing, torture, and genocide.⁵ The IPT, which followed the format of a formal human rights court, also aimed to draw attention to the complicity of Western powers in the mass killings, including the United States. The Tribunal concluded that the US had been complicit in two ways: by providing lists of PKI members to the Indonesian army despite knowing that killings were taking place, and by supplying arms and communications equipment.⁶

The ruling is in line with scholarly accounts. In *The Killing Season*, one of historian Geoffrey Robinson’s main claims is that “the actions of powerful foreign states (...) together with aspects of the international context were instrumental in facilitating and encouraging the army’s campaign of mass violence in 1965-66.”⁷ He argues that the US pursued a strategy of deliberate silence regarding the mass killings and covert support regarding the army. Additionally, he contends that the US government has tried to hide its role in the mass killings.⁸ Similarly, historian Bradley Simpson, argues that the US both supported and encouraged the mass killings.⁹ War Studies scholar David Easter, moreover, contends that the US, Great Britain, Australia, and Malaysia used extensive propaganda campaigns to encourage hostility towards the PKI which, in turn, encouraged the killings.¹⁰

It should be noted that, with regards to the involvement of the US and other Western states, the Indonesian case is hardly unique. According to Simpson, most perpetrators of mass violence in the past century have had accomplices through the indirect or direct involvement of foreign powers.¹¹

This has led Adam Jones to coin the term ‘democrisy’, which refers to the hypocrisy of democratic states who protect their own citizens from state violence but participate in such actions abroad. In the case of the US, Jones finds this term especially applicable to the period of the Cold War.¹² During this era, the US was regularly involved in episodes of mass violence similar to the Indonesian case, especially in Latin America.¹³

In this paper, I examine US policy towards Indonesia during the 1965–66 killings by considering the significance of Ambassador Green. No earlier study of American policy towards Indonesia has had this focus on Green.¹⁴ Based on a qualitative analysis of archival material, including newly declassified correspondence, I analyze Green’s significance in policy-making. Additionally, I study how Green represented the events of 1965–66 in an interview and his memoirs *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation: 1965–1968*.¹⁵ I argue that Green, although generally in agreement with the State Department, was highly significant in policy-making. First, the State Department relied heavily on Green and the Embassy for information and policy guidance. Second, Green advocated a policy of providing covert assurance and assistance to the army, while simultaneously trying to keep a low-profile. The State Department shared this view, although it advocated a more cautious approach. Third, the mass killings were not a priority for Green or the State Department despite extensive knowledge about them. Instead, both supported the army’s campaign against the PKI. Finally, Green’s memoirs acknowledge his own role in taking Indonesia off the course towards communism. Overall, his book shows support for the Suharto regime while downplaying the US’s knowledge of the mass killings.

The mass killings started with the kidnapping and killing of six generals of the Indonesian army by the communist-inspired September 30 Movement. On October 1, 1965, its members announced on national radio that they had prevented a coup against President Sukarno.¹⁶ The September 30 Movement, however, was small and poorly organized. In a counter-action, General Suharto overcame their forces, took control of the army, and declared the September 30 Movement’s actions to be a coup attempt which he blamed entirely on the PKI.¹⁷ After a brief power struggle with Sukarno, Suharto was appointed commander of the army.¹⁸ In the months that followed, the army launched an extensive campaign against the PKI and leftist sympathizers resulting in mass killings and mass imprisonment. According to Simpson, “the slaughter paved the way for the army’s ouster of Sukarno in March 1966, its ascension to power, and the reconfiguration of Indonesian politics and foreign policy.”¹⁹

The ‘coup attempt’ happened at a time when US-Indonesian relations were tense. In the years leading up to 1965, President Sukarno took an increasingly anti-Western stance. He accused the West of neo-colonial imperialism, established ties with the People’s Republic of China, and supported North Vietnam in its war against America. Additionally, he took Indonesia out of the United Nations in January 1965 and tried to destabilize newly-established Malaysia, which he saw as a British creation. In his domestic policy, Sukarno favored the PKI and leftist politics.²⁰ As Easter has argued, “Sukarno appeared to be mounting a comprehensive challenge to Western interests in South-East Asia.”²¹ The US was singled out as the main representative of the West. On August 8, 1965, Green wrote in a telegram that the US was constantly smeared by the Indonesians. American officials had become increasingly isolated.²² On August 23, 1965, he reported that “Sukarno has clearly identified [the] US as enemy.”²³

The American Embassy responded with surprise and confusion to the ‘coup attempt’.²⁴ Green wrote that the Embassy was “just as puzzled as everybody else” by the “coup” and its direct aftermath.²⁵ The State Department had not yet anticipated a power move. When discussing the possible opposition of the army to the PKI in a breakfast meeting in August, Under-Secretary of State George Ball remarked that such a situation would not take place as long as Sukarno was alive and in power.²⁶ Over the next couple of days, the events of October 1 remained, in the words of Ball, “pretty opaque,” as it was still unclear how successful Suharto’s counter-coup had been.²⁷ Nevertheless, it was immediately evident that what was happening would be of great importance; a memorandum for President Johnson described the events as “a power move which may have far-reaching implications.”²⁸ By October 5, Green reported that the PKI was on the defensive and that he suspected the army might “at long last” act effectively against the communists.²⁹ An October 6 intelligence memorandum confirmed that the army was “firmly in control of Indonesia.”³⁰

The State Department relied heavily on Green and the Embassy for recommendations and advice on what American policy towards Indonesia should be. In a 1987 interview, Green told Robert J. Martens, his former Political Officer in Indonesia, that “after October 1965 we pretty much wrote our own instructions.”³¹ According to Green, Washington did not know what to do and relied on the Embassy for guidance. He said: “We talk about getting instructions but who originated the instructions? Well, we did.”³² In the foreword to Green’s memoirs, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs William Bundy provided a similar account. He stated that “as Assistant Secretary, I never sent our Embassy in Jakarta any sweeping policy guidance. There was no need to do so.”³³ Instead, Bundy recalled that he and his colleagues tended to agree with the Embassy’s proposals. Bundy’s discussions with his colleagues, he states, boiled down to: “Marshall’s advice makes sense. (...)What the US government did in Indonesia from mid-1965 to the end of 1968,” Bundy contended, “was, essentially, to follow the advice of Marshall Green on basic approach, and of a few others on how to carry through that approach.”³⁴

The correspondence between the Embassy and the State Department confirms the idea that Green’s proposals were of great importance to policy-making. The Department repeatedly asked the Embassy for comments before moving ahead with policy-making, as is standard procedure within the State Department. On October 22, 1965, Secretary of State Rusk sent a telegram outlining the Department’s thoughts on recent developments “intended to solicit [the] Embassy’s comments.”³⁵ He emphasized his belief that the Department and the Embassy should agree on the main lines of US policy in case the Indonesians would probe their position.³⁶ A week later, on October 29, Rusk again asked Green for “comments and observations in order to develop it into policy recommendations.”³⁷ Moreover, before making a decision on whether or not to provide Indonesia with aid, the Indonesia Working Group asked the Embassy for information and opinion.³⁸

In his policy recommendations, Green showed himself to be a supporter of the army who wished to provide assurances and assistance if requested. He did, however, advocate keeping a low profile and only acting covertly. In a telegram sent on October 5, Green recommended that the US should covertly indicate to the army “our desire to be of assistance where we can.”³⁹ He also proposed to extend contact and to avoid any actions that might be interpreted as the US not having confidence in the army.⁴⁰ On October 12, Green reported that a German Embassy officer had received word

that the army would approach Western embassies and hoped for sympathy and aid from the West if they were to decide to dispose of Sukarno.⁴¹

In line with his October 5 guidelines, Green supported the army's requests for American assistance whenever they came up. First, when the Embassy was approached in November 1965 by General Sukendro requesting several types of aid, Green recommended fulfilling the majority. He believed that the requested medicine should be provided and that the request for communications equipment should be met if assurances about their need and purpose were given. As to the provision of arms, Green believed this should not be done at the time, but cautioned the State Department not to "close our minds to this possibility."⁴² Green's recommendations to provide communications equipment intensified, and the provision was approved by the CIA's 303 Committee, formerly known as the Special Group, on November 17.⁴³

Second, Green supported giving Adam Malik, Suharto's chief aide, the fifty million rupiahs he requested to finance the activities of the KAP-GESTAPU movement, the movement behind the anti-PKI campaign. He found these activities an essential and successful factor in the army's program.⁴⁴ According to Kent Sieg, Green established a close relationship with Malik over the course of the 1965 winter.⁴⁵

Third, Green supported the army on his own initiative. On October 13, 1965, he wrote to the State Department that three walkie-talkies were covertly given to the Indonesian army. He argued that this was needed to protect army leadership from assassinations but also found it necessary for establishing good relations with the army, saying that it should be seen as "important in terms of helping a friend in need and will be remembered accordingly."⁴⁶ In his interview with Martens, Green confirmed that he decided to provide the army with walkie-talkies "entirely on [his] own."⁴⁷ He stated that he did this primarily to show the army leadership that their safety was important to the US and that his decision to do so received "a most gratifying telegram back from Bill Bundy."⁴⁸

Green's proposals to support the army were generally in line with the CIA's opinion of how to act: assist and show support, but covertly. A November 9 CIA memorandum argued that "we should avoid being too cynical about [the army's] motives and its self-interest, or too hesitant about the propriety of extending such assistance provided we can do so covertly, in a manner which will not embarrass them or embarrass our government."⁴⁹ The CIA argued that there were risks involved in helping the army, but that these risks did not outweigh the risks of not doing so, which could "result in reduction of the Army's future political position and concomitant erosion of what may be a unique opportunity to ensure a better future for U.S. interests in Indonesia."⁵⁰ The CIA believed that "the Indonesians needed to know who their friends were."⁵¹

The State Department, similarly, often agreed with Green and was in favor of supporting the army. The Inter-Agency Working Group on Indonesia proposed on October 30 to set up a "covert plan of assistance."⁵² In a joint State-Defense cable to the Embassy, they asked for an estimate of what equipment the army might need in case the PKI mounted an insurgency.⁵³ However, although Green also advocated keeping a low-profile as to not work into the hands of Sukarno, the Department preferred an even more cautious approach.⁵⁴ A memorandum to President Johnson speaks of "simmering policy differences within the USG."⁵⁵ In the memorandum, dated February 15, 1966, the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Komer urged Johnson to convey his support to Green for his wish to have the authority to assist the army when an

opportunity arises to “encourage [the] State not to be too unimaginative when we may at last have Sukarno on the run.”⁵⁶ The policy differences Komer referred to concern the State Department’s more cautious approach and unwillingness to provide covert assistance, which on December 13, 1965, was called unpracticable.⁵⁷ On January 20, 1966, the State Department still found that the Indonesian situation was not yet ripe for assistance.⁵⁸

The situation in Indonesia changed before a definitive decision favoring either Green’s or the State Department’s approach could be made. Suharto ousted Sukarno on March 12, 1966.⁵⁹ In his February 15 meeting with Johnson, Green indicated some agreement with the Department’s position. He conveyed his belief that the US should keep a low-profile and not extend assistance until Indonesia “begins to set its house in order.”⁶⁰ However, Green also contended that the US should keep an open mind and be prepared to provide support if a situation arose that called for help.⁶¹ Johnson left it up to Green to make recommendations as to if and when assistance should be given.⁶² To be sure, the difference in stance between Green and the State Department was a minor one and boiled down to Green wanting to tell the army that emergency assistance would be given if needed and the State Department wanting to wait with such assurances.⁶³ Taking into account the support already provided before February 1966, it seems plausible that the army was already aware of the US’s position. More importantly, the existing documentary evidence indicates that the State Department and the ambassador completely agreed that the army should be supported. While this seems logical considering that the army was taking Indonesia off the course towards communism, supporting the army while they were massacring civilians would have reflected negatively on the US as a state committed to the protection of human rights.

The US was well aware of the fact that mass killings were taking place. On October 18, 1965, a few days after providing the army with walkie-talkies, Green reported his suspicion that the army was acting methodically against the PKI.⁶⁴ In another telegram of the same day, he reported that he was told by special assistant to Minister Ruslan Abdulgani Sutarto that anti-PKI actions were being extended geographically. Green was aware that these actions included executions. Sutarto said that they “probably have to string up” PKI leaders to “show everybody what kind of people they are.”⁶⁵ Two days later, Green reported that thousands of PKI members had been arrested and several hundred executed.⁶⁶ Over the next few months, the Embassy reportedly wrote about killings in their telegrams to the State Department and received multiple telegrams from the consulates in Medan and Surabaya telling the same story of slaughter and persecution.⁶⁷ One of those telegrams conveyed the information that most PKI members were unaware of and uninvolved in the September 30 Movement, while another showed knowledge that confessions were being falsified.⁶⁸

Despite these reports, neither the Embassy nor Washington proposed any measures to stop the massacres. Instead, the Embassy showed a certain admiration for the army’s actions. When speaking about how the army dealt with feedings prisoners, Masters stated that they were “successfully meeting this problem by executing their PKI prisoners.”⁶⁹ Green seemed to completely support the army, saying that it “has nevertheless been working hard at destroying PKI and I, for one, have increasing respect for its determination and organization in carrying out this crucial assignment.”⁷⁰ This attitude is unsurprising considering that the mass killings led to a communist defeat at a time when the Cold War was in full swing.

In his memoirs, Green mentioned the killings only briefly while simultaneously showing his anti-communism and support for Suharto. He stated that “rumors and unverified reports” of killings surfaced in late 1965.⁷¹ According to Green, it was impossible to estimate the size of the killings or who was behind them. He condemned the killings as “deplorable blood-letting” but argued that communism itself was to blame for them; communism’s atheism and theory of class warfare was at odds with Indonesian culture’s emphasis on tolerance and harmony.⁷² In other words, while Green did acknowledge the slaughter, he tried to absolve the US from any responsibility and accountability while simultaneously blaming the PKI for its own murder. In the interview with Martens, Green again emphasized that there were only rumors of killings and that providing an accurate death toll was impossible. When asked to do so, he guessed that three hundred thousand people had been killed.⁷³ Throughout his memoirs, Green shows consistent support for Suharto, praising him and his leadership qualities and emphasizing the obstacles he had to overcome to defeat communism.⁷⁴

How the US, and Green specifically, dealt with the mass killings afterward is by no means atypical. Claiming not to know about atrocities or only having a vague idea about them is a regularly used argument by both perpetrators and bystanders to absolve themselves of responsibility.⁷⁵ As argued by sociologist Stanley Cohen, bystander states often turn a blind eye to atrocities for which they have indirect responsibility when this is in their national interest.⁷⁶ In this case, the defeat of the PKI was in the US’s national interest. This case also confirms Samantha Power’s argument that the US has refused to take any risks to stop genocide in the twentieth century, and that knowledge about mass killings has not fostered a willingness to act.⁷⁷

When Marshall Green said that “after October 1965 we pretty much wrote our own instructions,” he was not wrong.⁷⁸ Regarding the making of US policy towards Indonesia in 1965–66, Green was highly influential. The State Department sought out Green’s and the Embassy’s advice continuously and often converted it into policy with only minor adjustments. Apart from a minor disagreement on whether to explicitly tell the Indonesian army that they had American support, Green and the State Department were on the same page and agreed that the US should lay low while also covertly assisting and supporting it. They took a similar approach to the mass killings. Despite extensive knowledge of massacres taking place, neither advocated any measures to stop the murders. Inspired by anti-communism, Green showed himself to be a staunch supporter of Suharto in his memoirs. Exhibiting typical bystander and perpetrator behavior, he downplayed his knowledge of the mass killings and tried to blame the victims for their own murders. These results are significant in light of the recent ruling of the international panel of judges of the IPT and the fact that processes of getting justice for the victims of the 1965–66 mass killings are still in full swing. By giving detailed insights into the complicity of the US and how this complicity came to be, they might help bring clarity to an episode of history that remains unclear and underdiscussed.

Notes

¹ Marshall Green, *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation 1965–1968* (Ann Arbor: The Compass Press, 1990), 17.

² James Curran, “Marshall Green: American’s Mr. Asia. The Career of a Distinguished US Diplomat During the Cold War Has Lessons for America’s Place in the Region Today,” *American Review* 12 (2013): 56.

³³ I use ‘coup attempt’ in quotations marks in agreement with Bradley Simpson’s argument that there is still too much unclarity on the September 30 Movement to definitively determine whether the movement was attempting a coup. Bradley

Simpson, *Economists With Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 173.

⁴ Geoffrey R. Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 3.

⁵ There is no scholarly consensus that the 1965-66 events constituted a genocide. I use the term 'mass killings' in this paper to keep with the UN definition which does not include political groups in the groups that can have genocide perpetrated against them. "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," United Nations Human Rights, accessed 18 December 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crimeofgenocide.aspx>; "IPT Concluding Statement: Indonesia Is Responsible For Ten Gross Human Rights Violations of 1965 and Afterwards," Tribunal 1965, accessed October 19, 2018, <http://www.tribunal1965.org/en/ipt-concluding-statement-indonesia-is-responsible-for-ten-gross-human-rights-violations-of-1965-and-afterwards/>.

⁶ International People's Tribunal on Crimes Against Humanity Indonesia 1965, "Final Report of the IPT 1965. Findings and Documents of the International People's Tribunal on Crimes Against Humanity Indonesia 1965," (The Hague, 2016), accessed December 19, 2018, <http://www.tribunal1965.org/en/tribunal-1965/tribunal-report/>, 63-4.

⁷ Robinson, 22.

⁸ Ibid., 11, 22-3.

⁹ Simpson, 174.

¹⁰ David Easter, "'Keep the Indonesian Pot Boiling': Western Covert Intervention in Indonesia, October 1965-March 1966," *Cold War History* 5, no. 1 (2005): 55-73.

¹¹ Simpson, 193.

¹² Adam Jones, "Introduction: History and Complicity," in *Genocide War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity*, ed. Adam Jones (London: Zed Books, 2004), 8-12.

¹³ See for example: Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Kent Stieg considers Green's significance for the establishment of the New Order but not the dialogue between Green and the State Department. Additionally, some correspondence between the Embassy and State Department was not yet declassified. Kent G. Stieg, "Marshall Green and the Reverse Course in Indonesia, 1965-1966," *The American Asian Review* 15, no. 2 (1997): 101-25.

¹⁵ Green.

¹⁶ Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor, "Introduction: The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68," in *The Contours of Mass Violence in Indonesia, 1965-68*, ed. Douglas Kammen and Katharine McGregor (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 1.

¹⁷ Simpson, 172.

¹⁸ Kammen and McGregor, "Introduction," 2.

¹⁹ Simpson, 172.

²⁰ Easter, 55-6.

²¹ Ibid., 55.

²² Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, August 8, 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*], 1964-1968, Volume XXVI, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2000), Document 131.

²³ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, August 23, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 135.

²⁴ Simpson, 176.

²⁵ Marshall Green Interviewed by Robert J. Martens, May 12, 1987, *Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Arlington, VA*, accessed 19 December 2018, www.adst.org.

²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, August 18, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 134.

²⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between Acting Secretary of State Ball and Senator William Fulbright, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 144.; Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between Acting Secretary of State Ball and Secretary of State Rusk, October 2, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 145.

²⁸ Memorandum for President Johnson, October 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 142.

²⁹ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, October 5, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 147.

³⁰ Intelligence Memorandum, October 6, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 149.

³¹ Marshall Green Interviewed by Robert J. Martens.

³² Ibid.

³³ William P. Bundy, "Foreword," in Green, *Indonesia*, xiii.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia, October 22, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 159.

³⁶ Ibid.

- ³⁷ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia, October 29, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 163.
- ³⁸ Memorandum From the Assistant for Indonesia (Nuechterlein) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Friedman), November 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 168.
- ³⁹ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, October 5, 1965.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Telegram 971 to Secretary of State, Secret, October 12, 1965, National Security Archive, Briefing Book 607, accessed December 19, 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/indonesia/2017-10-17/indonesia-mass-murder-1965-us-embassy-files> [hereafter NSA].
- ⁴² Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, November 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 165.
- ⁴³ Telegram From the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State, November 11, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 173.; Memorandum Prepared for the 303 Committee, November 17, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XXVI, Doc. 175.
- ⁴⁴ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand, November 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 170.
- ⁴⁵ Sieg, "Marshall Green and the Reverse Course in Indonesia," 114.
- ⁴⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, October 14, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 155.
- ⁴⁷ In the interview, Green is speaking of fourteen walkie-talkies in contrast to three walkie-talkies he wrote about in his telegram to the State Department. Marshall Green Interviewed by Robert J. Martens.
- ⁴⁸ Marshall Green Interviewed by Robert J. Martens.
- ⁴⁹ Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, November 9, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 172.
- ⁵⁰ Telegram From the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State, November 5, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 171.
- ⁵¹ Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Coordination, Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Koren) to the Director (Hughes), December 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 181.
- ⁵² Memorandum From the Assistant for Indonesia (Nuechterlein) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Friedman), October 30, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 164.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ Green warns about this for example in his November 4 and November 19, 1965 telegrams. Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, November 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 169. Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, November 19, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 177.
- ⁵⁵ Memorandum From the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Komer) to President Johnson, February 15, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 192.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ Memorandum From the Director of the Far East Region (Blouin) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Friedman), December 13, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 183.
- ⁵⁸ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia, January 20, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 189.
- ⁵⁹ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, March 12, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 200.
- ⁶⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, February 15, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 194.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ Memorandum From the Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Komer) to Chester L. Cooper and James C. Thomson, Jr., of the National Security Council Staff, January 19, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 188.
- ⁶⁴ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, October 18, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 157.
- ⁶⁵ Telegram 779A from American Embassy in Jakarta to Secretary of State in Washington, Secret, October 18, 1965, NSA.
- ⁶⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, October 20, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 158
- ⁶⁷ Telegram From the Consulate in Medan to the Department of State, November 16, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVI, Doc. 174.; Telegram 194 from American Consul in Surabaya to Jakarta, Limited Official Use, November 4, 1965, NSA.; Telegram 1425 from American Embassy Jakarta to Secretary of State, Secret, November 12, 1965, NSA.; Action Telegram 183 from American Consul Surabaya to Jakarta, Confidential, November 26, 1965, NSA.; Telegram 184A From American Consulate in Medan to the American Embassy in Jakarta, Confidential, December 6, 1965, NSA.; Telegram 187 from American Consulate Surabaya to American Embassy Jakarta, Joint sitrep 19', Confidential, December 10, 1965, NSA.; Telegram A-386 From American Embassy Jakarta to Secretary of State, 'The PKI Hunt in Central Java', Confidential, December 10, 1965, NSA.; Airgram A-408, Joint Weeka No. 48 from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to State, Secret,

December 21, 1965, NSA.; Telegram 203 from American Consul in Surabaya to Jakarta, Confidential, December 22, 1965, NSA.; Telegram from 212 American Consul in Surabaya to Jakarta, 'Joint Sitrep 22', Confidential, December 28, 1965, NSA.

⁶⁸ Telegram 1516 from American Embassy in Jakarta to Secretary of State, Secret, November 20, 1965, NSA.; US Department of State, Airgram A-398 to U.S. Embassy Jakarta, Secret, November 20, 1965, NSA.

⁶⁹ Airgram A-353, Joint Weeka No. 45 from U.S. Embassy Jakarta to State, Secret, November 30, 1965, NSA.

⁷⁰ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, October 20, 1965.

⁷¹ Green, 57.

⁷² Ibid., 58-60.

⁷³ Marshall Green Interviewed by Robert J. Martens.

