

Traces

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A Letter from the Editors

It is with great pleasure that we present the ninth volume of *Traces*, the UNC-Chapel Hill Journal of History. This volume is a special one in many respects. Above all, the production of this volume was marked by the extraordinary events associated to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, interruption and reconstruction are two major themes that ran through the production of this volume. The majority of the article authors in this volume submitted their papers during the spring of 2021, and for a while, it was uncertain whether there would even be a 2021 volume. We have to thank the previous editorial staff, Victoria Johnson, Kimathi Muiruri, and Daniel Velásquez, for their help and disposition in making the transition towards the current editorial team possible. We have included a short statement about the authors at the end of each article and the reader might realize that most of the authors already graduated from UNC during 2020-2021 and have since taken different directions in their lives. As mentioned earlier, the ongoing pandemic has meant an immense disruption to everyone's day-to-day lives, but it also offers an opportunity to rebuild and revitalize. This volume also features an author from UNC-Greensboro, and it is our hope as an editorial staff that we can position *Traces* as a relevant publication for undergraduate research throughout the Triangle Area, while keeping our mission of primarily being a showcase for historical research on the part of UNC-Chapel Hill students. The staff would also like to thank each article author as well as the graduate students at UNC-Chapel Hill who submitted book reviews for the current volume. Our deepest gratitude goes out to Dr. Kathleen DuVal for her support as Chief Faculty Advisor and the History Department for their continued support towards *Traces*. Finally, we would like to thank Matthew Turi from Special Collections at Wilson Library for his support in helping us find a cover image.

Our cover image is a photo of Morehead Planetarium undergoing renovation during the 1970s. We felt the photo was appropriate given the fact that there is an article about Morehead Planetarium in the current volume and it is a highly recognizable landmark in Chapel Hill. Moreso, however, the image of a building under construction strikes home for the editorial staff seeing as this present edition was put together by a skeleton staff under adverse circumstances. The road has been long, winding, and uncertain, but we are elated to finally present this volume to our readers.

May the history students at UNC-Chapel Hill forever keep this self-managed, collaborative, and empowering venture that is *Traces*.

Sincerely,

Clare Byers

Javier Etchegaray

The Rise of the Workingmen's Party of California: A Product of Anti-Chinese Fervor in San Francisco

Jonathan Cope

Abstract. Through an analysis of primary sources including political pamphlets, first-hand accounts, and speeches, "The Rise of the Workingmen's Party of California: A Product of Anti-Chinese Fervor in San Francisco" explores the explosive growth of the city of San Francisco from mission town to metropolis, the history of discrimination against Chinese immigrants in San Francisco in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and how and why the Workingmen's Party of California gained popularity and rose to prominence in the 1870s and 1880s. Although the history of anti-Chinese immigration in San Francisco during the nineteenth century had unique elements and examples, this paper's research provides a microcosm of the anti-Chinese sentiment that existed in the United States in the nineteenth century, which ultimately coalesced in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Introduction

"In conclusion, fellow workingmen. Awake! Arise! Your work begins anew! We will teach these thieves and bondholders what workingmen can do. We will do it with our bullets if our ballots fail. We will drive these moon-eyed lepers back by steamship and by sail."¹

– Denis Kearney, founder and leader of the Workingmen's Party of California, 1878

No group encapsulates the anti-Chinese immigrant fervor in San Francisco, and the United States in general, like the Workingmen's Party of California (WPC). The WPC was founded in 1877 on the platform of ridding the economy of corrupt industrialists and simultaneously prohibiting all Chinese immigrants from entering the United States. The Workingmen's Party of California was led by Denis Kearney, an outspoken Irish immigrant working in San Francisco. Kearney's rousing, passionate public speeches, like the one above, drew large crowds and helped the WPC gain seats in the California State Legislature in 1878.

San Francisco, strategically located on the Pacific coastline of California, was one of the primary entry points for Asian immigrants entering the United States, and thus the city was a focal point of the push to ban Chinese immigration. San Francisco had a

¹ Denis Kearney, *Speeches of Denis Kearney, Labor Champion* (New York: Jesse Haney & Co., 1878), 13.

significant population of Chinese immigrants since its inception as a territory of the United States in 1848. The California Gold Rush of 1849 led to an influx of immigrants from all over the world, the Chinese among them.² A decade or so later, the construction of the transcontinental railroad acted as another draw for Chinese immigrants.³ Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, racial ideologies set apart the Chinese as a separate and different race. The economic depression of the 1870s in the United States put the wheels in motion for a ban on Chinese immigration, as many white laborers felt that cheap Chinese labor was preventing them from finding work and earning a living wage. The passage of the Page Act in 1875, which prohibited the immigration of unfree laborers and women brought for "immoral purposes," was one of the first efforts to restrict Chinese immigration.⁴ The vehement racial protests against Chinese immigrants in the United States culminated in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, a federal act banning all Chinese laborers from entering the United States for the following ten years. Upon its expiration in 1892, the act was extended via the Geary Act, and regulations on Chinese immigration continued well into the twentieth century.⁵

This paper seeks to answer how and why the Workingmen's Party of California gained popularity and rose to prominence in San Francisco during the 1870s and 1880s. Through an investigation of the WPC, this paper dialogues with the larger history of anti-Chinese sentiment in San Francisco, and on a greater scale, California and the United States. While San Francisco exhibited unique cases and characteristics of anti-Chinese sentiment, it was also an important case study of racist attitudes in the United States, which ultimately coalesced with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This paper attempts to capture the complexity of discrimination towards Chinese immigrants in San Francisco.

Contemporary newspaper articles, speech transcripts, and pamphlets distributed by the Workingmen's Party of California constitute the majority of the primary sources used in this paper. By examining the history of San Francisco as an American city beginning in the 1840s, a time during which Chinese immigrants arrived to the city in vast numbers, I intend to provide important background knowledge to facilitate the understanding of the rise of the WPC. Through primary and secondary sources, this paper describes how and why The Workingmen's Party of California gained popularity

² Roger Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856: From Hamlet to City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

³ "Geography of Chinese Workers Building the Transcontinental Railroad," Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, Accessed October 26, 2020, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/virtual/>.

⁴ "Page Law 1875," Immigration History, Accessed October 28, 2020, <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/page-act/>.

⁵ "Transcript of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)," Our Documents, Accessed October 28, 2020, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=47&page=transcript>.

as a result of the economic and social conditions of the 1870s, coupled with existing racial beliefs that portrayed the Chinese as an inferior race. The WPC's political platform was two-fold, stressing anti-monopoly beliefs as well as the prohibition of all Chinese immigrants to California. Denis Kearney's speeches played a central role in channeling the anti-Chinese fervor of white laborers in San Francisco, a sentiment that the greater United States echoed with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

This paper first provides a brief history of San Francisco's path from a small mission town to a major metropolis, as well as the demographic make-up of the city's immigrant population, specifically Chinese migrants. The paper then examines early reasons for the discrimination against Chinese immigrants. Next, the paper addresses the economic and political context of the 1870s, setting the stage for the rise of the Workingmen's Party of California in 1877. The paper then shifts to the formation of the WPC following the summer riots of 1877, and how the WPC gained popularity through its two-sided political platform of anti-monopolism and anti-Chinese immigration. Finally, the paper addresses how the rise of the Workingmen's Party of California served as a microcosm of anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States as a whole during the mid to late nineteenth century, most obviously in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

A True Boomtown and the Beginnings of the Chinese Question

Until 1849, the San Francisco Bay Area was of little significance to most citizens of the United States of America. Established in 1776 by Spanish colonizers as a small mission on the Pacific coast of northern California, San Francisco had a population of just 150 people in the year 1845. This all changed in just a handful of years. In the aftermath of the Mexican-American War, fought between 1846 and 1848, Mexico ceded the territory of California, including the Mission of San Francisco, to the United States. A year later, in 1849, gold was discovered outside of San Francisco, spurring the massive migration of people from all parts of the world to the Bay Area.⁶

Bayard Taylor, a traveler who visited San Francisco in 1849, recorded his first impressions of the city, commenting how the streets were filled with

Yankees of every possible variety, native Californians in sarapes and sombreros, Chilians [sic], Sonorians, Kanakas from Hawaii, Chinese with long tails, Malays armed with their everlasting creeses, and others in whose embrowned and bearded visages it was impossible to recognize any especial nationality.⁷

Taylor went on to marvel at the rapid growth of the city, saying, "I could scarcely realize

⁶ Lotchin, *San Francisco*, 3, 7.

⁷ Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or, Adventures in the Path of Empire* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1850), 55.

the change that had taken place during my absence of three weeks. The town had not only greatly extended its limits, but seemed actually to have doubled its number of dwellings since I left."⁸ This population boom triggered by the 1849 Gold Rush spurred the rapid development of a metropolitan city where only five years earlier a modest mission of 150 people stood. In the year 1850, California was granted statehood as the 31st state of the United States, and by the year 1852, the population of San Francisco had exploded to 34,000.⁹

The incredible amount of people from around the world who immigrated to the Bay Area made San Francisco's rags to riches story possible. San Francisco in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the epitome of a metropolis. As the traveler and New York Times newspaper correspondent Bayard Taylor recorded in his 1850 book *Eldorado*, the streets of San Francisco were bustling with people from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.¹⁰ In 1860, foreign immigrants made up 50.09 percent of the San Francisco population, giving the Golden Gate metropolis "the third highest proportion of immigrants among American cities," behind Milwaukee and St. Louis.¹¹

This was an overwhelmingly male-dominated migration, chiefly made up of young men. A state survey in 1852 found the ratio of males to females in San Francisco at six to one. The majority of people migrating from other parts of the United States came from New York and Massachusetts, with a modest amount coming from the Midwest, the South, and other parts of California. Free Blacks came from the cities in New England and the Middle Atlantic states. The British Empire was a major source of foreign immigrants entering San Francisco, with people emigrating from Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and Australia. The next largest source of European immigrants came from Germany and France, with smaller contributions from Switzerland, Poland, and Italy, among others. Interestingly, many of these European immigrants immigrated not directly from their homeland, but from other places in the United States, Australia, and even Latin America. Latin America itself provided a great number of immigrants to San Francisco, most substantially from Mexico and Chile, and immigrants from China constituted the majority of Asia's contribution. "It is perhaps the most perfectly cosmopolitan city on earth," noted the San Francisco newspaper *Alta*.¹²

The cosmopolitan nature of San Francisco during its adolescent years as a state of the US did not, however, translate to equal treatment of all people. The city developed a hierarchy based on race and ethnicity. Whites regarded themselves as superior to the Chinese, Latin American, and Black immigrants, and within the population of whites, immigrants from within the US became the dominant demographic. Interestingly, there

⁸ Taylor, *Eldorado*, 109.

⁹ Lotchin, *San Francisco*, 102.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Eldorado*, 55.

¹¹ Lotchin, *San Francisco*, 103.

¹² *Ibid.*, 104-106.

was a significant amount of inferiority bestowed upon Irish immigrants, despite their European origin. Many Irish immigrants came from Australia and were thought to be ex-convicts, and the Irish struggled to assimilate as fluidly as the English and Scottish.

Many white people in San Francisco adhered to the ideology of white supremacy as a baseline in their view of other people. This racist ideology was a key reason for the prejudice whites had against Chinese immigrants. Additionally, Chinese immigrants coming to San Francisco as indentured servants were perceived as competitors to white workers in the labor market, something that added fuel to the fire. This sentiment of the Chinese worker as a threat to white laborers was a common theme in nineteenth century San Francisco and is explored in greater depth later in this paper. Despite this prejudice, Chinese, as well as Black laborers, were praised by whites for being “industrious, peaceful, and thorough,” while their bottom-of-the-social-ladder cohorts from Latin American were seen as lazy and useless.¹³ In turn, according to a contemporary newspaper, Blacks described the Chinese as “filthy, immoral, and licentious.”¹⁴ As these social dynamics convey, San Francisco’s metropolitan nature and immigrant population led to ethnic and racial struggles, as different immigrant groups sought to climb higher in the city’s social hierarchy.

Chinese immigrants in particular encountered a significant amount of discrimination upon arrival in San Francisco. Scholar Roger Lotchin summarizes racist sentiment towards the Chinese in his book *San Francisco, 1846-1856: From Hamlet to City*. According to the white supremacist views of whites in San Francisco, Chinese immigrants were “the most exotic, most transient, least free, most brutalized, and most clannish nationality in San Francisco.”¹⁵ The stereotype of Chinese immigrants, according to whites, was that Chinese immigrants, many of whom were indentured servants, came to San Francisco with hopes of paying their debts and then becoming rich and returning to China. Because of this, whites saw the Chinese as a group that made little attempt to assimilate, resulting in a greater ostracism of Chinese migrants in San Francisco as opposed to other immigrants, such as those from Europe. A Chinatown developed in San Francisco which was quite successful in maintaining its Chinese culture and even exercised a degree of autonomy with its internal affairs. Despite its vibrant and thriving culture, whites criticized San Francisco’s Chinatown as dirty, hazardous, and crowded, something which further separated the Chinese as different from the rest of San Francisco’s burgeoning population.¹⁶

Many white immigrants, both American and European, regarded Chinese laborers as unwanted competition in San Francisco’s labor market. The white immigrants that subscribed to the racial ideology of white supremacy saw Chinese immigrants as “obsta-

13 Lotchin, *San Francisco*, 108-110.

14 *Ibid.*, 117.

15 *Ibid.*, 123-124.

16 *Ibid.*, 125.

cles in the road to the realization of the California dream” for Americans.¹⁷ Similar to the Chinese, Americans came to San Francisco hoping to make a quick fortune mining for gold, and once these dreams were not met, the focus shifted to earning a living. The difference was that Americans and other white immigrants far outnumbered Chinese immigrants and the ideology of white supremacy was rife among the Caucasian population. White Americans’ “accumulated prejudices” against Blacks and Native Americans “had developed an underlying suspicion of men whose skins were not white. The Chinese, the first substantial group of colored immigrants to come to the United States, inherited that hostility.”¹⁸ Because of this racial hostility, the Chinese were met with resentment in San Francisco.

The initial wave of Chinese immigrants did not think of themselves as immigrants, but rather sojourners seeking to make a fortune and return to a life of luxury in their homeland.¹⁹ The transient nature of these immigrants did not sit well with other residents of the city, who felt that they made more of an effort to cultivate a sense of communal San Franciscan identity. Chinese immigrants also differed from the majority of San Francisco’s population in that they did not practice Christianity. As such, Christian ministers and missions made a great number of attempts to convert the Chinese to Christianity, but the majority of these attempts fell short.²⁰ A likely explanation for why Chinese immigrants maintained such a high degree of their culture was because they were subject to xenophobia and drew closer together as a response to this discrimination, while other immigrants did not face such racist attitudes.

The economic situation of the state of California, including the mines around San Francisco, also fostered hostility towards Chinese immigrants. Many of the Chinese laborers worked as indentured servants or for low wages, which made them more desirable for labor organizers and employers. This was a point of contention for whites in the area, who believed they were superior to the Chinese immigrants and deserved employment. As an immigrant from Australia recorded, “capitalists had hired numbers of Chinese, Cooleys, and Kanakas, to work for them,” which “was very obnoxious to the Californians” because the cheap Chinese labor prevented the white Californians from working in the mines. The indentured servitude of the Chinese immigrants was likened to slave labor, which was illegal in California, and drew the ire of white laborers. When Chinese contracted labor was deemed legal in the California state legislature, San Francisco’s daily evening newspaper *Picayune* responded vehemently, asking “Is any one so simple as to doubt that capitalists will avail themselves of its provisions to import crowds of cheap laborers here to work the mines,...to build up a large monopoly, to the injury of men of small means, who do their own work?” Opponents of Chinese immigration argued that Chinese laborers

17 Gunter Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 2.

18 *Ibid.*, vii.

19 *Ibid.*, 1.

20 *Ibid.*, 163.

“undermined the foundations of free society, degraded labor, threatened the tranquillity [sic] of the mines, encouraged monopolies, and endangered the California dream.”²¹

The meteoric rise of San Francisco as a cosmopolitan city on the west coast of the United States in the nineteenth century opened the door for the rapid migration of people from all over the world. Immigrants from China, due to their cultural cohesiveness, transient nature, and most of them being indentured servants, stood out from the rest of the city’s migrant population. As the century progressed, Chinese immigrants faced discrimination due to their tight-knit culture and willingness to work for less than most working-class white men, in addition to the prevalent racial discrimination they faced as people of color. The history of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco is also a history of xenophobia and white supremacy which rose to a fervor in the 1870s.

Contextual Factors of the 1870s

Fast forward to the 1870s, and the little-known mission of San Francisco had grown into a city of almost 150,000 people in the span of 32 years since becoming a part of the United States of America in 1848. From 1870 to 1880, the population of San Francisco accelerated to over 233,000 residents.²² Immigrants from all over the world continued to flood into San Francisco, including Chinese laborers who continued to carve out an important economic role for themselves in the American West. Between 1865 and 1869, Chinese laborers constituted as much as 90 percent of the workforce tasked with constructing the Central Pacific Railroad, part of the greater transcontinental railroad project that famously culminated in 1869 with the placement of a golden spike in Promontory Point, Utah.²³

Economic conditions such as a nation-wide depression and congested San Francisco labor market, were one part of the foreboding climate that led to the rise of the Workingmen’s Party of California in 1877. Jerome Hart, a journalist and later publisher of the San Francisco newspaper *Argonaut*, provided insight into the economic environment of San Francisco in the 1870s in his 1931 book *In Our Second Century*. Hart was in the California National Guard during the 1870s, and was called into duty during the anti-Chinese riots of the summer of 1877, which are discussed later in this paper.²⁴ As such, Hart was able to provide a first-hand account of the troubles in San Francisco in the 1870s. Hart recounted, “The troubled conditions in California were in 1877 a reflex of those in the Atlantic States. The Civil War boom, with greenback inflation, high prices,

21 Barth, *Bitter Strength*, 134, 139, 141.

22 “San Francisco City and County: Decennial Census Data,” Bay Area Census, Accessed October 26, 2020, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty40.html>.

23 Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, “Geography of Chinese Workers Building the Transcontinental Railroad.”

24 “The Sandlot and Kearnyism,” The Museum of the City of San Francisco, Accessed October 20, 2020, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist2/kearneyism.html>.

and high profits, was followed by a depression, then by a slump.”²⁵ In San Francisco, the Bank of California was suspended in 1875, leading to the fall of the California stock exchange which alarmed financial, commercial, and industrial circles.²⁶ The completion of the transcontinental railroad, considered a major accomplishment whose completion “was heralded with joy,” had unexpectedly negative consequences in San Francisco and the rest of California. Thousands of Chinese migrant workers returned from the railroads in search of new economic ventures, only to complicate and clog the labor markets of the region. Hart reported that, “The labor congestion thus caused, aggravated by further Chinese immigration, grew worse with each succeeding year. It was at its worst in 1877.”²⁷ He went on to say, “The labor element felt the situation most acutely, as there was much unemployment. Labor leaders finally concentrated on Chinese immigration as the source of the industrial trouble.”²⁸ As Hart says, labor leaders blamed Chinese immigrants for the economic strife of the 1870s, and this is exactly what the leaders of the Workingmen’s Party of California did in order to gain followers and supporters.

The *Argonaut*, founded in 1878 and published and edited by Frank Pixley, a “wealthy Republican and old friend of Stanford [the railroad magnate],” was established as a counterweight to Denis Kearney and the WPC, according to scholar Daniel Lindley. Because of Pixley’s pro-monopoly, capitalist political leanings, it is safe to assume that his journalists also disagreed with the WPC’s anti-monopoly political platform and voiced their opinions in the *Argonaut*.²⁹ Hart, as a journalist for a newspaper at odds with the WPC, likely paid great attention to Denis Kearney, making *In Our Second Century* an invaluable source in the study of the rise of the WPC.

Another element that facilitated the rise of the Workingmen’s Party of California were the summer riots of 1877 which happened just months before the WPC was founded. The labor issues on the West coast were “felt most acutely in San Francisco,” and in July of 1877, a group of white San Franciscan laborers called for a meeting among laborers to discuss the issues. The meeting took place next to City Hall in a vacant space called the Sand Lot and was organized by James F. D’Arcy, who founded the Workingmen’s Party of the United States a year earlier, in 1876. During the Sand Lot meeting, labor leaders discussed labor reforms, such as “denouncing the employment of the military against strikes” and “declaring that subsidies to transportation lines should be abolished.” However, the meeting took a turn for the worse and anti-Chinese riots

25 Jerome Hart, *In Our Second Century: From an Editor’s Note-book* (San Francisco: The Pioneer Press, 1931), 41.

26 *Ibid.*, 51.

27 *Ibid.*, 42-43.

28 *Ibid.*, 51.

29 Daniel Lindley, *Ambrose Bierce Takes on the Railroad: The Journalist as Muckraker and Cynic* (Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 77-78.

broke out against Chinatown and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the company responsible for bringing Chinese immigrants to San Francisco. The riots lasted for three days, destroying Chinese wash-houses, burning lumber-yards and hay-barns, and killing four people. The escalation from a labor meeting to an anti-Chinese mob illustrates how the two issues of labor and Chinese immigration were intricately intertwined.³⁰

The political and economic situations San Francisco found itself in during the 1870s disturbed the working classes of the city. Economically, the failure of the Bank of California generated a distrust of financial institutions, while the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad triggered the return of thousands of Chinese workers to San Francisco, where the already congested labor market became even more competitive and clogged. Because of these economic issues, the lower and middle classes wanted labor reforms in order to protect their jobs, so political means were organized in order to achieve this. The Sand Lot Riots, intended to be peaceful discussions of reform and law, turned ugly, as anti-Chinese sentiment reared its head and members of the white working class took to the streets. Because of these occurrences in San Francisco, the time was ripe for the establishment of an organization that supported the lower- and middle-class laborers as well as the anti-Chinese fervor that existed in the city, and in the late summer of 1877, this is exactly what happened.

The Rise of the Workingmen's Party of California

On August 22, 1877 less than a month after the Sand Lot Riots of July 1877, labor leaders in San Francisco formed an organization called the Workingmen's Trade and Labor Union, and officially changed its name to the Workingmen's Party of California (WPC) in September of 1877.³¹ The Workingmen's Party of California was at first organized as a section of the Workingmen's Party of the United States, but within a month of its formation the WPC became a separate entity, so it could "act in political matters without the specific authority from the central body" of the WPUS.³² Denis Kearney, an incendiary and skilled orator who spoke at, and called for, many of the WPC's early meetings, was elected president of the group on October 5, 1877, and at the next Sand Lot meeting, over 4,000 people attended.³³

Among the founding principles of the Workingmen's Party of California were the following:

"We propose to wrest the government from the hands of the rich and place it in those of the people, where it properly belongs. We propose to rid the country of cheap Chinese labor as soon as possible, and by all the means in our power,

30 Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 52-53.

31 Ibid., 53.

32 Denis Kearney and William Wellock, *The Workingmen's Party of California: An Epitome of Its Rise and Progress* (San Francisco: Bacon & Company Book and Job Printers, 1878), 16.