⁷⁴ Green, 97, 104, 149-53.

⁷⁵ Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 124-9.

⁷⁶ Cohen, 162.

⁷⁷ Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: American and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 503-5.

⁷⁸ Marshall Green Interviewed by Robert J. Martens.

New York on a Fire Escape: Exploring the Sociocultural Significance of the Iron Balcony Fire Escape in American Urbanism

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Simply put, a fire escape is any means of emergency egress used in the event of a fire. What exactly this entails has changed over the course of history, with each new design reflecting, for example, changes in building height, technology, and the eccentricity of inventors.¹ However, no kind of fire escape has been as evocative as the iron balcony fire escapes that line the streets of New York. These iconic series of steps and balcony-style landings have zigzagged across the cityscape since the late nineteenth century and remain a striking symbol of American urbanism. They have become the wallflowers of urban architecture, standing unnoticed against the wall, quietly observing the metropolitan party. Over time, these fire escapes have witnessed the myriad of sociopolitical movements the city has hosted, overlooking everything from riots to parades. From these fire escapes, residents have reclaimed caveats of semi-private space, simultaneously engaging with the city and their homes. As such, the history of fire escapes is inextricably tied to the development of New York City and the heritage of its residents. Still, the historical and sociocultural significance of exterior fire escapes often goes unacknowledged. Debates surrounding their effectiveness, safety, and aesthetic value cast doubts over their legitimacy and threaten their existence. Thus, it is in the interest of historical preservation that I argue the importance of fire escapes as sociocultural artifacts. Throughout this essay, I will demonstrate their historical significance and advocate for their conservation, exploring their role as microcosms of urbanism and their presence in popular culture and the wider collective consciousness.

By the end of the nineteenth century, New York had endured a long struggle against the ever-present threat of fire. The city had been devastated by repeated conflagrations in 1811, 1828, 1835, and 1845. In fact, the Great Fire of 1835 was the largest in the city's history, destroying over 670 buildings at a cost of \$26 million.² The risk of fire was endemic to the crowded rows of wood-framed buildings and was compounded by the overpopulation of inner-city areas. New York's population had grown exponentially throughout the century, and with this came a host of social issues: from racial tensions exacerbated by the growing immigrant population to a severe shortage of adequate housing. An 1856 survey of sanitary conditions in tenements found that, in addition to being conducive to terrible living conditions, "the buildings were firetraps, with flimsy, combustible interior partitions and steep, dark, crooked stairways that could not be descended quickly."³ While the report recommended that halls and stairways be regulated to "ensure easy egress in case of fire," no

immediate legislative action was taken to secure safer housing for New York's immigrant and working-class populations.⁴

It was only in 1860, as part of New York's first comprehensive building code, that the city's first exit regulations were enacted.⁵ These regulations were the culmination of a devastating fire which had started in the basement of a bakery earlier that year. The flames had quickly engulfed the inhabited floors above, burning through the singular staircase and trapping families inside the building. Many were too high up for the fire department's ladder to reach, and in the end ten women and children succumbed to the smoke and flames.⁶ The New York Times published a heart-wrenching account of the event, vividly illustrating the devastation fires could cause and listing the hazards commonly found in tenements.⁷ The first building code was drafted to reflect these publicized concerns and stated that "every large tenement house was to have either a noncombustible tower stairway or fireproof balconies on each story on the outside of the building, connected by fireproof stairs."⁸ This suggestion was formally reiterated in the Tenement Housing Act of 1867, which made the provisions of fire escapes mandatory on all non-fireproof buildings, and was further refined in the Tenement Housing Act of 1901.⁹ The 1867 Tenement Housing Act had been drafted in response to years of unrest over housing conditions, namely riots in 1849, 1857, and 1863, and the successful mobilization of the Citizen Housing Association of New York.¹⁰ If the Tenement Housing Act marked the official beginning of the iron balcony fire escape, its historical context illustrates how the fire escape was embroiled in wider social issues. The evolution of the fire escape is anchored in that of the city, its legislation, and the social mobilization which had first called for the improvement of tenement conditions. As such, it provides a lens through which New York and its inhabitants can be historicized.

The poor living conditions in tenement housing were well documented: the buildings were dark, damp, and crowded, and effectively were a breeding ground for disease.¹¹ When fire escapes were introduced, they became more than emergency exits, for they offered additional living space and fresh air away from cramped apartment rooms. From their inception, the repurposing of fire escapes became a part of urban culture and quickly became another unspoken New York tradition, similar to jaywalking. Early laws stated that those who obstructed fire escapes could incur penalties of \$10 per offense, but this never did much to deter residents.¹² The problem of obstruction was substantial enough that in 1936, the New York City Tenement House Department commissioned a Federal Art Project to urge tenants to keep their fire escapes clear.¹³ This poster conveys the essence of tenement neighborhoods, as it illustrates the makeshift gardens, storerooms and lounge spaces that fire escapes were transformed into. Balcony-landings were repurposed to suit the needs of the inhabitants, offering more space, light, and air. In this way, fire escapes helped forge a new cityscape. They adorned building facades and lined the streets with hanging clothes and potted plants. This cemented their place in the urban fabric and further demonstrates their sociocultural significance.

Other photographs reassert this idea, each showcasing the unique ways in which city-dwellers have interacted with their coopted terraces over time. These are *Typical Tenement Fire escape, serving as an extension of the "flat" -- Allen Street (ca. 1890)* by Jacob A. Riis,

Boy and Mattress on Fire Escape (1935) by Arnold Eagle, *Park Benches - Love is Everywhere [Couple flirting on a fire escape.]* (1946) by Stanley Kubrick, *Hanging out on the Fire Escape* (1978) by Rene Burri, and *A Newly Arrived Immigrant Eats Noodles on a Fire Escape* (1998) by Chien-Chi Chang.¹⁴ Taken decades apart, these photographs demonstrate the historical legacy of fire escapes and show how they were constantly repurposed. Moreover, the images beautifully frame fire escapes as part of New York's urbanism, capturing the sense of height, crowdedness, and the brutalist materials which together characterize the city. The photographs show how fire escape balconies become extensions of their tenants' lives, seamlessly transforming from laundry room, to bedroom, to dining room; from a place for oneself, to a place for friends, to a place for lovers. This hints at the semi-private nature of the fire escape, as it straddled the private and public spheres in more ways than one. For instance, it links the home to the outside, bridging the separation by extending out from a tenant's window. It offers space that is absorbed into the function of the home but remains physically outside - in the view of the public. The fire escape becomes a shared space that belongs to the building but is simultaneously claimed, in part, by each individual that lives there. This idea is further emphasized by the railings and grating which outline the fire escapes, lending the space a sense of privacy while allowing others to see through, so retaining a connection to the public. In this way, there is a social tenet to the fire escape, best illustrated in Figures 4 and 5, which show people socializing out on fire escape balconies. Fire escapes also physically connected people by climbing from apartment to apartment, offering a space that fostered social encounters.

To better understand the social component of fire escapes, as well as their wider sociocultural significance in American urbanism, it is useful to consider them in dialogue with Lewis Mumford's 1937 essay "What is a City?" In his seminal article, the renowned historian and urban sociologist laid out the fundamentals of urbanity and explored the nexus between urban planning and the human condition. He offered a definitional framework for a city which, coupled with his ideas about social drama and metropolitan theatrics, have shaped discourses in social philosophy and urban studies. Mumford defined the city as "a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theatre of social action, and as an aesthetic symbol of collective unity."¹⁵ I argue that this definition can be applied to the fire escape as well. A geographical plexus, the fire escape is, like a city, a network connecting distinct spaces to each other and between the outside/inside, private/public spheres. An economic organization and institutional process, the fire escape is tied to the legislative process of New York and bears an economic facet which includes construction, installation, and maintenance cost, and extends to the economics of fire protection and the economic history of tenements.¹⁶ A theater of social action, it offers a stage upon which social encounters can be enacted and viewed. It also offers a front-view seat to the social action occurring in the streets below. In this sense, it "creates the theater and is the theater."¹⁷ An aesthetic symbol of collective unity, the fire escape is an architectural feature which, by visually connecting spaces and their occupants, serves as a symbol of collectiveness. It is through this definitional parity that the fire escape can be understood as a microcosm of the city, legitimizing it as a symbol of urbanism.

By focusing on the fire escape's social tenet and contextualizing it in terms of social theater, we can further argue its sociocultural significance. Fire escapes are both the seat and stage to social action. However, they also form a part of the physical organization of the city which acts as a stage-set for the wider social drama that is, according to Mumford, intrinsic to urbanism.¹⁸ This concept is brilliantly conveyed in Arthur 'Weegee' Felling's photograph *Balcony Seat to a Murder* (1939).¹⁹ Published in *Life Magazine*, it captures the dramatic atmosphere that followed the murder of a café-owner in Manhattan's Little Italy.²⁰ Spectators to the commotion are caught peering from their fire escapes and out of their windows, lending the photograph its title. In this moment, the fire escape became a front-row seat to a crime drama, a stage for neighbors' excitement, and the urban stage-set to the wider drama of New York City.

Like any effective stage-set, the fire escape "intensifies and underlines the gestures of the actors and the action of the play" without overshadowing them.²¹ It does this by blurring the line between private and public against a backdrop of urbanity, offering a unique look into the micro-drama of neighbors, friends, family, and lovers which, in turn, feeds the macro-drama of the city. To echo Mumford's word, fire escapes are an exertion of the unified plans and buildings that become a symbol of citizens' social relatedness and fulfill a need for reintegration endemic to cities wherein citizens risk personal disintegration. Put more simply, they serve the city's social function.²²

The nexus of social drama and fire escapes is perhaps best observed in popular culture and images conjured in the collective consciousness. Its depiction in literature, art, and cinema has exalted the fire escape as a token of urbanism, evoking a sense of escapism, romance, and aspiration. In Tennessee Williams's 1968 memory play "The Glass Menagerie," the fire escape provides a literal and metaphorical means of escape from the domestic coffin of the apartment.²³ The narrator and character, Tom Wingfield, must work at a warehouse to support his mother, Amanda, and sister, Laura, after his father abandoned them. Each character feels trapped within the confines of their quotidian reality and harbor romanticized perceptions of the outside world and individual aspirations of escape. The fire escape attached to their apartment becomes the embodiment of these sentiments. For Tom, it represents an exit to the outside world of adventure he ultimately leaves his family to pursue.²⁴ For the mother and sister, it is the quixotic place where a? gentlemanly caller will come forth and save them.²⁵ In this way, the fire escape offers a "touch of accidental poetic truth" by representing an escape from "the implacable fires of human desperation."²⁶

Similar notions of romance, escapism, and aspiration are portrayed in "West Side Story."²⁷ An urban retelling of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliette," the musical stages Tony and Maria's dramatic declaration of love on a fire escape. As Tony climbs the stairs, he bridges the literal and figurative divide between Maria and him, yet the audience understands this love is merely aspirational, made impossible by their families' rivalry. However, in that moment, the fire escape encapsulates their romance and becomes a private space of escape, love, and hope while anchoring them into the urbanity of the musical. The scene was so memorable, it inspired the poster for the 1961 "West Side Story" cinematic adaptation.

It is through such culturally eminent depictions of fire escapes that the association between fire escapes and romanticized ideals of urbanism are perpetuated within our collective consciousness. “The Glass Menagerie” and “West Side Story” are two examples I have chosen to focus on, but there are many others, such as the movie *Rear Window* (1951), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) and *Pretty Woman* (1990). More recently, fire escapes continue to appear in television series such as *Friends* (1994-2004), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014), and *Shake It Up* (2010-2013). In all of these examples, fire escapes help convey the urban landscape and lifestyle which underpin each storyline. In this way, popular culture has canonized fire escape in the collective consciousness.

Despite its cultural merits, the fire escape has not been impervious to critique. By 1911, the National Fire Protection Association condemned the iron staircases as a “pitiful delusion” as critics pointed to its susceptibility to wear, rust, and malfunction.²⁸ Over time, a lack of maintenance can indeed affect the structural integrity of fire escapes and risk their collapse.²⁹ Moreover, the zigzag laddering is inefficient on taller buildings and was deemed unusable in the skyscrapers that emerged over the twentieth century. As such, officials looked for more suitable alternatives, and fire safety measures shifted to reflect developments in technology.³⁰ When New York building codes were updated in 1968, the stipulations effectively banned exterior fire escapes on new constructions.^{31, 32}

While exterior fire escapes have largely been declared defunct as a means of emergency egress, this does not negate their sociocultural importance.³³ Tightly woven into New York’s urban fabric, the fire escape as a sociocultural artefact has supplanted the emergency exit. Fire escapes are anchored – both literally and figuratively – in American urbanism. Their history is intertwined with that of New York and its citizens, and they offer a unique historical lens through which urban sociopolitical issues can be considered. Over time, they have contributed to the social drama that defines the metropolitan experience. Therein lies their legitimacy as a sociocultural artefact, for they are both a microcosm of the city and a capsule of its ethos. This argument was echoed by a group of New Yorkers who, in 2015, opposed architect Joseph Pell Lombardi’s plan to remove the exterior fire escape from two landmarked buildings in SoHo. Residents were adamant that the fire escapes contributed to the “historical character” of the buildings and defined “the sense of place.”³⁴ It is clear that the transformation of fire escapes from safety apparatus to historic architectural features was inextricably tied to the romantic canonization of fire escapes in popular culture and their increasing rarity. If fire escapes are indeed faulty and prove dangerous, let safer alternatives be introduced, but retain the city’s iron facades for historical preservation. Let their maintenance become an act of historical conservatism.

Notes

¹ Early fire escape designs ranged from basic rope lowering devices (William Houghton’s 1891 patent US459963A, Henry Vieregg’s 1902 patent US708846A) to creative parachute helmets (BB Openheimer’s 1879 patent US221855A) and wing-suits (Pasquale Nigro’s 1909 patent US912152A).

² Richard Plunz and Jackson T. Kenneth, *A History of Housing in New York City* (La Vergne: Columbia University Press, 2016), 3.

- ³ Sara E. Wermiel, "No Exit: The Rise and Demise of the Outside Fire Escape," *Technology and Culture* 44, no.2 (2003), 260; John M. Reed et al., *Report of the Select Committee appointed to examine into the condition of tenement houses in New-York and Brooklyn* (Albany: C. Van Benthuysen, printer to the Legislature, 1857), 1,17, 24.
- ⁴ Reed, 3.
- ⁵ Wermiel, "No Exit," 260.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ "Calamitous Fire: Tenement House on Elm-Street Destroyed. Thirty Persons Supposed to have Perished in the Flames," *New York Times* (1857-1922), Feb 03, 1860.
- ⁸ Wermiel, "No Exit," 260.
- ⁹ Plunz and Kenneth, *Housing in New York City*, 22; Robert W. De Forest and Lawrence Veiller, *The tenement house problem; including the report of the New York state tenement house commission of 1900* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 169-179, 175-176.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 21.
- ¹¹ Robert W. De Forest, "A Brief History of the Housing Movement in America," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 51 (1914), 9, 15; Reed et al. *Report of the Select Committee*; Plunz and Kenneth, *Housing in New York City*, 27.
- ¹² De Forest and Veiller, *The tenement house problem*, 241.
- ¹³ Muller, *Keep Your Fire Escapes Clear*, 1936, Washington D.C: Library of Congress Prints and Photography Division.
- ¹⁴ Jacob A. Riis, Typical Tenement Fire escape, serving as an extension of the "flat" – Allen Street, ca. 1890, New York: Museum of the City of New York, 90.13.4.206; Arnold Eagle, Boy and Mattress on Fire Escape, 1935, New York: Museum of the City of New York, 43.131.11.131; Stanley Kubrick, Park Benches - Love is Everywhere [Couple flirting on a fire escape.], 1946, New York: Museum of the City of New York, X2011.4.10347.11; Rene Burri, Hanging out on the fire escape, 1978, New York: Magnum Photos; Chien-Chi Chang, A newly arrived immigrant eats noodles on a fire escape, 1998, New York: Magnum Photos.
- ¹⁵ Lewis Mumford, "What is a City?" *Architectural Record* (1937) 94.
- ¹⁶ G. Ramachandran, *The Economics of Fire Protection* (London: Routledge, 1998), 49-52.
- ¹⁷ Mumford, "What Is a City?" 94.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Weegee, *Balcony Seat to A Murder*, 1939, New York: The International Centre of Photography, 14040.1993.
- ²⁰ "Murder in New York," *LIFE Magazine*, Nov 27, 1939.
- ²¹ Mumford, "What Is a City?" 94.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Honors English 11-1. "Through a Glass Starkly," *The English Journal* 57, no. 2 (1968), 210-11.
- ²⁴ Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 1945 (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2011) 145.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 100; Honors English 11-1, "Through a Glass Starkly," 210.
- ²⁶ Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 57.
- ²⁷ Ernest Lehman, *West Side Story*, film, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins (US: The Mirisch Company and Seven Arts Production, 1961).
- ²⁸ Quoted in Wermiel, "No Exit," 279; 275.
- ²⁹ "Fire Escape Collapse," Time 100 Photos, http://100photos.time.com/photos/stanley-forman-fire-escape-collapse_
- ³⁰ Wermiel, "No Exit," 277.
- ³¹ Vivian Yee, "Actor's Fatal Fall Underscores Dangers of Fire Escapes, a Refuge for Many in the City," *New York Times*, Aug 30, 2015.
- ³² Pippa Biddle, "Fire Escapes Are Evocative, But Mostly Useless," *The Atlantic*, Feb 25, 2018.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Jeremiah Budin, "Soho Residents Not Thrilled About Losing Fire Escapes," *Curbed.com*, <https://ny.curbed.com/2015/3/19/9979136/soho-residents-not-thrilled-about-losing-fire-escapes>.

Fever Pitch: American Vinyl Burning and the Maintenance of the Musical Environment

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*“... Fez and I both feel that burning disco records is wrong. Just like burning books, but worse,
because disco tells a story!”*

- Jackie Burkhart , That 70's Show¹

*“And our time is flying, see the candle burning low
Is the new world rising, from the shambles of the old?”*

- Led Zeppelin²

In the summer of 1979, a scorned radio DJ decided to host the world's largest Disco Demolition Night after his resident radio station switched to playing disco. That night, entrance to Comiskey Park in Chicago was less than a dollar if you brought along a disco record for shock-jock Steve Dahl to set fire to, and soon the park was crawling with young Chicago rockers prepared to help him exact his revenge. Their mission statement was clear: Disco Sucks. As the vinyl bonfire blazed, bronzed bodies in sleeveless t-shirts crowded the field as ushers, referees, and commentators were left bewildered by the riot taking place before their eyes. Sportscaster Harry Caray, who was sixty-five at the time, even sang “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” over the stadium speakers to calm things down.³ Alas, the bourbon-brandishing youths were already busy locking themselves in the clubhouse and having sex in the White Sox dugout. Comiskey Park was aflame with thick, toxic, vinyl bonfires.⁴

The vinyl bonfire is a ritual that arises when subcultures clash; when groups choose to cling tightly to the status quo's apron strings. Looking closely at vinyl bonfires means looking back at music when it was material, and the practice has a strange past; one that can be compared to other uses of fire to manage environments. Some Native communities in North America, for example, have practiced a tradition of controlled fire as a form of land management for three main purposes. The first is to get rid of the dense shrub that can catch fire easily and prevent bushfires from spreading uncontrollably. Burning controlled areas of the land also restores biodiversity to the habitat and regenerates soil to produce new feed for the surrounding ecology. The tradition requires a sound knowledge of the surrounding habitat and a feel for the natural conditions which may necessitate regrowth and renewal.⁵ Americans have been burning vinyls symbolically for similar purposes of upkeep around their musical environment. Through analyzing the instances of vinyl burning in works of fiction

and real life, this paper will uncover the ways in which American music fans have taken matters of musical purity, diversity, and regeneration into their own hands.⁶

The first argument for controlled burning in Native traditions is that land densely populated with easily flammable shrubs puts the entire habitat at risk of incineration. This was exactly the worry portrayed by the character of Mrs. Lisbon in Jeffrey Eugenides' novel *The Virgin Suicides*. The strict Catholic mother lords over her household with an iron fist and keeps a tight leash on her five daughters to protect them. When her daughter Lux Lisbon breaks curfew after attending the school dance with a boy, Mrs. Lisbon's first port-of-call is forcing Lux to destroy her rock records.⁷ In this fictional instance of record burning, rock records symbolize the possibility of awakened sexual desires, an unholy influence that her children are vulnerable to. In Sofia Coppola's 1999 adaptation of the film, the suburban home quickly filled with a thick black smog; mother and daughter stand spluttering at the fireplace. Burning the vinyl has proven impractical, and the untamable fumes are symbolic of the futility of Mrs. Lisbon's best efforts to protect and purify her home. After all, the downfall of the Lisbon household is not godlessness, but rather each daughters' innate and insidious desire for freedom.⁸

Where Mrs. Lisbon was protecting her daughters from the contagion of lust, some evangelical groups burned vinyl to ward off idolatry. In 1966, John Lennon said The Beatles were becoming more popular than Jesus. In the public outcry that followed, an anti-Beatles torrent swept through America's conservative Christian regions. Beatles Burn-Ins were hosted at radio stations and Sunday schools alike, "[illustrating] just how seriously evangelicals were now taking popular culture and its appeal to youth."⁹ Not only were evangelicals all over the country taking pop culture seriously, but they were also trying to erase a substantial element of the music scene of the sixties. By making sure that Beatles vinyls went up in smoke, evangelical communities declared that they still loved Jesus more than they loved John, and radio stations could prove their pietism to their communities. The trend of Beatles Burn-Ins was a collective Christian effort to clear the country of anti-Christian values and protect hearts and homesteads from being corrupted by false idols. In the Bible, there is an emphasis on stewardship and fostering God's earthly resources. By incinerating mortgage notes, or vinyl records, Christians affirm themselves as earthkeepers devoted to restoring holiness to God's green earth. Similar to Native Americans getting rid of flammable vegetation to protect their environment, Christians vowed to protect their vulnerable communities from the spread of secular values.

Other than reducing the extent of destruction, Native Americans also used controlled fire to restore biodiversity to environments. In Stephen J. Pyne's *Fire: A Brief History*, fire is described as having the power to "(swamp) the native flora and recharge the fields with ashy silt," facilitating regrowth and regeneration of the ecosystem.¹⁰ The urban music scenes of the late seventies were encountering a similar problem as Disco permeated every radio station and dance hall. Due to disco's roots in socially, racially, and sexually diverse communities, historical accounts often deem disco fans victims of 'discophobia.' This phenomenon is expanded on by American Studies researcher Gillian Frank, who convinces his reader of the "primarily white male and middle-class audience [who] sought to assert their masculinity" by

protesting a movement that was seen as “too black” and “too gay” for white heterosexual audiences.¹¹ Indeed Steve Dahl, ringleader of the Comiskey Park Disco Demolition, later reflected on how disenfranchising the club scene had become for white heterosexual males—from the eccentric attire and cover charge at the door to neatly choreographed dance routines.

While there is probably some truth to this, there is also evidence that challenges the severity of the Disco Sucks Movement's political undertones. Two years prior to the inferno, many themes of white male disenfranchisement were explored in the 1977 blockbuster hit *Saturday Night Fever* starring heartthrob John Travolta. The film is about Brooklyn boy Tony Manero, who moonlights as a disco dancer but cannot escape the gang violence that plagues his neighborhood.¹² The film is about a white working-class family, and its soundtrack, performed by the equally white band the Bee Gees, led disco to its peak popularity at the film's release. A 1978 article in the *New York Times* titled “The Bee Gees Are Getting as Big as the Beatles” noted the group's blend of “disco urgency and lush, middle-of-the-road romanticism.”¹³ As a result of the genre's commercial success, every white working-class hero from The Rolling Stones to Frank Zappa took their piece of the disco pie. The music industry was becoming increasingly homogenized and slapped the ‘disco’ moniker on anything they wanted to sell.