33 Ibid., 27.

because it tends still more to degrade labor and aggrandize capital. We propose to destroy land monopoly in our state by such laws as will make it impossible. We propose to destroy the great money power of the rich by a system of taxation that will make great wealth impossible in the future."³⁴

These principles, set forth at the first meeting of Denis Kearney's presidency, highlighted the two-tiered political platform of the Workingmen's Party of California which centered on anti-Chinese immigration and anti-monopoly policy.

The topic of anti-monopolism was attractive to the working-class white men of San Francisco because of the lack of job security both in San Francisco as well as beyond the city in industries such as the railroad business. Working class men felt that Chinese immigrants were outcompeting them in the job market due to their willingness to work for low wages, and this issue was compounded by the return of thousands of Chinese railroad workers to San Francisco upon the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Denis Kearney and the Workingmen's Party of California accused the government of being corrupt and a tool of the wealthy, and pledged "to elect none but competent workingmen and their friends to any office whatever."³⁵ As a show of defiance towards the industrial and railroad magnates of San Francisco, whom the WPC blamed for the workingmen's plight, the WPC organized the first of a series of sensational meetings on Nob Hill, the site of a cluster of grand homes built by the railroad magnates of San Francisco. Kearney was recorded as saying "The Central Pacific men are thieves, and will soon feel the power of the workingmen. When I have thoroughly organized the party, we will march through the city and compel the thieves to give up their plunder." Kearney went on to say "I advise everyone within the sound of my voice, if he is able, to own a musket and a hundred rounds of ammunition." Kearney's rant against the rich on Nob Hill resulted in his arrest a week later, on charges of "tending to excite his hearers to deeds of violence."³⁶ The Workingmen's Party of California sought to rally supporters through their anti-monopolism policy by denouncing the wealthy San Franciscan elite and allotting some of the blame for laborers' economic struggles on the rich and corrupt city leaders.

The WPC also sought to gain supporters through its anti-Chinese immigration platform. While the anti-monopolism platform was an important directive, the prohibition of all Chinese immigrants in San Francisco was the primary objective of the party.³⁷ Party founder and leader Denis Kearney famously began and ended every one of his speeches with the slogan, "The Chinese Must Go!"³⁸ The Chinese were regarded as racially inferior

34 Kearney and Wellock, *The Workingmen's Party of California*, 20-21.

35 Ibid., 21.

36 Ibid., 26.

37 Ibid., 19.

38 Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 66.

to whites and a major threat to the success of working-class white laborers in San Francisco. The WPC played upon these existing sentiments and used them as a common point to unite all working men against the Chinese in California. This anti-Chinese sentiment, when paired with the existing economic crises of the day, proved to be a perfect combination for the formation of an organization like the Workingmen's Party of California.

In a pamphlet distributed by the WPC in 1879, Chinatown was portrayed as "one vast mass of crime, filth, and disease." The WPC propaganda said, "Chinatown is one great conspiracy. It holds slaves. It makes a business of prostitution...It kidnaps women. It commands murder...The whole dark pile should be swept into the sea." This attack on Chinatown was equally matched by an attack on the Chinese themselves. Chinese prostitutes were called "the lowest and most debased" who were the root cause of "an alarming prevalence of vile diseases" among the San Franciscan youth. Chinese servants were labeled as slaves and regarded "as a thing, as a dog or a monkey." Furthermore, "It is generally admitted that lying and stealing are as natural to the Chinaman as eating and drinking." Although clearly full of lies and falsehoods, a pamphlet like this was intended to convey to the white working men how the Chinese were a danger to San Franciscans, both because of the perceived disease and filth of Chinatown and because of the supposed crimes and inferiority of Chinese immigrants. By playing upon these anti-Chinese sentiments and denouncing all things Chinese, the WPC was able to gather supporters who saw no need for the Chinese to live in San Francisco.³⁹

The two political platforms of the Workingmen's Party of California, anti-monopolism and anti-Chinese immigration, were not stand-alone platforms. These two policies were connected to each other in important ways. In the eyes of the WPC and low- to middle class laborers, big-business industrialists were largely responsible for the continual immigration of Chinese workers to the United States. Thus, the WPC set out to vilify two groups of people – wealthy industrialists and Chinese immigrants. A WPC pamphlet linked the two groups together, declaring, "The railroad magnates are fit companions for such wretches [the Chinese]."⁴⁰ In his speech on Nob Hill, Denis Kearney threatened the railroad industrialists living there by name while at the same time holding them responsible for the presence of the Chinese in the West, declaring, "I will give the Central Pacific just three months to discharge their Chinamen, and if that is not done, Stanford and his crowd will have to take the consequences. I will lead the workingmen...and give Crocker the worst beating with sticks that a man ever got."⁴¹ By creating two common enemies that were very different but indelibly linked, the Workingmen's Party of California was able to promote a simple and concise

³⁹ *The Workingmen's Party of California, The Labor Agitators, or the Battle for Bread* (San Francisco: G.W. Greene Publisher, 1879), 23-36.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁴¹ Kearney and Willock, *The Workingmen's Party of California*, 26.

political agenda that attracted much of the working-class of San Francisco who felt wronged.

The Kearney Factor

The organization and success of the Workingmen's Party of California would not have been the same if not for its president and founder, Denis Kearney. Kearney, born in Ireland in 1847, arrived in San Francisco in 1868 and worked as a wagon driver until the formation of the WPC. Kearney was able to take advantage of the economic and social discontent in San Francisco during the summer of 1877, and despite being just 30 years old, used his impressive public speaking skills to gain much popularity among the workingmen gathered. As San Franciscan newspaper publisher Jerome Hart wrote, "The unrest caused among white laborers by the presence of these alien thousands caused clever leaders – some called them demagogues – to use the Chinese labor question as a stepping-stone to power. The most prominent among these were Denis Kearney."⁴² Little is known about how Kearney came to occupy such a prominent role in the summer riots of 1877, but regardless, Kearney's brazen personality and rousing speeches served as the lightning rod for the labor agitation in San Francisco, and he was quickly elected president of the newly formed Workingmen's Party of California. Kearney was a working class white man, just like his constituents, which made him even more appealing as the leader and symbol of the WPC. Kearney made sure to make known that he was a naturalized citizen of the United States.⁴³ In one of his speeches, Kearney referred to himself as "the humble representative of the humble classes, the poor working classes," and often juxtaposed the honest workingmen with the cutthroat robbery of the elite.⁴⁴ Kearney continually challenged the San Franciscan elite, denouncing the "shoddy aristocrats" and "thieving millionaires."⁴⁵ Kearney also decried the presence of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco, notoriously beginning and ending each of his speeches with the words, "The Chinese Must Go," which only served to increase his popularity among the working class. Kearney, in a speech in 1879, declared, "We are going to drive these Chinamen out. That is the object of this movement."⁴⁶

It is important to note the blatant racism that Kearney used in his speeches as a means of dehumanizing Chinese immigrants and appealing to the racist ideologies that were prevalent at the time. Kearney referred to the Chinese as a "heathen horde" and "moon-eyed lepers," drawing upon racial stereotypes that the Chinese spread infectious diseases and lived in filth and immorality.⁴⁷ In an 1878 address, Kearney said of the Chinese, "We know how false, how inhuman, our adversaries are. They are imported

⁴² Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 52.

⁴³ Kearney and Willock, *The Workingmen's Party of California*, 95-96.

⁴⁴ Kearney, *Speeches of Denis Kearney*, 6.

⁴⁵ Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 55.

⁴⁶ *The Workingmen's Party of California, The Labor Agitators*, 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

by companies, controlled as serfs, worked like slaves, and at last go back to China with all their earnings.”⁴⁸ In another speech, Kearney said, “The Anglo-Saxon spirit is not dead...we are superior to these Mongolians, and will survive them.”⁴⁹ As these examples show, Kearney subscribed to the racist ideology of white supremacy, and used it to justify his and the WPC’s argument to exclude all Chinese immigrants from San Francisco.

The Spread of the Workingmen’s Party of California

After the establishment of the Workingmen’s Party of California in 1877, Kearney and the rest of the WPC still had work to do in order to achieve real political gains in San Francisco, California, and the United States. After the initial establishment of the WPC, the party continued to grow and spread throughout the city. The Sunday following the meeting in which Kearney was elected, over four thousand people showed up to the Sand Lot meeting, and branches of the party sprang up around the city. Kearney himself helped author a book titled *The Workingmen’s Party of California: An Epitome of Its Rise and Progress*, published in 1878. This book reported that “Large numbers of laborers eagerly enrolled themselves as members of the party. This activity and zeal were continued throughout the entire city for the succeeding three or four weeks, the weekly Sunday gatherings upon the Sand Lot showing increasing numbers with every meeting.”⁵⁰ While this book had a clear bias in favor of the WPC, enrollment in the party certainly exploded upon its inception in San Francisco.

After the party’s initial growth in membership in San Francisco, Kearney began to travel throughout the state of California promoting the newly formed party and its ideals. Kearney’s strong leadership and oratory skills enabled the party to attract an increasingly large following. The movement in San Francisco triggered similar movements in the Californian cities of Sacramento and Oakland, where resolutions were passed in solidarity with the WPC. Kearney visited the southern portion of California, where he founded organizations, including in Los Angeles. The party met resistance from the press and the established politicians such as the mayor of San Francisco, who issued a proclamation prohibiting the assembly of the WPC. Even the archbishop of San Francisco wrote a letter against the WPC, but nevertheless the party continued to meet and grow in its various branches. The party adopted an official platform at a statewide convention in January of 1878, and ultimately won seats in that year’s municipal and state elections, with successes in Oakland and Sacramento.⁵¹ The two dominant political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, “were forced to admit that a new political power had appeared.”⁵²

48 Denis Kearney and H. L. Knight, *Appeal from California. The Chinese Invasion. Workingmen’s Address*. Indianapolis Times, 28 February 1878.

49 Kearney and Wellock, *The Workingmen’s Party of California*, 19.

50 *Ibid.*, 23.

51 *Ibid.*, 42-45, 49-50, 62, 66, 69.

52 Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 57.

Once the party successfully established itself as a political force in the state of California, the WPC turned its attention towards making waves on a national scale in hopes of pressuring the federal government into passing a law banning Chinese immigration to the United States. As scholar Andrew Gyory writes, “The momentum for Chinese exclusion continued to come – as it had for years – from Washington and from the West.”⁵³ The “Chinese question,” as it was called, referred to whether or not Chinese immigration should be banned in the United States. This debate had been on a national scale for some years and resulted in the passage of the Page Act of 1875, a federal law prohibiting the entrance into the United States of any Asian immigrants who were unfree workers or immoral women.⁵⁴ Chinese men who came voluntarily to the United States were allowed entrance. A congressional committee came to San Francisco in 1876 to carry out a preliminary investigation into the matter of the Chinese question and concluded, “The Chinese were faithful laborers; that they did much necessary labor which white laborers would not do; that they worked for lower wages than the whites; but that they were generally disliked.”⁵⁵ The Chinese question gained momentum on a national scale, and by the year 1878, “a debate of sorts had emerged within the labor press on Chinese immigration.” Anti-Chinese immigration sentiment began to “creep eastward,” and “more powerful forces in the East began airing hostility” regarding Chinese workers. These so-called forces, including presidents of Ivy League schools such as Cornell and Princeton, used the racial ideology of white supremacy, as well as pseudoscience, in order to argue for the exclusion of Chinese immigrants.⁵⁶

In order to generate a national cry for the ban of all Chinese immigrants into the United States, Denis Kearney began giving speeches in big cities around the country. Kearney spoke in cities like St. Louis, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Boston, denouncing the rich, the established political parties, and the Chinese as threats to the well-being of the workingmen of the United States.⁵⁷ In August of 1878, about a year after the inception of the Workingmen’s Party of California, Kearney was granted a personal meeting with President Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House in Washington, DC. The transcript of this meeting, as recorded in a book titled *Speeches of Denis Kearney, Labor Champion*, is likely biased towards Kearney and must be taken with a grain of salt, as the interaction seems too good to be true. According to the book, Kearney and Hayes discussed the Chinese question in San Francisco, and Hayes told Kearney that lately he had received so many letters regarding the Chinese question that he had filled a box with them. Hayes also confided in Kearney, “I wish to say this: That your going about the

53 Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 184.

54 Immigration History, “Page Law 1875.”

55 Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 41.

56 Gyory, *Closing the Gate*, 101-102.

57 Kearney, *Speeches of Denis Kearney*.

country and speaking in the manner you do you are doing good work, noble service...I think Congress next winter will come to definite action favorable to your people on the vexed question."⁵⁸ While the dialogue between Kearney and Hayes here is likely exaggerated to flatter Kearney, the WPC leader's discussion with the President of the United States does reveal that the Chinese question was a national issue, as well as the power and recognition that the WPC, led by Kearney, gained in the timespan of just one year.

In 1879, as President Hayes predicted, the United States Congress did pass a law restricting Chinese immigration, but Hayes himself vetoed the bill, an action that undermined the validity of Kearney's account of the meeting between himself and Hayes. The WPC was forced to continue waiting on the passage of successful legislature banning Chinese immigrants, but not for long. The wait ended on May 6, 1882, when President Chester A. Garfield signed a bill suspending all Chinese immigration to the United States for ten years. This law, known as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, had a lasting legacy in the United States, as restrictions continued to be placed against Chinese immigrants until 1965.⁵⁹ The 1882 bill echoed the sentiment of Kearney and the WPC, stating, "In the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory."⁶⁰ This opening line hints that the Chinese laborers were upsetting the socio-economic climate of places like San Francisco, just like the Workingmen's Party of California argued. While there is no explicit language in the bill or historical evidence citing Kearney or the WPC as a reason for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the WPC nevertheless can be used as a microcosm for those interested in the anti-Chinese fervor that existed in the United States before 1882.

Concluding Thoughts

The rise of the Workingmen's Party of California, while sudden and mercurial, took place during an important juncture in not only San Francisco's history, but also the United States' national history. This juncture was the federal decision to suspend all immigration into the United States from China, the first such law restricting an entire population based on their ethnicity and country of origin. San Francisco was at the center of this issue, the so-called Chinese question, which is part of the reason why the WPC first originated in that particular city. San Francisco's history as an American city up until the 1870s was characterized by the 1849 Gold Rush, rapid population growth, and continued discrimination towards Chinese immigrants. Racial ideologies such as white supremacy led to prejudice against people of color, including Chinese immigrants. The indentured servitude under which many of the Chinese immigrants entered the United States, coupled with the cultural cohesiveness due to the impermanent nature of many Chinese immigrants,

led to the Chinese being regarded as outsiders in the metropolitan city of San Francisco. Anti-Chinese sentiment was always present in San Francisco, but gained fervor and national attention in the 1870s, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

The Workingmen's Party of California was able to rise to power due to the economic and social unrest of the 1870s and the leadership of Denis Kearney. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 led to a surge of Chinese workers returning to San Francisco, flooding an already crowded labor market. This, compounded with the economic depression sweeping the United States during the 1870s, led to many discontented white working-class men, who felt that the Chinese workers were unfairly outcompeting them for jobs. This economic duress in San Francisco resulted in the Sand Lot riots of the summer of 1877, which turned from a gathering of labor reform discussions to a deadly and destructive anti-Chinese mob.

Denis Kearney, a young Irish immigrant living in San Francisco, gained popularity during the summer of 1877 due to his rousing public speeches and unapologetic persona, and by October of 1877, Kearney became the president of a newly formed labor organization called the Workingmen's Party of California. The party's two-fold platform focused on securing a ban on Chinese immigration into San Francisco, as well as countering the wealthy industrialists whom the WPC held responsible for their economic struggles and the presence of the Chinese in the city. By playing upon the ideology of white supremacy and the negative stereotypes of the Chinese, Kearney and the WPC were able to gain a following in San Francisco, which spread throughout California, helping the party to elect officials into municipal and state offices. Kearney began touring the country in order to put pressure on the federal government to pass legislature banning all Chinese immigrants, and, although it is difficult to say how, if at all, the WPC influenced the decision, the United States government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, effectively banning all Chinese immigrants from entering the United States.

⁵⁸ Kearney, *Speeches of Denis Kearney*, 27-28.

⁵⁹ Hart, *In Our Second Century*, 70.

⁶⁰ Our Documents, "Transcript of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)."

About the Author

My name is Jonathan Cope, and I graduated from UNC in May of 2021 with a double major in History and Global Studies. I wrote my research paper in my History capstone class with Dr. Chad Bryant. The course was titled “Global Cities and Boom Towns,” and San Francisco was one of the first cities that crossed my mind as having an especially explosive population growth. As research goes, one thing led to another and I found myself tracing the history of an upstart group who used and cultivated anti-Chinese sentiment in San Francisco to their advantage.

In the months following the completion of my paper, the national news began highlighting the dramatic increase in anti-Asian violence in the present-day United States. After spending a semester researching, reading, and writing about anti-Asian sentiment in the United States in the nineteenth century, this latest wave of anti-Asian racism and violence was especially poignant and saddening, and it served as a reminder to me that knowing our country’s history, both the good and the bad, is important in understanding our country today.

In the months following graduation, I have traveled extensively throughout the United States. My destinations included Zion National Park, New York City, and Virginia’s Eastern Shore. One of my favorite experiences since graduation was being able to travel to San Francisco and actually walk the streets that I wrote about, which was a very gratifying experience. Having already written this paper, I felt a deeper sense of connection with the city than I otherwise would have felt. I enjoyed walking on Nob Hill and imagining Denis Kearney orating to an eager crowd, gesticulating wildly towards the general vicinity of the railroad magnates’ sweeping mansions.

The Letters of Hernán Cortés

A Fabrication of the Conquest of Mexico

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Abstract. For over five hundred years, Hernan Cortes secured that his story would be remembered in his own words. His letters, sent from Mexico during the war against the Nahua peoples, spread through Europe and the world in the years following the Conquest, and were the inspiration to historians and artists alike. Soon, romanticized versions of Cortes and Montezuma, together with a mythical version of the Conquest, became the standard accounts of the events between 1519 and 1521. It was not until the twentieth century that these views began to be challenged by historians exploring the holes on Cortes’ narrative, and the different versions left by those around him. In this article, I revisit the letters of Cortes, taking into account the several recent studies that have suggested new elements to the Conquest and new interpretations of the texts left by the Captain General. Moreover, gathering the narratives and documents left by conquistadors who served under Cortes and the Spanish Crown, I build up the argument that Cortes’ letters are an attempt to fabricate a Conquest narrative made to highlight himself as an indispensable asset of the Spanish Crown, while downplaying everyone around him, common features of 16th century petitions to the King. Moreover, the paper explores the veracity, intensions, and omissions in the letters, diving into questions about the true nature of the Conquest and the many actors involved in it.

Introduction

In 1544, just three years before his death, Hernán Cortés wrote his last petition to the Emperor Charles V.¹ He opened the letter by stating, “I thought that the labors of my youth would earn me some rest in my old age, and yet I have spent forty years not sleeping, eating badly, or if not badly, not well either, always with weapons ready, placing myself in danger, spending my life and property all in the service of God.” Despite the hyperbole,

¹ This was Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire (1519-1556), also known as Charles I of Spain (1516-1556). He was born in 1500 and ascended to the throne of Spain at the age of sixteen. Three years later, the same year that Cortés arrived at the coast of Mexico, he was elected Holy Roman Emperor, therefore ruling, by the end of his life, what is today Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, over half of Italy and much of Central and South America. For reference see Geoffrey Parker, *Emperor: A New life of Charles V* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019).

this passage delivered a clear message: like so many *conquistadores*, Cortés felt, in his last years, like he had been abandoned by his king. As if to confirm his fears, the king's secretary of state wrote at the bottom of the page "not to be answered."² This brief peek into the mind of a bitter old man could not be further from the popular imagery of Cortés, the captain who conquered, killed, and enslaved his way to the title of *Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca*. Despite acquiring immense estates in New Spain, thousands of slaves and servants, and fame beyond almost anyone in his time, the Spanish *conquistador* grew old in the midst of never-ending lawsuits and feeling forgotten by the crown he had served.

Nevertheless, during the past five hundred years, Cortés secured something that few historical figures have: being remembered in his own words. His letters to the Emperor Charles V during his years as *conquistador* and later governor of New Spain have been translated and published hundreds of times throughout Europe and the world since 1522. Innumerable artists, novelists, playwrights, and historians have since used them as basis for their idealized and heroic accounts of Cortés's conquest of the Mexica Empire.³ Recent scholarship, however, questions his narrative, instead advocating for a more skeptical analysis of the words written by *el Marqués del Valle* during those crucial seven years between his arrival in Mexico and deposition from the office of Governor of New Spain, in 1526. Taking into consideration not only other accounts written at the time, but also legal documents, memoirs, and the works of scholars such as Matthew Restall and Camilla Townsend, who have advocated for new perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico, this paper will explore the veracity, intentions, and omissions in the letters of Hernán Cortés and the heroic mythology about the Conquest that they have helped to create.

2 "Pensé que el haber trabajado en la juventud, me aprovechara para que en la vejez tuviera descanso, y así ha cuarenta años que me ocupado en no dormir, mal comer y a las veces ni bien ni mal, traer las armas a cuestras, poner la persona en peligros, gastar mi hacienda y edad, todo en servicio de Dios, trayendo ovejas a su corral muy remotas de nuestro hemisferio [...] sin ser ayudado de cosa alguna, antes muy estorbado por nuestros muchos émulos e envidiosos que como sanguijuelas han reventado de hartos de mi sangre [...] por defenderme del fiscal de Vuestra Majestad, que ha sido y es más dificultoso que ganar la tierra de los enemigos [...] no se me siguió reposo a la vejez, mas trabajo hasta la muerte," "Hernán Cortés to Charles V", in José Luis Martínez (ed.), *Documentos Cortesianos IV: 1533-1548, secciones VI a VIII, Segunda Parte* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015), 267-270. Francisco de los Cobos noted at the bottom of the page: "No hay que responder."

3 The term Aztec was only introduced much later to refer to the political force of the Empire based on Tenochtitlan. The inhabitants of the city and their ethnic group referred to themselves as Mexica, although two other city-states were part of the governing coalition. They were also part of the several ethnic and political groups in Mesoamerica that spoke Nahuatl, and like all others, can be referred to as Nahuas. See Camilla Townsend, "Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 3, (June 2003): 660; "Translator's Introduction" in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *Letters from Mexico* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), lvi-lx.

From Medellín to Mexico

Hernán Cortés was born around 1484 to a family of the lower nobility of Medellín, in western Castile.⁴ As Matthew Restall notices, the first thirty-four years of Cortés' life have been neglected in favor of his time in Mexico ever since his earliest biographical accounts. Some contemporary sources claim that he attended the University of Salamanca as a law student for at least a period, before enlisting in the Spanish Navy. Cortés himself never made such a claim. Others placed his education not at a university but as an employee at a notary's office in Valladolid. Either way, by 1504, at the age of nineteen, he had already sailed to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, where he lived until joining the 1511 expedition under *conquistador* Diego Velázquez to the island of Fernandina (Cuba). The enterprise ended with the settling of the territory and defeat of the local Taíno people. Cortés, having received an *encomienda* on the island, spent the next eight years living a quiet life, not embarking on any other expedition until 1519.⁵ Velázquez was so impressed with Cortés that he decided, as the new Governor of the territory, to appoint the young *conquistador* to be his personal secretary. With the help of his new patron, Cortés was able to later secure the office of mayor in the city of Santiago, which in turn elevated his position in the complex political game of the Caribbean phase of the Conquest. By 1519, however, the relationship between both men had deteriorated as Cortés accumulated power, influence, and the main prerequisite for conquest: wealth.⁶

Because of their growing, though still veiled, rivalry, Cortés was not the first nor the second pick of Diego Velázquez for the expedition to the mainland. Two prior expeditions, instructed to explore and trade but not to conquer or settle, had been sent by the Governor before 1519. The second of these, headed by Captain Juan de Grijalva, suffered so many hardships that Velázquez feared to have lost his considerable investment on the fleet. That was because each expedition was privately funded by its members and patrons with the authorization of the Crown. Each captain had to provide funds for ships, supplies, arms, armor, servants, slaves, and anything else they might need. Individual *conquistadores* serving under them had to pay out of their own pockets for their equipment, aides, and horses if they had any. It was a costly investment for both, but a minimal one for the Crown, who only issued permissions for the various types of expeditions after lengthy contracts had been signed. Among many provisions, these contracts imposed the

4 Hernando Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro Altamirano signed his letters both as Fernando and as Hernando. For the sake of simplicity, I chose to refer to him as Hernán Cortés, unless using a direct quotation.

5 The Spanish *Encomienda* system was one of the most common forms of profit-generation of the conquest period. It consisted of shares of inhabited lands awarded to Spaniards by the Crown or the local government, making them responsible for the development of that land through the exploitation of native and slave labor.

6 Pagden, "Translator's Introduction" in *Letters from Mexico*, xlvi-xlvii; Matthew Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 155-159.

payment of the Royal Fifth, a tax of 20% on all profits that resulted from such enterprises. The only payment any of the *conquistadores* received came from their individual shares of the spoils, after deduction of the Royal Fifth. These types of payment included precious metals, lands, *encomiendas*, slaves, and any other things of value they encountered.⁷

Having invested a large amount on Grijalva's expedition, Diego Velázquez began to formulate a plan to recover his money. He needed a partner willing to invest large amounts on a new voyage, able to mobilize a whole fleet, but not so famous or influential that he would become a nuisance. Meanwhile, the Governor would use his office to issue permits for trading and exploring at the same time that he petitioned the Crown for the title of *Adelantado*, the greatest motivation for any ambitious captain in the West Indies. Receiving that title was the same as acquiring a royal permit for settlement and conquest, which were the most lucrative enterprises one could engage in. According to Cortés, the Governor came to him out of desperation. Portraying himself as a selfless servant of the Crown, and Velázquez as a malicious self-serving man "moved more by cupidity than any other passion," Cortés argued in his first letter to the king that Velázquez's intentions were to simply acquire more wealth, acting without the consent of the Royal Representatives to the Indies.⁸ When Grijalva reappeared at the last minute, Cortés' expedition was already in the water. Some sources even say that Velázquez, upon receiving word of Grijalva's return, ran to the docks with a small army to prevent the company from sailing and arrived in time to see the ships disappearing in the horizon. The deal they had struck, Cortés later wrote, would only benefit himself and Velázquez, since his instructions were to go to the Yucatec coast to look for Grijalva and engage in trade with the local Maya populations. He and his men, though, claimed to believe that they could better serve the king by denouncing Velázquez's actions and requesting for Cortés the title of *Adelantado*. The captain's open rebellion against the Governor's orders was justified, he claimed, by his eagerness to serve the Crown, shown by his large investments in the expedition that amounted to two-thirds of its total value. He claimed that he paid for seven of the ten ships, and for the equipment of "those who were to sail in the fleet but were unable to equip themselves with all they required for the journey," while at the same time diminishing Velázquez's investments to "wine and cloth and other things of

7 Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 65-69.

8 The letter itself is signed by "the Judiciary and Municipal Council of the Muy Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz", but it was most certainly edited, if not partially written, by Cortés, who was at the time Captain General of the territory; Hernán Cortés, "Primera Carta-Relación" in *Cartas de Relación*, 5th ed. (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa S.A., 1970), 8; "Movido más a codicia que a otro celo," *Letters from Mexico*, 5.

no great value" which he had sold to them "at a much higher price than he paid for."⁹

A Battle of Narratives

Cortés' betrayal, though, was just one in what recent historians characterize as a long history of backstabbing and throat-cutting in the West Indies. That is because treason and ambition, as Restall and Anthony Pagden argue, were an essential part of the Spanish legal approach to the Conquest. The *conquistadores* were moved, above all, by their greed, but could not operate without the Crown's consent. Cortés himself is infamously quoted by his first biographer, Francisco de Gómara, in 1552, as having said that "we, the Spaniards, suffer from a disease of the heart that can only be cured by gold," a phrase not present in any of the letters. People in positions of power had to carefully choose their associates knowing that their very existence was perceived as detrimental to the profits of those serving under them. The Crown profited from these conflicts through the legal nuances that bonded any enterprises of conquest and trade to the king's authority, while providing several mechanisms to exclude older *conquistadores* from the picture. Cortés himself would later be double-crossed by his own captain, Cristóbal de Olid, who in 1524 set to conquer his own lands in today's Honduras, prompting Cortés into a failed expedition to defeat the insurrection and subjugate the region.¹⁰

Because the battle of narratives that sprang from these conflicts was, at the end of the day, more important than legal nuances, the reports and other proofs of merit that the Crown required on a regular basis became increasingly important. As Restall explains, these reports sent by conquerors to the Crown of Castile served a dual purpose; first, they informed the monarchs of the events, lands, and peoples encountered by the Spaniards, as well as of the presence or not of precious metals; second, they served as petitions for financial rewards, titles, offices, and anything the Crown could provide. Promoting their own deeds and downplaying or completely ignoring those of others was an essential part of these reports, and Cortés was well aware of the impact they would have in his enterprise. At the same time, his letters were exceptional in the sense that they had a third purpose, which was to justify his rebellion against Diego Velázquez and prove to the royal offi-

9 J.H. Elliott, "Introduction," *Letters from Mexico*, xiii and Cortés, "Primera Carta-Relación," 10-11; 26. "el dicho Fernando Cortés [...] propuso de gastar todo quanto tenía en hacer aquella armada, casi las dos partes de ella a su costa, así en navíos como en bastimentos, de más y allende de repartir sus dineros por las personas que habían de ir en la dicha armada, que tenían necesidad para proveerse de cosas necesarias para el viaje"; "...en vinos y en ropas y en otras cosas de poco valor para nos lo vender acá en mucha más cantidad de lo que él le costó," *Letters from Mexico*, 11.

10 Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 21-22 and Pagden, "Translator's Introduction" in *Letters from Mexico*, xli; see Cortés' Fifth letter, where he describes in detail the expeditions to Honduras and the quarrels with Cristóbal de Olid and Francisco de Las Casas. David Sánchez, "Hernán Cortés y La Enfermedad del Oro." *Revista de Artes, Humanidades, y Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 6, no. 10 (September 2019): 36-45.

cials that would read them that his case was worth gambling on. Most letters of this type received by the Crown were fairly short, no more than a few pages long, mostly covered by formalities, and ended up receiving little attention. Thousands upon thousands are stored in the archives at Seville, Madrid, Mexico City, and many other cities around the world, in some cases having never been read. Cortés' letters were the opposite of short, sprawling over dozens of pages, and written for a broader audience than only the Court's officials. At the same time, they petitioned for a retroactive license to conquer and settle and assumed it had already been granted. Detailed descriptions fulfilled the need of assuring the Crown of the potential for profit, while the language employed was that of Spanish petitioners.¹¹

At the same time, Cortés knew Velázquez had the upper hand. He had the status of a Governor, and his powerful relative Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca lobbied intensively in his favor in the Court of Spain, and would later succeed in convincing the king's representative, Adrian of Utrecht, to send a royal inquirer to Vera Cruz to assess the situation of Cortés' expedition. For that reason, Pagden and J. H. Elliot argue that Cortés arranged for two copies of his letters to arrive in Europe, one to be delivered directly to the king, who was constantly on the move, and one to be delivered to his own father, Don Martín Cortés. This second set was for immediate publication. He hoped that by sending his men to the king personally while spreading his version of the story among the literate nobility of Europe, the king would favor his narrative, or at least not be able to ignore it. The first letter, dating from 1519, was not signed by Cortés and thus was not published until 1777, but the second, third, and fourth letters were edited and printed as soon as they arrived.¹² Although pre-modern communication chains may seem slow by our post-globalization standards, the printing press allowed for information to spread quicker in the early sixteenth century than ever before. Even before the arrival of Cortés' second letter, anonymous descriptions of his meeting with Montezuma were published in several languages throughout Europe.¹³ Less than two months after the

11 Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 12; 66-67.

12 Elliott, "Introduction," *Letters from Mexico*, xxix-xxx and Pagden, "Translator's Introduction" in *Letters from Mexico*, xlv; lvi-lx. What we today know as the First Letter, dating from 1519, was written by officials of the city of Vera Cruz as well as Cortés, and would remain hidden from the public until 1777 when Scottish historian William Robertson received permission to search the Österreichische National Bibliothek in Vienna. He was looking for a letter referred to by Francisco Lopez de Gómara, which he never found, but ended up discovering this other letter that was supposed to accompany the lost one. The Fifth Letter was also uncovered in the same library. All letters would not be printed together until 1866, but editions containing the Second, Third and Fourth were popular in Europe since 1525.

13 The most common Spanish spelling of the Mexica Emperor's name is Moctezuma, although no one at the time used it. Each conqueror spelled Nahuatl names and words as they understood them phonetically, and so they will not be changed in direct quotations from original sources. I have elected to use Montezuma, which is the most common English and German spelling.

letter's official publication in 1522, German and Italian editions already existed.¹⁴

Founding Vera Cruz

More than any other, the first letter, signed by the "Justiciary and Municipal Council of the *Muy Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz*," served as the justification for the company's rebellion against Velázquez's orders. It opened with the claim that nothing Velázquez had told the Crown about the mainland was true, "nor could have been true," since "until now no one has known any of these things."¹⁵ It also spawned one of the most famous myths about Cortés that supposedly exemplified his ingenious thinking. This was the foundation of the city of Vera Cruz, a legal maneuver to undermine the orders received in Cuba by creating a municipal council that answered directly to the king's authority. Early authors such as the biographer Francisco de Gómara gave Cortés sole credit for this idea.¹⁶ However, Gómara was not present during the Conquest, a fact stressed many times in Bernal Díaz's memoir "The True History of the Conquest of New Spain," written in 1568 as a response to the "errors" the old *conquistador* claimed to have found in Gómara's text.

When describing the foundation of Vera Cruz, Díaz made sure to emphasize that he and his comrades felt cheated by Velázquez and, to a certain extent, by Cortés, for they had entered the company believing they would have permission to settle. Having this in mind, the captains would have approached Cortés to suggest founding a new municipality, counting on the Captain General's opposition to the Governor of Cuba as an incentive for him to listen to their plan. Díaz, in conversation with those same captains, agreed with the plan, arguing that "it was not a wise decision to return to Cuba and that it would be a good thing for the country to be settled. What he credited Cortés for, however, was exploiting the situation in order to secure for himself a fifth of the spoils just like the king, an unpopular decision that would become the subject of contempt among the troops during and after the expedition. Díaz's version is supported by the first letter itself, where the members of the Town Council of Vera Cruz claimed that the men in the expedition, "most eager to honor the Royal Crown, extend its dominions and increase its revenues, came together and urged [...]"

14 Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 36-38.

15 Cortés, "Primera Carta-Relación," 3. "No son ni han podido ser ciertas porque nadie hasta ahora las ha sabido," *Letters from Mexico*, 7.

16 Fernando Lopez de Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary*, ed. and trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 65-68.

Captain Fernando Cortés, saying that this land is very good and [...] most wealthy also.”¹⁷

Lost in Translation

The first letter also introduces the reader to Gerónimo de Aguilar, a shipwrecked Spaniard rescued by the expedition in Cozumel after seven years living as a slave of the Maya in Yucatán. Recounting the rescue operation, the text describes what would become the standard framing of Cortés’ approach to conquest. Upon encountering a new people, if he was met with hostility, he would read them the *requerimiento*, a standard document that required their complete surrender and peaceful acceptance to become vassals of “the most powerful monarch in the world,” as well as their conversion to the Catholic faith. As Pagden explains, if they interpreted that the natives had understood and refused to comply, then the Spaniards were free to engage them in battle and force them into submission. In the case of a peaceful encounter, Cortés would send for the local chiefs, as he did in Cozumel, offering a peaceful alliance and preaching the Christian gospel. Without an interpreter, however, the latter option would not be possible, and that is why Cortés decided to rescue Aguilar. After seven years in Yucatán, he had become fluent in Yucatec Maya, and thus could communicate with most Maya speakers.¹⁸

The other link in Cortés’ chain of communication was Malintzin, a Nahuatl woman who was sold as a slave to the Yucatec Maya at an early age, making her fluent in both languages.¹⁹ “Without the help of Doña Marina,” Díaz wrote, “we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico.” The fact that she was referred to by the Spaniards as “Doña,” a pronoun of respect, is already revealing; this was not the type of treatment that conventional slaves received. Malintzin was a powerful tool for the conquistadors, for she not only allowed for communication but also taught Cortés and his captains about

17 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, “The True History of the Conquest of New Spain.” in Stuart Schwartz (ed.), *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahuatl views of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 70-71 and Cortés, “Primera Carta-Relación,” 18. “*Celosos del servicio de Nuestro Señor y de vuestras reales altezas, y deseosos de ensalzar su corona real, de acrecentar sus señoríos y de aumentar sus rentas, nos juntamos y platicamos con el dicho capitán Fernando Cortés diciendo que esta tierra era buena, y que [...] se creía que debía ser muy rica,*” *Letters from Mexico*, 7.

18 Cortés, “Primera Carta-Relación,” 4-15, 18; *Letters from Mexico*, 11-18, 21-24; and Cortés, “Cuarta Carta-Relación” in *Cartas de Relación*.

19 The ex-slave was baptized Marina, and was normally referred to as Doña Marina by the Spaniards, a sign of respect. The Nahuas, then, recognizing her status, added the suffix -in to her name, which was reserved for the nobility. The Spaniards heard the name Malintzin and ended up corrupting it, originating yet another spelling of her name, Malinche. I have decided to use Malintzin, which is the name by which most Nahuas would refer to her.

local culture and customs. By later learning Spanish, she made herself indispensable.²⁰

The role of interpreters, especially that of Malintzin, is highlighted in several accounts left by the conquistadors, such as Andrés de Tapia and Bernal Díaz, as well as in the later account of Gómara. In a later chapter, when describing the hardships of their campaigns, Díaz adds that Doña Marina’s courage was admired by them all, and that in every moment of hardship, when the troops seemed to be at breaking point, she “never allowed us to see any sign of fear in her”. Similarly, he commended Aguilar for his role in helping the expedition in understanding the Maya culture.²¹ Cortés, however, only mentioned his interpreters twice throughout five letters. For the most part, he wrote as if he was able to clearly communicate with the Nahuas, ignoring the several layers of translation involved in each conversation, even when directly quoting Nahuatl speakers such as Montezuma.²² In places like Cempoala, where Totonac was spoken, Cortés would speak in Spanish to Aguilar, who would translate it to Yucatec Maya to Malintzin, so she in turn could repeat it in Nahuatl to a Totonac interpreter who would finally deliver the message to his lords. If miscommunications and misinterpretations between two completely different languages and cultures were expected, this whole process made them certain. It also created room for several challenges to the narrative presented in Cortés’ letters.

Divided They Fall

“When I saw the discord and animosity between these two peoples, I was not a little pleased, for it seemed to further my purpose considerably; I might have the opportunity of subduing them more quickly, for, as the saying goes, divided the fall...”²³ With these words, referring to the rivalry between the cities of Tenochtitlan and Tlaxcala, Cortés created the illusion that the Nahuatl leaderships were under his control. Making sense of local politics and exploiting divisions was a common theme in the history of Old World conquest since Rome. In the case of Mexico, however, things were not so simple. The several *altepetls*, or city-states, were bound by culture, religion, and some-

20 Juliane Cristine Dias de Barros Jankowski; Adriana Mocelino de Souza Lima; Alexandra Ferreira Martins Ribeiro; and Vanessa Iansen Rodrigues, “As Razões da Conquista de Tenochtitlán (1519-1521) Contidas na Narrativa de Hernán Cortez”, *Revista THEMA*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2018): 189 and Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 83.

21 Díaz, “The True History of the Conquest of New Spain” in *Victors and Vanquished*, 61-69; 110. Andrés de Tapia, “The Chronicles of Andrés de Tapia” in *Victors and Vanquished*, 21-25.

22 Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 12 and Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” *Cartas de Relación*, 52.

23 Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 69-70. “*Vista la Discordia y desconformidad de los unos y de los otros, no hube poco placer, porque me pareció hacer mucho a mi propósito, y que podría tener manera de más aún sojuzgarlos, y que se dijese aquel común decir de monte etc... y an acordéme de una autoridad evangélica que dice: omne regnum in se ipsum divisum desolabitur,*” *Letters from Mexico*, 42. The biblical passage, in Latin on the original, is from Luke 11:17.

times language, but each had their own complex political organization. Warfare, trade, and alliances created a system of peer-polity interaction much like that of the Greeks or the Sumerians.²⁴ How could, then, a group of foreigners, unable to even communicate effectively, so quickly understand the complex politics of pre-Conquest Mesoamerica to the point where they were confident enough of their ability to manipulate the main actors? Simply put, they could not. Especially if they were under the impression that they could.

The excerpt above is from the second letter, right after Cortés described their 18-day war against Tlaxcala, the second most powerful city in Mesoamerica and sworn enemy of the Mexica. The company, after conquering some coastal cities and founding Vera Cruz, was guided to Tlaxcala by their newly found allies from the city of Cempoala, who claimed to be taking them to meet Montezuma. These were the Totonacs, a people allied to Tenochtitlan, and one of the first to be subdued by the Spaniards. As Restall points out, Cortés claimed to have played off the Totonac grievances against Tenochtitlan in his favor, while pretending to act friendly to Montezuma's ambassadors who had met him on the coast. For Cempoala, however, a Spanish-Tlaxcalteca conflict seemed like the most beneficial situation; it would weaken both sides and by doing so, win for the Totonacs the favor of the Mexica. Furthermore, it also allowed Montezuma's informants, who watched the Spaniards' battles closely, to gather all information they could on the "Caxtiltecas", the men of Castile.²⁵

The Totonacs were most likely instructed by Montezuma to bide their time and look for signs that either side, the Spaniards or the Tlaxcaltecas, would win. Their loose alliance with Cortés could not undermine their long-standing bond with the Mexica, especially because Montezuma's ambassadors had arrived at Cempoala just two days after the settlement of Vera Cruz. As recounted after the Conquest in Nahuatl texts, the Mexica were keeping track of the sailors and were aware of their existence at least since Grijalva's expedition. Thus, when Cortés and his men first made contact with the Totonacs, the Emperor was quickly informed. Unbeknownst to him, Cortés was caught in the midst of the political game between Tlaxcala and Tenochtitlan, and each side wanted to use the Spaniard forces to its advantage. The company's complete dependency on their allies for food, supplies, and information was the natives' greatest advantage. That is what allowed them to play Cortés into facing off with their enemies completely unprepared. Cortés would later write to the king that he "had come to their [the Tlaxcaltecas'] land thinking that I came to a land of friends

24 Altepetl is the Nahuatl word for city-state. Peer-polity interaction is a concept from archaeology that refers to the relations between several societies that influence each other's development through technology spreading, competition, warfare, and the adoption of common symbols. The most well-known example is that of the Greek poleis. See Colin Renfrew, "Peer Polity Interaction and Political Change" in Colin Renfrew & John Cherry (ed.), *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

25 Cortés, "Segunda Carta-Relación," 57-58; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 184.

because the men at Cempoala had assured me it was so." The Totonacs, however, could never have guessed that the outcome of a Spanish-Tlaxcalteca war would be an alliance.²⁶

The Politics of Mass Murder

The war against Tlaxcala was a costly one for both sides. Cortés, however, omitted the hardships in his letters, as did Gómara in his account. Both describe the war in a heroic tone, with no Spanish casualties whatsoever besides a couple of horses. In reality, by the end of the first battle, the Spaniards were already short on all types of supplies, from food to gunpowder. They resorted to eating the enemies' dogs. Some died and all of the survivors were wounded. Their necessity was such that Díaz described how they had to dress their wounds "with the grease from a fat Indian who we had killed and cut open," for they had no oils, salt, or medicines.²⁷ Many times, the Tlaxcaltecas followed the Mesoamerican protocol of offering peace in return for tributes and submission but the Spaniards refused to capitulate. Realizing that, despite the enemy losing many more warriors, they were still greatly outnumbered, Cortés and his captains resorted to another classic strategy of conquest. Instead of battling the Tlaxcalteca army coming from the city, they set out for the surrounding peasant villages which had been neglected due to the urgent need for the defense of the capital. They massacred Tlaxcalteca villagers for days, killing, plundering, and burning down whatever structures they could find. Cortés described these massacres, sometimes in detail, as in the case of a village that he claimed had "more than twenty thousand houses." He recounts that "they [the villagers] rushed out unarmed, and the women and children ran naked through the streets, and I began to do them some harm." They also included other forms of psychological terror such as the mutilation of prisoners and messengers. These attacks, which left thousands of peasants dead, prompted the Tlaxcaltecas to drop their tribute demands and agree to peace negotiations.²⁸ The tributes did not matter. They knew they had an advantage.

The proof that any sense of control the Spaniard captains had been simply illusory came seventeen days after the peace with the Tlaxcaltecas was achieved and an uneasy alliance was formed. Still recovering from their wounds, the Spaniards decided to march

26 Bernardino de Sahagún, "Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex" in James Lockhart (ed.), *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, vol. 1 (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1993), 56-57; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 182-184; Cortés, "Segunda Carta-Relación," 38-41; "Yo les satisface diciendo que conociesen cómo ellos tenían la culpa del daño que habían recibido, y que yo me venía a su tierra creyendo que venía a tierra de mis amigos, porque los de Cempoal así me habían certificado que lo eran y querían ser." *Letters from Mexico*, 57-66; 68-69.

27 Díaz, "The True History of the Conquest of New Spain," 106-108; Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary*, 97-106.