By the time Dahl put a match to disco records in the late seventies, the genre was embodying anything but diversity—it was the dominant format that nobody could get away from. Disco Demolition Night occurred not because the genre was “too black” or “too gay,” nor did it happen because white men missed their blue jeans and hard rock scenes of the early seventies. It happened because disco was beginning to collapse under the weight of its own popularity, much like a breaking wave at its peak amplitude. The Disco Sucks Movement was concerned with restoring diversity in the music industry, and blowing up disco records made it clear to the industry that they were demanding range over revenue.

Creative depictions of the late seventies similarly challenge the presence of discophobia during the Disco Sucks Movement. In the early-2000's period sitcom *That '70s Show*, the kids that had spent most of the seventies smoking weed in a basement decide to have a disco bonfire of their own; the episode, titled “We Will Rock You,” aired in 2006, though set in 1979.¹⁴ The group's street-smart ringleader, Hyde, sets up a stake of disco records and invites people to a clearing in the woods. Even though the night does not go as planned, the episode illustrates how low-maintenance a vinyl bonfire is. A match, some friends, some vinyls, and a keg of beer is all that is needed. Vinyl bonfires are an easy way for people to gather, especially for suburban and small-town youths looking for cheap thrills. Admittedly, most of the attendees of this fictitious bonfire are white and working-class, but as they hang out on each other's tailgates, there are no palpable themes of discophobia present. This may have been a deliberate effort by producers to steer clear of controversy when the episode aired thirty years after the fact. However, it still strikes a contrast between the Disco Sucks Movement's ideological undertones and the shaggy-haired rockers getting high around the fire.

It is unlikely that all the attendees of Disco Demolition Night were united in a specific phobia of the disco genre — a lot of the teenagers that attended were probably there looking

for a cheap thrill on a summer night. This is exactly what Comiskey Park owner Mike Veeck had in mind: by giving dismayed music fans a chance to protest the mockery that disco had made of the music industry, he himself could make a buck off the controversy.¹⁵ Disco Demolition Night was in itself a cheap marketing gimmick to get the park packed tighter than John Travolta's pants in Saturday Night Fever. This tableau is perfectly telling of that superficial commercialism that defined the music industry in the late seventies. It was precisely this level of commercialism that had led to the decline of diversity in dance halls and on the radio: it was time for disco to go.

Aside from being a way to protect the purity and biodiversity of the land, fire was also utilized by Native Americans to regenerate their environment and make way for new forms of vegetation, and it can be hard to know when it is time to get rid of the old and bring in the new. Before the disco saturation of the seventies, and before the demolition at Comiskey Park, there was Woodstock. The success of the festival that took place in 1969 in New York inspired The Rolling Stones to organize a west-coast version later that same year. But rough winds were beginning to shake the darling buds of flower power. Though their intentions were pure, namely, to create a beautiful atmosphere for their fans free of charge, the concert quickly descended into a violent chaos. Staff at Rolling Stone Magazine later accused the organizers of creating a "blueprint for disaster," with fights and fires all over the terrain, resulting in four fan deaths and multiple injuries.¹⁶ Throughout the sixties, the music industry had been bolstered by freewheeling idealism and the romanticization of revolution. When the Stones refused to play their Altamont set due to the mounting violence of the crowd, the police descended on the scene, and this idealism was brought to a grinding halt.

A poem titled "Altamont" by poet Alan Williamson sketches the drive home from the concert: "the first tendrils of the fog, driving home/With the sad talk-shows."¹⁷ The "tendrils of the fog" symbolize the slow lurch into the seventies, the unknown, accompanied only by the sad hollowness of radio chatter. The sixties' idealism had reached its critical amplitude, and like a breaking wave, imploded at its peak. Ten years later, the same happened for the saturation of disco; its collapse signaled a move towards genres that were more amenable to social criticisms and representations of America's marginalized communities. This move can be found around the corner from Comiskey Park, where Larry Sherman, the owner of Trax! Records was smashing old vinyl records to pieces with a hammer.¹⁸ The shattered vinyl was melted down into new records, and pressed with house music. Meanwhile, the hip-hop scene of New York had been growing in popularity throughout the late seventies and was finally pushed into the eighties mainstream with hits like *Rappers Delight* and *The Message*. In 1980, rap group Collective Effort recorded the first socially conscious rap song *How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise* over Cheryl Lynn's 1978 disco hit *Got to Be Real*. The seventies had danced away the heartache of a stagnating economy and superficial commercialization. The new decade had come in hot, and it was time for a musical regeneration.

The vinyl bonfire reveals the ways in which people wanted to govern and care for their cultural environments. In the same way that Native American communities preserved their land by controlled fire, the music industry has mirrored the need for regeneration,

diversification, and purification. Colonialism put a stop to Native American traditions, while the digitalization of music has meant that little musical material is left to burn in current-day America. In a literal sense, this is why music bonfires have ceased to exist: record collections have been condensed into iPods and mobile phones, and vinyl records have become popular millennial house decorations, artfully warped into novelty clocks and ashtrays. However, the digitalization of music also put an end to the symbolic need for vinyl bonfires, the *figurative* compulsion to destroy, purify, and reconstruct a musical mainstream.

Music streaming platforms make use of mysterious algorithms to give every user a tailor-made experience. What is mainstream is not necessarily what is popular anymore, or better put, it is not what is considered ‘cool’ anymore. It is likely that the trend of individuality will define millennial music tastes. Spotify’s “Discover Weekly” playlist translates the data collected on user music preferences and spins them into tailor-made playlists for all its users. The Discover Weekly feature is reflective of modern listening habits: insulated and self-isolated, but unique. The mainstream does not require purification or regulation because the mainstream represents a beaten track that the music industry no longer needs people to like.

Of course, the music industry no longer warranting a demolition of the mainstream does not necessarily mean a total loss. The democratization of music preferences has opened itself up to cross-pollination, and the newest music can be accessed almost in real-time. US expansion put an end to Native American traditions of managing and preserving land. Centuries on, time has told a bleak story of what happens to the environment when people no longer take care of it, but it is too early to tell what will become of our musical surroundings now that nobody is lighting fires anymore.

Notes

¹ *That '70s Show*, season 8, episode 18, “We Will Rock You,” directed by David Trainer, written by Bonnie Turner, featuring Mila Kunis, Danny Masterson, Laura Prepon, aired May 4, 2006, in broadcast syndication, Carsey-Werner Company.

² Led Zeppelin, “The Rover,” Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, 1974, Swan Song Records, track 02 on *Physical Graffiti*, 1975, vinyl.

³ “Anti-Disco Rally Halts White Sox,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1979, sec. Archives. For details concerning the dugout and Caray, see “Disco Demolition Night became a fan riot set to Take Me Out to the Ball Game The Worst” Secret Base, August 18, 2018, video, 4:44, <http://youtu.be/GEP-8IFTKKg>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ M. Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California’s Natural Resources*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. 136.

⁶ Colin Fisher, “Forgotten Fires: Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2004): 244–45.

⁷ Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides*, (New York: Warner Books, 1994). 144.

⁸ *The Virgin Suicides*, directed by Sofia Coppola (1999; Cannes, France: Paramount Home Video, 2000), DVD.

⁹ “Bible Class Holds Beatle Burning,” *Reading Eagle*, August 27, 1966.

¹⁰ Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire: A Brief History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 68.

¹¹ Gillian Frank, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (2007): 276–306.

¹² *Saturday Night Fever*, directed by John Badham (1977; New York, NY: Paramount Pictures)

¹³ John Rockwell, “The Bee Gees Are Getting as Big As the Beatles,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1978, sec. Archives.

¹⁴ *That '70s Show*, season 8, episode 18, “We Will Rock You.” May 4, 2006, Carsey-Werner Company.

¹⁵ “Steve Dahl’s Notorious 1979 Disco Demolition” Decades TV Network, September 20, 2016, video, 0:28, Accessed October 28, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODcEkPuQ4ts>.

¹⁶ Lester Bangs, Reny Brown, John Burks et al., “Disaster At Altamont: Let it Bleed,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, January 21, 1970.

¹⁷ Alan Williamson, “Altamont.” *Agni*, no. 41, 1995, 142-43.

¹⁸ *I Was There When House Took Over The World*, directed by Jake Sumner (2017; London, England, Pi Studios): 26:49.

An Expanding Nation Divided: Expansionist Debates on the Annexation of Texas, 1836-45

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When Sam Houston, the first president of the Republic of Texas, requested the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1836, his appeal was declined. The United States itself would not annex an independent republic, but this looked like a perfect solution: a republic *asking* to be annexed. Nevertheless, the United States did not annex the Republic of Texas until 1845. This was surprising, given America's ambition to expand its borders to the west. Indeed, historians generally agree that American politicians supported expansionism. However, there might not actually have been a general American expansionist worldview. As historian Frederick Merk concludes: "From the outset Manifest Destiny – vast in program, in its sense of continentalism – was slight in support. It lacked national, sectional, or party following commensurate with its magnitude. The reason was it did not reflect the national spirit."¹

This essay will explore how the debate over the annexation of Texas reflected different political perspectives on expansionism in the United States between 1836 and 1845. To this end, the essay examines the views of several political actors who had an active role in decision making between 1836 and 1845, such as John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun and John Tyler. This paper is divided into several sections. The first section will provide an overview of expansionist ambitions in the United States before the 1830s. Second, this paper will examine why the United States declined the annexation of Texas in 1836 and how expansionist ambitions developed after that. The third part will analyze how British involvement affected expansionist aspirations in the 1840s. Lastly, this paper explains why the United States eventually did annex Texas in 1845.

Historians have identified the annexation of Texas as a pivotal moment in American history for various reasons. As Matthew Karp argues, some scholars see it as a "triumph of expansionist 'manifest destiny'," or as a tactic by the Democratic Party to gain votes.² Karp himself, on the other hand, argues that the annexation of Texas was part of a Southern policy to protect the institution of slavery in the South and even in the rest of the world.³ History is written by its winners, and as historian Lyon Rathbun suggests, the same is true for the annexation of Texas, where the supporters of annexation have gotten more attention in historiography than the opponents.⁴ This essay will attempt to give both sides equal attention. As will become apparent, most of the key players presented in this essay supported expansionism at some point, but changed their minds when it came to the annexation of Texas in the 1830s.

Some historians, such as Frederick Merk and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., argue that the support for Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth-century United States is rather debatable. As discussed, Merk argues that Manifest Destiny did not reflect the national spirit. Schlesinger argues something similar in suggesting that territorial expansion was always met with resistance. He concludes that “the imperial dream had encountered consistent indifference and recurrent resistance through American history.”⁵ However, most historians do not question the prevalence of Manifest Destiny in the United States. Historian Mark Joy, for instance, contends that an expansionist philosophy had been present in the Union since its birth.⁶ He claims Americans believed they were destined to take the continent, which was also the basic idea on which Manifest Destiny was built. Elaborating on Joy’s claim, Thomas McCormick argues that expansionism on the American continent can be perceived as a form of American empire.⁷ He suggests that there had always been a focus on the colonization of the American continent. Choices made by American politicians in terms of foreign policy had clear expansionist goals, he writes.⁸ Daniel Immerwahr agrees with McCormick, adding that by 1784, when Virginia claimed territory north of the Ohio River, “the United States was no longer a union of states alone but an amalgam of states *and territories*, which it has been ever since.”⁹ Finally, Michael Morrison adds that “expansion was in the American character and was both desirable and inevitable.”¹⁰

One politician who initially advocated for the acquisition of new territories to the United States was John Quincy Adams.¹¹ Adams, then a Senator from Massachusetts, supported the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the first grand addition to the United States. At that time, Adams endorsed American expansionism because he believed it would strengthen national power.¹² Furthermore, Adams thought expansion was inevitable because it was the country’s destiny.¹³ In his diary, he wrote:

From the time when we became an independent people, it was as much a law of nature that this should become our pretension as that the Mississippi river should flow to the sea - Spain had possessions upon our Southern border and Great Britain upon our Northern border - it was impossible that centuries should elapse without finding them annexed to the U.S.¹⁴

It was in Adams’s interest that threatening European powers, such as the British, stayed away from the continent to maintain national security. Adams believed that expanding was important to maintain independence and to protect the United States from unwanted intruders.¹⁵ Charles Edel writes that Adams at this time did not yet realize that expansion would cause sectional tensions.¹⁶ However, as Secretary of State to President James Monroe, Adams would gain firsthand experience with the potential dangers of Manifest Destiny.

A crucial moment for Adams was the question of Missouri statehood, which led to a significant debate. What would become known as the Missouri Crisis started in 1817, when settlers in the Missouri territory applied for statehood. Because Missouri wished to be accepted as a slave state, both opponents and supporters of expansion expressed their positions on the issue. After all, adding another slave state would disturb the balance between

slave states and free states. In the end, politicians reached a compromise, admitting Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state in 1820, which would maintain balance in the Union. The compromise also divided the rest of the Louisiana territory. Slavery would be prohibited in new states north of 36°30 latitude, Missouri's southern border. Although the compromise avoided a sectional war, it did not end the discussion on whether slavery could extend to future western territories. Just as significantly, both Adams and Monroe came to understand the potential impact of slavery's westward expansion.¹⁷ In February 1820, one month before the compromise passed in Congress, Adams wrote that "if the Union must be dissolved, slavery is precisely the question upon which it ought to break."¹⁸ Although Adams was aware of the dangers that expansion posed, he still tried to purchase Texas from Mexico in 1827 when he was president.¹⁹ All things considered, it is almost unbelievable that Adams would become a strong opponent of the annexation of Texas in the 1830s and 1840s.

Adams was not the only politician interested in the region of Texas. Henry Clay, a Senator from Kentucky, worked "vigorously for the acquisition of Texas."²⁰ Like many of his contemporaries, Clay believed that the United States had a rightful claim to Texas because of the Louisiana Purchase.²¹ In a letter to former Senator John Crittenden, Clay wrote: "I mean to propose the recognition of the Patriots and the seizure of Texas."²² More strongly than most of his compatriots, Clay believed in an American Empire within the Western Hemisphere. Although he saw the first sectional tensions in the United States during the Missouri Crisis, Clay did not give up on his expansionist ambition.²³ Together with Clay and Adams, John Calhoun was also part of the so-called National Republicans who supported an expansionist agenda.²⁴ Even though Calhoun and Adams clashed over slavery, Calhoun supported Adams's expansive agenda during his presidency. Calhoun found the balance between slave states and non-slave states important and did not want to create sectional tensions. Still, he was very outspoken in his defense of slavery, calling it a "positive good."²⁵ Eventually, Calhoun's defense of slavery would spark the very sectional tensions he had wanted to avoid.

Two other key figures in the debate over expansionism were Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, who both had their own views on the subject. Jackson was an advocate of expansion both during and after his presidency. He criticized Adams, believing that he threw away Texas in 1819 by signing the Adams-Onís treaty, which established that the Sabine River would be the western boundary of the Union. In a letter to his advisor John Overton, Jackson wrote: "I have long since been aware of the importance of Texas to the U.S., of the real necessity of extending our boundary west of the Sabine as far west as the sandy desert."²⁶ Although Jackson himself was likewise unsuccessful in adding Texas to the United States, he achieved an expansionist success when Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830. In his second Annual Message, he emphasized the importance of expansion, arguing that the Union could now "advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power."²⁷ Jackson's Vice President and successor Martin Van Buren, on the other hand, did not openly support an expansionist agenda during his presidency, though he did continue Jackson's aggressive policy toward Native Americans east of the Mississippi River. In his autobiography, Van Buren wrote that he kept quiet during the Missouri Crisis, believing that "nothing had arisen that

would justify us in making the subject of slavery a matter of political controversy.”²⁸ Before the debates over Texas started, the key actors all shared expansionist aspirations, albeit to varying degrees.

Despite their affinity for expansionism, these politicians found themselves at odds over Texas after 1836. The majority of the Texan population favored joining the Union, and when President Sam Houston requested the annexation of Texas, most inhabitants assumed that the United States would accept their offer.²⁹ This was a reasonable expectation, considering that the American government had made multiple efforts to purchase Texas from Mexico in the preceding decade. For several reasons, however, the United States declined the request. One reason for declining was a clash between supporters of providential destiny and those in favor of classical republicanism.³⁰ Supporters of annexation argued that abandoning Texas would be a betrayal of the nation’s Manifest Destiny.³¹ Opponents argued that extension would cause internal damage. They believed that it would be better to “cultivate the inner resources of the Republic instead of pursuing empire.”³² As history had proven, republics, such as the Roman Empire, could not endure such a big size.³³ Another reason for rejecting the annexation of Texas was the debate over slavery, which would ultimately prove to be a more significant obstacle to expansion.

One politician who changed course in the debate over Texas was Andrew Jackson. Although Jackson had previously stated that Texas was an essential part of his dream empire, he declined annexation in 1836.³⁴ There were several reasons for him to reject annexation. First, Mexico never recognized Texas as an independent state. As such, the annexation would ignite a war with Mexico, which Jackson wanted to prevent.³⁵ In a speech to the Senate in December 1836, he stated: “A premature recognition under these circumstances, if not looked upon as justifiable cause of war, is always liable to be regarded as a proof of an unfriendly spirit to one of the contending parties.”³⁶ Joy adds that if war with Mexico had not been a threat, Jackson would have annexed Texas.³⁷ Second, the Texas question threatened the balance of power between slave states and non-slave states. Westward expansion meant the expansion of slavery: because of the Missouri Compromise, Texas would enter the Union as a slave state. Jackson, as a Southern politician and slaveholder, was naturally interested in the expansion of slavery. However, he acknowledged how complicated the annexation of Texas would be. He did not publicly embrace annexation, probably knowing that if he did, it could destroy his neutral image and that of Van Buren, who was running for president later that year.³⁸ In the end, Jackson chose his political career over his personal expansionist ambitions. Only in March 1837, when Van Buren’s election was secured, did President Jackson officially recognize Texas as an independent republic.³⁹

Though Jackson believed more in the national security of the United States than in the country’s expansion, the fierce opposition to annexation played an essential role in his decision making as well. Although opponents also believed that annexation would lead to a war with Mexico, the issue of slavery was more important to them.⁴⁰ As Amy Greenberg argues, “many feared that Texas would be the genesis for a new empire of slavery.”⁴¹ Karp agrees, suggesting that Texas was the “central arena in the battle over the future of slavery.”⁴² The opposition to annexation came from a combination of Whig politicians and abolitionists,

who feared a stronger Southern dominance in national politics.⁴³ One influential member of that Southern bloc was John Calhoun, who argued that the United States should not only recognize Texas but annex it too. William Rives, a Whig politician, accused Calhoun of stating “his feelings as a Southern man.”⁴⁴ Even though Calhoun answered that all the nation’s regions were equally interested in the independence of Texas, he would later admit that Texas was of vital importance to the South in particular.⁴⁵

Adams, who had actually tried to purchase Texas during his presidency in the 1820s, emerged as a particularly strong opponent of annexation. He changed his mind about expansionism once he realized that continental expansion would lead to the expansion of slavery and sectional tensions. In the wake of the Missouri Crisis, Adams had realized that Southerners would try to protect slavery at any cost.⁴⁶ Edel argues that Adams was still in favor of expansion, but not in those instances where he feared it would make Southern dominance stronger, as would be the case for Texas.⁴⁷ Like Adams, Whig politicians, such as Henry Clay, now believed that annexation would be anti-republican.⁴⁸ In 1838, Clay accused Calhoun of envisioning the annexation of Texas in order to expand the institution of slavery.⁴⁹ However, Clay was a bit more reserved than Adams, writing that a decision on annexation should not only be informed by the question of slavery.⁵⁰ Adams and Clay both changed their minds, still believing in expansion but only if it would increase the dominance of Southern slaveholders.

During Van Buren’s administration, the debate over Texas received little attention, but that changed shortly after he left office. In 1840, President William Harrison passed away within one month after his inauguration and was succeeded by John Tyler. Tyler was a Whig, the political party that opposed the annexation of Texas. However, after vetoing two bank bills, Tyler was expelled from the Whig Party and almost his entire cabinet resigned, making Tyler a pariah in American politics. Tyler, who was a Southern slaveholder, was aware of the tensions over Texas and therefore knew he had to work cautiously to establish a treaty.⁵¹ Further contributing factors to the debate over the annexation of Texas were theories claiming that Great Britain conspired against slavery in the United States and the American annexation of Texas. In a letter to Calhoun, Ashbel Smith, who worked as an ambassador to Texas in Great Britain, warned him about “the proceedings of certain parties in England, having for their immediate object the abolitions of slavery in Texas.”⁵² Two months later, Smith wrote: “Ought we not to move immediately for the admission of Texas into the Union, as a slave holding state? Should not the South demand it, indispensable to their security? In my opinion, we have no alternative.”⁵³ In response, Calhoun argued that it was important to make the public realize the danger.⁵⁴ Texas, which was still not recognized by Mexico, needed a helping hand. If the United States would not take that role, Great Britain would.

These rumors affected the debate over national expansion and the annexation of Texas. In fact, Karp argues that British abolitionism threatened Southerners even more than Northern abolitionism.⁵⁵ Understandably, Southern leaders turned to immediate action toward Texas in response. Even Jackson interfered, writing to Tyler that the president had to negotiate a treaty with Texas in secret and make sure it would be ratified in the Senate.⁵⁶ For the South, there was a lot at stake. Tyler preferred the immediate annexation of Texas, but tried to turn attention away from the debate over slavery. To do so, he tried to convince

Northerners of the advantages of annexation for the nation.⁵⁷ In addition, Tyler and his administration turned to general Anglophobia, which had been present in the United States for decades. There was a fear of British presence along the northern border, so evidently, their possible presence at the southern border was undesirable.⁵⁸ Tyler's administration accused Great Britain of blocking their expansionist ambitions.⁵⁹ In the meantime, Tyler worked on negotiating a treaty between Texas and the United States.

Tyler benefited from the fact that both Southern expansionists and anti-expansionists feared the British. This is evident from a diary entry by Adams in which he wrote that he believed that the British aim of the annexation of Texas was not to abolish slavery, but "to weaken and rule us."⁶⁰ However, in April 1844, Adams wrote that he supported Richard Pakenham's assertion that Great Britain had no intention to interfere in Texas.⁶¹ Adams thought that for the British, power was more important than abolitionism, but ultimately, he did not believe that the British would interfere. On Adams's side was Henry Clay, who still believed in expansionism, but only if it would benefit the nation. If expansion threatened unionism, he would oppose it.⁶² In December 1843, Clay wrote that he would indeed vote against a treaty to annex Texas.⁶³ He explained that, first, "the territory of the United States is already large enough," and second, annexation could break the Union in two.⁶⁴ He argued that "Texas is destined to be settled by our race," but should stay an independent republic.⁶⁵ Regarding the British accusations, Clay wrote that "there is not the smallest foundation for the imputation of a design on the part of Great Britain to establish a colony of Texas."⁶⁶ Even though American politicians took British interest in Texas seriously, politicians such as Adams and Clay did not believe it was a serious threat to the United States, as President Tyler suggested.