28 Cortés, "Segunda Carta-Relación," 39-40; "Y como los tomé de sobresalto, salían desarmados, y las mujeres y niños desnudos por las calles, y comencé a hacerles algún daño." *Letters from Mexico*, 62-63; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 206-210.

to Tenochtitlan accompanied by their new allies, who advised them not to follow the path indicated by Montezuma's ambassadors. Instead, the Tlaxcaltecas insisted on guiding them through a different road they claimed to be safer. This was the road to Cholollan, today's Cholula, a detour to the south on the way from Tlaxcala to Tenochtitlan. The city of Cholollan had been part of a troubled alliance with Tlaxcala and the city of Huexotzinco against Tenochtitlan, but switched sides a few years before the arrival of Cortés' expedition. In order to test their new alliance, and use the Spaniards to settle old scores before marching to Tenochtitlan, the Tlaxcaltecas, joined by thousands of Huexotzinco's warriors, led 250 Spaniards already in fighting condition again against the Chololtecas, their former allies and now enemies. Cortés, finding himself having to justify the massacre of thousands of Chololtecas and their vassals in his letters without admitting that he had been manipulated by his allies yet again, blamed the Cholollan fiasco on a complex plot by Montezuma. In his account, Malintzin, who he does not mention by name, was told by a local woman "that the people of the city had sent away their women and children and all their belongings, and were about to fall on us and kill us all." He then captured some of the vassals of Cholollan, who admitted that "they had wished to kill me treacherously", but only because Montezuma "had forced them to it, and had garrisoned [...] fifty thousand men for that purpose." Like so many times throughout the text, Cortés claimed to have uncovered a plot by the Mexica emperor to kill him, thus arguing that he outsmarted his enemies again and justifying his actions. Even some of his men spoke out against subsequent massacres, although they were a minority.²⁹ Besides the immediate death toll from the battle, Cholollan would later be ravaged by smallpox, becoming increasingly depopulated even after its submission to the Crown of Castile. Nevertheless, the city became an important base of operations during the Spanish-Mexica War.³⁰

The Emperor of Mexico

Montezuma's ambassadors and spies closely watched the terror perpetrated by the Spaniards in both Tlaxcala and Cholollan. The Mexica had been present since the first steps of Cortés' journey inland and they had learned a great deal about the foreigners. By the time the

29 Cortés, "Segunda Carta-Relación," 42; 44-47; "tenían fuera sus mujeres e hijos y toda su ropa, y que había de dar sobre nosotros para nos matar a todos"; "hablé con aquellos señores que tenía presos y les pregunté qué era la causa que me querían matar a traición, y me respondieron que ellos no tenían la culpa porque los de Culúa que son los vasallos de Mutezuma, los habían puesto en ello, y que el dicho Mutezuma tenía allí en tal parte [...] cincuenta mil hombres en guarnición para lo hacer;" *Letters from Mexico*, 74-75; 465; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 210.

30 Cortés, "Tercera Carta-Relación," *Cartas de Relación*, 104-105. Cortés later writes that even Magiscacin, his "great friend" and appointed ruler of Cholollan, died of smallpox; Francisco de Aguilar, "The Chronicle of Fray Francisco de Aguilar," *The Conquistadors: First-Person Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, ed., Patricia de Fuentes (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 144.

company left Cholollan, Montezuma had a much clearer picture of who the Spaniards were than they could have had of him. He also knew how much they could harm him. The dominance of Tenochtitlan over Mesoamerica was based on two things: their military supremacy and their ability to keep peace. Cortés was a challenge to both. The Mexica were well aware of the technological disparity between them and the invaders in weaponry, technology, and transportation, especially when it came to metallurgy, the arrival of reinforcements through the sea, and the use of gunpowder. They had been watching and learning, developing ways of countering the enemy's advantages, and had witnessed the carnage the invaders and Tlaxcaltecas were willing to unleash when antagonized. Montezuma knew he could not face off with Cortés in open field, like the Tlaxcaltecas did, and that he could not afford to look weak in the eyes of his subjects by allowing for other *altepetl* to fall like Cholollan. A logical decision, then, was to welcome the Spaniards into Tenochtitlan, win their friendship if he could, but have them cornered within his own territory if conflict followed.³¹

When it comes to Montezuma, myth and history are especially intertwined. That is because the figure of the Mexica emperor was the subject of several characterizations based mostly on the *conquistadors'*, and especially Cortés', descriptions of him. The other major source on his life is the Florentine Codex, a compilation of oral histories and testimonies of mainly Tlatelolco Nahuas compiled by the Spanish friar Bernardino de Sahagún. The problem with all these sources is that none is entirely trustworthy. Cortés and the Spaniards had many reasons to distort their individual versions of the narrative, while the Codex, written after the conquest by a European with the aid of natives of one of the dozens of Nahua ethnicities, was heavily influenced by Latin and Greek writings brought over from Europe and altepetl-specific points of view. For the Christianized informants who helped Sahagún, the image of a weak and superstitious Montezuma was compelling as it denounced the idols of the past while exempting their forebears from any guilt for losing the war³². From these narratives, three main myths about Montezuma arose, all rooted in Cortés' letters describing their meeting and time together.

The Surrender

The first of these myths is that of the surrender. When Montezuma met Cortés, both leaders exchanged gifts and speeches, as well as lengthy conversations through Malintzin and Gerónimo de Aguilar. Montezuma's impressions and interpretations of this encounter have not survived, but Cortés' have. In his second letter, Cortés transcribed what he claimed to be the speech given by the Mexica emperor on their first meeting. Strangely, it follows the

31 Townsend, "Burying the White Gods": 678-679; 682-683; Jankowsk, Lima, Ribeiro, and Rodrigues, "As Razões da Conquista de Tenochitlán (1519-1521)": 191.

32 Townsend, "Burying the White Gods": 667-69; Stuart B. Schwartz (ed.), *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahuatl Views of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 26.

idealized and fantastic “peaceful surrender” path described in the *requerimiento*. According to Cortés, Montezuma said that “all the land that lies in my domain, you may command as you will, for you shall be obeyed; and all that we own is for you to dispose of as you choose.”³³ The expected interpretation from a European audience was that Montezuma deliberately surrendered his kingdom. By placing these words in Montezuma’s mouth, Cortés simply confirmed what the Spaniards already believed. From the beginning of the second letter, Cortés had been writing to Charles V as if the emperor already owned the land. From here on, that belief was justified. Anyone who resisted the Conquest could now be framed as being in rebellion against the crown. This version also fits the narrative of the descendants of the Nahuas in Mexico, such as the informants for the Florentine Codex. They adopted the characterization of Montezuma as a cowardly dictator who surrendered his empire, blaming him for their fall but also legitimizing claims of loyalty for local vassals to the Spanish king. Inadvertently, they strengthened Cortés’ claims.³⁴

The White Gods

Why would Montezuma have surrendered, especially without a fight? Cortés, again, gives us a clever answer. During the same speech where he “surrenders”, Cortés wrote that Montezuma said “so because of the place from which you claim to come, namely, from where the sun rises, and the things you tell us of the great lord or king who sent you here, we believe and are certain that he is our natural lord, especially as you say he has known of us for some time.”³⁵ With these words, and with a few other passages in the same letter, Cortés gives Montezuma a compelling reason to surrender, creating the second myth about him: deceived by his idols and superstitions, the emperor thought the Spanish were gods, or at least, were in the service of a god. Later works built upon that idea and a whole mythology grew around it. Forty years later, conquistador Francisco de Aguilar added the detail that “bearded and armed men” were part of an old Mexica prophecy. As Restall shows, before Aguilar, nobody had ever claimed that. Syncretism among the descendants of the Spaniards and the Mexica added yet another important detail to this story. In the Florentine Codex, the god in question was said to be Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, who had left Mesoamerica to the land of the rising sun and would return one day to reclaim his throne. The Codex argued that Montezuma believed this was

33 Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 52; “*Y bien podéis en toda la tierra, digo en la que yo en mi señorío poseo, mandar a vuestra voluntad porque será obedecido y hecho; y todo lo que nosotros tenemos es para lo que vos de ello quisiéredes disponer*,” *Letters from Mexico*, 62-63; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 66.

34 Elliott, “Introduction” in *Letters from Mexico*, xxvii; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 45-48.

35 Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 52. “*y segun de la parte que vos decís que venís, que es a do sale el sol y las cosas que decís de ese gran señor o rey que acá os envió, creemos y tenemos por cierto, él sea nuestro señor natural, en especial que nos decís que él ha muchos días que tenía noticia de nosotros*,” *Letters from Mexico*, 62-63.

Cortés, while others claimed it was Charles V. Either way, this was not mentioned by any sources from the time of the conquest or immediately after it.³⁶ In the 1560s, one of the oldest living conquistadors, Fray Francisco de Aguilar, then at the age of eighty, wrote about what was probably the root of Cortés’ claim. He stated that many of the natives referred to them as “teules,” which he insisted meant “gods,” as did Francisco de Gómara.³⁷

This myth of the “white gods” was well accepted after Gómara’s publication, especially because it emphasized the natives’ submission to, and adulation of, the conquistadores instead of their military resistance. It certainly ties in well with the surrender narrative, as well as with the Abrahamic prohibition of worshiping idols.³⁸ But in reality, the word “teule” never existed. Nahuatl is a language that assumes that everyone has a place of origin or a social position. The Spaniards, as historian and Nahuatl specialist Camilla Townsend explains, did not quite fit the standard. Before the terms “Caxtilteca,” “Christian,” or even “Spaniard” were introduced, the Nahuas had no word to call the foreigners. Some of the earliest natives that contacted the Spaniards, then, decided to call them “Teotl,” meaning “powerful one.” Teotl could also be used to refer to a specific class of priests within Nahua religion, the so called “deity-impersonators,” who dressed as and played the parts of gods in religious ceremonies. The Spanish corruption of Teotl, as “teule,” was adopted by many Spaniards as the word they would use to refer to themselves. Later, the term *Cristianos*, the Christians, became the most common.³⁹

Montezuma in Chains

The third myth about Montezuma rooted in Cortés’ letters refers to the emperor’s imprisonment and death. After an *altepetl* subordinated to Tenochtitlan attacked the town of Vera Cruz, Cortés claimed to have imprisoned Montezuma, thus avoiding another plot by the Mexica. He wrote that he decided to “take him and keep him in the quarters where I was,” for it would “benefit Your Royal service and our safety if Mutezuma were in my power and not in complete liberty.” Right after, however, Cortés noted that he “begged him [Montezuma] not to take this ill, for he was not to be imprisoned but given all his freedom, and I would not impede the service and command of his domains.”

These passages generate some questions. First, they contradict narratives about the surrender and the teules. If Montezuma had surrendered, believing them to be gods, why would he revolt and have to be placed under arrest? Second, if his daily activities were not to be disturbed, and he was to have all the liberty to continue to rule as he

36 Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 43; Townsend, “Burying the White Gods”: 669; “Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex” in *We People Here*, 58-59.

37 Tapia, “The Chronicles of Andrés de Tapia,” in *The Conquistadors*, 138; Townsend, “Burying the White Gods”: 659.

38 Townsend, “Burying the White Gods”: 659-660.

39 *Ibid.*, 669-672.

did before, did he understand it as an arrest? A key point in answering these questions comes from a passage just after, when Cortés explains the work of the Spaniards who were to guard the emperor, saying that they were to “serve him in all he commanded.”⁴⁰ Indeed, several Spaniards, such as Andrés de Tapia, Bernal Díaz, and Francisco de Aguilar, wrote that they were ordered to guard Montezuma at some point, normally two at a time. They also wrote, however, that he was free to move around as he pleased, and that the “guards” became only two of the thousands of people who followed him around at every moment. It is possible that the men “on guard duty” during those months that the Spaniards spent in the city simply misinterpreted their roles in the emperor’s entourage, which, as Cortés points out, had “always at least three thousand men.”⁴¹

235 days after the Spaniards entered Tenochtitlan, however, Montezuma was dead. A few weeks before, Cortés and some of his company had left the city to face the royal inspector Francisco Narváez, sent by the Crown under Diego Velázquez’s recommendation. Meanwhile, in Tenochtitlan, an unspecified quarrel between the Mexica and the Spaniards Cortés left in charge escalated into a massacre, and upon his return, the Captain General faced an open revolt. Besieged within one of Montezuma’s residences, he decided to allow the emperor to speak to his people and try to calm the crowd. All around, stones and spears flew against them. After that, Cortés only wrote that Montezuma “received a blow on his head from a stone; and the injury was so serious that he died three days later.” Other conquistadores described the details, with Díaz adding that they “cried as though he had been our father.” Nevertheless, the message was clear: Montezuma was dead, and it was not the Spaniards’ fault. This, understandably, was the *conquistadors’* preferred version of the emperor’s death, one that exempted them from any blame by claiming that he was killed by his own disgruntled people, even if unintentionally. The natives’ preferred version, though, accused the Spaniards of having stabbed him to death and of killing other two thousand nobles right before escaping the city.⁴²

40 Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 53-54. “y aun por lo que de la tierra había visto, que convenía al real servicio de vuestra majestad y a nuestra seguridad, que aquel señor estuviere en mi poder y no en toda su libertad [...] Determiné de lo prender y pone ren el aposento donde yo estaba [...] los de mi compañía le servirían en todo lo que el mandase,” *Letters from Mexico*, 88-90.

41 Aguilar, “The Chronicle of Fray Francisco de Aguilar” in *The Conquistadors*, 148-149; Tapia, “The Chronicles of Andrés de Tapia,” 39; Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Bernal Díaz Chronicles: The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, ed. Albert Idell (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), 168-172; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 217-221.

42 Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 79. “le dieron una pedrada los suyos en la cabeza, tan grande, que de allí a tres días murió,” *Letters from Mexico*, 132; Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 248.

Cortés, His Troops, and the Uncredited

As stated earlier, the *conquistadores* had every incentive to downplay anyone else in their narratives, and Cortés was no different. Many times, he wrote that the expedition’s success was due to his own skill and God’s blessing, and from the third letter on, when the war against the Mexica was at its peak, he constantly claimed to have taken on the most dangerous tasks to lead by example. Rarely did he give any real credit to any of his aides or captains. Francisco de Gómara’s biography of Cortés, for example, was based on Cortés’ letters and personal documents, and paid for by his family, so that it tends to celebrate the Marquis and give next to no credit to the common soldier. This trend did not go unnoticed by his men. The lack of recognition is a driving force behind many of the later accounts written by *conquistadores*, together with their need to defend their actions from indigenist authors such as Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas.⁴³ Bernal Díaz writings are full of complaints about his and the officers’ sidelining, and claims that the captains had a much greater role than what Cortés’ top-down account reveals in his letters. His frustration is exemplified by a passage describing the war against Tlaxcala, where he noted that “although the historian Gómara says that Cortés did this and that, and came here and went there, and says many other things without reason, even if Cortés were made of iron, as Gómara in his history says he was, he could not be everywhere at once.”⁴⁴ Fray Francisco de Aguilar went further, asserting that the captains acted as breaks to Cortés’ tyrannical behavior, convincing him to show mercy to his own men when he was convinced of their treasonous intentions.⁴⁵

Another group whose role Cortés distorted is a special one in several respects. In contrast to the Mexica and the other *conquistadores*, these were men and women almost completely erased from any account, not only Cortés’. This group included African and Caribbean slaves and servants, brought over from the Caribbean islands or from across the Atlantic to serve either individual Spaniards or the Crown. Their presence was seldom noticed in Cortés’ letters, but the scattered evidence for their presence is gradually emerging. Some slaves even became *conquistadores* on their own, acting in the name of their masters in order to acquire wealth and buy their own freedom. Most were personal auxiliaries to individual Spaniards, armed out of the company’s desperate need for troops. Although dozens of enslaved Africans and Taíno Indians participated in the Conquest of Mexico, many more would be part of subsequent expeditions, numbering in the hundreds and even outnumbering the Spaniards. Cortés himself had over 300 enslaved Africans with him during his failed expedition to Baja California, many years later.⁴⁶

Even Cortés’ native allies were greatly disregarded, although they played a role

43 Schwartz (ed), *Victors and Vanquished*, 18.

44 Díaz, “The True History of the Conquest of New Spain,” 105; 109.

45 Aguilar, “The Chronicle of Fray Francisco de Aguilar,” 139.

46 Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 52-58.

that cannot be ignored in the war against the Mexica. Cortés only mentioned these groups of people when their presence could be used to exemplify either Spanish superiority or the inhospitable conditions that made his story all the more “heroic,” as when he noted that many of his men suffered with the cold nights of Mexico, so much so that “several Indians from the island of Fernandina who had not enough to wear died from [cold].” The few women that accompanied the settlers are also rarely mentioned by either Cortés or his men’s memoirs. Although not participating in the conquest itself, they had been present from the start, coming to the New World as Spanish settlers or native slaves.⁴⁷

Gold, God, and King

Gold was a central piece of the Conquest’s puzzle. Gold motivated the *conquistadores*’ actions from the moment they decided to join an expedition. It is not surprising, then, that one of the most common complaints made by the Spaniards who served under Cortés was against his division of the spoils. When, after the war, Luis Ponce de León was named the Royal inspector to New Spain, he was instructed to conduct a *residencia*, an investigation of Cortés’ actions while in charge of the colony, by taking testimonies from his men. There was not one witness who did not accuse him of unfairly dividing the spoils. The accusations ranged from giving greater shares to those he considered to be more loyal without their comrades’ consent to outright robbery, from them and from the Crown. Some, like Juan de Burgos and the interpreter Gerónimo de Aguilar, reported on rumors that Cortés was secretly minting gold bars and coins in his own house with the help of native servants.⁴⁸ While these were serious accusations, the most common complaint voiced by the conquistadors was regarding Cortés’ share of the loot. Rodrigo de Castañeda, in his testimony, said that talks about the “other fifth” were common among the troops throughout the whole expedition, for the Captain would demand one fifth of the spoils “after we deducted the royal one, in gold and gems and other things.”⁴⁹ Years later, Díaz summed up the general feeling by quoting a soldier as having “sworn to god that such a thing had never happened as to have two kings in the land of our king and lord, and to take out two fifths.”⁵⁰ Nowhere in his letters did Cortés mention to Charles V about his demand for one fifth of the spoils, although he constantly wrote about his personal expenses with the expedition.

47 Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 35. “y así murieran ciertos indios de la isla Fernandina, que iban mal arropados,” *Letters from Mexico*, 55.

48 *Sumario de la Residencia Tomada a D. Fernando Cortés, Gobernador y Capitan General de la Nueva España*, vol. 1, paleography and ed. Ignacio López Rayón (Mexico: Archivo Mexicano Tip. de V. García Torres, 1852), 53; 108-109; 165. For Gerónimo de Aguilar’s testimony, see *Sumario de la Residencia Tomada a D. Fernando Cortés, Gobernador y Capitan General de la Nueva España*, vol. 2, paleography and ed. Ignacio López Rayón (Mexico: Archivo Mexicano Tip. de V. García Torres, 1853), 198-199.

49 “a llevado a otro quinto despues de aver sacado el de su majestad del oro e piedras e otras cosas,” *Sumario de la Residencia*, vol. 1, 239.

50 Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 277-278.

Re-Fighting Lost Battles

Another important element of Cortés’ description of battles and conflicts is that these accounts were written later, when the outcomes were already known. It was easy for him to claim credit for the successful strategies in this scenario while blaming every failure on either treason or his men’s careless actions. An obvious example of that occurred during the siege of Tenochtitlan. In the face of the Spaniards’ greatest defeat during that battle, a failed attempt to take the central marketplace of the city that cost them sixty soldiers, several horses, and thousands of native allies, Cortés’ reaction was to lift the blame from himself. He claimed to have known the danger and advocated against the attack, blaming the whole operation on his men’s confidence after “fighting without cease for more than twenty days.” In the letter, he wrote that they pressured him “so much that I agreed to do all I could once I had spoken to the people in the other camps.” Besides the mounting casualties, this defeat was a blow to the Spaniards’ morale, for it cost them all the progress they had made throughout an entire month of battle, and forced them to retreat, regroup, and replan for the next two days.⁵¹ According to Díaz and Francisco de Aguilar, that was not how these events occurred. Díaz, who wrote about this very battle in a chapter he called “The Defeat of Cortés,” claimed that the commander summoned all the captains and soldiers in his camp, and proposed “that we enter the city with one great stroke and penetrate to Tatelulco, the main plaza of Mexico, which is much broader and longer than that of Salamanca.” He continued by stating that many of the Spaniards raised concerns, but Cortés did not listen to them.⁵² Aguilar also brought up the *Noche Triste*, the “Sad Night,” when, on June 30, 1520, almost half of the Spaniard forces were killed as they made their first escape from Tenochtitlan, right after Montezuma’s death. In his opinion, the tragedy could have been avoided if Cortés had listened to his captains, who advised him to set up camp in one of the other cities around Lake Texcoco so that they could not be besieged. Cortés, in contrast, blamed their forced retreat on the disturbance caused by the men sent to the mainland by Diego Velázquez.⁵³

Conclusion

In 1526, the royal inspector Luis Ponce de León took away Cortés’ powers and stripped him of the newly created office of Governor of New Spain, assuming the office himself. Ponce de León, who had been conducting a full-scale investigation on Cortés’ behavior during his time in Mexico, died four days later. Cortés, suspected of having poisoned

51 Cortés, “Tercera Carta-Relación,” *Cartas de Relación*, 143-144. “Y como los españoles veían tanta dilación en esto, y que había más de veinte días que nunca dejaban de pelear [...] y al fin tanto me forzaron, que to concedí que se haría en este caso lo que yo pudiese, consertándose primero con la gente de los otros reales,” *Letters from Mexico*, 235.

52 Díaz, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 361-371.

53 Aguilar, “The Chronicle of Fray Francisco de Aguilar,” 151; Cortés, “Segunda Carta-Relación,” 84.

both the interim Governor and his successor, was recalled to Spain in 1528. Despite the *residencia* and several lawsuits he was facing, Cortés was formally received by Charles V and granted the title of Marquis, as well as permission to return to his lands in New Spain, albeit stripped of his powers and offices. He returned to Mexico in 1530 and spent the next ten years there managing the thousands of servants and slaves in the lands he was granted, as well as embarking in failed expeditions to other regions of the Americas. He returned to Spain in 1540 where he died seven years later.

Since 1526, Charles V had forbidden the publication of Cortés' letters in Spanish, fearing the amount of fame they provided him. The letters continued to be published, however, in other languages.⁵⁴ In time, Cortés' narrative contained in his letters, backed by Gómara's books and influential to the accounts of other conquistadors such as Bernal Díaz, took the central stage on both the European and Mexican public memory of the Conquest. His image became synonymous with that of a successful leader, and all of his fabrications and omissions became part of the official narrative of the fall of the Mexica Empire. As the story developed and became embellished by novelists, poets, and playwrights, his enemies became cartoonish villains, the natives, slaves, and women became even less prominent (with the exception of Malintzin), and Montezuma's image suffered great distortions. Although inconsistencies and contradictions were gradually revealed as new documents and accounts emerged, it would take over 450 years for historians to more seriously investigate the veracity of Cortés' claims and more thoughtfully examine his letters.

About the Author

As an immigrant to the United States, travelling is a really important part of my life. In a globalized world, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are only nine hours away from the nearest airport. For the last two years, however, coming and going has become much more complicated. Covid has claimed the lives of so many of us, and no two places have been worst affected than the US and my home country, Brazil. Besides the constant dangers of the pandemic, being isolated from so many family members and friends was a challenge in itself. However, as the research for this paper was being concluded, I got lucky (or not); due to my immigration status, I had to leave the country for a while. As the flight restrictions got tougher, my options dwindled, and the only possible solution was to go back to Brazil ... by land. For two months, I travelled through Central America on my way home. I decided to make the best out of the situation and visit some of the places I had been researching. It was an incredible opportunity, although writing on the way presented some interesting challenges. From Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) to Uxmal and Chichén Itza, I had the chance to visit the homelands of the Nahuas and Maya, and see by myself how the Contact and the Conquest shaped Central American civilization. Despite the challenges posed by backpacking during a worldwide pandemic, this was a unique opportunity and experience that has made this project all the more special to me.

⁵⁴ Elliott, "Introduction," in *Letters from Mexico*, xxxvi-xxxvii; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 60-61; 173.

The Dark Reality of Costa Rica's Green Revolution

Mackenzie Stanley

Abstract. This research paper examines the historical beginnings of water and land pollution in Costa Rica, with a focus on modern-day pollution and environmental policy. The dichotomy of vast pollution with Costa Rica's "green and clean" environmental policies presents an important dilemma in our world: can humans transform Earth into a green and sustainable planet, especially with the continuous problem of pollution? While this is a loaded question that has many different facets and avenues to explore, this paper will attempt to answer the question within the context of the historical and environmental study of Costa Rica. Furthermore, Costa Rica has one of the leading ecotourism industries in the world and is the first and second leading world producer of bananas and pineapples, respectively, both of which undoubtedly have contributed to pollution in the country. All of these factors alongside others such as urban pollution, industrial pollution, and rural pollution, combine to create a research question on water and land pollution in what is on track to be the world's first fully energy sustainable country. How has Costa Rica managed to be so environmentally friendly while seemingly ignoring water and land pollution? What are the historical facets of this problem of pollution and how has environmental history affected Costa Rica's environmental policy?

Introduction

Costa Rica is a country many associate with beaches, rainforest, bananas, pineapples, and coffee. Two are the primary focus of this paper, but not because of their nutrition or sweetness. Costa Rica is one of the world's top producers of bananas and pineapples, but this production has an immensely negative impact on the environment. Costa Rica has a rich cultural history dating back at least 10,000 years, but the environment of the country was relatively pristine and untouched until the mid-nineteenth century. When exports began to explode during this time period, so did environmental impacts.

This paper discusses the environmental history of Costa Rica, dating back prior to Spanish colonization, and then dives into what changed in the 1900s to create an export-driven economy. It will then investigate pollution in Costa Rica as related to the production of bananas and pineapples, examining how the use of chemicals and pesticides came about and how they impact the environment. Examining land pollution first, the

paper looks at how these pesticides attack the soil in Costa Rica and then moves toward water pollution caused by rain soaking up these pesticides and washing them into the rivers and the ocean. There is a clear dichotomy here as Costa Rica is the world leader in environmental legislation, and I am writing this paper to examine how a country so focused on environmental conservation could have such an enormous problem with pollution. In modern-day Costa Rica, bananas and pineapples are still the two leading exports for the economy, but they are also two leaders in environmental degradation. Discussing present day ecotourism and the drive to become the world's first carbon neutral country, the paper will also examine the notable progress made by the small Central American country. The concluding note of this research will focus on how Costa Rica has made such progress with environmental protection but also is so deep into land and water pollution and finish by looking at what is next for the country's environmental policy.

Environmental History of Costa Rica Prior to and During Spanish Colonization

Although Costa Rica was sparsely populated until Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century, its modern-day territory has been inhabited for at least ten thousand years by small indigenous tribes. Costa Rica likely only had about twenty thousand indigenous peoples in 1502 when Christopher Columbus made his way to Limón, a port city on the Caribbean coast.¹ The land itself is quite swampy and wet, leading it to become part of an area that separated the Mayas and Aztecs to the North and Incas to the South. Most indigenous people were semi-nomadic hunters and fishermen who lived in communal huts. The largest population increase prior to European colonization happened in the fourteenth century when Chorotega people from southern Mexico migrated to modern-day Costa Rica, developing agriculture based on beans, corns, squash, creating calendars, writing books on deerskin, and making ceramics.²

Columbus arrived in present-day Costa Rica in 1502 looking for a strait to pass through the land and searching for gold. By 1513, Ferdinand of Spain had sent Governor Diego de Nicuesa to colonize parts of Central America but faced challenges from indigenous people and the intense weather and environment of the region. Nicuesa's attempt, and the later attempt of Gil Gonzalez Davila, failed as a result of Spanish starvation, disease, and the guerilla tactics of native Indian groups. Because of the inability of Spanish colonizers to fight off indigenous people and diseases, the region was left alone for a few decades until Juan Vásquez de Coronado, the nephew of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, previously governor of the province of Nueva Galicia in modern-day western Mexico, arrived as governor of Costa Rica in 1562. Juan Vásquez de Coronado found that a majority of the native population had succumbed to European diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis. Thus, colonizers had few natives to force into slavery and had to work for themselves or

¹ Baker, Christopher, "Costa Rica History." Costa Rica, History, 1994. <http://philip.greenspun.com/cr/moon/history>.

² Ibid.

buy indigenous slaves in order to produce crops and other goods. By 1565, Juan Vásquez had brought most of Costa Rica under Spanish rule, although true control was never exerted throughout most of the colony and many indigenous peoples were independent.

The Atlantic Slave Trade in the colony was not as prevalent as it was in other regions but occurred mainly on cattle ranches in the Central Valley. The economy for the Spanish took decades to become stable but wheat and tobacco became prime exports of the colony by the late 1700s. Costa Rica remained a Spanish colony until September 15, 1821, when all of Central America declared independence from Spain soon after Mexico gained independence earlier in the year. During the colonial period, the Spanish established a larger population than before contact and used more land for ranching and agriculture to produce crops such as tobacco and coffee. These colonizers had relatively little control over the indigenous people of Costa Rica, and the rest of Central America, leading to independent agriculture and trading networks being established among native peoples.

Three main areas of indigenous population were found in Central America during Spanish colonization. The Mosquitia lived on the Caribbean coast of Honduras and Nicaragua; the Talamanca lived south, near the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica and northern Panama; and the Darién lived on the Caribbean coast of southern Panama and Colombia. While these three areas were the main population centers for indigenous peoples, there were also groups spread throughout the central valleys of Central America and on the Pacific Coast, where the Spanish maintained the best control of their colonies. According to Alejandra Boza and Juan Carlos Fonseca, “these indigenous worlds were surprisingly active and internally well connected” throughout Central America during Spanish colonization.³ Natives engaged in a complex web of trade that connected them to other natives. Additionally, native peoples trusted English settlers as they were more focused on extracting resources and fostering trade with the native peoples, unlike the Spanish who were focused on territorial control.

Together, indigenous people traded slaves, cotton, clothing, wild pigs, gold, and beads from coast to coast while formally under Spanish rule. The Mosquitia Indians ended up controlling a significant part of the Caribbean coast by the eighteenth century and began to dominate trading networks and even demand goods from smaller groups. These indigenous groups relied on farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering but trade was the most important part of an indigenous group’s success. While the Spanish did not control all native peoples, they did control some and concentrated “Indians into *reducciones* (reductions), towns under their supervision where the reduced Indians devoted themselves to agriculture and other economic activities while learning the basics of Spanish culture and Catholicism.”⁴ However,

3 Alejandra Boza and Juan Carlos Solórzano Fonseca, “Indigenous Trade in Caribbean Central America, 1700s–1800s,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Borderlands of the Iberian World*, eds. Danna Levin Rojo and Cynthia Radding (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 239–265.

4 Ibid.

there is overwhelming evidence that reduced Indians and free Indians still managed to trade with one another, highlighting the significance of these indigenous trading networks during colonization. Overall, Spain did not completely control Costa Rica during the colonial period, allowing indigenous Indians to trade with one another for centuries under colonial rule.

Post-Independence

Industrialization in Central America occurred mainly in the mid-twentieth century after most countries had faced numerous government coups and civil wars. Costa Rica had multiple government changes from Independence until the Civil War in 1948 when the country became the democracy it is today.⁵ During this 120 year period, Costa Rica was in political turmoil, although the army dissolved and money flowed into public sectors like healthcare and education. Costa Rica started growing coffee in the early eighteenth century and coffee was the main sector of agriculture and was the only export of Costa Rica until 1890, when bananas were first exported by United Fruit. In 1821, the government of Costa Rica began giving coffee plants to farmers for free to increase the amount of coffee produced and exported, in exchange for the farmers becoming the owners of the land. Loans for the land would be suspended as long as farmers produced coffee for five years.⁶ Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, coffee plantations spread across Costa Rica alongside railway and road construction to export coffee quickly and more profitably. On average, individual coffee farmers would allocate about 15–20 hectares of their land to coffee production, using the rest for sugar and cattle.⁷ Because of this, more and more of Costa Rica was now being transformed into plantation land or being used to build roads.

At the start of the twentieth century, the completion of railways and more roads allowed the country to become more interconnected and trade to flourish. But, with the introduction of the banana in 1872, the point of the railway was now for banana plantations, notable for its extreme negative impacts on the Costa Rican environment. Throughout the rest of the early twentieth century, the production of coffee, bananas, and pineapples reached a massive scale, leading to environmental degradation. This time period is truly when environmental practices exploited the environment of Costa Rica in favor of economic profits. Environmental practices did not begin to change and attempt to conserve and protect the environment until the early 1980s.

5 Edelberto Torres-Rivas, “The Beginning of Industrialization in Central America” The Wilson Center, Number 141. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/wp141_the_beginning_of_industrialization_in_central_america.pdf.

6 “Historia Del Café De Costa Rica.” ICAFE, <http://www.icafe.cr/nuestro-cafe/historia/>.

7 Lowell Gudmundson, “Costa Rica Before Coffee: Occupational Distribution, Wealth Inequality, and Élite Society in the Village Economy of the 1840s,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1983): 449.

Mid-Twentieth Century Population and Agriculture Boom

Not only did the population of Costa Rica nearly triple from 1927 to 1963, the population of the nation's largest urban center, San José, also increased from 91,000 to 318,000 people.⁸ Costa Rican population demographics follow suit with that of other Central American countries, having a large population boom in the mid-twentieth century followed by mass migration to urban locales. Whether rural families moved into cities to find jobs or better education, mass migration was evident in the mid-twentieth century. According to the World Bank, Central American urbanization and Costa Rican urban population has been increasing since the 1940s and has more rapidly increased since the 1990s.⁹ This spike in urbanization was not coincidental. The need for work, education, and food fueled urbanization. Rural communities could not support the growing population present, as more and more rural land was being cultivated for exports and not for local subsistence, forcing people to move to urban locations to find work and enough food.

Alongside mass urbanization were the added negative impacts on the environment of the city, the rural areas, and on the people themselves. Hundreds of thousands lived in close proximity, leading to disease spreading rapidly and high reliance on resources from rural areas. In those circumstances, inequality began to proliferate. In *A Living Past*, the authors write an environmental history of Latin America, part of which focuses on mass urbanization of the mid-twentieth century, explaining that “This process transformed not only landscapes characterized by their forests, fields, and mountains, but also urban landscapes almost to the same degree as the arrival of the Europeans [in the fifteenth] century.”¹⁰ Latin American rural areas produced crops for extraction and manufacturing in urban areas while urban dwellers worked for large corporations. Within urban settings, additions of buildings, roads, and industries such as transportation and manufacturing not only changed the environment but also spearheaded inequality. Large cities constantly expanded into surrounding rural areas as city populations increased while poor workers lived in below-standard housing and large corporations dominated the extractive economy most of them worked in.¹¹

Foreign companies such as United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit Company (now Dole) were taking control of Costa Rica in the 1950s and 1960s with their political

8 Durand, John D., et. al., “Patterns of Urbanization in Latin America,” *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 4 (1965): 169.

9 Aguilera, Ana I., “How Urbanization Is Transforming Central America,” in Augustin María; Jose Luis Acero; Ana I. Aguilera, and Marisa García Lozano, *Central America Urbanization Review: Making Cities Work for Central America* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017), 31.

10 Lise Sedrez and Regina H. A. Duarte, “The Ivy and the Wall: Environmental Narratives from an Urban Continent,” in *A Living Past: Environmental Histories of Modern Latin America*, eds. John Soluri, Claudia Leal, and José Augusto Pádua (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 143.

11 Ibid.

influence. Initially, United Fruit owned banana plantations across Costa Rica and Latin America employing tens of thousands of Costa Ricans and producing a majority of a fruit the nation was dependent upon for export revenues. By employing so many Costa Ricans and producing nearly twenty percent of the nation's agricultural exports, United Fruit became a political entity in Costa Rica. Marcelo Bucheli argues that Although Costa Rica was more democratic than its neighbors, United Fruit managed to have a very strong influence in state matters thanks to the close relationship Minor Keith (one of United Fruit's founders) had with the Costa Rican government.¹² United Fruit was able to exert political control in Central America and create so-called banana republics by using their economic power to promote a government that would support their success and profit. United Fruit had decades of influence in Costa Rica but that influence decreased in the 1950s because of the Panama Banana Disease, which coincided with the establishment of the current day Republic of Costa Rica. Overall, policy decisions regarding pesticide use and employee rights were greatly influenced by banana companies in the mid-twentieth century, helping to explain why environmental regulations were so lenient.

The Panama Banana Disease struck Costa Rica in the 1950s. This fungal disease that attacks the roots of banana plants and has no chemical treatment, resulting in the plants being destroyed to stop the spread. A banana plant can no longer be grown in locations where the plants were previously destroyed, as key nutrients are no longer present. The 1950s outbreak forced United Fruit to abandon its plantations on the Caribbean coast, moving to the Pacific Coast to grow bananas. This left thousands unemployed in eastern Costa Rica and land that required repurposing, souring the federal government's relationship with United Fruit. As a result, the Costa Rican government invited Standard Fruit Company, a US-based company that had created a banana resistant to the Panama Banana Disease, to buy banana plantation land in Costa Rica. This led to the introduction of the Panama Disease resistant Valery Banana, but the problem was that this banana *required* chemical intervention to grow successfully, sparking pesticide pollution in Costa Rica.¹³

The 1970s - 1980s: Major Changes

With the transition from United Fruit to Standard Fruit in the 1960s came many other changes in Costa Rica, on both the local and national level. Locally, Standard Fruit bought bananas from independent banana producers, paving the way for Costa Ricans to have their own banana plantations. Costa Rica had been allocating funds to be spent on conserving

12 Marcelo Bucheli, “Multinational corporations, totalitarian regimes and economic nationalism: United Fruit Company in Central America, 1899–1975,” *Business History*, vol. 50, issue 4 (2008): 433–454.

13 Carlos E. Hernandez, and Scott G. Witter, “Evaluating and Managing the Environmental Impact of Banana Production in Costa Rica: A Systems Approach,” *Ambio*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1996): 171–178.

the environment since the mid-nineteenth century and that money increased in this era. In addition to that, Costa Rican society became focused on conserving the environment and the exploited land from decades prior, sustainability, and education. Conservation took off in the late 1960s with the creation of national parks and nature reserves along with a change in national pride, which now became focused on education and the environment.¹⁴

Costa Rica took unique early steps to preserve its natural resources, dismantle its army, and focus national pride on the environment and education. Costa Ricans did not want to control nature by preserving it, they wanted to allow nature to independently be nature, which is why they focused on conserving it, just as they still do today. Conservation is a very profitable field, as it provides income for locals and allows for ecotourism companies to make money while protecting natural resources. The Forest Law passed in 1969 made reforestation profitable by allowing it to be tax-deductible, incentivizing companies to literally create more forests. Twenty-two environmental laws passed in Costa Rica between 1971 and 2000, all of which improved conditions for the environment.¹⁵ Some of these laws were in regard to maritime zoning, the creation of national parks, but none regulated pesticide use and in 2000, Costa Rica was the highest consumer of pesticides per hectare in the world.¹⁶

During the 1970s and 1980s, Costa Rica quickly became known as a “green” country because of its efforts to conserve its environment. This green country made strides unlike any other country in the world and has become a leader in environmental protection. One-fifth of the country is currently under federal protection as some type of nature reserve or as designated as indigenous land, and over fifty percent of the land is forest, up from about twenty percent in the 1980s.¹⁷ Adding to the changes made by Costa Ricans themselves, Costa Rica’s highly ranked University system attracts scientists from across the globe who want to participate in research and conservation in one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet. Similarly, in 2011 Costa Rica came before all other Central American countries in the Environmental Regulatory Regime Index researched at Yale University and only came behind Brazil for the rest of Latin America.¹⁸ Overall, the efforts made by Costa Rica’s citizens and government to conserve their natural environment are unmatched by most similar nations, and their dedication to conservation and environmental

14 Jamie Foster, “The Green Republic: A Conservation History of Costa Rica,” *Geographical Review*, vol. 89, no. 4 (1999): 607-610.

15 “Costa Rica Environmental Laws.” *CostaRicaLaw.com*, May 16, 2016. <https://costaricalaw.com/costa-rica-legal-topics/environmental-law/costa-rica-environmental-laws/>.

16 “Countries Compared by Agriculture > Pesticide Use. International Statistics.” *NationMaster.com*. World Resources Institute, <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Agriculture/Pesticide-use>.

17 Foster, “The Green Republic”: 607-610.

18 Daniel Esty and Michael Porter, “Ranking National Environmental Regulation and Performance: A Leading Indicator of Future Competitiveness?,” in Porter et. al., *In The Global Competitiveness Report 2001–2002* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93.

education has launched the country into the forefront of global environmental policy.

Land Pollution

On the other side of Costa Rica’s leading environmental legislation is their massive production of bananas and pineapples, which have extreme consequences for the environment. Carlos Hernández and Scott Witterstate that “The first commercial banana plantation in Costa Rica was started by a man named Minor Keith in 1872 and by 1879 Costa Rica was exporting bananas regularly to the United States.”¹⁹ The second era of banana production sparked intense land pollution in Costa Rica in the 1950s with the introduction of a chemically dependent banana.

According to a study conducted by TROPICA Project on chemicals found in the Rio Madre de Dios, flowing near banana plantations toward Limón, scientists found higher than acceptable levels of two pesticides, ethoprophos and chlorpyrifos, in fish species in the river and river mouth in Limón. These two pesticides trace back to banana plantations, as Valery banana growth requires both to keep insects off of the banana stems. Planes drop the pesticides *twenty-two* times per growing season, but about ninety percent of the pesticides do not absorb or drop onto the banana plants.²⁰ This ninety percent absorbs into the air, into the lands and the soil of the plantation, or simply falls onto land outside of the plantation. Each ton of bananas produces three tons of waste, 0.38 tons of which the plant leaves and stems that contain these pesticides produce. The second problem arises with the placement of the leaves and stems in landfills near rivers. These types of leaves decompose rather quickly, and the soil absorbs the pesticides, which then washes away into rivers through rainwater runoff.

Water Pollution

Not only do banana plantations depend completely upon pesticide and chemical use, but they also produce immense amounts of waste contaminated by those chemicals that pollute the land and water of Costa Rica. Pineapple plantations also depend upon chemicals and pesticides to support their unnaturally quick growing season to keep up with international demand. Banana plantations use around forty-five kilograms of pesticides per hectare per year in Costa Rica, and about thirty kilograms on pineapple plantations.²¹ Costa Rica has designated about one hundred thousand acres to banana production to this day, and one hectare is about 2.4 acres so there are over forty thousand hectares dedicated to banana production in Costa Rica. Farmers are using 1.8 million kilograms of pesticides per year just on bananas. That same math for pineapples, with over 63,000 acres in 2013, equates to

19 Hernandez and Witter, “Evaluating and Managing the Environmental Impact of Banana Production in Costa Rica”: 171-178.

20 *Ibid.*, 175.

21 Noël J. Diepens, et. al. “Effect of Pesticides Used in Banana and Pineapple Plantations on Aquatic Ecosystems in Costa Rica,” *Journal of Environmental Biology*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2014): 73-84.

over 750,000 kilograms of pesticides per year.²² In total, banana and pineapple plantations alone use nearly three million kilograms of pesticides per year, ninety percent of which is instead absorbed by the soil inside and outside of the plantations. That is at least two million kilograms of pesticides that have contaminated the soil and water of Costa Rica per year.

Banana and pineapple plantations do not only hurt the soil, but also human beings who work on, work near, or live near these plantations. In 1996, researchers Carlos Hernandez and Scott Witter found that there was a “ten percent higher instance of sterility and damage to kidneys, liver, brain, nervous systems, lungs, heart, eyes, blood, skin, metabolism, and the overall immune system in people associated with banana production as opposed to the general population.”²³ Aside from employees that work on banana and pineapple plantations, people who live near these plantations or use river water that may flow from a region near these plantations are also greatly impacted by these chemicals. Land is clearly polluted as a result of pesticide use on banana and pineapple plantations, but that land pollution is eventually turned into water pollution, impacting a far greater region and number of people than land pollution.

Just like in every other nation, part of the Costa Rican population depends on river water for some part of their daily life. In addition, people across the country, and the world, eat seafood and aquatic animals that come from this polluted water. According to a study by Echeverría-Saenz et. al., heavy rainfall in Costa Rica promotes the runoff of soil and pesticides from crops into the rivers.²⁴ The Central American Institute for Studies on Toxic Substances has detected levels of Bromacil and numerous other Organophosphorus pesticides in the waters of Costa Rican rivers. These specific pesticides trace back to pineapple plantations in the Caribbean region of Costa Rica.

Echeverría-Saenz et. al. add that, “Up to thirty-nine pesticide residues were found in the Jiménez River basin whose toxicity immensely affects plants and aquatic invertebrates. Our data showed a clear deterioration of riparian habitats and aquatic communities at the studied sites impacted by pineapple fields, effects were associated with high levels of (fish) mortality and poor plant growth.”²⁵ Clearly, pesticide use on banana and pineapple plantations not only caused land pollution but also resulted in an immense amount of water pollution as well. This is widely known in Costa Rica, as a 2007 government

22 “Costa Rica: Pineapple Plantations See Rapid Growth.” FreshFruitPortal.com, January 15, 2019. <https://www.freshfruitportal.com/news/2019/01/15/costa-rica-rapid-growth-of-pineapple-plantations/>.

23 Hernandez and Witter, “Evaluating and Managing the Environmental Impact of Banana Production in Costa Rica”: 175.

24 Echeverría-Saenz, S., et. al., “Environmental Hazards of Pesticides from Pineapple Crop Production in the Río Jiménez Watershed (Caribbean Coast, Costa Rica),” *Science of The Total Environment*, vol., 440 (2012): 106-114.

25 Ibid., 113.

investigation concluded that in some cases, planes spread pesticides on pineapple plantations within twenty meters of rivers, but the law states that pesticides must be kept at least two hundred meters from a water source. Overall, the issues with pesticide use are clear, but how does Costa Rica balance its export dependent economy with the need to have environmentally friendly practices? Costa Rica has managed to do exactly that in other sectors of business but cannot seem to find a solution with bananas and pineapples.