Because the accusations did not sway anti-expansionists like Adams and Clay against the British, Tyler's treaty did not stand a chance in the Senate. Sam Haynes writes that, first, Tyler was a pariah for the Whigs, who had a majority in the Senate and would most certainly vote against annexation. Second, Haynes argues that many people in the North were not convinced that there was a British threat to the Union.⁶⁷ Lastly, a letter from Calhoun to Pakenham sparked a fierce discussion. This letter, which was sent to the Senate along with Tyler's treaty, made clear that at least from Calhoun's perspective, the treaty's objective was to protect slavery in the South. In the letter, Calhoun argued that "Great Britain desires and is constantly exerting herself to procure the general abolition of slavery throughout the world."⁶⁸ Calhoun's letter led the opposition to believe that the protection of slavery was the sole purpose of annexing Texas, instead of the nationalist arguments Tyler presented. Not surprisingly, the Senate rejected the treaty on June 8, 1844. For Tyler and Calhoun, as well as Jackson, the rejection of the treaty was a defeat, because they were still unable to add Texas to their dream empire.

It is important to note that even if a politician publicly opposed the annexation of Texas, it did not necessarily mean that he fully opposed either the annexation of Texas or expansion in general. Henry Clay is a perfect example, as he expressed both positions over the course of the 1844 debate. A day before the publication of the Pakenham letter, Clay wrote an open letter to the *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*. He stated that he was

still against annexation, arguing that the Southern politicians threw away Texas in 1819 because they preferred to acquire Florida from Spain. Moreover, he did not want to get the Union involved in a war.⁶⁹ However, in July, Clay wrote: “Personally, I could have no objection to the annexation of Texas; but I certainly would be unwilling to see the existing Union dissolved or seriously jeopardized for the sake of acquiring Texas.”⁷⁰ It is unclear what the exact reasons were for Clay to oppose annexation, but it seems that he preferred a harmonized Union over a dissolved nation.

The presidential election of 1844 marked a final turning point in the debate over the annexation of Texas. Throughout the election, Texas was an important issue on the political agenda. For the Whig party, Clay was the one to run for president in the election of 1844. For the Democratic Party, it seemed Martin Van Buren would win the nomination, but his public opposition to the annexation of Texas amounted to political suicide. Instead, the Democratic Party nominated James K. Polk. President Tyler, who wanted to run for re-election as a member of his newly established Democratic-Republican Party, dropped out before the elections. Tyler endorsed Polk, who ran for the presidency on an expansionist agenda and won. Nevertheless, Polk’s election did not mean that Americans were more in favor of annexation than before. Instead, his victory was an indication that the anti-annexation vote was split. Clay lost many votes to the Liberty Party, especially in New York, which helped Polk win the election.⁷¹

Nevertheless, it was not the election of 1844 that ultimately decided the fate of Texas, but President Tyler. In his final days as president, although his treaty had failed to be ratified in the Senate, Tyler stated that “it is the will of both the people and the States that Texas shall be annexed to the Union promptly and immediately.”⁷² With this message, Tyler requested that the Senate would discuss the treaty again. Tyler wondered whether the treaty could be ratified by a joint resolution. This way, Tyler did not need a two-thirds majority, only a regular majority in both houses of Congress. The treaty was accepted as a joint resolution on February 28, 1845. Annexation was set for December 28 that same year, adding Texas to the Union as a slave state. As historian Edward Crapol writes, Tyler’s determination to annex Texas was clear from the beginning of his term.⁷³ With the joint resolution, he made those expansionist ambitions a reality.

Politicians who were against the annexation of Texas, such as Adams and Clay, were outraged by the joint resolution. Adams saw the acceptance of the resolution as “a signal triumph of the Slave representation in the Constitution of the United States.”⁷⁴ Clay was disgusted, still believing that annexation would “prolong the duration of slavery, by opening to it a new theatre.”⁷⁵ The debate over Texas divided the American nation into supporters and opponents of territorial expansion, and into supporters and opponents of the expansion and protection of slavery. Regionally, the United States was divided into the North and the South, both accusing each other of pursuing their own self-interest. As stated before, the North feared the political dominance of the South and their desire to protect slavery at all costs. At the same time, the South believed that political decisions in the North threatened their system of slavery, especially due to the growth of abolitionism. These sectional tensions, which had already been present during the Missouri Crisis, emerged again during the debate

over Texas. The addition of Texas to the Union and the growing friction between the North and the South formally opened the road to secession.

From this analysis of several political figures who played a decisive role in the debate over Texas, it can be concluded that while expansionist philosophy was indeed present in the nineteenth-century United States, it was not supported across the political spectrum. Even though John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay initially tried to purchase Texas in the 1820s, they both became primary opponents of annexation in the 1830s. Nevertheless, the first fractures in the expansionist philosophy of Adams and Clay developed during the Missouri Crisis. By that point, they realized that Southern politicians were determined to fight for expansion to protect the institution of slavery. Adams and Clay did not completely abandon their expansionist ambitions, but they clearly felt a responsibility to keep the United States safe and undivided. Specifically, they were convinced that a more cautious approach to expansion would be better, which the annexation of Texas did not allow for. However, Southern politicians, such as John Tyler and Andrew Jackson, argued that they wanted the United States to expand not to protect slavery, but to secure the safety and independence of the Union. Perhaps not surprisingly, they were the primary supporters of the annexation of Texas. Both Tyler and Jackson believed in a less cautious approach, convinced that rapid annexation would be best for the United States. Ironically, they were willing to risk a war with Mexico to maintain the security of the nation.

Although the risk of war with Mexico was an important point of contention in the debates over the annexation of Texas, the two biggest issues were slavery and possible sectional tensions between the North and the South. Both Adams and Clay wanted to avoid the expansion of slavery in the United States. They believed that the expansion of slavery would be met with sectional tensions, which would be a threat to the Union. Evidently, they had taken note of what happened during the Missouri Crisis, where politicians narrowly avoided a break between North and South with a compromise. In their opinion, the best way to protect and secure the nation was to maintain the status quo. Adams and Clay distrusted politicians like Jackson and Tyler, because they believed that their only motive for expansion was the protection and expansion of slavery. Moreover, neither fell for the accusations made by Southern politicians toward the British. Lastly, John Calhoun's letter to Richard Pakenham convinced critics that Southern politicians did indeed try to annex Texas in an effort to expand the institution of slavery.

Logically, Southern politicians did want to protect the institution of slavery. For the South, slavery was the foundation of its economy. It is understandable that Southerners feared that the British wanted to annex Texas and abolish slavery there, and perhaps even in the American South. Considering that slavery had already been abolished in several countries and abolitionism was growing in the North, the Southerners feared that their institutions were at risk. Southerners would do anything to protect slavery, whereas the North had not reason to fear abolition. Consequently, the immediate annexation of Texas was important to Southerners, but the North did not see it as necessary. Expansionist philosophy was supported in the North, but only if it did not mean the expansion of slavery or a threat to the harmony of the Union. For the South, annexation was a last resort to expand and thus protect

the institution of slavery. In the end, the debates over the annexation of Texas make clear that Manifest Destiny was far from uncontested in nineteenth-century United States.

Notes

- ¹ Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 212.
- ² Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American foreign policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 82.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Lyon Rathbun, "The Debate over Annexing Texas and the Emergence of Manifest Destiny." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4, no. 3 (2011), 460.
- ⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The American Empire? Not so fast." *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 45.
- ⁶ Mark Joy, *American Expansion, 1783-1860: A Manifest Destiny?* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), xxvii.
- ⁷ Thomas McCormick, "From Old Empire to New: The Changing Dynamics and Tactics of American Empire" in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* ed. by Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 64.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 383.
- ¹⁰ Michael A. Morrison, "Westward The Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party." *Journal of the Early Republic* 10, no. 2 (1990), 229.
- ¹¹ Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 91.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ¹⁴ John Quincy Adams, *John Quincy Adams Digital Diary*, 16 November 1819, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, <https://www.masshist.org/publications/jqadiaries/index.php>.
- ¹⁵ Edel, 122.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.
- ¹⁷ Rathbun, 463.
- ¹⁸ Adams, 24 February 1820, *Digital Diary*.
- ¹⁹ Adams, 14 and 15 March 1827, *Digital Diary*.
- ²⁰ Thomas Jones, "Henry Clay and Continental Expansion, 1820-1844." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 73, no. 3 (1975), 242.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 250.
- ²² Henry Clay to John Crittenden, 29 January 1820, in *The Papers of Henry Clay, vol. 2*, ed. James Hopkins (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 769.
- ²³ Jones, 244.
- ²⁴ United States Senate, "John C. Calhoun," United States Senate, https://www.senate.gov/about/officers-staff/vice-president/VP_John_Calhoun.htm, accessed on 21 May 2020.
- ²⁵ John C. Calhoun, "Slavery A Positive Good" (speech, Washington D.C., February 6, 1837), <https://archive.org/stream/speechesofjohncc00incalh#page/222/mode/2up>.
- ²⁶ Andrew Jackson to John Overton, 8 June 1829, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson vol. 7*, ed. Daniel Feller (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 270.
- ²⁷ Andrew Jackson, "Second Annual Message" (speech, Washington D.C., December 6, 1830), The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/second-annual-message-3>.
- ²⁸ Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, volume 2* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1920), 140.
- ²⁹ Joy, 62.
- ³⁰ Rathbun, 464.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*, 459.
- ³³ Joy, 62.
- ³⁴ Amy Greenberg, "Time's Noblest Empire is the Last.' Texas Annexation in the Presumed Course of American Empire." in *Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution* ed. by Eric Schlereth and Sam Haynes (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015), 153.
- ³⁵ Morrison, 225.

- ³⁶ Andrew Jackson, "Special Message" (speech, Washington D.C., December 21, 1836), American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-4009>.
- ³⁷ Joy, 64.
- ³⁸ Morrison, 225.
- ³⁹ Andrew Jackson, "Special Message" (speech, Washington D.C., March 3, 1837), American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-3205>.
- ⁴⁰ Rathbun, 459.
- ⁴¹ Greenberg, 148.
- ⁴² Karp, 100.
- ⁴³ Rathbun, 459.
- ⁴⁴ Clyde N. Wilson, *Papers of John C. Calhoun, vol. XIII 1835-1837* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1980), 198.
- ⁴⁵ Wilson, 498.
- ⁴⁶ Rathbun, 463.
- ⁴⁷ Edel, 260.
- ⁴⁸ Morrison, 224.
- ⁴⁹ Henry Clay to Francis T. Brooke, 13 January 1838, in *The Papers of Henry Clay, vol. 9*, ed. Robert Seager (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 129.
- ⁵⁰ Henry Clay to John Whittier, 22 July 1837, *ibid.*, 64.
- ⁵¹ Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers, vol. 2* (1884), 299.
- ⁵² Ashbel Smith to John C. Calhoun, 19 June 1843, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun vol. 17*, ed. Clyde Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 252-253.
- ⁵³ Ashbel Smith to John C. Calhoun, 14 August 1843, *ibid.*, 356.
- ⁵⁴ John C. Calhoun to Abel Upshur, 27 August 1843, *ibid.*, 381-382.
- ⁵⁵ Karp, 12.
- ⁵⁶ Gardiner Tyler, 285.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.
- ⁵⁸ Sam Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security." in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* ed. Robert Johamsen, Sam Haynes et al. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press: 1997), 117.
- ⁵⁹ Haynes, 119.
- ⁶⁰ Adams, 666-667.
- ⁶¹ Adams, 701.
- ⁶² Jones, 260.
- ⁶³ Henry Clay to John Crittenden, 5 December 1843, 897-900.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁷ Haynes, 138.
- ⁶⁸ John C. Calhoun to Richard Pakenham, 18 April 1844, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun vol. 18*, ed. Clyde Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 273-278.
- ⁶⁹ Henry Clay to the *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 17 April 1844, in *The Papers of Henry Clay, vol. 10*, ed. Melba Porter Hay (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 41-46.
- ⁷⁰ Henry Clay to Stephen Miller, 1 July 1844, 79.
- ⁷¹ Edward Crapol, *John Tyler The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2012), 219.
- ⁷² John Tyler, "Fourth Annual Message" (speech, Washington D.C., 3 December, 1844), American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fourth-annual-message-5>.
- ⁷³ Crapol, 222.
- ⁷⁴ Adams, 724.
- ⁷⁵ Henry Clay to Martha K. Buckingham, 31 March 1845, 211-212.

Rural, Queer, and On the Move: Challenging Metronormative Biases and Generalizations in Intranational Queer Migration Studies

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A boy grows up in a small rural town, hangs out with his schoolmates, does what the other local kids do, yet always feels left out somehow. Only at the age of fourteen - having never had the terms to describe his feelings before - does he finally learn what being gay is. He learns this not from his peers or educators, but from the internet. Though he is able to safely come out to his small countryside community, his expressions are strictly policed by rural expectations of masculinity. It is not until he moves out of his small town and into a nearby city that he finds other queer people. They - no longer he - eventually figure out that they are transgender. They were not able to explore their queerness until they found solace in the anonymity and progressiveness of the city. This is my story, at the same time that it is not. It is heavily based on my personal experiences. However, it sounds just like many other narrations of queer intranational migration that foreground that queer people need to leave rural areas behind to develop themselves. This story lacks all the nuance of my ongoing connection to the rural, falsely poses the rural and urban as binary opposites, and presumes that my story is already over, much like contemporary academic work on queer migration does.

The way in which contemporary queer migration studies obscure the true nuances of rural queerness, and intranational queer migration in general, is harmful and wrong. Of course, queer migration narratives are personal representations of one's journey and therefore cannot objectively be wrong. Yet, it is crucial to consider that the way people tell their stories is nevertheless open to outside influences such as metronormativity - the widespread idea that queerness can only safely exist within urban areas - and conventional binary understandings of the urban and the rural. Not only does metronormativity within academia influence the way people work on intranational queer migration by foregrounding narratives about the city, but even the supposedly neutral sources they work with are subjected to these biases. It is time to critically reexamine biases within queer migration studies and to rid it of false dichotomies that erase complex rural experiences. I argue that contemporary intranational queer migration studies has a metronormative bias that falsely represents an urban versus rural binary opposition, assumes a need to escape the regressive rural once and for all, and simplifies queer identity journeys. Based on three recent Western queer migration narratives from the United States and Australia, I will show that false binaries and generalizations about queer migration do not just obscure rural queer realities, but also

incentivize a disconnect from rural culture despite the way in which rurality informs and supports a multi-faceted identity for many rural queer people.

The typical understanding and discussion of intranational queer migration is often decidedly metronormative and poses the rural and urban within an oppositional binary relationship to each other. Alexis Annes and Meredith Redlin, professors in sociology and rural studies, address these issues when they write that “[g]ay migration studies have consistently stressed the importance of the perceived symbolic binary rural/urban categories in understanding relocations of gay individuals.”¹ Using a large body of previous work on intranational gay migration as an example, they also determine that “these studies conflated gay migration with rural-urban displacement where rural areas were portrayed as inhospitable places for homosexual sexuality in contrast to urban spaces which were portrayed as idealized places for homosexual practices.”² They conclude that “[b]y equating gay migration with rural-to-urban migration, gay migration studies only account for a small portion of gay individuals’ experiences.”³ Though Annes and Redlin specifically focus on gay migration studies’ erasure and simplification of queer rurality here, it is unlikely that other fields within queer migration studies differ much, given the metronormative cultural bias throughout Western societies that poses the rural as harmful to and devoid of queerness in all of its forms. If we are to study queer migration, the very complexity and diversity of the term queer should remind us that we cannot allow for these generalizing biases to go unchecked.

Social geographer Andrew Gorman-Murray complexifies the field of intranational queer migration by attempting to reposition its focus. Surveying the field much like Annes and Redlin, Gorman-Murray finds that “rural-to-urban movement begins to be seen as the *foremost* and *archetypal* trajectory of queer displacement, and other moves, like those between cities, are understood as not merely additional, but as fundamentally similar to moving from rural areas to cities, and hence not requiring further explanation or analysis.”⁴ This sheds light on how metronormative biases sustain themselves. First, intranational migration studies foregrounds rural-to-urban movement by posing the city as a safe haven for queer people. Additionally, they make other forms of movement appear so homogeneous to rural-to-urban ones that they seemingly do not require additional research. This is problematic because countries commonly used in queer migration research such as “the USA, the UK and Brazil are all highly urbanized countries, each with over 80 percent of their national populations resident in variously defined urban areas.”⁵ Therefore, “the greater part of internal migration is consequently urban-to-urban. The ‘city-hopper’ is the norm, while the rural out-mover is actually in the minority, and this is as likely to be true for queer migrants as for the rest of the population.”⁶ Thus, intranational queer migration studies should not treat rural-to-urban migration as the archetype. Urban-to-urban and other forms of movement are more common and are just as central to queer identity journeys.

Another issue of the focus on the rural-to-urban within intranational queer migration studies is that it assumes finality. As Gorman-Murray so eloquently puts it, “[t]he normalization of rural-to-urban movement is also theoretically problematic, intimating a once-and-for-all emergence from the rural ‘closet’, and hence presenting as teleological and ontologically final.”⁷ He explains that the problem with this normalization is that it is out of

line with contemporary notions of identities that understand them as fluid and ever-developing, rather than having been constituted and finalized at the moment of coming out.⁸ He emphasizes that moving to and coming out in the city may only be the first step in an ongoing process of coming out that also includes more moving to different locations.⁹ The notion of coming out as being a process is commonly accepted nowadays, as reflected in a survey of LGBT Americans from 2013 that states that, for queer people, coming out is “a gradual process that can unfold over a series of years.”¹⁰ Thus, any understanding of a queer person’s identity journey and coming out as a singular event is flawed and reductive. While a queer person might indeed move to the city in order to feel safe to come out, they are likely to keep on moving afterward. The initial coming out and related movement are only the first steps in a longer process.

Queer identity journeys are long-lasting processes that are intrinsically tied to movement. Larry Knopp, a scholar of geography with a focus on queer theory, argues that ‘queer identity quests’ and their ties to movement and place are central to thinking about geography. He defines these quests as “personal ... journeys through space and time—material, psychic, and at a variety of scales—that are constructed internally as being about the search for an integrated wholeness as individual humans living in some kind of community.”¹¹ Of course, non-queer people also move a lot, but Knopp finds that queer people have a “rather urgent perceived need to reinvent the self” connected to their movement that stands out in their recollections.¹² Moreover, he also found there is an “attachment that many queer people ... feel to movement itself, and a corresponding ambivalent relationship to both placement and identity.”¹³ Based on many queer people’s accounts, these quests are “a source of considerable pleasure” and “it becomes a source of ontological and emotional security as well.”¹⁴ Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the specifics of queer migration outside of a single rural-to-urban movement. Not only because of queer people’s attachment to it personally, but also because “the idea of movement, flux, and flows as important ontological sites in and of themselves, for both queer people and geographic thought, has been underappreciated and underdeveloped in the literature on both.”¹⁵ The fix would be to consider how queer identity-related movement is multifaceted and not as metro-focused, binarily-locked, and final as it has wrongly been portrayed to be.

One way to deconstruct binary thinking when it comes to queer movement between the rural and the urban is to see how the two places relate, rather than oppose each other. To pose them as an oppositional binary is rather troublesome in practice because it assumes that both can be easily and rigidly defined. In reality, the exact lines between rural and urban spaces are hard to pin down. Historical geographer Garret Dash Nelson writes that “if we begin looking for a convenient cartographic borderline where the city ends and rural life begins, we find ... that these categories evade convenient definitions.”¹⁶ Nelson then proposes up to four different ways in which one could define rurality, all capturing a certain rural essence but none succeeding entirely in distinguishing all rural areas from urban ones.¹⁷ Given how hard both places are to precisely define, a more convenient approach would be to imagine them on a continuum from entirely rural to entirely urban rather than as two diametrically opposed entities. Sociologist Christopher J. Stapel does something similar when

he talks about “subjective ruralities” as “social constructions that fall along a spatial continuum rather than in a geographic or political urban/ rural dichotomy.”¹⁸ In that same vein, rural and urban queerness may be more accurately examined when not seen as two opposites, but as queer identities existing alongside a similar continuum. Those who move from the rural to urban or from the urban to the rural are likely to have an identity that reflects both spaces. They fall somewhere in the middle of that continuum, rather than swapping places entirely on either end upon moving.

In their previously mentioned work, Annes and Redlin also find that rural and urban queerness do indeed intermix as people do not just move to the city, but also return to the country. They study the specific kind of rural-to-urban movement that queer migration studies foregrounds by interviewing rural gay men about their experiences in the city. Their study, however, “does not confirm the existence of unidirectional movements from the country to the city. ... Back-and-forth movements between and within these two spaces more accurately define informants’ life itineraries.”¹⁹ This shows that the city is not a final destination, unlike what queer migration studies often portrays it to be. Furthermore, they confirm that participants required elements of both urban and rural spaces during their identity formation process. Throughout their interviews, they found that rural gay men view the city as a “paradoxical space” that, though attractive for its openness, is also surprisingly disciplinary and tends to clash with some of their personal views.²⁰ They highlight that “[f]or these men, coming back to the rural space is therefore equally important for the expression of gay masculine identity,”²¹ which points directly to the intermixing of urban and rural queer identities. Rather than being two opposites, both rural and urban spaces work together to constitute one’s queer identity.

Of course, Annes and Redlin talk only about rural gay men’s experiences, but the reasons they describe for back and forth migration, which facilitate mixed rural and urban queer identities, apply to the queer community as a whole. They mention how gay men growing up in heteronormative rural spaces tend to develop value systems that clash with the urban gay scene.²² In this case, these country-grown value systems informed by heteronormativity would most likely clash with any urban queer scene, regardless of what aspect of the queer community they represent. Furthermore, Annes and Redlin point out that rural gay men tend to have unrealistically high expectations of the city that are quickly adjusted and brought down upon interacting with the scene. What is at first perceived as a gay “mecca” of acceptance and visibility is quickly brought down to earth once rural gay men realize they do not know the norms and values of the urban scene, which prevents easy immersion.²³ This issue of unrealistic expectations of the city as a queer haven, something that proliferates throughout Western societies, would affect any member of the queer community. Lastly, “American informants criticize [the urban gay scene’s] assumed superficiality,” which is a critique that applies to any queer scene that allows its members to openly and loudly perform their identities, whether it is true or not.²⁴ Thus, much like gay men, other queer people would also be incentivized to travel back and forth to hold on to aspects of their identity that the city does not allow or appreciate. Though it may not be because they want to preserve masculinity as rural gay men do, there is a range of different motivations to find solace and familiarity

outside of the city that have to do with the various ways in which their rural upbringing ties into their identity, behavior, and cultural norms.

So, the false portrayal of rural-to-urban queer migration as the archetype of queer migration is harmful in multiple ways. It contributes to the metronormative work that social geographers like Jon Binnie do when they position “gay identity [as] first and foremost an urban identity.”²⁵ It erases all other forms of queer migration, such as the more common urban-to-urban within highly urban societies or the urban-to-rural. It reduces coming out to one singular action, rather than portraying it as the process it is. And most significantly, it also strengthens the idea within intranational queer migration studies and the wider imaginary that “the urban still functions as a queer homeland, while the rural heartland continues to refuse queer identities,” all the while upholding the perceived rural versus urban binary.²⁶ Oppositional binary explanations that render the rural devoid of queerness leave no space for rural queerness at all, let alone multifaceted identities that intermix rural roots and urban self-discovery. Shining a light on rural queer migration narratives helps combat this. They highlight the ontological significance of movement during queer identity journeys as well as the importance of and joy derived from multi-faceted identities.