It is worth noting that pesticide-linked pollution is not the only type of pollution Costa Rica struggles with. As mentioned previously, the Tarcoles River in Western Costa Rica is the most polluted river in Central America. That is not a list any nation wants to claim the number one spot on, especially Costa Rica with its environmentally friendly green reputation across the world. Studies conducted on the Tarcoles River found trace metals, fecal matter, trash, and, of course, pesticides.²⁶ In addition, a study conducted from 2000 to 2002 found trace metals and fungicides in four port cities in Costa Rica: Golfito Bay, Culebra Bay, the Gulf of Nicoya, and Moín Bay. In all locations, there were higher than acceptable amounts of iron, zinc, copper, and lead in the water.²⁷

Ecotourism and Modern Environmental Policy

It is no surprise that Costa Rica is known for its beautiful beaches, rainforests, biodiversity, and overall environmental friendliness. After all, this is the exact reputation the country has on a global scale as a prime vacation spot for travelers of all ages. Costa Rica has a booming ecotourism industry, which is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively untouched natural areas to support conservation efforts. As discussed earlier, one-fifth of Costa Rica is under some type of federal protection, whether that is as a national park or as designated indigenous land. Every recent president of Costa Rica has spoken often about environmental conservation and educating their youth about the environment.²⁸ From guided trips into national parks full of biodiversity to direct environmental service, Costa Rica truly offers it all when it comes to ecotourism. For Costa Rica, ecotourism does not only help conserve the environment, but it employs people in a sustainable field of work and sports quite the profit each year, at USD2.4 billion in 2012.²⁹

Costa Rica pledged in 2015 to become the world’s first carbon neutral

26 Sebastián Rodríguez, “Tárcoles: The Most Contaminated River in Central America.” Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), January 2, 2019. <https://aida-america.org/en/blog/tarcoles-most-contaminated-river-central-america>.

27 Jairo García-Céspedes, et. al., “Trace Metals in Coastal Sediments from Costa Rica.” *Revista De Biología Tropical*, vol. 52, suppl. 2 (2004): 51-60.

28 Foster, “The Green Republic”: 607-610.

29 “Ecotourism Costa Rica - The Impacts on Three Guides.” *Around the World in Eighty Years*, August 26, 2017. <https://www.aroundtheworldineightyyears.com/ecotourism-costa-rica/>.

country by 2021 with at least one hundred percent of its global warming emissions being balanced by carbon sequestration.³⁰ Costa Rica has nearly reached that goal, as it generated ninety-eight percent of electricity from renewable resources in 2018. Adding to that notable pledge and accomplishment, they also have numerous laws in place that limit deforestation, carbon output per company, pesticide use (to a certain extent, obviously), mining, and endangered species among others.³¹

Conclusion

Overall, Costa Rica has an obvious contradiction within its environmental practices: world leading carbon neutrality and conservation coupled with detrimental water and land pollution caused by pesticide use. In 2013, Costa Rica was the second largest producer of bananas in the world, with bananas accounting for over forty percent of total agricultural exports and over thirty percent of agricultural GDP. In addition, estimations say that the banana industry accounts for about eight percent of direct and indirect jobs in Costa Rica. With regards to pineapples, Costa Rica was the world's largest producer in 2012 and there was a 133% growth of pineapple production in the five-year period between 1998 and 2003.³² Costa Rica managed to become a nation leading the world in certain areas of environmental protection while also failing in the areas of water and land pollution because of the importance of bananas and pineapples to the success of their economy. When United Fruit and Standard Fruit were able to gain political influence in the twentieth century, they prevented environmental protection legislation from being enacted in regards to the use of pesticides in the banana industry, which directly led to the pineapple industry's use of pesticides later. These companies never lost their political influence, as they control the two most important exports for the Costa Rican economy and employ hundreds of thousands of plantation workers. Since the late nineteenth century, Costa Rica has been a sort of monoculture because although the nation is stable politically, it is economically dependent upon the extraction of bananas. With the introduction of the pineapple, the country became a bit of a Pineapple Republic as well, and today Costa Rica is a politically stable Fruit Republic that is completely dependent upon the extraction of bananas and pineapples. Costa Rica cannot, and will not, take the risk to injure these industries, and that is exactly why the contradiction in their environmental policies exists today.

30 Doug Boucher, Pipa Elias, Jordan Faires, and Sharon Smith, *Deforestation Success Stories: Tropical Nations Where Forest Protection and Reforestation Policies Have Worked* (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2014), 29-32.

31 "Costa Rica Environmental Laws." *CostaRicaLaw.com*, May 16, 2016. <https://costaricalaw.com/costa-rica-legal-topics/environmental-law/costa-rica-environmental-laws/>.

32 Gustavo Filipe Canle Ferreira, Pablo Antonio Garcia Fuentes, and Juan Pablo Canle Ferreira, "The Successes and Shortcoming of Costa Rica Exports Diversification Policies." *Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations*, 2018. <http://www.fao.org/3/I8308EN/i8308en.pdf>.

About the Author

My name is Mackenzie Stanley and I graduated from UNC with a double major in Peace, War, & Defense and History in May of 2021. I am currently a first-year law student at Campbell Law School in Raleigh! (three more years isn't that bad... I hope) I am a politics and news junkie, tennis is my stress reliever, and my hometown of Beaufort, NC made me into a total beach bum. I absolutely love law school and the challenge that it brings me. As a beach bum law student, my conflicting personality traits keep my school life and home life very balanced. I love dogs and have an unhealthy obsession with Pugs. During the pandemic, which is when I did most of this research paper, I struggled initially to adjust to college being online. This paper allowed me to focus on something that I was passionate and excited about, which a welcome distraction from the devastation encompassing the world.

When I was taking History 398 with Professor Radding (the course this research was for), our entire course was focused on the history of environmentalism, primarily in Latin America. I had the perfect experience to base my final paper off: three summers volunteering and interning in Costa Rica. Spending this time in Costa Rica, I had a deep interest in its environment and rich history of being one of the "greenest" countries in the world. This was, by far, my favorite research throughout my undergraduate career. I hope any readers enjoy it half as much as I did!

“Cookie Time” in Chapel Hill

Morehead Planetarium’s Astronaut Training Program, 1960-1975

Sarah Waugh

Abstract. From 1960 to 1975, every American astronaut trained in celestial navigation at Morehead Planetarium in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In multiple instances, this training saved lives and turned potential catastrophes into successful missions. Despite the demonstrated importance of this training, town, gown, and America at large have all but forgotten about astronaut training in Chapel Hill when considering the Space Race narrative today. The majority of scholarship about NASA and the Space Race overlooks Morehead as well. This paper fills a gap in previous research by providing this example of an astronaut training program with a different organizational culture than most of NASA, and shows that not all involved in the Space Race thought in terms of political conflict—instead prioritizing scientific collaboration. Through analyzing these differences, this paper addresses the reasons Morehead Planetarium’s training program was not assimilated into America’s historical narrative about the Space Race, explaining the present amnesia about the story.

Introduction

In October 1959, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Morehead Planetarium director Tony Jenzano spoke to a reporter for *The Daily Tar Heel*, the university’s student newspaper. He reassured the public that the Planetarium’s beloved annual Christmas presentation would go on as planned, following a four-week closure for the installation of cutting-edge auxiliary instruments to their Zeiss projector.¹ As the newspaper reported, this technology would allow the planetarium to accurately display the movement, size, and brightness of 42 important stars on any date—ranging from as far as 129,000 years in the past to 129,000 years in the future.² The new equipment, Jenzano said, would enhance audience experience and education.³ While he did not reveal it in the interview, Jenzano also hoped that the equipment could help Morehead teach another very special group of individuals how to read the

stars, in addition to North Carolina students and families. He wanted to teach the astronauts.

Only one year before, in 1958, the United States Congress expanded the existing National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Congress charged NASA with surpassing the USSR’s satellite and space program. When NASA announced its plans for a manned spaceflight program, Jenzano proposed the Morehead Planetarium as an innovative solution to one of the many problems that he knew the astronauts might face. He argued that his planetarium should train astronauts to manually navigate by the stars, an essential failsafe in case of electronic malfunctions.⁴ It has been 63 years since NASA began, and for 15 of the most crucial years in the history of manned spaceflight, astronauts came to Chapel Hill to train at Morehead Planetarium.

From books by historians at NASA like Roger Launius or political historians like Walter McDougall or authors like James Donovan, one can rarely browse a bookshop without coming across many histories of NASA, the Space Race, and astronaut training. However, despite the prolific content, many histories of the Space Race fail to add a new perspective to the historical memory. In the literature regarding astronaut training, there has been historical amnesia about Chapel Hill’s program, called “cookie time” by planetarium staff.⁵ Planetarium staff would say “cookie time” was coming soon to discreetly discuss when astronauts were coming to Chapel Hill.⁶ The calm imagery of “cookie-time,” chosen because of the snacks the astronauts preferred while on breaks from studying the stars, is an apt metaphor that mirrors the narrative of the astronauts’ Chapel Hill experience—and hints as to why this narrative has been forgotten in the wider analysis of the Space Race. Often, histories of the Space Race function “as a retelling of U.S exceptionalism...” shaping the historical memory of the time into one of American heroism and adventure, former NASA Chief Historian Roger Launius argues.⁷ In the 1980s, historian Walter MacDougall wrote *The Heavens and the Earth*, focusing on how the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union pushed them to technological competition.⁸ Like MacDougall, James Donovan’s *Shoot for the Moon* characterizes the Space Race as political competition as well. When Donovan discusses the astronauts, he chooses to emphasize competitiveness and daredevil nature, focusing on their reactions to dramatic moments more than the calmer moments that Jenzano and the

⁴ Jordan Marché, *Theaters of Time and Space: American Planetaria, 1930-1970* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 138.

⁵ Emilie Poppett. “Walking in the Footsteps of Men Who Walked on the Moon.” UNC-Chapel Hill, July 15th, 2019. Accessed May 1st, 2020. <https://www.unc.edu/discover/walking-in-the-footsteps-of-men-who-walked-on-the-moon/>.

⁶ Poppett, “Walking in the Footsteps.”

⁷ Roger D. Launius, *Reaching for the Moon: A Short History of the Space Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 218.

⁸ Walter MacDougall, *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (Basic Books, Inc: New York, 1985)

¹ “Morehead Planetarium to Get New Equipment,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 25 October 1959, 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

astronauts shared.⁹ Overall, the Morehead program's story mirrors the culture of science research and education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill more than it reflects the historical memory of NASA during the Space Race, prioritizing collaborative pursuit of knowledge rather than competition. Telling the story of Morehead astronaut training will contribute a new perspective to the political and nationalistic historical narrative of the Space Race, demonstrating that not all people involved thought of their work as a political or progandistic project, instead focusing on science and education.

This study demonstrates how Chapel Hill's science-based press coverage and humanized view of the astronauts deviates from the Cold War-based mythos of NASA—the idea of a faceless mass of employees and a few larger-than-life heroes engaged in conflict with an ideological enemy. It describes how Chapel Hill townspeople, the University of North Carolina students, Morehead staff, and the astronauts experienced the training program, especially focusing on the personal connections between Morehead staff and astronauts. By explaining what characteristics the Morehead training shared with NASA's organizational culture as a whole, and where it deviated from the mythologized version of NASA, the study places Morehead Planetarium into context with the larger space program. Therefore, it argues that the deviation from the wider historical narrative of the Space Race explains why Morehead's training program has been largely forgotten today, both in Chapel Hill and nationwide. Despite the amnesia about the program, it stands as an example of the importance of science education to the Space Race in the United States.

Teaching the Stars to Reach the Stars—and Get Back Down, Too

Tony Jenzano, with his crew-cut and starch-white, short-sleeve button up shirts, fit the picture of a stereotypical 1950s man of science. Like so many of his generation, he had served in World War II, foregoing formal education to serve his country, instead learning on the job as a Navy electronics technician. In the Navy, he trained in celestial navigation, learning the value of the stars as tools for survival.¹⁰ While his lack of a college education may have made him seem out of place in Chapel Hill's ivory tower, Jenzano was more than capable of directing the planetarium and teaching the astronauts. He worked as chief technician at the renowned Fels Planetarium with Director Dr. Roy K. Marshall before they came together to lead the new Morehead Planetarium in 1949.¹¹ According to *The Daily Tar Heel*, Jenzano and Marshall were the only “men in the world outside of employees of the Zeiss Optical Company in Germany who [had] ever

⁹ James Donovan, *Shoot for the Moon: The Space Race and the Extraordinary Voyage of Apollo 11* (Little, Brown, and Company: New York, 2019), 66, 76.

¹⁰ Cameron Clinard, “UNC's Morehead Planetarium trained 11 of the 12 people who have walked on the moon,” ABC-11 Raleigh-Durham, March 8, 2019.

¹¹ “Marshall Knows Stars; Will Make Study Easy,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, May 10, 1949.

assembled a planetarium instrument.”¹² Jenzano's technical experience and knowledge of the stars earned him the position of planetarium director in 1952. Seven years later, it would help him convince NASA to choose Morehead as an astronaut training facility.¹³

Just days after speaking to *The Daily Tar Heel* about the installation of new Zeiss equipment in October 1959, Tony Jenzano wrote to NASA's Langley Research Center to offer Morehead as a training facility for celestial navigation in manned spaceflight.¹⁴ Jenzano wrote of his idea to create a “lightweight, inexpensive dummy capsule” where the astronauts would practice their training as the planetarium projected the moving sky “past the window along a simulated ‘flight path.’”¹⁵ Thanks to the new Zeiss instruments, astronauts could practice with the exact night skies on the dates of their mission. No one had ever used a planetarium “as an analog spaceflight simulator” before.¹⁶ Jenzano's innovative suggestion, along with Morehead's superior new instruments, and characteristics of the town of Chapel Hill, led to NASA selecting Morehead for a celestial navigation program. Historian of science Jordan Marché argues that Chapel Hill's rural location and small population contributed to NASA's selection, as astronauts could use the planetarium on short notice, whereas a big city planetarium would be more likely to have prior commitments.¹⁷ Situated between key NASA sites—Langley Research Center in Virginia and the Kennedy Space Center in Florida—Morehead was ideally located for stopping to train for a few days while traveling between the two centers. The future would prove that NASA made the right choice by taking Jenzano's advice and conducting celestial navigation training at Morehead. The training methods devised by the Morehead staff saved lives on multiple occasions.

In the early 1960s, space travel was full of unknowns. Jenzano and his team of instructors had to invent a way to fill in some of those unknowns for the Project Mercury astronauts. NASA selected this first group of astronauts primarily because they were the best military test pilots—their experience flying experimental planes would presumably keep them safer when flying spacecraft, the riskiest experiments ever flown. Although NASA required astronauts to have at least a Bachelor's degree in engineering (or equivalent), none had a background in astronomy, so they had a lot to learn.¹⁸ Apollo 17 astronaut Gene Cernan compared facing the unknowns of space to the European age of exploration, and emphasized the importance of learning the stars:

¹² “Marshall Knows Stars; Will Make Study Easy,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, May 10, 1949.

¹³ “Directors.” Morehead Planetarium & Science Center, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, January 25, 2020, <https://moreheadplanetarium.org/about-morehead/our-history/morehead-directors/>.

¹⁴ Marché, *Theaters of Time and Space*, 138.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138, 222.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Donald K. Slayton, “Crew Functions and Training.” Paper presented at the AIAA 5th Annual Meeting and Technical Display, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 21st-24th 1968.

“The stars were our world. Columbus sailed across the ocean with a sextant, I suppose he had a telescope as well. We went to the Moon with a sextant and telescope. We had to use the stars to be able to navigate on. Oh, the ground could track us, but the fact of life is we had to sight on the stars and tell our computer exactly where we were to align our inertial platform for navigation. We also had to have the capability, if we lost all contact with the ground, of getting home alone without talking to anybody.¹⁹

Cernan, and the other astronauts from 1960 to 1975, would learn all this at Morehead. Jenzano and his instructors had to make certain that the astronauts memorized the locations of stars and planets, and the equations to calculate their own location in relation to these celestial bodies.²⁰ When teaching for later missions, Jenzano had to re-design simulators for teaching navigation as objectives became more complex.²¹ For Project Apollo, Planetarium staff designed a simulator that allowed an astronaut to control the projector as if he were flying through space, turning to find “recognizable star patterns” and trying to “get from one field of view to another by the shortest route... to economize on imagined fuel,” wrote assistant director Donald Hall.²² In addition to regular training at the planetarium, Morehead staff also had to be on call for last-minute help with missions. In 1962, a NASA official called Tony Jenzano to fly down to Cape Canaveral and update Walter Schirra’s star charts for Mercury-Atlas 8 to match with his flight date, which had been postponed to a few days later.²³ He and Morehead staff gathered information that night, and Jenzano flew out the next morning, working with a NASA official, Schirra, and his back-up crew to make sure the astronaut flew out with corrected star charts at hand.²⁴ Jenzano’s dedication left an impression on astronauts. Decades later, they still shared fond memories of their training and its importance.

In a 1998 interview with longtime NBC aerospace reporter and native North Carolinian Roy Neal, Walter Schirra, a famous jokester, pretended not to remember “some state on the East Coast that has a planetarium.”²⁵ In fact, the elderly former astronaut keenly remembered his time in North Carolina, echoing his statement from decades earlier

19 Eugene A. Cernan, interview with Rebecca Wright, December 11, 2007, NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project: Edited Oral History Transcript, https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral_histories/CernanEA/CernanEA_12-11-07.html.

20 Donald Hall, “What You Should Know About Astronaut Training at Morehead Planetarium,” Morehead Planetarium, 1966.

21 Marché, *Theaters of Time and Space*, 138.

22 Hall, “What You Should Know.”

23 Jim Wallace, “Jenzano Gave Assistance to Schirra,” *The Daily Tar Heel*. October 4, 1962.

24 Wallace, “Jenzano Gave Assistance to Schirra.”

25 Walter M. Schirra, Jr., interview with Roy Neal, December 1, 1998, NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project: Edited Oral History Transcript, https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral_histories/SchirraWM/SchirraWM_12-1-98.html.

that he counted celestial navigation as one of the most important parts of his training.²⁶ He told Neal how Jenzano and Planetarium instructors taught astronauts “every trick in the trade.”²⁷ At Morehead, Schirra said, astronauts learned “how to recognize stars, how to put the constellations together, [and] how to get checkpoints so we could find out what stars we needed to know very well” while looking through a simulated spacecraft window.²⁸ Schirra taught Neal about the technical aspects of celestial navigation and reminisced about fun times at Morehead. He described how astronauts learned to use celestial bodies as reference for yaw, commenting that “you can say, ‘Ah, that planet is where it should be. That star is where it should be. That’s my yaw attitude.’ Very, very precise.”²⁹ In a simplified explanation of the simulator training, Schirra remembered that it “was kind of fun” how “Tony would put us up on little chairs, much like a spacecraft, with our window again; and then he’d put projections of little constellations... in the planetarium.”³⁰

Schirra’s fellow Mercury astronaut Gordon Cooper recognized that the planetarium provided more than just fun and cookie-time snack breaks, but life-saving training, when he flew what would be the final Mercury flight in 1963. On the nineteenth orbit of that flight, Cooper “realized [he] was slowly, but surely, having an electrical fire from [his] relays.”³¹ The fire, Cooper told Roy Neal in 1998, shorted out the spacecraft’s entire electrical system. Without any electronics for navigation or assisted flight controls, Cooper had to rely on his training from Morehead and his test pilot skills to safely re-enter the atmosphere and land in the ocean nearby the aircraft carrier that was stationed to pick him up. He had to use only his “eyeballs out the window” and “a wristwatch for timing” to find his pitch, roll, and yaw attitude and position his spacecraft at the correct angle.³² Looking out the window of the Faith-7 as he hurtled down to Earth, Cooper did the same calculations he learned while looking out the simulator’s window back in the safety of Morehead’s dome. Reflecting later on his friend “Gordo” Cooper’s performance under pressure, Walter Schirra, who had the help of automatic controls for landing on his missions, exclaimed in surprise, “That son-of-a-gun landed closer to the carrier than I did!”³³ Tony Jenzano would not have been so surprised.

Astronauts in Town and in the News

While the “cookie time” code word prevented most Chapel Hillians from encountering the

26 Wallace, “Jenzano Gave Assistance to Schirra.”

27 Schirra, interview with Neal, December 1, 1998.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 L. Gordon Cooper, Jr., interview with Roy Neal, May 21, 1998, NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project: Edited Oral History Transcript, https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral_histories/CooperLG/CooperLG_5-21-98.html.

32 Ibid.

33 Schirra, interview with Neal, December 1, 1998.

astronauts while they trained, the men did explore downtown and occasionally socialize with UNC professors and students.³⁴ In April of 1966, UNC student Ernest Robl was the first Daily Tar Heel reporter allowed behind the scenes of the training program. His encounter with the astronauts humanized them, though he was awestruck by their work ethic. He followed Apollo 1 astronauts Gus Grissom, Ed White, Roger Chafee and their back-up crew on a training session, discovering that astronauts took the time to enjoy UNC's campus and the town despite their otherwise busy schedules.³⁵ This would become a bittersweet memory for Robl, as the three men tragically died on January 27, 1967, when their spacecraft caught fire during a test. A few days later, Robl wrote with sadness and respect for the men, and his experience watching them walk through UNC campus in their civilian clothes to play handball in Woolen Gym.³⁶ Not many students or townspeople were able to spend time with the astronauts in the way that Robl did, other than those who worked at Morehead.

In the formal tone of the technical memorandum for Mercury-Atlas 6, astronaut Scott Carpenter wrote that "members of the Morehead staff were most cooperative and continued use of their facilities is recommended."³⁷ Outside of training hours, Morehead staff and astronauts had a relationship that was much less formal, and closer than just workplace cooperation. In Chapel Hill, the astronauts spent their time at either the planetarium or the Jenzano house. Jenzano had a reputation for "giving such great parties!" according to astronaut (and UNC grad) William Thornton.³⁸ Sometimes, the astronauts would fly into Chapel Hill the night before training began, making a surprise visit to Jenzano's home to "come out and have some drinks," as daughter Carol Jenzano remembered.³⁹ The men would often hang out on the front porch with Tony Jenzano, becoming close friends as well as colleagues. Carol said the astronauts "were like family," and she remembered having "the biggest crush" on Neil Armstrong.⁴⁰ Pushing back against the idea of the astronauts as "supermen," Tony asserted that they "liked to drink a beer and tell a joke just like the next guy."⁴¹

Characterizing the astronauts as regular people is rare in the historical memory of the Space Race, which typically portrays the astronauts as supermen, sometimes more

34 Poplett, "Walking in the Footsteps."

35 Ernest Robl, "Busy Astronauts Find Light Moments Here," *The Daily Tar Heel*. April 17, 1966.

36 Ernest Robl, "Astronauts Dreams Cut Too Short," *The Daily Tar Heel*. January 31, 1967.

37 Scott Carpenter, "Astronaut Preparation." In *Results of the First United States Manned Orbital Space Flight*. NASA-TM-108605. (Houston: National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1962), 108.