Take Qiana Cutts for example, who is a southern black queer academic who wrote an autobiographical piece about her multidimensional identity. She writes that she makes use of the power of personal narratives because they make for nuanced stories that avoid generalizations and may inspire change.²⁷ Growing up queer in a small rural town in Alabama, she found herself questioning her “Southern authenticity” and wondering if she had to rank or abandon some parts of her identity.²⁸ It is not until she moves away to go to college in a nearby city and reads works like Audre Lorde’s that she starts talking about being on a journey and a “metaphysical transformation” that helps her become outwardly queer.²⁹ Now, much further along in her journey, she proudly writes that “my identity is multidimensional and each aspect of me contributes to my wholeness. Being Black intersects with being female intersects with being lesbian intersects with being Southern intersects with being Afrocentric.”³⁰ Her multifaceted identity is central to who she is now. She was only able to develop and accept it by moving to the city, going to college, and blending these lessons and experiences with her rural roots. Finally, she emphasizes that her journey is a long process when she expresses that “[i]t took me 35 years to get to the point where I accept my multiple, intersecting, duplicitous identities,” which is a far cry from one singular move to the city.³¹ Her story then, is not only a celebration of a multifaceted identity that intermixes all of the experiences throughout her life, but it is also one that highlights the length of these identity formation processes.

Similarly, sociology professor Porscha Yount uses her story of growing up queer and rural to shed light on people like her. As she puts it, she tells her story “because the smoothness of academia needs its edges roughened.”³² She shares her experiences of growing up as a white queer girl in a trailer park with a drug-addicted mother to showcase how, despite all the bad, her experiences also gave her a unique point of view.³³ Just like Cutts, Yount eventually moves out of the rural environment she grew up in and goes to college in a nearby city. There, she finally finds herself able to figure out her identity, which includes her queerness. Rather than viewing the different aspects of her identity as at odds with each other,

she proclaims that “[m]y poorness, my Southernness, and my queerness have all led me to a place I call home.”³⁴ She recognizes the differences between her mother’s life in the trailer park and her own life in a sturdy house with a wife in Asheville, but emphasizes that “[t]hese worlds are somewhat united now.”³⁵ She has lost her Southern drawl to come across as more of an academic, but still slips back into it when talking to her family.³⁶ The takeaway from this story is that her rurality is still part of her, even though she is now a queer person involved in academia in the city of Asheville. She continues to travel back and forth to the country to help her family out and show her partner what life is like for them.³⁷ Her identity is multifaceted. It is as rural as it is urban. She identifies as queer and finds that her background adds to that, rather than making it impossible. These kinds of stories directly contrast typical queer rural-to-urban migration narratives, and that is why they matter.

Next, the story of Australian lesbian couple Sharni and Tegan, as analyzed by social geographers Gordon Waitt and Lynda Johnston, point to the significance and complexity of migration to queer people. Waitt and Johnston used life narrative interviews to find out how Sharni and Tegan’s queerness, migration, and sense of belonging interacted.³⁸ Sharni and Tegan live in Townsville, which is often treated as an Australian rural idyll and associated in the media with images of rednecks but also has a population of 150,000.³⁹ Their journey reflects elements of queer urban-to-rural migration but also points to how both of those supposedly oppositional categories evade easy definitions. That same in-betweenness affects their sense of home. “For Sharni, migration cannot be conceived as leaving the original home behind, fixing it into the past, and seeking hominess elsewhere. Instead, as Eng (1997) suggests, home is an in-between space, both ‘there’ and ‘here,’ between origin and destination.”⁴⁰ As queer people leave their parental home to make a new one elsewhere, they thus do not simply replace one home with the other, but both become elements of home and acquire new meanings. Moving houses is not just about the destination, but about the journey in between. Sharni, for example, left Perth to travel around Australia for two years, after which she was still not ready to go back home. Waitt and Johnston deduce that for Sharni, mobility means a “possibility for transformation, self-reflection, transition, and self-searching that may occur moving between places.”⁴¹ Their narrative is particularly relevant because it stresses that movement is important regardless of a queer person’s origin.

Finally, my story also resists the conventions that intranational queer migration studies has put in place. Much like the previous three narratives, my queer identity is multifaceted, has developed through back and forth migration, and combines urban and rural experiences. The exception is that I was able to openly explore aspects of my queer identity - initially identifying as homosexual - whilst still in a rural environment. Whilst this is purely anecdotal, autobiographical stories allow us to talk about the nuances of queer experiences, and it helps showcase that rurality is not always devoid of (open) queerness. Continual migration is the key to my queer identity journey. Though I stayed within the same city, I migrated multiple times within to find a more hospitable environment for queer people, something referred to as intra-urban queer migration.⁴² Furthermore, I visited many other cities and towns, constructing a queer network throughout the country and experiencing queer scenes everywhere, both rural and urban. During this process, ‘home’ became a concept not so much

tioned to one physical place, but one tied to a sense of ontological security around queer peers. Nevertheless, as Annes and Redlin predicted, I returned to my rural roots many times. I realized that some aspects of my identity still belonged there as they did not always find a place in the urban queer scenes.⁴³ All in all, this story is a lot different from the original one. Though neither is entirely false, one looks beyond sweeping generalizations about the rural and avoids metronormative biases in order to paint a more accurate picture. Queer migration studies must do the same.

Intranational queer migration studies has many paths it can take to improvement. For one, it should recognize that rural-to-urban migration is not the predominant form of queer migration. Next, other forms of queer migration, such as urban-to-urban, require further analysis. Furthermore, since this migration is part of people's coming out and their identity journey, it should recognize that this is an ongoing process, rather than a singular event. Most significantly, it should critically examine the metronormative bias that makes it falsely present a binary system with on one end the rural as devoid of queerness and on the other the urban as a queer paradise. To help do this, they should actively listen to and examine rural queer narratives like the ones above. These narratives were never actively trying to intervene in queer migration studies discourse, but simply put their own stories out there in the hope that it may help others see how rurality and queerness can in fact support, rather than oppose each other. This paper intends to highlight unique aspects of rurality that have been overlooked due to metronormative biases. But beyond that, it also aims to showcase the often neglected similarities between urban and rural spaces in an effort to break the typical oppositional understandings of the two. More research is needed to make a significant intervention in the field of queer migration studies, but hopefully, this combination of theory and rural queer narratives is a helpful contribution.

Notes

¹ Alexis Annes and Meredith Redlin, "Coming Out and Coming Back: Rural Gay Migration and the City," *Journal of Rural Studies* 28, no 1 (2012): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2011.08.005>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Andrew Gorman-Murray, "Rethinking queer migration through the body," *Social & Cultural Geography* 8, no. 1 (2007): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360701251858>.

⁵ Ibid, 109.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, *A Survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2013), 44, www.pewsocialtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/06/SDT_LGBT-Americans_06-2013.pdf

¹¹ Larry Knopp, "Ontologies of Place, Placelessness, and Movement: queer quests for identity and their impacts on contemporary geographic thought," *Gender, Place & Culture* 11, no. 1 (2007): 123, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369042000188585>.

¹² Ibid., 124.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Garret Dash Nelson, "What Makes a Place Rural?" *Dissent Magazine*, Fall 2019, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/what-makes-a-place-rural>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Christopher J. Stapel, "Dismantling Metrocentric and Metronormative Curricula: Toward a Critical Queer Pedagogy of Southern Rural Space and Place," in *Queer South Rising: Voices of a Contested Space*, ed. Reta Ugena Whitlock (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 60, *EBSCOhost*.

¹⁹ Alexis Annes and Meredith Redlin, "Coming Out and Coming Back: Rural Gay Migration and the City," *Journal of Rural Studies* 28, no 1 (2012): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2011.08.005>.

²⁰ Ibid., 66.

²¹ Ibid., 67.

²² Ibid., 66.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gorman-Murray, 107.

²⁶ Ibid., 110.

²⁷ Qiana Cutts, "My Labels Are [Not] Too Many: My Journey of 'Becoming' a Black, Afrocentric, Southern Lesbian," in *Queer South Rising: Voices of a Contested Space*, ed. Reta Ugena Whitlock (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 298-299, *EBSCOhost*.

²⁸ Ibid., 300.

²⁹ Ibid., 311.

³⁰ Ibid., 316.

³¹ Ibid., 322.

³² Porscha Yount, "Trailer Park Queer," in *Queer South Rising: Voices of a Contested Space*, ed. Reta Ugena Whitlock (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 402, *EBSCOhost*.

³³ Ibid., 387-388.

³⁴ Ibid., 388.

³⁵ Ibid., 401.

³⁶ Ibid., 399.

³⁷ Ibid., 401.

³⁸ Gordon Waitt and Lynda Johnston, "It Doesn't Even Feel Like It's Being Processed by Your Head': Lesbian Affective Home Journeys to and within Townsville, Queensland, Australia," in *Sexuality, Rurality, and Geography*. Ed. Andrew Gorman-Murray et al. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 145, *EBSCOhost*.

³⁹ Ibid., 144-145.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 153.

⁴¹ Ibid., 150.

⁴² Gorman-Murray, 107; Knopp, 123.

⁴³ Annes and Redlin, 66.

Moving Forward:

Contingent and Productive Crisis in Philip Meyer's *American Rust*

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This paper was written for the course Politics & Culture in the 21st Century US in the RMA in Arts, Media and Literary Studies

Published in 2009, as US-led financial capitalism was pulling the world into the Great Recession, Philipp Meyer's debut novel *American Rust* is a social realist work of fiction about life in Mid-Western 'Rust Belt' communities after decades of capital flight. It describes a few months in the lives of Isaac English and Billy Poe, two squarely post-industrial high-school graduates. Both young men have failed to leave the immiserated (fictional) town of Buell in the (fictionalized) Fayette Valley despite Isaac's academic and Poe's athletic potential, which might have seen both through college and into a better life. Isaac lives in relative financial stability due to the checks that his father, Henry English, receives from the factory in which he was paralyzed, but has found himself unable to follow his sister Lee in the pursuit of an Ivy League education. Poe lives in a trailer with his mother, Grace, who works through her arthritis to provide for him now that Poe's father, Virgil, has left them. Police chief Bud Harris completes the cast of main characters as Grace's on-and-off-again lover and as the community guardian of Buell, attempting to stabilize the descent of a community in a downward spiral.

The second epigraph in *American Rust* is a quote from Albert Camus, asserting that "what we learn in time of pestilence [is] that there are more things to admire in men than to despise."¹ The hopeful aphorism from the noted existentialist contains echoes of Kurt Vonnegut's short story writing advice, widely available on the internet through any number of writing blogs but originally published in the introduction to his short story collection *Bagumbo Snuff Box* (1999). Here, Vonnegut advises to make awful things happen to your characters "in order that the reader may see what they are made of."² As both authors seem to agree, then, crisis prefigures improvement.

In this essay, I will attempt to explain this idea and argue that it is also present in the novel *American Rust*. I also want to explore how different crises in *American Rust* work and how they may be used productively. Specifically, I will argue that the novel portrays the wholly contingent nature of the term 'crisis,' as the use of this concept implies both a particular description of reality and a specific set of norms. Moreover, the novel shows the political efficacy and optimistic potential of thinking in terms of crisis, and it explores how crisis discourse prefigures action towards a better future. In what follows, I will first consider what crisis and crisis discourse are as concepts and implicit argumentative structures and how they can be recognized. Then, I will turn to the book to show how its description of an economic crisis speaks to the contingent nature of reality and how its descriptions of the spatial environment and of legal and social relations speak to the contingent nature of norms. Finally, the book's optimism, in my reading, stems from the characters' final rejection of despair in

the face of these crises. They reject the interpretive frames through which crises seem unsurmountable; instead, they opt to frame their crises productively as problems to be solved to create a better future, showing the optimistic potential of crisis discourse.

This analysis of *American Rust* will make use of the term crisis, as defined by anthropologist and theorist Janet Roitman, and the “state of exception,” as explained by philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Discussing the concept of crisis, Roitman defines it as the “discrepancy between morality and knowledge [which] is taken to be an aporia”; it is understood as a significant problem, which needs to be overcome.³ Crisis is thus the virtual space between the real situation as observed, which in Roitman’s shorthand is ‘knowledge’, and a particular norm, ‘morality’. While seemingly straightforward, crisis in this definition is wholly dependent on the limits of knowledge and the contingency of morality. Identifying a situation as a crisis implies, first, the existence of a particular describable situation, second, the existence of a way in which that situation does not live up to some existent norm, and third, a speculative way to change the present situation so that it will conform to the normative situation. Crisis furthermore exists exclusively from its articulation onwards: as “an observation that produces meaning,” it is performative in the sense that it simultaneously establishes the situation, norm, and solution. While it draws on the cachet of ‘objective’ observation, crisis discourse thus inevitably handles in normative meaning: specifically, it means to pose “progress [towards the implied norm] as a moral task.”⁴

Roitman is at pains to explain that she does not aim “to invalidate ‘crisis’ or to critique the term as inaccurate or merely symbolic,” but rather that it is essential “to consider the ways in which it regulates narrative constructions [and] allows certain questions to be asked while others are foreclosed.”⁵ The invocation of the term crisis means that a particular situation is wrong in a particular way and thus needs to change in a particular way. Roitman warns that it is important to be aware of the assumptions that are made when crisis discourse is used. While crisis discourse exists most explicitly in the use of the word ‘crisis,’ it can, based on these definitions, also be applied to the broader portrayal of deviation from (unquestioned) norms that imply an exigency to change in light of those norms. Agamben, in his attempt to theorize the “state of exception,” the legal term for the “suspension of the juridical order itself,” posits that such a state might arrive as “the result of periods of political crisis.”⁶ In the state of exception, then, ideally, legal norms are suspended in order to enable more effective normalization of a certain crisis situation.

Economic crises prefigure the action of *American Rust* and are the main reason for the described state of the Fayette Valley and the lives of the characters in it. The characters understand these crises in diverse ways: as moments of decay, despair, and death, and also in relation to a broader economic system, showing the contingent nature of crisis. While the novel does not often mention the word crisis explicitly, it depicts several examples of implied crisis. The only explicit mentions of the term are made in relation to the Buell police budget. The first time, Grace is thinking of Bud Harris and how “he was always pointing out [...] there were only six full-time officers, and with all the financial crises, half of them were due to be laid off.”⁷ In the second instance, Harris himself is overthinking those dismissals and remembers that “[t]hree years before there had been another budget crisis.”⁸ Concerning the

broader economic situation of the Valley, Grace recalls the “horror show” of rampant suicide following the period in which first “the mills just kept laying people off [...] and then they were closing,” and Harris reflects, “a stable society required stable jobs. The police could not fix those problems [and] stop a society from collapsing.”⁹ Fayette Valley, then, is a society in ruins due to the disappearance of “stable jobs” when the steel mills disappeared.

Simultaneously, the book portrays awareness and evidence of the extremely local nature of this economic and social crisis. Grace compares the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center to the demolition of two local “two-hundred-foot-tall and almost brand-new blast furnaces,” realizing “[t]here were certain places and certain people who mattered a lot more than others.”¹⁰ Henry English, paralyzed from the waist down since an accident in an unsafe steel mill, remembers learning that “the Japs and the Germans [...] were always sinking money into their plants” and that “Penn Steel never invested a dime [and] guaranteed its own downfall.”¹¹ His daughter Lee’s local and social mobility, having left Buell for Yale University, are evidence of the same point: the economic crises that have ravaged the Rust Belt constitute crises only for those living in the Rust Belt, and only for specific people living there. The fact that they impact only particular people in particular places does not alleviate the destructiveness of these crises, but it does show contingent and perspective-bound nature: the machine of capital and public life keeps churning while the floor disappears beneath unknown lives.

The effects of these economic crises are most clearly visible in *American Rust* in its discussions of ongoing changes in the spatial environment and infrastructure, and similarly in changes in social and societal relations in the Fayette Valley. The former changes especially resonate with Roitman’s concept of crisis. The Fayette Valley is portrayed as an intermediate state on the spectrum between a fully human-made world on the one side and an entirely natural environment on the other. The present intermediate state is described in alternating ways, with reference to a normativity based on either human society or unblemished nature. When Isaac, running away from home at the very beginning of the book in a failed attempt to make it across the country to Berkeley, California, to go to university there, reaches an overlook of the town, the view is described with precisely this ambiguity. He sees “green rolling hills [...] an expanse of forest unbroken except for the town of Buell and its steelmill,” implying that the non-human nature of those forests are the norm and that human society forms an exception to that norm, but also notes that “[t]he mill itself had been like a small city, but [...] now stood like an ancient ruin.”¹² The mill is in a state of decay, which is made a crisis by its relation to the historical moment, used as the norm, when it was intact. When Grace drives to her work, she “passes[s] vacant hamlets, abandoned service stations, [and] an abandoned coal mine.”¹³ Billy Poe, her son, refers to the opposite norm when he notes, “there were patches of wood that he remembered being overgrown fields [...] the land going back to its natural state.”¹⁴ The book’s descriptions of the spatial environment are thus posed in terms of either the decay of society, or the return of or to nature, or both. Depending on how situation is framed, the implication is that the norm is either the natural state or the human-made state. This can be valued negatively or positively: anthropic elements are either elegized or rejected, and the natural elements are returning or encroaching.

The community of Buell is portrayed to exist in a de facto state of exception under the rule of Bud Harris, whose suspension of one normative frame is justified by the endeavor to maintain or reach another: he identifies and attempts to improve the crisis situation not in light of the normativity of the law but in light of community preservation. The reputation of the chief of police in Buell is best articulated by Billy Poe when he thinks: “Everyone knew Harris didn’t give two shits about dead bums.”¹⁵ Partially because of the budget crises discussed earlier, Harris has effectively suspended the rule of law in Buell. Drug operations, like the conspicuously open bars that Poe passes on his way home from Isaac’s, are mostly left alone, except when they set their dog on police officer Steve Ho.¹⁶ Furthermore, he thinks of his plan to eliminate Murray, a homeless man who wants to testify to the fact that Isaac killed a man in self-defense during his first attempt to escape Buell, as “no different than anything else he’d done before, getting rid of a bad element.”¹⁷

Rather than legal norms, Harris seems to defer to a type of communal normativity. In his opinion, “[t]here was a role everyone played in the community [...] which was basically to do right” and, more explicitly, “it was not the law so much as doing right.”¹⁸ Isaac has a similar if more starkly put take on community preservation when he reflects on how he killed the Swede as he was bearing down on Poe: “Basis of everything, he thought. Pick your own over a stranger.”¹⁹ The choice of community over legality is thus a more widespread philosophy than just Bud Harris’s. When Isaac comes across two graffiti painters on the way out of Buell, he reflects on the “anti-authoritarian bent” of the Valley, and how “[b]eing a rat was lower than being a murderer.”²⁰ When Harris finally kills Murray and his unlucky compatriot Jésus to save Poe and Isaac, this assertion is proven to be right. Harris even justifies his actions because “[b]oth of those boys were worth saving.”²¹ The norm, for Harris, is the well-being of the community of people in Buell, which excludes “bums.” Thus, the extralegal action he performs in killing two outsiders can be justifiable as saving people, as solving a problem. Ultimately, his actions in this de facto state of exception are justified as the normalization of a crisis situation.

Despite the potential problems with the fluidity of this discursive construction, *American Rust* also, more forcefully, points towards the productive potential of crisis discourse, especially in the ways in which Poe and Isaac’s actions come to be understood in the course of the book. Both Isaac and Poe are essentially unaffected by the economic crisis in Fayette Valley in their latent potential for mobility — just like Lee, they could have left the Valley for college. They are distinguished, however, by their immobility: two years after high school graduation, they are still in Buell. Their motives for this are left mostly unclear. As Harris reflects about his brother, whom he dislikes: “You could make up anything you wanted, there were always stories to justify your choices.”²² Despite the cynicism of this idea, its resonance with the concept of crisis is unmistakable. Crises are stories of justification for certain courses of action, which means, in Harris’s words, that “[t]he trick [is] to figure out exactly what” the correct story is.²³ As Roitman explains in a footnote to her text, “narration is not ‘bad’; it requires epistemological self-reflexivity.”²⁴

Both Poe and Isaac struggle with finding their narration and, accordingly, asserting agency. In the end, however, they both find strikingly similar norms toward which to angle

their actions. Poe, faced with the choice of whether to sell out Isaac and save himself, concludes that he will not: “It showed you there was a reason for all of it [...] he had saved Isaac English [...] this was the one thing in his life he was not going to fuck up.”²⁵ Isaac’s epiphany is almost reciprocal, as a thought of Poe leads him to decide not to commit suicide: “It is the unfinished business. [...] It is only Poe. [...] Alright. I will get off this bridge I will choose something.”²⁶ After he has made this decision and returns to Buell, Isaac’s final thoughts of how “he’d decided to trust Harris [and] the others,” confirm his commitment to a norm of community and friendship.²⁷ In the book’s final image, Poe is walking “toward a new place,” where he will find his aptly named mother, Grace.²⁸ In their moments of crisis, the main characters of *American Rust* choose to value interdependence and friendship and can therefore move hopefully into the future.

American Rust unmistakably documents crises at many different levels and in many different ways. In these diverse articulations, as I have argued, it does not prove the existence of any one singular crisis or show the particular exigency upon which the Rust Belt must act. Instead, it can help to illustrate the versatility of crisis discourse and to help understand how the construction of a crisis exists in articulation. This versatility can be interpreted as a malicious feature: if the existence of crisis lies in its discursive construction, it may be inferred that the exigency is also no more than discursive — that it is fake. What I have attempted to emphasize in this essay, however, is how *American Rust* shows the productive nature of crisis discourse. With the narrative structure of crisis, it is possible to imagine a better future and, as such, to undertake hopeful political action.

Notes

¹ Philip Meyer, *American Rust* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), n.p..

² “Kurt Vonnegut’s Rules for Writers,” KU Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction, accessed October 16, 2020. <http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/Workshop-stuff/Vonnegut-Rules.htm>.

³ Janet Roitman, “Crisis,” *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, accessed April 18, 2019. <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/issue1/crisis/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 2005), 4, 1.

⁷ Meyer, *American Rust* 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44, 120.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91, 124.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54, 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 362.

²² *Ibid.*, 117.

²³ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁴ Roitman, “Crisis.”

²⁵ Meyer, *American Rust*, 321.

²⁶ Ibid., 315.

²⁷ Ibid., 361.

²⁸ Ibid., 367.

“All Changed, Changed Utterly”: US Foreign Policy Towards Iran, 1977-89

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America's relationship with Iran underwent a sea change between 1977 and 1989. At the beginning of the Carter administration in 1977, Iran was a pillar of America's anti-Soviet strategy in the Middle East and was vital to the stability of the global oil market.¹ By the end of President Reagan's second term in 1989, the US and Iran were sworn adversaries. At the lowest point in this antagonistic relationship, the US attacked several Iranian naval ships and accidentally shot down an Iranian commercial airliner.² However, there were also moments of co-operation between the two countries during this tumultuous period. This paper analyzes the policies of the Carter and Reagan administrations with respect to Iran using Walter Russell Mead's four schools of American foreign policy: Hamiltonianism, Wilsonianism, Jeffersonianism, and Jacksonianism.³ In particular, I examine the Iranian Revolution and the ensuing hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Iran-Contra affair to determine which schools had greater influence on America's Iran policy during these twelve years.