38 Monica Byrne. "To the Moon, from Chapel Hill." *Our State Magazine*. January 2013. <https://www.ourstate.com/morehead-planetarium/>.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Melissa Staples, "Planetarium Training Aids Apollo-Soyuz Mission," *The Daily Tar Heel*, July 17, 1975.

as symbols than as human beings. Former NASA Chief Historian Roger Launius believes this functions as "the 'communication of tribal rituals, meant to comfort the old and indoctrinate the young,'" quoting historian Alex Roland.⁴² Historian Walter MacDougall, in emphasizing the global political significance of the astronauts' achievements, lends credence to Launius' idea that astronauts have been remembered this way so that their story can stand in for teaching about American political values.⁴³ Likewise, author James Donovan focuses on traits like hotheadedness and bravery in the astronauts, and emphasizes the competitive, cutthroat nature of NASA research and development work.⁴⁴ Tony Jenzano's personal relationship with the astronauts led him to present a realistic, human picture of them to the press, rather than using them as symbols, as Roger Launius described.

Moreover, Jenzano's knowledge of and dedication to science allowed him to judge the Russians separately from exaggerated Cold War depictions. Jenzano said that "in spite of the differences in ideology and technology, [he believed] that the Soviet cosmonauts are similar in nature and character to their American counterparts," when discussing the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz joint US-Soviet "handshake in space."⁴⁵ His connection with the American astronauts and his unbiased, scientific view of the Space Race led him to represent both the Americans and the Russians as regular people to the press, breaking from the epic, political competition represented in the later national historical narrative of the Space Race. The final section will discuss the legacy of Morehead's astronaut training program, and argue that Morehead's deviation from the national historical narrative led to this amnesia.

From Top of Mind to Trivia: Concluding Thoughts

Unlike today, in its time, the program was well-known. The Daily Tar Heel reported on the training almost every time astronauts left Chapel Hill, expressing pride that their town and university contributed to a nationwide scientific achievement. Many articles about Morehead Planetarium's public educational programs discuss astronaut training as well, showing the outsize cultural impact of the training at the time—even though astronauts only visited a few days, they often shared equal billing with the planetarium's year-round mission of teaching ordinary people about the stars.⁴⁶ Even NASA taught ordinary people at Morehead Planetarium as well, partnering with Morehead staff and UNC scientists to teach space science in a public lecture series from 1969-1970.⁴⁷ From 1960 to 1975, Daily Tar Heel presented astronaut training as a known fact, without having to explain the background

42 Launius, *Reaching for the Moon*, 218.

43 MacDougall, *The Heavens and the Earth*.

44 Donovan, *Shoot for the Moon*, 66-76.

45 Staples, "Planetarium Training Aids Apollo-Soyuz."

46 Nancy Stancill, "Morehead Offers Cultural Show," *The Daily Tar Heel*. September 17, 1968; Ernest Robl, "Morehead Planetarium Visitors Travel in the Company of Astronauts," *The Daily Tar Heel*. September 12, 1967.

47 "12 NASA Lectures Scheduled." *The Daily Tar Heel*. September 16, 1969.

information much. By 1977, however, just two years after the last group of astronauts trained at Morehead, the tone shifted. One Daily Tar Heel article about things to do around Chapel Hill mentioned Morehead astronaut training as if it were a rumor, saying Morehead was where “it’s been said, astronauts go for space training.”⁴⁸ Today, the few news articles about astronaut training at Morehead frame it as a tidbit of historical trivia. In fact, unless North Carolinians happen to visit the Planetarium’s own exhibits or read its own publications, most are unlikely to learn about the astronaut training that took place for over fifteen years in Chapel Hill. Why, one wonders, has this history been forgotten in the intervening years?

Historian Roger Launius writes of the impulse to mythologize the astronauts—the drama of space travel, and how the tangling of life-or-death Cold War competition with NASA’s exploits lends itself to national myth making.⁴⁹ In Chapel Hill, though, this did not happen with respect to the astronauts training. Primary sources on the topic—quotes from Jenzano, literature from the Planetarium, The Daily Tar Heel articles—associate the training with local pride, but do not overtly connect it to national prestige. No one mentions the Soviet Union, or that the training is part of a larger program designed to beat the Russians. The overall tone is one of respect for the astronauts, but for them as individuals, more than as larger-than-life symbols. Jenzano and the planetarium staff emphasized science over mythos and took pride in their contribution to scientific achievement more than any contribution to a political project.⁵⁰ That the organizational culture of the Morehead astronaut training program aligned with local university values about the creation of knowledge more than the promotion of patriotic mythos, likely contributes to why its story has been left out of the national narrative and largely forgotten—even by Chapel Hillians and UNC students.

Later depictions of the Space Race capitalized on the patriotic nostalgia for the era.⁵¹ A patriotic interpretation appeals to many Americans, but Morehead staff focused more on the scientific aspects of the Space Race than the political aspects during the astronaut training. Their focus on science (generally reflected in the local press), and the lack of opportunity for most townspeople and students to interact personally with the astronauts during their “cookie-time” in Chapel Hill, complicates its legacy. The fact that key individuals such as Jenzano and others at UNC did not emphasize the Cold War propaganda aspects of the astronaut training left it out of the patriotic myth-making of the era. Astronauts learned important skills in Chapel Hill, but not in glamorous ways—studying stars and taking cookie breaks is less dramatic than strapping into powerful rockets and launching, with the reputation of their country, to global prestige. Furthermore, as sociologist William Bainbridge notes, “the general public is interested in people before it is interested in ideas,”

48 Nancy Hartis, “No Doldrums in the Southern Part of Heaven.” The Daily Tar Heel. May 26, 1977.

49 Launius, *Reaching for the Moon*, 206.

50 Hall, “What You Should Know.”

51 Launius, *Reaching for the Moon*, 209.

so the most enduring space stories “focus on the astronauts who have what Tom Wolfe called ‘the right stuff,’ rather than on the scientists and engineers.”⁵² Instead of the high flying drama of *The Right Stuff*, Morehead astronaut training resembled the university education style already familiar to Chapel Hill. Interestingly, Daily Tar Heel reporter Ernest Robl wrote that at first glance, one could mistake the astronauts for graduate students: while at Morehead, they took off their heroic spacesuits and took on the ordinary role of students.⁵³ Since it did not fit into the dramatized historical myth, and did not stray far from ordinary life in Chapel Hill, the Morehead Planetarium story was increasingly forgotten.

Another narrative that has endured in the popular culture portrayal of NASA, but diverges from the experience of the Morehead Planetarium’s astronaut training program, can be found in James Donovan’s historical analysis. Donovan describes a divide between “the four hundred thousand other men and women” working at NASA and the astronauts, who all “devoted themselves to helping their country triumph against the Communist threat.”⁵⁴ In contrast, at Morehead, Jenzano focused more on science than on the Cold War politics of his work, and the workers and astronauts interacted as friends. The common, national historical narrative often portrays NASA as “sink or swim” in that “the [employees] who didn’t blend in or learn fast enough” did not last, as Donovan describes it.⁵⁵ In contrast, Morehead’s culture was not cutthroat and faceless, but tight knit and friendly: the astronauts believed in Jenzano, as a friend and teacher, and consistently thanked the Planetarium for all they learned there.⁵⁶ While its work was important, Morehead’s training program lacked the personal and political tensions that the typical Space Race narrative plays up.

These characteristics—that the astronauts were not made out to be mythical heroes, that the focus stayed on science over politics, and that the risks inherent in the training were not dramatic, instead resembling Chapel Hill’s familiar university style—make the Morehead Planetarium astronaut training program an outlier compared to the national historical narrative of the Space Race. The difference between the national and the Chapel Hill narrative likely explains why the Morehead training program was mostly forgotten after its conclusion. While it may not fit well into the national narrative, it should be remembered, both locally and nationally, for emphasizing another aspect of this period—the important role played by science, and science education, in the ultimate success of the space program.

52 William Sims Bainbridge, “The Impact of Space Exploration on Public Opinions, Attitudes, and Beliefs,” in *Historical Studies in the Societal Impact of Spaceflight*, ed. Steven Dick (NASA History Program: 2015), 29.

53 Ernest Robl. “Busy Astronauts.”

54 Donovan, *Shoot for the Moon*, 66.

55 Ibid.

56 Marché, *Theaters of Time and Space*, 140.

About the Author

After graduating from Carolina with a Bachelors in History in December 2020, Sarah worked in child-care until beginning her master's in Public History at NC State in August 2021. She is part of the dual master's program for archives and records management with UNC School of Library Science, so she will be returning to her alma mater once she has earned her degree from NC State. Double Tar Heel, born, bred, (eventually) dead! Sarah's current research interests concern the use of oral history interviews to build community between first and second generation Latin-American immigrants and to fill archival gaps.

Since 2019, save for the closure through lockdown, Sarah has worked as a docent at the Burwell School Historic Site, teaching about early 19th century girls' education and the lives of enslaved people in Hillsborough, NC. She has always loved teaching and working with children, and enjoyed her time as an "essential worker" during the pandemic, at a fifth grade afterschool program and a preschool summer camp. Like many, the pandemic spurred her to find different ways to connect with friends and reconnect to old hobbies. She now attends a weekly Zoom game night and has gotten back into the habit of making art by being "art pen-pals" with friends across the country. Sarah has enjoyed walking all her life, and admittedly felt a bit territorial when everybody else in town discovered what she considered her secret trails during lockdown, but she soon made peace with the influx and continues to walk in almost any weather. She has learned to go with the flow at this point in the pandemic, and looks forward to her future, having built the resiliency to deal with whatever it changes may bring.

Contemporary Commemoration

The National World War One Memorial

Megan Westbrook

Abstract. The World War One Centennial Commission has been tasked with constructing the first World War One Memorial in the nation's capital. In the past decade the conversations and trends have shifted in the field of commemoration from "Great Man Memorials" that provide a narrow view of the past. In current times, the perspectives have widened to allow for more inclusive and contextualized memorialization of the past. This project explores how the Commission and their construction of the memorial relates to these changing trends of commemoration. Both the physical space of the park and the virtual experience created by the Commission, represent contemporary commemoration. With a close analysis of the park's centerpiece, *A Soldier's Journey* by Sabin Howard, and an exploration of their virtual reality app's ability to expand accessibility, the evolution of the field of memorialization is clearly embodied in the commission's work.

Introduction

The United States honors the American veterans of every major war of the twentieth century with a national memorial in Washington, D.C. except for World War One (hereafter WWI). However, in 2014, an Act of Congress created the WWI Centennial Commission to plan, develop and execute programs and activities to commemorate the centennial of WWI.¹ Not only was the first physical memorial built in Washington, D.C., just a block away from the White House, Congress also appointed the Commission to create educational programs to raise awareness of the events from 100 years ago. The elements of this campaign embody a new era of commemoration. As societal expectations of remembering and memorializing the past have changed, the focus has shifted from glorifying the past to evaluating the past critically and inviting discussion. The National WWI Memorial and the education campaign will be an example of contemporary commemoration due to its focus on contextualization and accessibility by physical and non-physical elements of the park's sculpture, education resources and a virtual reality app.

¹ "Introduction," About Us, The World War One Centennial Commission, accessed October 3, 2020, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/about.html>.

WWI Background

Over a century has passed since the advent of what became known as “The War to End All Wars.” Although its contributions are numerous to history and continue to largely shape the modern world order, United States history does not often herald it as such. After decades of rising tensions in Europe, WWI quickly encapsulated all of Europe. Then, on April 6, 1917, the United States of America broke from isolationism and officially entered the War on the side of the Allies. In just 18 months after the United States’ entrance into the war, 2 million men and women were sent abroad. By the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, 204,000 Americans would begin to depart for home wounded while 116,516 never returned home.² While the National WWI Memorial in Washington, D.C. will be dedicated to those who sacrificed their lives abroad, it is also aimed at commemorating the mobilization of American society and industry. Millions of American women entered the factories to keep industry alive while the Doughboys, led by General John Pershing, departed for Europe. The heroism of the mobilization of 4.7 million American men and women has never been recognized in the Nation’s capital and with this project, they will be.³ Alongside those who fought on the front lines, this memorial likewise commemorates the societal changes wrought by WWI. Historian and writer A. Scott Berg wrote of these legacies, “I hope audiences will appreciate the presence of [WWI] in our lives today—whether it is our economy, race relations, women’s rights. Xenophobia, free speech, or the foundation of American foreign policy for the last one hundred years: They all have their roots in [WWI].”⁴ Tools of the 21st century memorialize these sacrifices and legacies and shaped the WWI Centennial Commission’s initiative to create an example of contemporary commemoration: one that places just as much emphasis on the physical memorial as it does the digital and educational aspects that create an opportunity for broad accessibility.

Contemporary Commemoration

Contemporary commemoration in the twenty-first century is a response to the change in expectations for memorialization from the twentieth century. The memorial designers of the twentieth century “could not anticipate that the physical space of the monument would also become a mental and emotional space of engagement, with historical traumas as well as triumphs.”⁵ Now, memorial designers must create consciously of the didactic

2 Home Page, The World War One Centennial Commission, accessed October 3, 2020, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php>.

3 Ibid.

4 Meredith Hindley and Tom Christopher, “World War I Changed America and Transformed Its Role in International Relations,” The National Endowment for the Humanities, 2017, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2017/summer/feature/world-war-i-changed-america-and-transformed-its-role-in-international-relations>.

5 Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 197.

purpose of commemoration. It has to recognize the success or heroism while simultaneously recognizing the complexities of trauma from an event. These sites of memory, such as the National WWI Memorial are “places where groups of people engage in public activity through which they express ‘a collective shared knowledge’ of the past on which a group’s sense of unity and individuality is based.”⁶ While it is difficult to try to appeal to every experience of a historic event, contemporary commemoration attempts to expand its accessibility to be more inclusive of different groups’ collective shared knowledge. In the case of WWI, in order to embody the trend of contemporary commemoration, the memorial designers had to balance honoring the heroism of those who fought and lost their lives while also respecting the reality of trauma from the war. Since a memorial is subject to criticism and debate by its very nature of being in public space, designers are increasingly encouraged to invite critical conversations inherently in their design.

In contrast, a great man memorial has a stagnant message through time that overwhelmingly pushes an idea of heroism and requests respect from its audience. Contemporary commemoration rebuffs this tradition: it demands education and contextualization. According to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, “Our country’s current monument landscape offers an incomplete - and even inaccurate - picture of our gloriously complex and diverse history.”⁷ The Monument Lab, a public art and history studio based in Philadelphia, also reimagines monumental history in communities.⁸ These examples are a part of a larger trend to raising the expectations of history and memorialization. The Mellon Foundation and the Monument Lab are also examples of what this essay will call “contemporary commemoration.”

Increasingly, citizens expect memorials to encourage inclusive conversation rather than provoke a singular message such as honor or heroism. The Mellon Initiative “The Monuments Project” summarized it well as it plans to “support efforts to recalibrate the assumed center of our national narratives to include those who have often been denied historical recognition. This work has taken on greater urgency at a moment of national reckoning with the power and influence of memorials and commemorative spaces”⁹ Again, people expect contemporary commemoration as it evolves to address the diversity of history and most importantly bring to the forefront experiences that are commonly forgotten in monuments or memorials. For example, the National WWI Memorial site and the complementary digital education resources recognized the contributions of “those who have often been denied historical recognition” like women, immigrants and African Americans.¹⁰

6 Jay Winter, “Sites of Memory,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susanah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 312.

7 “The Monuments Project,” The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, accessed October 19, 2020. <https://mellon.org/initiatives/monuments/>.

8 About, Monument Lab, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://monumentlab.com/about>.

9 “The Monuments Project.”

10 Ibid.

This paper explores contemporary commemoration through the physical contextualization of the Memorial's sculpture entitled "A Soldier's Journey" in Washington, D.C. It will also explore the non-physical elements of technology and education to uncover the contemporary trend of making history accessible to modern values of inclusion. Contextualization and education play large roles in the act of commemoration today. Carefully so, they act as tools to educate about the events of the past to those alive today but also leave space for future conversation and discussion. Rather than creating a narrow view of history, it creates a platform for further discovery. Education coupled with technology widens the scope and accessibility of a project. It has allowed historians, activists, scholars and students of all ages to participate in commemoration and history more broadly. "Digital technologies have been merged with or included in traditional memorial programs" and as they work together, they are able to extend outreach and further the experience of memorization.¹¹

The Physical

The commemorative centerpiece of the National WWI Memorial in Washington, D.C. will be a sculpture created by Sabin Howard. His creative narrative entitled "A Soldier's Journey" will be 65 feet long, with 38 distinct figures and multiple tableaux, and will be the largest bronze sculpture of its kind in the world.¹² Edwin Fountain, Vice Chair of the WWI Centennial Commission, when asked about the sculpture, was quick to address its divergence away from "Great Man Memorials."¹³ These are often portrait statues that represent "great men" who were thought to be the makers of history.¹⁴ Statues of Washington, Lincoln, Grant and also can include the numerous squares and circles scattered around Washington, D.C. and around the country are examples of great man memorials. Even the location of the new National WWI Memorial is replacing a great man memorial of Pershing Park, dedicated to General John Pershing for his service during WWI. In December 2019, construction began to transform Pershing's statue into a form of contemporary commemoration that encourages discussion, education and contextualization in a way that a great man memorial cannot. WWI is also popularly memorialized with Doughboy Memorials. These are sculptures of infantrymen depicted as charging forwards that were meant to serve as sites of remembrance and symbols of loyalty and stability.¹⁵ The great man and doughboy memorials in their poses, uniformity and expressions cultivate

11 Mario Carpo, "The Postmodern Cult of Monuments," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation History Theory & Criticism*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 50-60.

12 Angharad Coates, "Sabin Howard visits New York Academy of Art, exhibits World War I Memorial Maquette," The World War One Centennial Commission, accessed October 4, 2020, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/communicate/press-media/wwi-centennial-news/4220-sabin-howard-visits-new-york-academy-of-art-exhibits-wwi-memorial-maquette>.

13 Edwin Fountain, Telephone Interview with Author, October 26, 2020.

14 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 195.

15 Jennifer Wingate, "Over the Top," *American Art*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2005): 1.

ideas of heroism born through war. Kirk Savage argues these hero monuments are "void of intellectual conception" and suggests that memorials should aim to raise above empty conventions of portrait statuary.¹⁶ The WWI Memorial's sculpture "A Soldier's Journey" does this by decentralizing the conventional "heroes" and introducing inclusive narratives.

This bronze sculpture is a sculpted narrative of many individuals. It is designed for viewers to experience it as a story and in order to experience the story the visitor must walk down its entirety. The figures of the sculpture are representational on their own but are each decentralized to teach the viewer not just of the heroes of war, but rather of the "process of being human," according to Howard.¹⁷ By making this sculpture accessible for the public to understand, it guides the viewer to deeply consider the costs of war and the reality of the times. This section will focus on two of the many scenes throughout the 65-foot-long sculpture, the first will share a story of the role of women on the home front and the second will explore the representation of the costs of war through a soldier with PTSD.

The first scene depicts a family being separated by war. The first figure of the entire sculpture is a young girl handing a helmet over to her father. From the very outset of the narrative, the soldier becomes decentralized by other figures that the viewer will identify immediately. As an example of contemporary commemoration, this scene is educational while representational. Behind the kneeling soldier is his wife with her hands lying on his shoulders. Her figure then transitions into the next scene as her husband departs for war. Her body is facing back towards her daughter. Her positioning toward her daughter represents facing home and the responsibilities that remain while her husband is departing for war. In spite of this, she turns her head to watch her husband depart. This scene is educational as it represents the unprecedented emergence of women in factories and industry all over the country. Her body represents the changing expectations of women at the outset of the war. The WWI Centennial Commission's Education Website states that, "the expansion of the military in 1917-18 pulled 16 percent of the U.S. male workforce into uniform."¹⁸ As the men were sent abroad, there was a great void in American industry. The United States called upon women to fill jobs as factory workers, clerical staff, drivers, technicians, researchers...virtually every position in every field or industry.¹⁹ As her body remains facing back to the nation to represent these women who had to send their loved ones away while keeping American industry alive themselves.

Sabin's depiction of this family as the beginning of the sculpture's narrative imme-

16 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 210.

17 Loma Media, "A Soldier's Journey," commissioned by World War I Centennial Committee, January 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVPtxDS3o5U>, 4:35.

18 "Educate," The World War One Centennial Commission, accessed October 3, 2020, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/educate.html>.

19 Ibid.

diately reveals its divergence from soldier-centric monuments. Rather, it furthers the theme of contemporary commemoration that aims to contextualize this time period. It expands the memory of WWI to the home front where women played an instrumental role. The choice to showcase multiple experiences from the war follows the tenets of contemporary commemoration and continues throughout the sculpture. Rather than glorifying one heroic soldier, Sabin Howard wanted his sculpture to be “about the process of being human, not the glorification of war so what I did was created something that everyone would understand.”²⁰ This scene, as many of them do, invites discussion or further discovery into the topic of women in the war. It makes the piece more accessible as it depicts a family; therefore, the people who visit the memorial will be able to see this scene and immediately relate to it. By pulling in the audience to relate, it then opens the scene up to discussion.

In the next scene, the father breaks away from his family to join his brothers in arms. At this point, the visitor would have to move down the sculpture to continue the story. In the following battle scenes, Sabin Howard created a geometric “X” into the sculpture. It is at this point that the fighting is leading into the ground. This allows the continuous movement to push the storyline to keep the visitor moving. Down into the “X,” the lowest point is the “Cost of War” in which there is a wounded soldier being carried by his comrades. Coming out of the other side of the “X,” the other diagonal rises through a nurse aiding a soldier into the soldier standing gazing into the distance, representing a man with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; this is the next scene that this essay will analyze to explore the aspects of contemporary commemoration in this sculpture.

Again, this memorial is not the glorification of war as Great Man Memorials tend to be. Rather, the designers created it to be more accessible for the viewer to understand, Howard explains: “the PTSD soldier that represents America emerging from WWI as well as the father transformed from the battle that he has just left.”²¹ It is representative of a singular soldier as well as a country changed by war. Behind the standing soldier, the viewer will see other figures surrounding him. Wounded soldiers, men fallen into the trenches and even a nurse holding up a Doughboy populate the scene. Sabin Howard again created a narrative focused on de-focalizing any singular, heroic soldier. Instead, Howard depicts the inclusivity of experiences and the true costs of war. He stands collectively between men who are showing the physical and mental reality of WWI’s toll. Such a representation starkly contrasts the narrow interpretation of a Great Man Memorial or even the popular individual Doughboy sculptures scattered around the United States. The high point of the relief is the soldiers intertwined and leaving the scene together. The father figure from the beginning of the sculpture then returns from war to give his daughter, or representationally the next generation, his helmet thus foreshadowing World War II.