Almost every scholar that has written about American foreign policy has had a slightly different approach to distinguishing between different foreign policy approaches which policies carried out by the US abroad exemplify. However, two main dichotomies are commonly seen in the literature. Epitomized by Henry Kissinger, one set of authors discern between policies that suggest a 'realist'/'amoral' approach and those which suggest an 'idealist'/'moral' approach to American foreign policy.⁴ Other authors categorize American foreign policy decisions as falling under an 'isolationist'/'restrained' banner or within an 'activist'/'interventionist' approach.⁵ Mead instead differentiates between four approaches to or 'schools of' US foreign policy, each named after a prominent American historical figure whose ideas, rhetoric, and approach to both domestic and foreign affairs are representative of these schools.

To some extent - as can be seen below in Table 1 - Mead's schools can be understood as overlapping the distinctions that other authors draw (although Mead does not explicitly conceive of his schools as such). Aside from using a greater number of schools - which allows for better analysis than using a single dichotomy - the significance of Mead's work is that he draws an explicit causal link between how these schools perceive long-term domestic policy goals and how they act internationally. Thus, the following analysis of American foreign policy towards Iran is more grounded in the domestic situation in the US at the time than if either of the more abstract 'realist'/'idealist' or the 'restrained'/'interventionist' dichotomies had been used. Mead notes that most policy makers and administrations combine elements of different schools in their decisions. Indeed, a given foreign policy decision can align with or be justified

by multiple schools for different reasons at the same time. He also stresses that his schools are not meant to suggest that American policy makers acted consciously with these schools in mind. Rather, he suggests using these four schools – as will this paper – as analytical tools to better understand the motivating factors for different American foreign policy decisions.⁶

Works on American-Iranian relations have also used a wide range of methods and approaches. For example, Middle East scholar Ray Takeyh has focused on the expected result that decisions regarding Iran were and are intended to have, contrasting between strategies of ‘compellence’ and strategies of ‘deterrence’.⁷ In a review of existing literature, American-Iranian relations scholar Babak Ganji has demonstrated that most analyses of US foreign policy towards Iran during the revolutionary period have narrowly focused on the post-Vietnam War context.⁸ Therefore, there exists a gap in the literature in that American-Iranian relations are commonly understood as a *sui generis* case rather than authors attempting to analyze this relationship through more traditional approaches to US foreign policy. This paper will instead place America’s Iran policy into the wider context of Mead’s foreign policy schools. Doing so will make it easier for future authors to analyze American-Iranian relations between 1977 and 1989 while also allowing for clearer comparisons in future works between America’s actions vis-à-vis Iran in this period and American policies towards other countries and in other time periods.

	Realist/Amoral	Idealist/Moral
Activist/Interventionist	Hamiltonianism	Wilsonianism
Isolationist/Restrained	Jacksonianism	Jeffersonianism

Table 1: Mead's four schools of American foreign policy

Mead’s schools of US foreign policy

Mead’s first school of American foreign policy is named after one of America’s founding fathers: Alexander Hamilton. Hamiltonianism is a relatively amoral approach on the need for a strong American global presence and a focus on economics in foreign policy.⁹ Originally protectionist in nature, post-1945 Hamiltonianism re-oriented towards a pro-free trade standpoint. As the US was now the world’s pre-eminent economy, it stood to benefit most from closer global economic ties.¹⁰ The institutions and rules erected at this time placed the US at the center of the world’s economy and the new liberal, capitalist world order. This anti-Communist world order focused on forming enduring alliances to safeguard American national security and economic interests.¹¹ The Hamiltonian school is exemplified by the policy of ‘containment’ under the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, America’s protection of allies from their – and America’s – foes, and support for trade agreements like NAFTA. Critics of this school decry it as a cloak for American neo-imperialism. For example, US foreign policy scholar Inderjeet Parmar suggests that policies associated with Hamiltonianism legitimize US hegemony by disguising its power politics as being for the benefit of all countries.¹² Certainly Hamiltonianism’s preference for stability alongside

America's own national security and economic interests have influenced multiple administrations to support numerous repressive regimes.

Mead's second school is named after President Woodrow Wilson. This highly moral perspective calls for an active US role in the global spreading of peace, liberty, democracy, and human rights. Even before Wilson, Wilsonianism had its antecedents in the American missionary movement and the pressure they exerted on policymakers to aid the promotion of Christianity, liberty, and democracy abroad. Nowadays, it is essentially secular, but Wilsonians retain a quasi-messianic belief in the righteousness of their cause.¹³ Wilsonianism will even countenance military interventions to prevent mass atrocities in other countries.¹⁴ However, this school also poses problems for US foreign policy. One is that the gap between the ideals espoused and the actions taken by the US can lead to disillusionment with both American democratic ideals and America itself.¹⁵ Secondly, the Wilsonian concept of the US as the 'indispensable nation' – a term also cherished by Hamiltonians – can cause the US to contravene international law in pursuit of its own ideals.

Mead's third school is named after President Thomas Jefferson. Jeffersonianism is also a moral foreign policy, but one that calls for a very narrow US role abroad. Jeffersonianism's highest priority is America's democracy, which it sees as inherently fragile and requiring vigilant protection. To a Jeffersonian, foreign entanglements entail great risks to 'the American experiment', as they promote an imperial presidency, inflate the size of the armed forces, and increase the national debt. Jeffersonians reject such developments because they lead to a strong central government, which can itself threaten American liberty and democracy. Therefore, foreign affairs should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Even if there is a direct threat to the US homeland, Jeffersonians' prefer diplomacy or limited war.¹⁶ Jeffersonianism has declined in saliency since World War II, but still remains relevant. Jeffersonians highlight restrictions on civil liberties and increases in the national debt due to military appropriations post-9/11 as vindicating their claims about the dangers of foreign entanglements. However, this foreign policy school can be criticized for being so wary of an American role abroad that it leaves the US vulnerable.

Mead's fourth school is named after President Andrew Jackson. Jacksonianism is also an amoral foreign policy, but one that opposes an expansive American role abroad. Jacksonians focus primarily on safeguarding what Mead refers to as America's 'folk community'. Originally comprising white Protestants in the rural frontier states, this folk community now includes all those Americans regardless of location who prioritize self-reliance, honor, valuing hard work, equality between community members, individualism, and courage (although racial prejudices still hamper the inclusion of non-white Americans). Jacksonians reject foreign entanglements that do not present a clear and immediate benefit to the US. However, if the US or even Americans abroad are attacked they will consider all options, including all-out war to exact retribution.¹⁷ Jacksonians point to the 'total war' waged against Germany and Japan as the appropriate response to threats to the 'homeland'. However, this foreign policy school can be criticized for its frequent racial undertones, often depicting enemies – especially non-white enemies – as inferior. The Jacksonian tradition –

alongside those of Hamiltonianism, Wilsonianism, and Jeffersonianism - impacted America's Iran policy from 1977 to 1989 in differing but important ways.

The Iranian Revolution

After the Second World War, US foreign policy towards Iran was driven primarily by Hamiltonianism. Along with Saudi Arabia, Iran was one of America's few Muslim allies in the Middle East. Its secular ruler Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was not only a bulwark against Communist influence in the region, but Iran was also a critical provider of oil for the US.¹⁸ Moreover, it was one of the few countries in the region which had good relations with Israel.¹⁹ After the release of the Pentagon papers and the fall of South Vietnam, President Jimmy Carter took office promising a more militarily restrained and human rights-oriented foreign policy, thereby suggesting an approach more grounded in Jeffersonianism and Wilsonianism respectively. Despite these stated foreign policy goals, Carter essentially continued with the status quo of Hamiltonian policies when it came to the repressive Iranian regime. For example, in 1977 he approved the purchase of F-16 fighter planes by the Shah - who seemed to have charmed Carter personally - as well as AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) intelligence aircraft.²⁰ The yawning gap between Carter's rhetoric and the reality of his continued support for the Shah caused many activists in the various Iranian opposition groups to view the US president as a hypocrite. Moreover, believing that the US had outsized influence over the Iranian regime, the opposition blamed the Carter administration in large part for the repression of the initial protests which began on 8 January 1978 in the holy city of Qum.²¹

Initially focused on the Pahlavi regime's attacks on the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the protests soon grew into general anti-regime demonstrations and spread rapidly to more cities across Iran. The Carter administration was internally divided over the best course of action. There were those, such as National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who advocated a more hawkish approach, backing a potential bloody crackdown by the Shah. Others, including Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the State Department, encouraged a more conciliatory stance.²² President Carter equivocated between the two approaches: he sent a message through Brzezinski to the Shah in November supporting any measures the latter saw necessary to regain control of Iran, but he did not make a phone call himself to demonstrate his personal confidence in the Iranian leader at this crucial stage.²³

While the State Department's stance was slightly more Jeffersonian due to its restraint, all major US policymakers adopted a Hamiltonian approach throughout the crisis. Their priorities were to keep Iran as an ally for economic reasons and to maintain an anti-Communist balance of power. Disagreements within the Carter administration mostly concerned the best method for combatting the Iranian protests. Placing the regime's survival first and foremost perhaps explains why Vance, Brzezinski, and President Carter all essentially ignored warnings in November and December 1978 that the Shah was unlikely to survive and that America should reach out to the leaders of the protests without delay, including from then-Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan and former diplomat George Ball.²⁴

After the Shah fled on 16 January 1979, the Carter administration attempted to mend relations with the new regime, which included moderates as well as religious fundamentalists. However, they underestimated the depth of anti-American sentiment that had built up in Iran and that had been one of the driving forces of the revolution. Symbols of Western or American influence, such as cinemas, casinos, and nightclubs, were torched, seen as representative of Iran's moral decay under the Shah and American dominance perverting Iranian culture.²⁵ These anti-American sentiments demonstrate a core weakness of Hamiltonian foreign policy, since the prioritization of alliances with repressive non-Communist rulers could lead to resentment directed toward America by citizens of these dictatorships. In Iran, such resentment soon turned into outright suspicion and hatred against an America that many opposition figures perceived to be plotting with the moderates against the revolution.

America's blindness to the depths of animosity against it is exemplified by the top policy makers who overlooked the importance of seeking a high-level meeting with Khomeini, the real power behind the revolution.²⁶ Decades of influence by pro-Shah diplomats, lobbyists, and experts had left them woefully ill-informed about the strength of Islamic fervor in Iran during and after the revolution.²⁷ President Carter's decision to allow the Shah to enter the US for medical treatment – alongside Brzezinski's meeting with Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Barzagan in Algiers on 1 November 1979 – fueled paranoia among Iranian hardliners that the US was plotting against the new Iranian state. This helped prompt the Iran hostage crisis later that month, when radical students stormed the US embassy in Tehran and took fifty-two Americans hostage for over a year.²⁸

Jacksonian elements in America's Iran policy started becoming apparent early in 1979. The US Senate passed resolutions condemning the extrajudicial actions of the Iranian revolutionary government (despite these being similar in nature to those previously carried without censure by the Shah's secret police, the SAVAK) and prominent Senator Henry Jackson made public statements suggesting the Iranian regime would soon fall.²⁹ However, it was the hostage crisis that caused a significant increase in Jacksonian thinking about Iran. By attacking the US embassy, Iran had not acted with 'honor' and therefore the US did not have to so either. Enormous bipartisan pressure came on Carter from figures like Republican candidate Ronald Reagan and former Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern to use military action.³⁰

Mead suggests that if there had been a primarily Jacksonian administration in office, there would have been a war with Iran in 1980.³¹ Carter's reticence and Jeffersonian leanings prevented him from engaging in a full-blown conflict, even though he did authorize an incredibly risky and ultimately ill-fated rescue mission in April 1980. Nevertheless, Carter did bow to some demands for escalation. As retribution for breaking international law by taking diplomatic hostages – an affront to Hamiltonians' faith in a rule-based international order – the US broke off diplomatic relations with Iran, froze all Iranian assets in the US, and suspended purchasing imports from the country.³² Carter also continued negotiating the hostages' release. This was eventually secured – in part due to the unfreezing of some Iranian assets – on 20 January 1981, the day President Reagan took office.

The Iran-Iraq War

On 22 September 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein launched an all-out invasion of Iran. The reasons for the Iran-Iraq War included long-standing enmities, Saddam's ambitions for regional hegemony, and his fear that as a minority Sunni dictator in a secular state, the majority Shia population would be incited to revolt by the fundamentalist neighboring Iran.³³ Despite Iranian suspicions, there is no hard evidence that the US pushed Saddam to invade. Former Middle East correspondent Patrick Tyler has pointed out that Carter's initial reaction was displeasure, as the invasion complicated his efforts to secure the hostages' release.³⁴ Moreover, Iraq had severed diplomatic relations with the US in 1967 because of the Six-Day War and was aligned with the Soviet Union. Therefore, Carter declared that the US would remain neutral in late 1980. Both states were hostile towards the US and posed threats to Saudi Arabia, which was now America's major ally in the Middle East aside from Israel.³⁵ Carter's decision can be interpreted as Jacksonian due to his reluctance to police the world, Jeffersonian because of his fear of foreign entanglements, Wilsonian due to his values counselling against supporting either horrific dictatorship, or Hamiltonian thanks to his prioritization of the Saudi Arabian alliance and confidence that war would damage both of America's adversaries in the region. This decision thus provides a rare example of a major foreign policy decision that aligned with all of Mead's foreign policy schools.

However, as the Iran-Iraq War progressed the US found itself inexorably drawn into the conflict. This was in part due to the course that the war took. After initial setbacks, Iran regrouped and drove Saddam's forces back into Iraqi territory. An Iranian victory would have posed a massive threat to Saudi Arabia and to Israel. Therefore, the US began to align itself with Iraq, despite the latter being pro-Soviet. The US removed Iraq from its list of state sponsors of terrorism in 1982, in 1983 financial and intelligence support was extended to Iraq, and in 1984 diplomatic relations were restored.³⁶ This was a display of classic Hamiltonian logic: form an amoral alliance based upon the premise that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. However, these decisions were also infused with a Jacksonian sense of hostility towards an Iran that was still festering from the hostage crisis. The Reagan administration showed no compunction with supporting the Iraqi regime, despite its use of chemical weapons on the battlefield from 1983 onwards. Use of such weapons contravened the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which the US had ratified.³⁷ Such blatant violations of international law would normally be a great affront to Hamiltonians, but the need to prevent an Iranian victory trumped such concerns. America's public criticisms of the use of chemical weapons during the war also helped to allay the concerns of Jeffersonians and Wilsonians, of which there were few in the administration anyway.³⁸

As the war continued, US support for Iraq became more overt. When Iran massed troops in preparation for a major offensive on Basrah in 1987, the US provided Iraq with information on the locations of these troops. They did so knowing that Saddam's regime would use sarin gas against them, killing thousands.³⁹ Two-thirds of Iraq's chemical weapon attacks occurred in the final eighteen months of the war, when US intelligence on the locations

of Iranian troops was made available to Iraq without restrictions.⁴⁰ American military intelligence operatives provided bombing plans to the Iraqi government, who then added chemical weapons attacks to them. Even after Saddam's government massacred the Kurdish population of Halabja with chemical weapons in 1988, the Reagan administration worked with Republican allies in Congress to ensure that Iraq would not be sanctioned.⁴¹ This was anathema to Jeffersonians and Wilsonians, who saw the US supporting proxies in a distant war and doing so in a manner that perverted both American laws and values. Anti-Iran Jacksonianism and Hamiltonianism had embedded itself in America's Iran policy so thoroughly that in May 1987 the Reagan administration it even refused to react to an Iraqi missile launched at the USS *Stark*, which had been patrolling the Persian Gulf, resulting in the deaths of thirty-seven American sailors.⁴²

This acquiescence to the loss of American lives at Iraqi hands contrasted sharply with the US attitude towards Iranian aggression at sea. As the war dragged on, Iran escalated its strategy by laying mines in the Persian Gulf in 1987, as well as firing upon merchant ships that had recently been reflagged with the US flag. The US had taken it upon itself to ensure the freedom of the seas – a classic Hamiltonian concern – in this vital oil passage and responded by bombing Iranian military platforms.⁴³ However, it was only in April 1988 that the US and Iran came into direct conflict. An Iranian mine disabled the USS *Samuel B. Roberts*, causing great damage but no deaths. This prompted a classically Jacksonian disproportionate response, as President Reagan ordered the destruction of two oil platforms being used as Iranian naval bases in addition to attacking the Iranian warship *Sabalan*. In Operation Praying Mantis, the US sank the Iranian frigate *Sahand* – neglecting to rescue survivors – and severely damaged the *Sabalan*.⁴⁴

The deaths of seventy-seven Iranians in this action was compounded in July by the accidental downing of an Iranian passenger jet by the USS *Vincennes*, in which 290 civilians were killed. The US refused to apologize for this incident at the time and did not agree to pay compensation for eight years. The Iran-Iraq War concluded a few months later, with no border changes despite terrible loss of life.⁴⁵ American foreign policy historian George C. Herring gives credit to US actions in the Persian Gulf for hastening the end of the war. Nevertheless, it is clear that America's support for Iraq throughout most of the war – best understood through the Jacksonian and Hamiltonian schools of foreign policy – increased the number of casualties and ensured that Iran would remain a US adversary moving forward.⁴⁶

The Iran-Contra Affair

During the Iran-Iraq War, there was a brief rapprochement between Iran and the US. When exposed in 1986, this rapprochement – which became known as the Iran-Contra Affair – threatened to bring down the entire Reagan administration. While such reconciliation may seem antithetical to Jacksonian principles as Iran was a sworn enemy that supported terrorist proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, in reality the Iranian role in Lebanon was key to the whole affair. The Reagan administration was desperate to secure the release of hostages held by Iranian-sponsored proxies in Lebanon; it had become an issue of prestige and honor for

the administration.⁴⁷ To be seen negotiating directly with terrorists would have further degraded this honor.

In return for the release of three out of five hostages, the US - working through the Israeli government as an intermediary - supplied Iran with 2,500 anti-tank missiles and 300 surface-to-air missiles, which it desperately needed. Such arms sales had been banned since 1979. The US also provided Iran with satellite imagery that showed the locations of Iraqi troops. The US government then funneled the money Iran paid to the Contras rebel group in Nicaragua, which was fighting against the left-wing Sandinista government.⁴⁸ When the sordid affair was revealed in November 1986, it shocked policymakers in Washington. Paying in effect a ransom for hostages went against the Reagan administration's public stance on the matter, not to mention that the US Congress had previously explicitly banned funding the Contras.⁴⁹ Moreover, investigations revealed that the entire operation had essentially been run in secret by the White House and the CIA to ensure that it would never come to light.⁵⁰

The Iran-Contra Affair perfectly demonstrates the extent to which Jacksonian populism and a Hamiltonian focus on the balance of power had taken over America's Iran policy. Clearly, contravening a law passed by Congress was illegal. However, a key tenet of Jacksonianism is how it assumes that politics always involves a degree of corruption. Jacksonians worry more about *perversion*, i.e. whether the corruption is benefitting elites in Washington or instead aiding the goals of the 'folk community'.⁵¹ In this context, bypassing a Congress averse to conflict in order to fight Communism while also securing the release of Americans held hostage is exactly the sort of corruption Jacksonians can abide by. There was also another reason for Jacksonians - as well as Hamiltonians - to support the exchange of arms with Iran. The administration feared that Iran might disintegrate under the pressure of both the war and internal conflicts, thereby allowing the Soviet Union to overrun the state and gain abundant oil reserves in addition to excellent maritime access to the Persian Gulf. Tyler suggests that such an invasion was inconceivable while the Soviet Union was bogged down in Afghanistan, but he, James A. Bill, and Herring all acknowledged that it was a motivating factor for the Reagan administration's actions.⁵² For Hamiltonians and Jacksonians who primarily oriented their policy around containing Communism, balancing Iran against the Soviet Union while also balancing Iraq against Iran was simply common sense.

If it was common sense, however, it was blatantly unlawful common sense. For Jeffersonians, the Iran-Contra affair exemplified the dangers of foreign entanglements to the US. For the sake of three hostages and some vaguer broad strategic concerns about the balance of power in the Middle East, the Reagan administration had run roughshod over Congress's prerogative to allocate funds. Jeffersonians' fear of conflict allowing the development of an imperial presidency seemed to have been vindicated. Wilsonians in Congress were also shocked by the actions of the administration. The Contras were a brutal force that committed countless human rights abuses in their war with the Sandinistas (who were far from paragons of virtue themselves). Not wishing to support a militia committing crimes inimical to American values and fearful of 'another Vietnam', the US Congress passed multiple restrictions on aid to the Contras.⁵³ Moreover, dealing with Iran through an Israeli back-channel and selling arms to both Iraq and Iran also violated the tenets of Wilsonianism.

This school emphasizes the prevention of wars as opposed to profiting off them, and heartily dislikes any form of agreement or alliance with tyrannical regimes.⁵⁴

Conclusion

By 1989, Iran was exhausted after over a decade of revolution and war. However, the one constant over this period was Iran's steadily increasing fear and suspicion of American intentions. Iran therefore continued to arm terrorist proxies in the Middle East, as well as beginning its own nuclear weapons program.⁵⁵ While this change in the US-Iran relationship was heavily influenced by factors internal to Iran, Mead's different schools of US foreign policy are vital for understanding the decisions made by US policymakers during this period. The Hamiltonian focus on alliances and the global economy failed to anticipate the resurgence in fundamentalism within Iran. The Jacksonians backed an alliance with an equally tyrannical Iraq, as well as authorizing violent responses to Iranian infractions which seemed sure to solidify anti-Americanism in Iranian hearts. After having had some influence during the Carter administration, both Jeffersonians and Wilsonians were essentially reduced to protesting from the sidelines, as the Reagan administration's support for Saddam and the disastrous Iran-Contra affair was pursued against every tenet their foreign policy schools hold dear. While all four foreign policy schools had some influence on the policies of the Carter and Reagan administrations towards Iran, it seems evident that Hamiltonianism and Jacksonianism dominated – and indeed, have mostly continued to do so since.

Notes

¹ George C. Herring, *The American Century and Beyond: U.S. Foreign Relations, 1893-2014* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 548.

² Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: America in the Middle East* (London: Portobello Books, 2009), 332-5.

³ Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed The World* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 52-5. To somewhat oversimplify, the distinction this set of authors make between the approaches focuses on the motivations for a given foreign policy decision or decisions.

⁵ Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 113-5. Monten himself refers to these schools as 'exemplarist' and 'vindicationalist'. Again, to somewhat oversimplify, these authors distinguish between the approaches based on the degree of America's involvement in the world.

⁶ Mead, 86-90.

⁷ Ray Takeyh, "The United States and Iran: Challenges of Deterrence and Compellence," in *The Oxford Handbook of US National Security*, ed. Derek S. Reviron, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and John A. Cloud (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 357-73. That is, Takeyh contrasts between strategies which aimed to compel Iran to change a foreign policy decision/action which was deleterious to the United States and those which aimed to deter them from taking such actions in the first place.

⁸ Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 1-10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125-31.

¹² Inderjeet Parmar, "The U.S.-led Liberal Order: Imperialism by Another Name?" *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 155-160. Parmar criticizes the US-led liberal world order which he describes as legitimising itself through a 'liberal internationalist' doctrine. This covers both Hamiltonianism and Wilsonianism in Mead's typology.

¹³ Mead, 132-73.

¹⁴ Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

¹⁵ Erez Manela, “The Wilsonian Moment and the rise of Anticolonial nationalism: The case of Egypt,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12, no. 4 (2001): 99-122. Manela suggests that America’s refusal to support anti-colonialist movements after World War I led these movements to turn away from American democratic ideals, instead finding solace in communism or fascism.

¹⁶ Mead, 174-217.

¹⁷ Mead, 218-63.

¹⁸ Tyler, 205-6.

¹⁹ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 171.

²⁰ Bill, 226-33; Herring, 548-9.

²¹ Bill, 228-34.

²² Herring, 550.

²³ Tyler, 217-20.

²⁴ Bill, 248-54.

²⁵ Tyler, 210-2.

²⁶ Bill, 276-82. No US government official had any official face-to-face contact with Khomeini during the entire revolutionary period.

²⁷ James G. Blight, Janet M. Lang, Hussein Banai, Malcolm Byrne, and John Tirman, *Becoming Enemies: U.S.-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-1988* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 55.

²⁸ Herring, 550-1.

²⁹ Bill, 283-5. Senator Henry Jackson, it should be noted, was no relation of President Andrew Jackson.

³⁰ Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America’s War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 408.

³¹ Mead, 246.

³² Bowden, 211; 402.

³³ Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 45-67.

³⁴ Tyler, 239.

³⁵ Razoux, 68-81.

³⁶ Bill, 306-7.

³⁷ Shane Harris and Matthew M. Aid, “Exclusive: CIA Files Prove America Helped Saddam As He Gassed Iran,” *Foreign Policy*, August 26, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/26/exclusive-cia-files-prove-america-helped-saddam-as-he-gassed-iran/>

³⁸ Tyler, 297.

³⁹ Harris and Aid, “America Helped Saddam.” <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/26/exclusive-cia-files-prove-america-helped-saddam-as-he-gassed-iran/>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Tyler, 326-31.

⁴² Bill, 307.

⁴³ Razoux, 420-32.

⁴⁴ Tyler, 331-4.

⁴⁵ Razoux, 448-68.

⁴⁶ Herring, 581.

⁴⁷ Tyler, 321-5.

⁴⁸ Razoux, 379-84.

⁴⁹ Herring, 580.

⁵⁰ Tyler, 325-6.

⁵¹ Mead, 238-9.

⁵² Bill, 310-11; Herring, 579; Tyler, 323.

⁵³ Herring, 590-2.

⁵⁴ Mead, 162-6.

⁵⁵ Tyler, 385-6.

A Counternarrative Approach to 9/11: Satirizing the Unspeakable in the Works of Ken Kalfus and Art Spiegelman

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After the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, literary critics raised a broad debate on how to write about these events, and also if it was necessary at all to start talking about it. One of the main frameworks through which the events came to be understood and talked about was that of trauma theory, which pointed to the unspeakable quality of the events and led to a general "inward turn" of novels that tried to deal with 9/11, with authors trying to cope with the national trauma through familiar structures.¹ At first, as literary scholar Catherine Morley points out: "novelists handling the events of 9/11 framed them within the personal and the small-scale."² This 'domestication', this tendency to talk about the events primarily in terms of their effects on the individuals' private life, came to characterize mainstream literature about 9/11, shifting the main focus from the political to the personal sphere. This focus on the personal seems to have never been fully challenged. Not even at a later time, when writers started producing what could be considered a counternarrative that went against and criticized the political and cultural status established by the main media in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. This essay will investigate two works that deal with the events of 9/11: *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* by Ken Kalfus and *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman. Both make use of satire, but also show that the tendency towards domesticity is hard to escape in works about the attacks. Despite their aim to criticize the mainstream 9/11 novel and satirize American politics, the authors of these books cannot seem to get away from this tendency either. Therefore, even if these satirical works could be seen as a point of departure for the flourishing of a counternarrative genre, their role can be challenged on several levels.

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, any use of satire to talk about the events was promptly and severely banned by mainstream media and popular consensus, and were set aside as a dangerous and inappropriate way to represent the events. According to scholar William R. Jones, this reaction was the result of "insecurity and fear:" instead of facing the trauma, there was a general tendency to try to go back to a previous and imaginary state of innocence.³ In a situation like this, there was no space for a genre that "demands intellectual engagement with a living and ambiguous present."⁴ Spiegelman himself testified to the difficulty he had in the first few months after the attacks to find publishers for his comic strips, as they were rejected by leading newspapers. His works first came out through a transnational collaboration, with his main publishers being in Europe. When he finished the book in 2004, in his own words: "the cultural climate had changed."⁵ It was now possible to talk more freely

about the government's antiterrorist actions, and his comic pages were full of rage and disappointment with people who were not opposing a system where Homeland Security measures were undermining civil liberties. As literature professor Richard Gray points out: "with time, and in the absence of additional attacks, fear and pain recede, disremembering becomes forgetting, and the ironic satirist finds the space to declaim again, but not without some lingering scars."⁶

Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006) is a brilliant parody of the typical domestic novel that emerged after 9/11. Through the extensive use of satire, he overturns the common perception and the normal reaction to those traumatic moments and their consequences by exaggerating the connection between the protagonists' personal lives and American history. According to literary critic Linda Hutcheon, parody is "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text. Parody is repetition with critical distance, which echoes past works in order to borrow a context and to evoke an atmosphere."⁷ It must not be confused with satire, which is "a mode, an attitude, or a procedure, which invades different literary forms with a variety of aims, including to investigate, to please, to aggravate, to reaffirm, and to disown."⁸ Parody is often used as a medium for social and political critique and, together with satire, it uses irony in order to ridicule and criticize the cultural, social, and political context.⁹

Kalfus's novel can be considered a parody of most common 9/11 novels in that it depicts how the catastrophe affected the life of an average American family. However, it overturns all the conventions of the serious novel through what literary scholar Katherina Dodou calls the use of "disjunctive tactic:" the protagonists' "reactions violate a series of expectations, including expectations about typical reactions to the presumed death of a family member and reactions to the attacks, and also about appropriate ways of writing about these topics."¹⁰ Thus, anxiety and despair about the attacks on the Twin Towers here become joy and exhilaration, hope for the destruction of the other partner.

The novel opens in medias res: we are immediately told that the protagonists are in the middle of a nasty divorce and that, on the morning of the attacks, both of them could be involved in the tragedy. Marshall, the husband, works at the World Trade Center, while Joyce, the wife, should have been on one of the planes that hit the towers. Marshall manages to escape from the towers, while a last-minute change of plans saves Joyce, but for a few hours, they both think (and hope) that the other is dead. While Joyce is watching the collapse of the towers from her office, her reaction sharply deviates from the one commonly depicted: "The building turned into a rising mushroom-shaped column of smoke, dust, and perished life, and she felt a great gladness."¹¹ As Dodou writes: "Satire offers freedom from the restraints of expectations placed on reports of 9/11 in the news media, which, as critics have shown, focused on grief, mourning, and national memorialization."¹² Kalfus uses the trope of the familiar and domestic, generally used to depict the protagonist's struggle to recover from the attacks, and distorts it by metaphorically representing marriage as a war, thus bringing to the edge the general post-9/11 tendency of "militarizing mourning and sentimentalizing politics."¹³ At the beginning of the novel, we are told that Joyce is very aware that her husband plotted against her: "Marshall worked stealthily, finding allies among distant acquaintances and

family; he passed damaging gossip untraceably.”¹⁴ Even the dog is “a slobbering, stinking, slacks-tearing instrument in Marshall’s campaign against her, a war fought in the shadows.”¹⁵ A war in which their children are at the same time weapons to be used against the other and “civilian casualties.”¹⁶

Throughout the book, we follow the developments of the divorce between Marshall and Joyce, in a series of escalations that, at times, reach the tragicomic and absurd. Their respective lawyers had suggested the couple to continue sharing their apartment. They now live in a situation where they try to ignore each other as much as possible. Through their relationship, Kalfus highlights some of the general paranoia, fears, and criticism that spread after 9/11: the anthrax scare, terror sex, the extreme monitoring of citizens perpetrated by the government, criticism of the FBI’s failure, and the stock market crash. When, for example, a letter with what is initially believed to be anthrax arrives at Joyce’s office, the entire building is evacuated by the FBI, and the case ends up on the television news. In this scene, Kalfus mocks the government’s Homeland Security practices: Joyce thinks she recognizes the handwriting on the letter the sender wrote, and she even confesses to an FBI agent that her husband could have written it. As Dodou writes, “The novel ridicules this call to civic responsibility and mocks its ineffectuality as a strategy, as it has Joyce report information that is not only baseless, but also immaterial to the search for bioterrorists.”¹⁷ This is a crucial point because, besides the state of general paranoia, where all common citizens are invited by the State to be vigilant, Joyce’s egotism is also exposed: she needs to think she is so important that all of this happened because of her. Now more than ever, she compares her marriage to a war in which she is the victim, and her husband is the enemy.

This identification of Marshall with the enemy increasingly becomes real as the novel develops: he actually starts listening to Joyce’s phone calls through a device he bought to detect any move she could make against him. Even if, according to law scholar Carla Spivack, this novel, like other novels in the genre, fails to address “the dismemberment of civil rights and constitutional protections that started almost immediately after the attacks” when “the FBI significantly increased its warrantless wiretaps of U.S. citizens,” in this scene we can see how Kalfus uses irony and satire to criticize exactly those practices. Dodou points out, “the analogy requires the readers to ask ‘whose security’ it is that the government’s homeland security strategies serve and suggests that interests other than safety may motivate them.”¹⁸ This scene, together with the one with the anthrax threat, cleverly criticizes not only the government’s politics and state of suspicion in which it cast American citizens, but also the citizens themselves. A criticism that, in this case, takes the shape of the protagonists and the FBI agent: as Dodou points out, “In terms of satirical provocation, then Kalfus does not only attack the normalization of the ‘state of exception.’ He also attacks the custodians of this social order: American citizens themselves, who are unable or unwilling to discharge their responsibilities in denouncing the government’s trespassing on civil liberties and human rights.”¹⁹

Furthermore, Kalfus puts into question who the villain is. By identifying Marshall as the enemy, he is associated with Islamic extremism. For example, on the phone, Joyce tells her sister, “I can’t talk. Osama’s holed up in Tora Bora.”²⁰ Later, when he is forced to leave

the apartment, and his family is watching a statue of Saddam Hussein being torn down on TV, Marshall shouts: “You think it’s symbolic, don’t you? ‘Another evil person removed!’ There’s no analogy here! I’m a nice guy.”²¹ At the same time, his identification with the enemy could be associated with his being American: after all, he is the one who secretly entered his wife’s bank account in the hope of draining off all her savings and who wired her phone in order to listen to her conversations, actions which make us think of the American government’s civil rights violations in the name of social security.

The most exhilarating and absurd scene in the novel is when Marshall puts on a bomb-jacket and tries to make himself and the entire family explode while shouting: “God is great.”²² The bombs do not go off, probably because he misplaced some wire because the instructions he followed were in Arabic. Therefore, Joyce interrupts their regular habit of ignoring each other to help him connect the wires. At that point, the children join their parents, and Marshall remembers “how the family once looked to the outside world, how it had once been: a compact unit, loving and intimate.”²³ Being suddenly fatigued, he stops her and goes away, while Joyce accuses him of “not follow[ing] through with anything.”²⁴ What makes the scene absurd and ironic is that the only thing that manages to bring the family together again is that which would have killed them all.

Moreover, this episode can be seen as the culminating point of a continued escalation of acts due to traumatic events that marked Marshall, who never really had the possibility to work through his trauma of barely surviving the collapsing towers. Professor Thomas A. Bjerre argues that Marshall shows signs of “emotionally paralyzed masculinity.”²⁵ In this scene, Marshall tries to grasp a bit of control over the evolving situation around him: “Far from embodying any sense of traditional male heroism, Marshall is just as insecure and confused as everyone else. But because of the hegemonic configuration of masculinity, he feels obligated to live up to its impossible ideals.”²⁶ Marshall is unable to comply to that role; therefore, the image of the family re-united after the attacks is totally destroyed and subverted. Kalfus “suggest[s] the novel’s anti-sentimental attitude toward the American family at a time when the family unit served as a particularly powerful metaphor for patriotic unity and for the promise of recuperation.”²⁷

These scenes serve to make clear the political and cultural satire that Kalfus levels against what President Bush intended with his rhetoric of “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”²⁸ In this way, he called for total unity in times of mourning, almost promising war to those who did not comply with this motto. As Gray puts it: “The irony is that, relying on a familiar romance pattern – in which couples meet, romantic and domestic problems follow, to be concluded in reconciliation or rupture – books like this simply assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures. The crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated.”²⁹ Therefore, on the one hand, the novel partakes in the usual domestication of the events, which does not allow it to avoid the normalization schemes of the post 9/11 novel. On the other, using familiar structures to satirize the events could be seen as an intentional, critical act on Kalfus’s part: in this way, he mocks the over-personalization of the traumatic events, exaggerating it to an extreme, also giving space to the critique of American

white-centrism, deliberately avoiding almost completely the representation of the figure of “the other,” allowing it to enter the discourse only as something exotic and far from “us.”³⁰

Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel similarly participates in the “domestication” of 9/11’s traumatic events. The book is divided into two parts: the first consists of ten comic plates, while the second consists of “A Comic Supplement:” seven plates with old comics strips which Spiegelman claims brought him comfort while coping with the events.³¹ This essay will mainly focus on the first series of plates, those designed by Spiegelman. These plates illustrate his own use of political satire in relation to the US government and Islamic terrorism, while intertwining it with his personal experience of the collapsing towers: he wants to let us know his own version of the story. Significantly, the first strip in which he represents himself does not portray the traditionally “strong hero”; on the contrary, he is represented as a neurotic man who feels the need to obsessively retell his story.

The caption reads like this: “Doomed! Doomed to drag this damn albatross around my neck, and compulsively retell the calamities of September 11th to anyone who’ll still listen!”³² This first vignette provides a useful example of how the fall of the towers was initially also seen as an attack on masculinity. In response to it, the media constructed a “gendered narrative of 9/11” where “the male hero was again a prevailing cultural icon, invoking a narrative of strength to a nation seeking emotional grounding.”³³ Spiegelman is aware that he is being neurotic and paranoid; he actually opens his book as follows: “I tend to be easily unhinged. Minor mishaps – a clogged drain, running late for an appointment – send me into a sky-is-falling tizzy. It’s a trait that can leave one ill-equipped for coping with the sky when it actually falls.”³⁴ As professor Kristiaan Versluys reports: “The refusal to strike a ‘manly’ pose, the refusal, ultimately, to participate in crusades and manhunts and to answer aggression with aggression is an expression of Jewish *Menschlichkeit*, which posits that given a choice between good and evil, one must choose ‘what is morally and ethically right.’”³⁵ With such an opening, we expect to find a lot about the author’s reactions to the traumatic events throughout the book.

Nonetheless, even if he is aware that he is traumatized, he does not retreat into himself but rather feels the urge to speak up, as “such commitment is embedded in the personal need to diminish anxiety.”³⁶ Both Kalfus’s male protagonist and Spiegelman show what Caruth called the “notion of the drive to life,” an urge to continue living and affirming oneself despite the paralysis characteristic of trauma.³⁷ However, Spiegelman cannot get out of this circle of repetition by slipping back again and again into the description of the falling towers. Indeed, the ten plates common element is a digital drawing of the collapsing tower that he tried to reproduce as it was imprinted in his mind that morning. This is an obsessive act that fits in seamlessly with Caruth’s explanation of trauma theory, according to which a traumatized person cannot experience the traumatic events at the moment these happen due to “unpreparedness” but tends to “relive it over and over again.”³⁸ What Spiegelman does, despite a condition that usually reduces people to silence, is to speak up. He does not surrender to his trauma but feels compelled to talk according to what has been defined as an urge toward “critical citizenship,” which is the need for a citizen to think of himself as a political subject in connection with other power dynamics. Spiegelman cannot escape his duty

of denouncing the instrumentalization of the events enacted by the government; an urge defined more negatively by others as a “narcissistic contemplation of his own wound.”³⁹

The domestication of traumatic events is more evident in the first few plates, which are mainly about the rescue of their daughter Nadja from school, a school at the foot of the towers, to which they rush as soon as they see the first plane crashing into the building. When they arrive at the school, they are the only parents admitted inside due to their “hysteria:” that is one occasion when this quality is useful.⁴⁰ But we see also how this hysteria can be dangerous, as it spreads rapidly: their daughter, indeed, later told her father “she wasn’t scared till she saw me there.”⁴¹ The focus on himself, his feelings and thoughts, and the tragedy his family is living through, all contribute to the narrative of domestication so widespread after 9/11. While Kalfus uses the form of the novel in order to parody and satirize the politics and culture after 9/11 through the vicissitudes of a New York family, Spiegelman recounts the events from his personal point of view, thus re-enacting in some way this sort of domestication, even if in a different way, by focusing on the personal and familiar.

Moreover, we should keep in mind that his original project with the book was to depict only his personal view of the morning of the attacks and its aftermath, but “his original idea is abandoned halfway through the series. He intended to recount how he had to race across the city to retrieve his son from the United Nations school, but suddenly this project seemed less urgent once the war with Iraq began.”⁴² If he had followed his original plan, his final project would have been even more inscribed into the mainstream narrative, but the urge to give voice to his conscience changes his focus. Because of his later involvement, then, we can still include his comic novel in the “counternarrative” genre, in the sense that he does not buy the hegemonic discourse perpetrated by a government to which everybody seemed to have to agree. As Versluys points out, “Spiegelman’s political commitment is part of the working-through of the trauma.”⁴³ Witnessing the attacks, he understands his roots are firmly planted in New York, that even if he did not like those towers and the meaning they had, he still cherished them: “his fidelity to 9/11 fired his opposition to the Bush administration, which, in his opinion, violated the true meaning of the events and dispossessed their true owners.”⁴⁴ The true owners, the American citizens, are meanwhile being lied to and manipulated for the government’s gain, maybe unaware of what is really going on, and facing this injustice, he cannot put his head in the ground.⁴⁵

In plate 8, Spiegelman clearly critiques the war waged by the Bush administration against Iraq, with his own caricature seemingly guiding a platoon of soldiers while praising the USA’s swift military victory. This satirical take immediately calls to mind the critique included in the conclusion of Kalfus’ novel. In both works, indeed, there is the subversion of what really happened, satirizing the idea spread by the government that the war was swiftly won by the USA, while the reality is very far away from this view. Thus, while Spiegelman says, “So, how’d you like that war? Well, we’re number one! We won! We won! We won!”, in Kalfus’ novel the government announces that “the Iraq war had been won with unprecedented speed and dexterity.”⁴⁶ This “fantasy of national unity,” of the perfect community which, united, was able to destroy a common enemy, is the fantasy mocked by Kalfus when he writes: “*What if*

*Bush was right!*⁴⁷ A fantasy which, in reality, remained a fantasy and provoked a rise in anti-American sentiments in foreign countries.

Another similarity with Kalfus's novel is the ambiguity of the definition of good and evil, of who is actually the "bad guy." This ambiguity, which we first saw in the character of Marshall in *A Disorder*, is used here as the writer-protagonist depicts himself as the victim, "equally terrorized by Al-Qaeda and his own government."⁴⁸ In Spiegelman's work, too, there seem to be two evils and no good guy, but only victims, in the form of civilians, of a war protracted for reasons other than those propagandized. This view is quite revolutionary in a cultural narrative that depicted America as both victim and hero to rescue the nation from a foreign evil.⁴⁹ Spiegelman suggests that while "Our hero is trapped reliving the traumas of Sept 11, 2001... [u]nbeknownst to him, brigands suffering from war fever have since hijacked those tragic events...," thus the Bush administration's reduction of the traumatic events to militaristic propaganda, which equally "hijacked" Americans as the terrorists had done.⁵⁰

Later on, the artist represents himself as not being able to sleep because he expects the world to end any moment: he thinks he is crazy in his expectation that something else tragic will happen, but then he "glance[s] at the news and there's absolutely no doubt... The Sky is Falling!!!"⁵¹ His paranoia seems not so much only his anymore since it is fed by tv news and newspapers, putting everybody into a state of alarm and frenzy: the author himself writes that he "realize(d) that *all* New Yorkers were out of their minds compared to those for whom the attack was an abstraction."⁵² As Karen Espiritu writes, "Certainly the American government has itself appropriated and flaunted its nation's projected 'victim status' as a country besieged by terrorists who loathe freedom; this, to garner unquestioning electoral support for the often aggressive decisions the US makes with regards to those sovereign countries it authoritatively deems as 'rogue nation-states.'"⁵³ Thus, stimulating this state of alertness, and emphasizing their status of victims, served the government in order to continue undisturbed with its practice of social control, moving into "full dystopian Big Brother mode" and silencing any kind of protest against a war they so rashly announced.⁵⁴

In conclusion, Gray has argued that "new events generate new forms of consciousness requiring new structures of ideology and the imagination to assimilate and express them."⁵⁵ However, regarding the new novels that came out about 9/11, the answer to the question if these structures are new is negative. As many critics have pointed out, no grandiose change happened in post-9/11 literature as "cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists," a scheme used by American novelists whenever something new came up in their time.⁵⁶ In this sense, both Kalfus and Spiegelman's books still partially and firmly fit into this domestic narrative framework. Nonetheless, they fit into it in very different ways: the first by re-enacting the plot of the familiar novel, even if subverting it, and the other by focusing on his personal trauma and the sudden disruption of his daily routine by those morning attacks. Where words are deemed ineffective, the use of images helps explain a trauma that generally "cannot be voiced."⁵⁷

Simultaneously, unlike other writers, they both succeed in criticizing the politics and cultural climate of the aftermath of 9/11 through the extensive use of satire. In this sense, they

can be seen, at least to some extent, as part of a counternarrative genre, if we consider this being one that goes against the status of numbness and political consensus that took over the American population under the Bush administration - at least before the Iraq war. As Dodou argues, “comedy and satire today are defined as acts of political resistance, also since the task of the 9/11 novelist has been described as offering intellectual clarification and a counterweight to patriotic definitions of 9/11.”⁵⁸ If, as Lucy Bond suggests, no valid counternarrative has been produced due to the “overreliance upon themes of trauma,” a case could be made that satire is the most effective counternarrative genre in a panorama of “interpretative void.”⁵⁹ At the same time, as Morley argues, “writers [cannot be asked] to write about what they don’t really know.”⁶⁰ But then the question arises of why and how, in a country which has always prided itself on its openness and multi-ethnicity, authors do not feel compelled to open their discourse to “the other,” preferring instead to focus on domesticity.⁶¹

Notes

¹ Lucy Bond, “Compromised Critique: A Meta-critical Analysis of American Studies after 9/11,” *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2011): 734; Ruth Franklin, “The Novel Turns Inward,” *The New Republic* 242, no. 13 (2011): 11.

² Catherine Morley, “‘How Do We Write about This?’ The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel,” *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2011): 717.

³ William R. Jones, “‘People Have to Watch What They Say’: What Horace, Juvenal, and 9/11 Can Tell Us about Satire and History,” *Helios* 36, no. 1 (2009): 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵ Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, (Viking, 2004), ii.

⁶ Richard Gray, “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis,” *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 138.

⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1985), 6.

⁸ Katherina Dodou, “Satirical Frame of Mind: Ken Kalfus’s *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* and the Literary Engagement with 9/11,” *European Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2017): 6.

⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989): 97.

¹⁰ Doudou, 5.

¹¹ Ken Kalfus, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (Harper Perennial, 2006): 3.

¹² Dodou, 5.

¹³ Bond, 733.

¹⁴ Kalfus, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ Dodou, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ Kalfus, 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

²² *Ibid.*, 188.

²³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Thomas A. Bjerre, “Post-9/11 Literary Masculinities in Kalfus, DeLillo, and Hamid,” *Orbis Litterarum* 67, no. 3 (2012): 243.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁷ Dodou, 5.

²⁸ George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20th, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.html>.

²⁹ Gray, 134.

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- ³⁰ Exotic use of the figure of “the other” can be seen in the novel in various scenes, for example when Joyce goes to an Afghan restaurant, or when TV reports on Afghanistan life let her think of Afghan women as “valuable objects with mystic attributes.” See Kalfus, 62-63.
- ³¹ Spiegelman, *The Comic Supplement*, 1.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 2.
- ³³ Bjerre, 242.
- ³⁴ Spiegelman, 1.
- ³⁵ Kristiaan Versluys, “Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*: 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006): 986.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 987.
- ³⁷ Cathy Caruth, “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival,” *Intervalla: Platform for Intellectual Exchange* 2 (2014): 30.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21; Versluys, 993.
- ³⁹ Karen Espiritu, “Putting Grief into Boxes: Trauma and the Crisis of Democracy in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 28, no. 2 (2006): 195; Versluys, 995.
- ⁴⁰ Spiegelman, 3.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁴² Martha Kuhlman, “The Traumatic Temporality of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 5 (2007): 861.
- ⁴³ Versluys, 992.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 993.
- ⁴⁵ The reference here is to Spiegelman’s plate of the “Ostrich party”: being unrepresented by the two parties at the government, he proposes a third one which would truly represent American citizens (plate 5).
- ⁴⁶ Spiegelman, 8; Kalfus, 229.
- ⁴⁷ Spivack, 881; Kalfus, 202.
- ⁴⁸ Spiegelman, 2.
- ⁴⁹ Elizabeth Anker, “Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11,” *Journal of Communication* 55, no 1 (2005): 23.
- ⁵⁰ Anker, 4.
- ⁵¹ Spiegelman, 9.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, i.
- ⁵³ Espiritu, 191.
- ⁵⁴ Spiegelman, ii.
- ⁵⁵ Gray, 134.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134; Morley, 721.
- ⁵⁷ Bond, 734.
- ⁵⁸ Dodou, 13.
- ⁵⁹ Bond, 733.
- ⁶⁰ Morley, 720.
- ⁶¹ See the critical articles by Gray, Rothberg and Said.

Politicizing Memory: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Collective Memory in the United States

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This paper contains a section of a thesis written for the BA program in International Studies

The United States is full of monuments and memorials dedicated to specific events, periods, and people in its history, ranging from Mount Rushmore and the Statue of Liberty to the many sites around the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Public monuments and memorials play a crucial role in the remembrance of historical events because they can frame discussions on the history it commemorates. This means that if a government wishes to influence how historical events are remembered, it can promote the construction of memorials that frame events in a positive light for the government.¹ Of the memorials built in the United States over the past fifty years, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is one of the most visited.² Despite its current popularity, the process of creating this memorial was at times highly controversial.

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to examine how political actors in the United States have attempted to affect the collective memory of the Vietnam War. This analysis not only contributes to our understanding of the current collective memory of the Vietnam War, but it also yields further insight into processes of collective memory building in general. The first section provides an overview of the relevant literature on memory in relation to war, trauma, and memorials. The second section discusses public opinion on the Vietnam War in the United States during and after the war. The third section subsequently examines the creation process of the memorial and the controversy surrounding it. Finally, the fourth section will evaluate how the Vietnam War has been remembered since the creation of the monument.

Literature on Collective Memory and the Commemoration of War

Prior to the twentieth century, most Western societies saw war as a logical and necessary aspect of life, to be relied upon for their continued existence. According to historian Paul Fussell, warfare changed into its modern form during the First World War. This was due to the traumatic nature of the conflict, which also influenced the way academics interpreted accounts of war.³ One of the most notable early writings on trauma might be Sigmund Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," where he describes what would later become known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In her work on war and memory, Elizabeth Samet points to Freud's book as a critical moment in the evolution of the remembrance of war. With the advent of modern warfare, forgetting became just as significant as remembering in the process of understanding the past.⁴ Following Freud's research on

trauma in soldiers' recollections, first-hand accounts of war became a central topic within the study of memory of war. The subject of forgetting first came up in this study of individual trauma and memory of war. More recently, Catherine Hall and Daniel Pick examine a related topic that builds on forgetting: denial in history. They call for a greater recognition of forgetting and denial on an individual level in the study of history, because it would help understand the motivations and overall psyche of the individuals studied, regardless of their direct interactions with war or trauma.⁵ Moreover, Hall and Pick posit that denial in the political sphere is used to create communities and nations.⁶ However, this field of research almost always emphasizes the impact of trauma on individual memory rather than collective memory.

More recently, scholars have begun to expand the study of forgetting to cases of collective memory. For instance, Timothy Recuber brings forgetting into the discussion on commemoration, which he defines as “protest against the urge to forget.”⁷ Specifically, he asserts that people naturally try to repress traumatic events, such as wartime experiences, which would otherwise be gradually forgotten over time. Making a similar connection as Recuber while staying focused on individual memory, Hall and Pick do point to commemoration as a key tool in achieving a sense of unity. In their argument, commemoration is the communal, active act of remembering some shared event, often in public.⁸ Yet, the most commonly discussed form of commemoration in connection to memory and war is the public memorial, often sponsored by a government. In his book *Remembering War*, Jay Winter finds that the task of these memorials is not limited to the facilitation of commemoration. Instead, he argues that war memorials also serve another role: bringing history into the present and to the people.⁹ The arguments made by these authors makes it evident that people's collective remembering and forgetting is influenced most effectively through public commemoration. As such, commemoration can be a tool to harness the past for current political objectives.¹⁰

The way groups of people remember events is central to Aleida Assmann's theory of collective memory. She divides collective memory into three subcategories: social, cultural, and political memory. Of these three forms of collective memory, social memory stands closest to individual memory, which she defines as “the past as communicated (or repressed) within a given society.”¹¹ Key to the concept of social memory is that it does not transcend generations; it refers only to collective memories of individual experiences. As individuals age and pass away, the social memory of an event changes, and eventually disappears. Cultural and political memory, however, do extend beyond a single generation. This means that they usually take shape over longer periods of time. To help sustain collective memory over time, it relies heavily on imagery and symbolism. The aspects of social memory that survive into future generations become what Assmann calls cultural memory. Cultural memory is made up predominantly of a ‘canon’ of memories, which is a key element of the culture it belongs to. Memories in this category are generally less nuanced than the social memories they grew out of, and can instead communicate values the way myths or fables might. The final category that Assmann identifies is political memory, which she defines as “institutionalized, top-down memory.”¹² It is a purposeful construction of memory that tries to imitate the bottom-up

structure of cultural memories. On a practical level, the political construction of memories manifests itself as attempts by states or other institutions to add memories to a cultural canon for a political agenda, for example to aid the strengthening or shifting of national identity.¹³

It is Assmann's concept of political memory that is most relevant to the study of commemoration and war memorials, as memorials are among the most direct ways in which a government can influence the commemoration of a conflict. Adam Piette addresses the connection between political memory, commemoration, and forgetting in his discussion of *Memory, History, Forgetting* by Paul Ricoeur. In his article, Piette examines a case study of commemoration in post-World War Two France, comparing two mass murders by Nazi troops. Specifically, he investigates how these events are remembered differently by the general public and what role the post-war French government played in constructing these differences in commemoration. Through his comparison of these cases, Piette convincingly demonstrates that commemorative objects and events were politically constructed to emphasize certain aspects of the historical events, while downplaying other parts. In a way, these differences in commemoration served the narrative of the French government in the rebuilding of its national identity.¹⁴ Piette's work demonstrates that forgetting helps people make sense of events that have faded from collective memory. Furthermore, he shows that forgetting should be considered when looking at events of which the memory has been transformed to serve a political goal.

In summary, the idea of forgetting has become more influential than the concept of remembering in the study of war and memory over the course of the twentieth century. First, on an individual level, forgetting is linked to personal trauma and the effect of war on the mind. Second, on a public level, a relationship has developed between the memory of war and forgetting, which plays out most clearly in memorials. Memorials are an aid to commemoration, and thus to remembering, but can also aid in forgetting. These memorials help reshape the memories of the public for political ends. One such memorial is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., which has been pivotal in its effect on the collective memory of the Vietnam War since its creation.

Before the Memorial

The evolution of collective memory of the Vietnam War in the United States can be divided into two periods with a distinct emphasis: before and after the creation of the memorial. Public opinion before the creation of the memorial was highly anti-war. Opinion polls conducted by Gallup between 1965 and 1971, during the final phases of the conflict, showed that over 60 percent of Americans believed that sending troops to Vietnam had been a mistake. Similarly, roughly 60 percent disapproved of how President Nixon approached the situation.¹⁵ These sentiments were reflected in the large number of protests against the Vietnam War. William Berkowitz, who studied them as they were occurring, estimates that over 1,000 protests were held during the war, with over two million cumulative protesters.¹⁶ Another study by Berkowitz shows that many of the demonstrations had over 100,000 attendees at the primary locations, with many more at supportive gatherings across the country.¹⁷ Berkowitz' studies also confirm the results of the Gallup polls, which showed that

approximately 60 percent of bystanders at protests agreed to sign an anti-Vietnam war petition.¹⁸ The protests generally focused on three main sentiments: lack of progress, morality, and casualties.¹⁹ First, opponents of the war criticized both the lack of progress and the American government's duplicity toward its citizens concerning the progress and conduct of the war. Second, protestors questioned the morality of the military's conduct in Vietnam, such as the use of napalm and other chemicals. Finally, protesters worried about the large number of casualties on both sides of the conflict.

It is these three sentiments, framed by the massive public movements that they sparked, which laid the foundation for the collective memory of the Vietnam War in the years following the US withdrawal. One of the protestors' main arguments concerned the loss of life during the conflict, but their criticism did not center on American casualties. Instead, it focused predominantly on the harm done by US soldiers to the Vietnamese people.²⁰ This focus meant that the collective memory of the Vietnam War initially favored the larger geopolitical dimensions of the war. It was not until the discussion surrounding the Vietnam Veterans Memorial started receiving attention that the general public began to factor in the experiences of American veterans during and after the conflict. Nowadays, the collective memory is different with regards to the protests and the Vietnam War itself. How both of these are remembered has been colored by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the shift toward veteran experiences, as will be discussed later.

Nevertheless, despite this increased focus on the veteran experience in the war's collective memory, the contributions of the protest movement have not been completely erased. It is worth noting that it has changed American self-perception in two fundamental ways. First, the Vietnam protests were the first major negative reaction toward American military action abroad. This reaction led to a shift in American consciousness, as people began to question the role of their country as the world's peacekeeper. Second, citizens started to question their own place and influence within the democratic system for the first time in American history. This change was largely due to the relative ineffectiveness of other types of activism that were less disruptive than protests, as well as the government's slow reaction to the protests.²¹

Creation and Controversy

Although the anti-war protests took the forefront of any discussion on the Vietnam War in the second half of the 1970s, veterans of the conflict soon joined the debate as well. Indeed, considering that more than 3.4 million Americans served in South East Asia during the conflict, it was inevitable that they would eventually add their experiences to the conversation.²² The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) was founded in 1979 by a young Vietnam veteran, Jan Scruggs, to organize the necessary approvals and collect funding for a monument to commemorate the soldiers who had died fighting in Vietnam. Perhaps in part because of the strongly negative connotations with the Vietnam War that dominated US public opinion at that time, the efforts of the VVMF were initially not very successful. Both the general public and politicians showed little enthusiasm, and the organization failed to raise any substantial amount of money. The organization's connection to a relatively overlooked

aspect of the war initially led them to be unsuccessful. Nonetheless, this connection also meant that the VVMF and their cause were seen as distinctly apolitical, which would lead to their eventual success. Their image of political neutrality meant that the VVMF was seen as something that stood apart from the US involvement in Vietnam which was still a widely controversial topic. Over time, their apolitical identity helped build a support base for the fund, after which public interest in the memorial started to accelerate as well.²³

In the year following the founding of the VVMF, the organization joined forces with prominent sponsors that represented a cross-section of society to launch a funding campaign under the motto: “Honor the soldier, not the cause.”²⁴ With the help of these uncontroversial sponsors, support for the monument grew quickly, and in July 1980 a joint resolution by Congress put the creation of an official Vietnam Veterans Memorial in motion. This resolution established that the monument would not mention the conflict itself and should focus exclusively on the soldiers who fought in it. Similarly, when President Carter approved the resolution, he stated that he believed the explicit focus on honoring veterans would help to heal the nation. Overall, the early stages of the memorial’s creation started to amplify attention for the veteran experience.²⁵ By the time the Congressional resolution was passed, there was widespread support for the memorial. All aspects of the project were widely reported on, from its funding and design to the actual construction of the memorial, which further increased public interest in the monument. Nevertheless, the process of creating it remained fraught with conflict and disagreement, and the controversies were not finished.

The VVMF remained in charge of the design, construction, and funding of the monument. By the end of 1980, before any design had been chosen, the organization had already raised \$700,000.²⁶ In October of that same year, they announced a competition for the design of the memorial. It was already decided that the monument should focus on the names of those who died or went missing in Vietnam, and that it should “harmonize with its surroundings” so as not to interfere with the other monuments near the location.²⁷ On top of these requirements, the competition also called for the design to “make no political statement about the war.”²⁸ The winning design was picked anonymously by a jury and is now known as The Wall. It was designed by Maya Ying Lin, an architecture undergraduate at Yale University. The Wall is made of two black slabs of granite, sunk into the ground and standing at a wide angle from each other. Behind the monument, a grass lawn slopes up toward the top, while the granite walls on the inside bear the names of all Americans who died or went missing in Vietnam.

Despite the fact that Lin’s design met all the requirements set by the VVMF and was selected by a jury, the design was not received positively by everyone. Among the critics were certain government officials and significant backers of the fund, which led to considerable delays and disagreements about the advancement of the project.²⁹ Their main objection to the Wall was that the design went against the essence of what they wanted the memorial to represent. They felt that the lack of realism and the black material would not adequately honor the veterans’ bravery and sacrifice. They argued that Lin’s design was not an apolitical monument because the emphasis on the names neglected the larger picture, and instead projected a message about the futility of the conflict. It is worth noting that the two elements

most often specified by the opposition – the black stone and the lack of realism – in fact played a large role in the jury’s choice for the design. The black stone would reflect other surrounding monuments and thereby be in harmony with the environment, while the lack of realism was cited as an effective way for the monument to remain apolitical.³⁰ At the heart of this debate are two fundamentally different interpretations of the Vietnam War and how it should be commemorated. Especially notable is the fact that stakeholders disagreed whether the monument was apolitical. Remarkably, a single design choice brought across the monument’s political message for some, while this same choice represented the monument’s apolitical nature for others.

The conflict was finally resolved in 1984 when stakeholders agreed to create an additional part of the monument in a more traditional style: The Three Soldiers. This is a bronze statue of three soldiers, one White, one African American, and one Latino. As opposed to the Wall, which explicitly focuses on soldiers who did not return from the war, this statue is meant to explicitly honor those who did come home. The compromise also involved a few small additions to the Wall that would not compromise the original design, such as a small US flag carved into the stone.³¹

The creation process of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial played a large part in how the Vietnam War was remembered in the United States. The Wall is a great example of the way monuments embody all categories of collective memory as defined by Assmann. The idea for this memorial first arose with the VVMF, an organization made up of citizens that were not involved in the political system. Because the VVMF was a bottom-up organization, the original memories that created the need for a monument and the establishment of the organization behind it can be classified as social memory. The efforts by the first generation to create a symbol to help future generations remember and understand the event is part of the process of these social memories becoming part of the canon of cultural memory that Assmann describes. As soon as the government becomes involved in the process of designing and building the memorial, it also becomes part of political memory.³²

Specifically, government officials involved with the Memorial saw its construction as a chance to reshape the collective memory of the Vietnam War, as such changes could restore some of the public’s trust in government. Before Congress took an interest in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, protests against the war had led to a significant loss of confidence in the government. The memory of the Vietnam War had a heavy focus on the government’s decisions in Vietnam and their reaction to the protests. Political actors were trying to change these memories that were strongly characterized by this political context. Making the monument apolitical would help disassociate the Vietnam War from this context, and move toward a healing process for the nation.³³ Those who intended on using the monument to construct a political memory felt that a focus on healing would mean recognizing that damage was done in the first place, which they did not want include in the collective memory. Their alternative, which became the Three Soldiers, instead placed the emphasis entirely on the heroism of the soldiers in Vietnam, without explicitly acknowledging their losses.

Despite the importance of the debate in illustrating how the memorial would shape political memory, the actual change in collective memory was caused by the memorial itself

after its creation. The extensive creation process of the monument first brought up the veteran experience to the American people, starting the shift in memory. Prior to the creation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, these experiences were rarely acknowledged. Indeed, most veterans reported having difficulty dealing with the fact that their actions and the sacrifices they made for their country were not appreciated or recognized by their fellow citizens.³⁴ By having the memorial focus specifically on the veteran experience, the broader, national collective memory of the war started to incorporate the collective memory of veterans. Eventually, this inclusion began to shift the focus of the public more and more toward the veteran experience, with the side effect that other aspects of collective memory started to disappear into forgetfulness.

Remembrance at the Memorial

After the Wall was opened to visitors in 1982, the public started to engage in rituals of remembrance.³⁵ There are two prevalent rituals at the Wall, both of which are common practices at gravesites as well. One of the rituals that comes most directly from mourning practices at cemeteries is name rubbing. This is a way of getting a copy of a name carved into stone by rubbing a piece of charcoal or a crayon over a piece of paper pressed against the carving.³⁶ The other common practice is the leaving behind of memorabilia at the Wall, often dedicated to a specific soldier. This practice has been further encouraged and institutionalized by the National Park Service (NPS), the government organization that maintains the monument grounds together with the VVMF. More than 400,000 objects have been left at the Wall over the years. The NPS has collected and stored these items, and the VVMF hosts an online database with a selection of items.³⁷ These rituals, with their obvious connections to other sites of mourning, show that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has itself become a site of mourning centered around the experience of soldiers that served in the conflict.

Clear evidence that the collective memory of the Vietnam War has been changing can be seen in the way it is discussed in school curricula. Most history textbooks used in schools today entirely ignore the anti-war sentiments that dominated the public sphere at the time of the war.³⁸ Instead, discussions of the Vietnam War focus on the experiences of soldiers in Vietnam, and may even include a visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.³⁹ Even so, the anti-war sentiment and widespread lack of trust in the government have not truly left the collective memory. Though increasingly forgotten, these topics are still present in American popular culture, such as the 2017 Steven Spielberg film *The Post*. The film's story presents one of the main reasons that people started to lose trust in the government: the leaking of classified documents that proved the government had been lying about aspects of its involvement in Vietnam. However, the movie uses the fear of the suffering of American troops as a motivation for the characters.⁴⁰ The political memory that was constructed with the creation of the Wall has evidently become part of the cultural memory of the Vietnam War. Unlike the Wall, the optimistic – and explicitly patriotic – political memory pushed for by the creators of *The Three Soldiers* has not become as widespread. Because of its late addition and smaller size in relation to the Wall, it is not nearly as well known or widely discussed.

The common understanding of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial focuses on the Wall and its emphasis on mourning and healing.

The way the Vietnam War is remembered, and the role of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in this process, is still evolving. In 1993, decades after the end of the conflict, a third statue was added to the memorial: the Vietnam Women's Memorial, which depicts three nurses caring for a wounded soldier.⁴¹ Just as the VVMF had to fight for the creation of the Wall, the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project spent years lobbying for this addition, mainly in reaction to *The Three Soldiers*, which takes a completely male-centric approach to the war.⁴² The site of the monument now also features a storage facility operated by the NPS for all the items left at the Wall, including a public display for visitors to view some of the items left in the past.⁴³ The continued acts of commemoration at the memorial show that the conflict is still actively being remembered, and that the memorial helps to keep these events in the forefront of American collective memory. Since the opening of the memorial, the way the Vietnam War is remembered has focused increasingly on the veteran experience. This narrative, which is promoted by political actors and communicated to the general population through the memorial, is now extended through teaching in schools and stories told in popular media. The emphasis on remembering this aspect of the conflict also relates to the concept of forgetting. Over time, the emphasis has been increasingly placed on the veteran experience. As a result, the other aspects that used to dominate the public memory—such as the anti-war sentiments and the effects of the war on the relation between the government and its citizens—will start to fall into forgetfulness.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to find out how political actors in the United States have tried to affect the collective memory of the Vietnam War through an in-depth analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Current literature on collective memory and memorials suggests that memorials can be a tool for the government to use. Indeed, it is generally accepted that the process of remembering or forgetting certain parts of a historical event can happen naturally within a culture. However, objects like monuments and museums are understood to be purposeful attempts to affect this process. This understanding could lead to the assumption that if political actors wanted to affect the collective memory of the Vietnam War, they would simply need to create a monument that follows the narrative they want to emphasize. This analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has shown that – at least in the United States – this is not so straightforward.

On the one hand, the process of creating the Vietnam memorial unfolded as could be expected based on current scholarship. The collective memory of the Vietnam War was initially unfavorable to the government. Consequently, when the opportunity arose to construct a memorial that would portray it more positively, it did so. As a result, the collective memory of the Vietnam War has shifted in the government's favor. On the other hand, this process did not go smoothly. The monument was met with opposition and debate about the design and the message it should convey. Eventually, the government was forced to concede to pressure from other stakeholders, and they constructed a second section to the monument

that did not fall into the narrative they had promoted. It should be noted that the design process for the memorial was done openly and democratically. The creation relied on expert juries and anonymous submissions to ensure that as many people as possible were satisfied with the design and decisions. If officials had chosen to be less open in the proceedings, there would have been far less possibility for interference, and the monument would have portrayed the history of the Vietnam War exactly as the government had initially envisioned. Overall, political actors did influence the collective memory of the Vietnam War through the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, but their influence was limited considerably by the democratic nature of the process. As a result, the memorial has affected collective memory through a negotiated process involving many stakeholders, making the role of the memorial in the creation of collective memories a complicated one.

Notes

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²⁰ Keith Beattie, *The Scar That Binds: American Culture and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 108.

²¹ Magnus Ring, Ron Eyerman, and Todd Madigan, "Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory and the Vietnam War," *Croatian Political Science Review* 54 (2017): 26.

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²⁵ *Ibid.*, 389–91.

²⁶ Hagopian, 91.

²⁷ Ibid, 93.

²⁸ Ibid, 93.

²⁹ Ibid, 111-39.

³⁰ Ibid, 97-98.

³¹ Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 395.

³² Assmann, 41-43.

³³ Beattie, 43.

³⁴ John A. Wood, *Veteran Narratives and the Collective Memory of the Vietnam War* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2016), 76.

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³⁷ Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, "Items Left at the Wall," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.vvmf.org/items/>.

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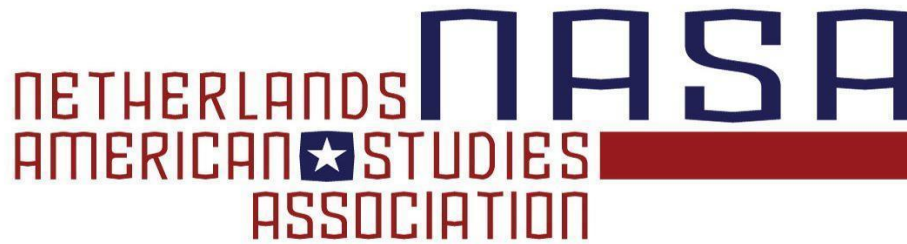
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