20 Loma Media, “A Soldier’s Journey,” 4:40.

21 Loma Media, “A Soldier’s Journey,” 6:20.

Instead of making this an homage to a “great man” or a specific hero as is common, it is a panoramic view on the reality of war and its legacy. Whether it be from the inclusion of women, nurses, the decision to move away from the great man memorial is a part of a larger shift in commemoration that values contextualization. Kirk Savage explains, “At the beginning of the twenty-first century, national memorials are now expected to be spaces of experience, journeys of emotional discovery, rather than exemplary objects to be imitated.”²² This reorientation of expectations for a memorial is present in the message and purpose of “A Soldier’s Journey.” It utilizes traditional representation in the form of a physical sculpture, but it represents multiple generations, genders and experiences from the war. Contemporary commemoration expects and demands decentralization of traditional narratives and the inclusion of those that rightfully deserve recognition.

The Non-Physical

Pure physical commemoration, as contemporary as it may be in its creation and narrative, has its limitations in the twenty-first century. These sites of memory require upkeep and constant care, as well as attendance. Jay Winter writes on this inevitable truth, “sites of memory live through their life cycle, and like the rest of us, inevitably fade away. This natural process of dissolution closes the circle on sites of memory and the public commemoration that occurs around them.”²³ There are also skeptics of physical memorialization who question the usefulness of sculptures altogether. For example, skeptic Mario Carpo writes about the idea that “monuments in stone may be destined to play a lesser role in the future as they have in the past due to electronic technologies of transmission.” Simply put, there is “no need to go there if the original, or a digital reproduction of it, may come here.”²⁴ The experiences of 2020, and restricted travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have only furthered the questions concerning physical memorialization. While there are institutions set in place to ensure the upkeep of the WWI Memorial, how could the Commission ensure the continuation of memorialization of the war for years to come? In the year 2020, more than ever, contemporary forms of commemoration have to answer this question as physical attendance is no longer guaranteed. Therefore, the Commission implemented a digital educational campaign to extend the commemorative efforts from just the park itself and into digital manifestations.

According to the WWI Centennial Commission’s website, their National Educational Initiatives and Digital Learning Program plans to reach over 10 million students. The Commission partnered with “A+E/History Channel to develop a national educational programming outreach for students in grades 6-12.”²⁵ This campaign to divert resources

22 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 21.

23 Winter, “Sites of Memory,” 324.

24 Carpo, “The Postmodern Cult of Monuments”: 50-60.

25 “Educate.” The World War One Centennial Commission.

away from the physical monument itself demonstrates the broad focus of doing more than only lionizing the Doughboy and America's status as a "winner" of WWI. but rather to create critical conversations about WWI. Further, the educational programs also put focus on "The war's effects on geopolitics to the current day, Implications for the forces of nationalism and self-determination of free peoples, technological changes the war brought to manufacturing and industry, The war's impact on society and on arts and culture" and many other legacies of the war.²⁶ This intention parallels the expectations introduced by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as well as the Monument Lab to decentralize memorialization with a wave of contextualization. These projects aim to "ensure the future generations inherit a commemorative landscape that venerates and reflects the vast, rich complexity of the American story."²⁷ As does the work of the WWI Centennial Commission.

These programs aim to transcend the problems that will face the park itself in what Jay Winter referred to as dissolution. These initiatives keep the history relevant and accessible to students. However, there is the natural question that if there are so many limitations of a physical memorial relative to the educational campaigns, why indulge the resources? The Commission found a worthy balance by utilizing the advantages of both the physical and non-physical modes of commemoration. While the physical is able to utilize narrative in representation from the sculpture and creates the opportunity for commemorative activities, the non-physical aspects like education capitalize on technological capabilities to further accessibility for those not able to visit the site, or for those who want more information about the lessons the site introduces. While the physical and non-physical are powerful on their own, when combined they embody contemporary commemoration in its goal to educate and contextualize.

The memorial and the commission provide education about the war and the men and women who served. For it is first and foremost the National WWI Memorial. However, much like the larger narrative decentralizes the Doughboy in the sculpture, the broader context of the early twentieth century decentralizes the war. Decentralizing the glorification of war and the textbook heroes allows for the recognition of critical viewpoints and unsung narratives. The memorial industry has to be more creative and forward thinking about commemoration. In the twenty-first century, these education initiatives can take commemoration even further, in the Commission's creation of a virtual reality app.

Mario Carpo introduced the idea that "electronic technologies of transmission" could replace physical commemoration.²⁸ However, sites of memory are cornerstones of American commemoration. As valuable as they are to society, it would be difficult to imagine their absolute extinction. Yet, Carpo presents an opportunity for balance. Instead

26 "Educate." The World War One Centennial Commission.

27 "The Monuments Project," The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

28 Carpo, "The Postmodern Cult of Monuments": 50-60.

of a demise of the physical, what is there to be said of bringing the physical world into the digital? The WWI Centennial Commission, partnered with Walmart, brought this balance to fruition in the WWI Memorial Virtual Reality App. The app complements the experience of the park in Washington, D.C. and also expands the reach of the Commission's mission to develop educational programs to further the commemoration of WWI. When explored virtually in the app, video game style 3D stories and over 50 videos integrated into 3D space fills the user experience.²⁹ By using twenty-first century capabilities, the commission has brought not only the National WWI Memorial into the hands of students all over the country, but it has also expanded the accessibility of education about the war and its legacies. The WWI Centennial Commission introduces the educational component on their website:

The Explorer's 'How WWI Changed America' Theater offers dozens of short videos in nine categories including how WWI affected women, immigrants, African Americans, Native Americans, citizenship, finance, international standing, and prophetically, the Pandemic 100 years ago. Prominent WWI historians, archival footage, period photos and newspaper headlines provide short focused insights.³⁰

As physical commemoration faces growing pressure, Kirk Savage explains, "Someday, we worry, our war memorials will turn into monumental albatrosses, empty of visitors, because the veterans they honor will pass away and become too distant from living kin and other social networks with a stake in remembering them."³¹ Without an emotional or immediate familial connection to WWI, it is a reasonable concern that the physical monument would be out of touch for people today who are not directly interested in the topic of WWI and its legacy. For example, the Vietnam memorial faced this issue because the "original rationale for the memorial rested on the uniqueness of the trauma suffered by American soldiers in Vietnam. Now that the memorial has performed its act of restitution...there will be strong reasons to shift the rationale in the opposite direction - to make the veteran of Vietnam more representative of the tradition of American military service and sacrifice."³² The Vietnam memorial, according to Savage, is now required to embody a new duality. Its initial purpose was recognition and restitution. As time moves on this purpose has to change if the memorial wants to expand its significance through time. The WWI Memorial, from its physical representation and even more obviously, its non-physical aspects embody the duality before the park opens to the public. In the app specifically, the stakes for the audience are clear because of the topics introduced in the video series. The topics like women's suffrage, the roots of the civil rights movement, and immigration still have immense importance in education

29 "Introducing the WWI Memorial 'Virtual Explorer,'" Virtual Explorer, The World War One Centennial Commission, accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/educate/2020-digital-resources/virtual-explorer-home.html>.

30 Ibid.

31 Savage, *Monument Wars*, 309.

32 Ibid.

today. Since it follows a common thread through history, it creates a stake for audiences today and in the future. The WWI Centennial Commission is utilizing these contemporary modes of commemoration to make educational resources about the war accessible.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the nature of contemporary commemoration through the National WWI Memorial in Washington, D.C. Through physical and non-physical aspects, much has been revealed about the expectations of commemoration today: it values education, contextualization and it should continue to broaden the accessibility to an audience outside of the borders of the park itself. However, this is inherently connected to the changing expectations for the study of history as a discipline. As history has evolved, commemoration has adapted with it. The Mellon Initiative, and the work done at the Monument Lab introduced earlier, expose these evolving expectations: the lessons of history are not stagnant, neither are its forms of memorialization. It has become a growing trend to push back against the accepted norms of history that have for so long been the status quo. For example, the challenge to great man memorials with the park's narrative sculpture is a microcosm of the larger trend to contextualize figures of the past to reveal a more holistic lens. Contextualization is increasingly a major component of teaching history by reconfiguring the past. By decentralizing the dominant narratives of history, the Euro-centric tendencies of the recollection of history, the discipline can evolve towards being a more inclusive field. In this way, the work being done at the WWI Centennial Commission is following the same trend. Neither history as a subject nor commemoration at this point in time are entirely inclusive or perfect. However, when programs such as these become more commonplace, history can continue down its path of inclusivity and accessibility. With challenges to norms comes uncomfortable change. Contemporary history is one that gives great emphasis to the invitation of discussion and conversation about the past and is increasingly unapologetic of these standards.

Thus, the non-physical elements of the Commission's project, the education campaign and the virtual reality app, have pushed the evolving nature of history to the forefront. Since history is becoming more susceptible to revision, the digital platforms allow for this. As time goes on, researchers will continue to learn more about WWI and the lessons will continue to expand. Therefore, to have a digital space for resources to be added and revisions to be made, its flexibility allows for it to adapt to the future of history. The physical space of the memorial, while limited in its capabilities relative to the digital platform, still invites discussion. More than a solitary great man memorial or doughboy sculpture, the sculpture's narrative is still an experience that can be analyzed for years to come. This memorial and its non-physical elements create a starting place for the future generations to springboard into an even newer era of commemoration at some point. One that continues to mirror the evolution of the discipline of history. The study of history will continue to evolve through time, as will the practice and creation of commemoration and memorial spaces.

About the Author

My name is Megan Westbrook and I am originally from Wilson, North Carolina. I graduated in the fall of 2021 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a double major in History and Peace, War and Defense as well as with a minor in Geography. After graduation, I moved to Paris and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Relations from Queen Mary University at the University of London Institute in Paris.

Leading up to the summer of 2020, I, like many others, lost an in-person internship due to the worsening COVID-19 pandemic. Luckily, I came across a virtual opportunity with the World War One Centennial Commission. My positions included being a Genealogical Research Intern and Webinar Assistant for this Commission. Upon the start of the fall 2020 semester, I was enrolled in the History 398 capstone course, "Monuments, Commemoration and Memory" with Professor William Brundage. I was instantly inspired by my work with the Commission and knew I was in the perfect position to explore the Commission and their work in a way no one had been able to do yet. Therefore, with the generosity of members of the Commission who were willing to do interviews with me and the guidance of Professor Brundage, I focused on how their work represents a new and ambitious era of commemoration. I utilized the term "contemporary commemoration" and explored how the work of the commission answered the call for memorialization to encourage inclusive and critical conversations rather than the familiar one-dimensional story of heroism. The events of 2020 constantly reminded me how important it is to closely examine the role of our monuments as well as the motivations of those who are tasked with creating them. This project continues to shape how I view the physical and virtual spaces of commemoration.

Book Reviews

Moscow Monumental: Soviet Skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin's Capital.

By Katherine Zubovich. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. xii + 228 pp., acknowledgments, note on transliteration and abbreviation, maps, images, notes, bibliography, index.)

Frederick Cochran

Katherine Zubovich's new work *Moscow Monumental: Soviet Skyscrapers and Urban Life in Stalin's Capital* provides an exciting and richly detailed history of the Stalinist architectural project of "monumentalism" which sought to create a city so grand in scale as to make Moscow the "showcase socialist city" or the "capital of all capitals." (21) This project revolved around the building of eight skyscrapers throughout Moscow, all united around the centerpiece of the city: the unbuilt Palace of the Soviets. These skyscrapers were sidelined by shortages, poor planning, bureaucratic clog, as well as *Zhdanovshchina*, the Great Purges, and the Great Patriotic War. However, they came to represent a new Soviet order that saw the backwater capital city become "monumental" in record time, a transformation that extended the impact of the buildings and the state ideology that inspired them into the social and political lives of everyday Muscovites.

Zubovich's book is neatly separated into two halves: the first half is devoted to the Moscow of the 1920s and 30s, when ideas about "monumentalism" and architecture's role in the Revolution began to circulate and find expression. Here, readers become acquainted with the Palace of the Soviets and its designers, as well as the trials that stalled the project's development. What began as a radical re-envisioning of the urban landscape during society's march toward socialism, the grand architectural project of the interwar years devolved into a harried and ideologically fraught process of (re-)asserting state power and hegemony through its physical imprint on the city.

In the second half, we meet those whose lives were altered by the project: those living on plots of land slated for construction, workers, prison laborers, and even the future occupants of the skyscraper project. Here, readers are presented with one of the greatest strengths of the book, or the argument that Moscow's construction projects not only reflected, reinforced, and produced social, economic, and political cleavages in Soviet society. Ultimately, by the time the sky-scrapers were built, Stalin had died and the Soviet Union had entered a new cultural and political landscape. The project that so plagued citizens, planners, architects, builders, and ideologues was harshly criticized for its Stalinist "excess" and pomposity by Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev. Nevertheless, the buildings remained and continued to reshape and redefine the city and its inhabitants.

Zubovich's most obvious contribution to the field is her use of the term "monumentalism" to describe the Stalinist skyscraper project. While already an established architectural form, monumentalism in Zubovich's work serves two purposes: one is to show that the scale of the Stalinist skyscrapers exceeded their functional use, a fact not lost on the starved and weary citizens of the interwar Soviet Union. (18) Moreover, monumentalism self-consciously served to consolidate the power and the authority of the state, convey a sense of national (and Soviet) pride, and reorder the city according to Marxist-Leninist principles. However successful this project may have been, the destruction and privation of the war and postwar era made it hard for many (especially those who had to resettle or join the construction effort) to reconcile the loftiness and expense of the project with the realities of starvation, health crises, and housing shortages unfolding around them. As Zubovich convincingly argues, not only were the skyscrapers off limits for most Soviet citizens, their construction actually made their lives worse.

Another key intervention in Zubovich's work is to show how this project was founded on a vast network of cross-cultural exchange, especially with the West. Though the design of the Palace of the Soviets signaled a "break" with Western modernist architectural traditions, the project was actually founded on the expertise and design of American firms and European engineers. For example, Zubovich notes that the main state organization tasked with the construction of the skyscrapers was "officially encouraged, authorized, and expected to act as a bridge between the capitalist building industry abroad" and the planned economy project underway at home. (94) This cooperation took the shape of coordinated visits to New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago, the sharing of the latest scientific knowledge, and even material support or aid. Zubovich shows how, though formerly considered to be insular or autarkic, the Soviets had no qualms about cooperating with or learning from the capitalist West in building their socialist city. Here, Zubovich's work is in good company with the scholarship of historians like Lewis Siegelbaum and Stephen Kotkin, whose work also underscored the internationalist underpinnings of Soviet industrial, commercial, or construction projects.

Finally, Zubovich deftly argues that the state used the new construction of monumentalism to uncover an identifiable past via archaeological excavations (such as the 1949-50 dig at the Zariad'e site which, after the discovery of artifacts from the 10th-13th century, ironically prevented construction on the planned eighth skyscraper altogether), which they used in broader processes of postwar national identity building. One wonders whether this preservation-through-destruction impulse extended into other arenas as well, such as in the arena of state atheism which, following the war, had become bound up with the collection and analysis of the anthropological or "folk" origins of religious belief. Readers are also left wondering if the processes of monumentalism occurred on a smaller scale elsewhere, and if the state harnessed the destructive capabilities of the project to settle past debts through the targeted displacement of troublesome groups, areas, or landmarks. These minor and tangential omissions aside, Zubovich's work remains a valuable contribution to the fields of Soviet urban, political, and social history.

American Slavery and Russian Serfdom in the Post-Emancipation Imagination.
By Amanda Brickell Bellows. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. xvi + 224 pp., acknowledgments, a note on translation, illustrations, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index.)

Luke Jeske

American Slavery and Russian Serfdom in the Post-Emancipation Imagination is a timely work conceived and published in Chapel Hill. Amanda Bellows, a UNC product and lecturer at The New School in New York City, has written the first comparative history of the historical imagination of American slavery and Russian serfdom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over six chapters, bookended by an introduction and epilogue, Bellows effectively constructs a cultural history that juxtaposes American and Russian histories by drawing on popular as well as lesser-known sources from US and Russian archives.

Abolitionist literature of the 1850s and 1860s constitutes the first chapter's subject. Readers learn that Louisa May Alcott, famous for her novel *Little Women*, penned numerous short stories about African Americans who absconded from the shackles of slavery only to find themselves in a liminal state between bondage and freedom. In the more restricted public and political spheres of the Russian Empire, poet Nikolai Nekrasov and dramaturge Aleksei Pisemskii, though elided from the traditional canon of Russian literature, captivated contemporary audiences with their critiques of serfdom and the land-owning class. While US and Russian audiences remained divided over the question of emancipation, these writers all helped shape the cultural landscapes upon which memories of slavery and serfdom would be remembered.

The second chapter continues Bellows' analysis of the written word, turning to landowners' use idealization of the past through fiction during the 1870s and 1880s. These elites romanticized rural agricultural work and laborer-landowner relations under regimes of serfdom and slavery. Bellows introduces readers to lesser-known authors, including Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, Grigorii Danilevskii, Vsevolod Solov'ev, Evgenii Salias, and Evgenii Opochinin. The Russian *pomeshchiki* (landowners) nurtured nostalgia for non-existent but idyllic and well-run estates of bygone years. Meanwhile, American landowners longed for the 'quaint respectability,' as they called it, of dependable and dependent African American slaves.

Next, Bellows ventures into the visual world, concentrating on illustrated periodicals in chapter three and oil paintings in chapter four. Emancipation and the social changes it unleashed came to be depicted in lithographs as well as on canvas. Consumers of popular culture – readers of Harper's Weekly or *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* (The Illus-

trated World) – encountered images of the “deplorable” transition to freedom marked by rural-urban migration and the loss of morality associated with it. More rarely, viewers might encounter self-portraits asserting the freed peasant or freed slave’s newfound sense of dignity. Painters captured yet other themes and moments in their respective post-emancipation societies. Their major themes included military service, agricultural fields, ceremonies from the rustic past, and education. Russian artists from Vasilii Maksimov to Il’ia Repin depicted the peasantry as the repository of national culture. American painters such as Henry Ossawa Tanner and William Edouard Scott imbued African American subjects with a sense of pride while others emphasized their “exotic” and “colorful” nature.

Chapter five focuses on advertisements and ephemera, an exciting if sometimes elusive source base. Differences between American and Russian capitalism yielded different mechanisms for creating and placing ads with advertising agencies appearing in the former, while publishers themselves tended to ads in the latter. Despite these dissimilar approaches to generating advertisements, both US and Russian printers drew on nostalgia for the ‘simpler’ past seen broadly in visual culture of the time. Yet, advertisements added a new dimension to popular imagery by encouraging urban assimilation among freed peasants and freed slaves through the consumption of new goods such as cigarettes or suits. Notably, American advertisements almost completely excluded African Americans, regulating freedmen to highly negative roles in their rare appearances.

The sixth chapter and epilogue concentrate on the early twentieth century, culminating in the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the abolition of serfdom and slavery. Whereas landowners cultivated nostalgia in prior decades, Russian and US cultural producers and consumers now shifted their attention forward. Neither African Americans nor peasants would return to their historical roles in the coercive labor systems; change was the new watchword. In reaction to these new realities and their polarizing politics, memorials tended to avoid divisiveness – commemorating Alexander II, the “Tsar-Liberator,” and President Lincoln, the emancipator – except for Confederate statues that could be erected and defended by the deep pockets and violence of white supremacy.

Bellows’ highly readable volume will interest a wide array of audiences but can be recommended particularly to students of comparative history as well as historians of Russia, the United States, and global slaveries.

Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement. By Christine Rosen. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. viii + 188 pp., acknowledgments, images, notes, selected bibliography, index.)

Carter Kurtz

Christine Rosen’s book *Preaching Eugenics* explores the connection between the American eugenics movement and the Protestant, Catholic, and (Reform) Jewish communities in the United States. She argues that the belief in the separation and inevitable conflict between religion and science, as seen in the infamous Scopes trial, did not prevent religious leaders from aligning themselves with the eugenics movement. In fact, some religious leaders, particularly from liberal Protestant traditions, eagerly embraced eugenics and became some of its staunchest defenders. Rabbis and Catholic priests also played a part in spreading the eugenic message in the United States, though the latter group often had an uneasy relationship with the movement. Rosen takes a largely chronological and sectional approach, tracking the ways in which each religious community responded (and contributed) to eugenic issues and goals over time.

Rosen highlights the nineteenth-century roots of eugenics and connects the movement to the rise of voluntary associations and charity organizations that arose at the end of the century. Concerned by increasing numbers of immigrants, deleterious social conditions, and perceptions of a faltering white (generally Anglo-Saxon) race, religious leaders from a number of traditions joined the eugenic cause in the name of social betterment and progressivism. To some religious leaders, eugenics was a logical counterpart to the Social Gospel, which advocated for an activist, post-millennial approach to social welfare.

Of particular interest is Rosen’s discussion of Jewish involvement in the eugenics movement, as this involvement might seem surprising in light of Hitler’s later application of eugenic principals in the Holocaust. Some non-Jewish eugenicists referenced the relative insularity of the Jewish community – particularly regarding marriage – as an aspirational model for other “racial” communities who also wished to retain a sense of racial purity. Reform Jewish leaders and rabbis associated with the eugenics movement were eager to assert the ways in which eugenic messages and goals had long been a part of Jewish practice, prior to the rise of the secular eugenics movement. Generally thought to be of a separate “race” from white, Jewish involvement in eugenics often focused on the importance of general social betterment and care for the wider community. Jewish participation in the eugenics movement might also have functioned as an effort at assimilation with progressive American ideals that would help to distinguish second- and third-generation Jewish-Americans from their “fresh-off-the-boat” counterparts.

Beyond noting the appeal that eugenics had for religious leaders who wished to position themselves as “modern,” Rosen highlights the ways in which secular eugenicists courted and worked with religious leaders in an attempt to popularize the eugenic movement and its core concepts. The sermon contests of the American Eugenics Society (AES) were one such way of integrating secular and religious communities under a common cause. However, this connection occasionally had unintended consequences, as “lay” concepts of eugenics and eugenic goals often differed from those of the eugenicists and occasionally led to disagreements over methods and actions, such as the push for state mandatory health examinations prior to marriage.

While Rosen’s primary goal of clarifying the relationship between the clergy and the wider eugenics movement is certainly accomplished, certain elements of the eugenics movement are curiously brushed over or ignored altogether. Discussion about race, so central to the eugenics movement, is largely limited to white or Jewish communities, and the impact of eugenics on other racial groups is largely overlooked. Part of this may be a function of the author focusing on religious leaders from the North, which has a different legacy of race relations than the South. Discussion of the role of gender in the eugenics movement – even as it pertains particularly to religious leaders – is also largely absent. Second, the author suggests that the eugenics movement largely died out around the 1930s and 1940s with the end of the AES. However, many elements of the eugenics movement lived on beyond even World War II, and the lack of information on this front may be due to the author’s decision to limit the scope of the eugenics movement to its institutional torchbearers, rather than its discourse. Half of Rosen’s discussion of eugenics is focused on the ways in which formal eugenics organizations courted and interacted with religious leaders in an attempt to emphasize the multi-directional flow of influence. This is certainly admirable, but it obscures other ways in which religious leaders influenced and were influenced by eugenic messages on a less formal level.

Overall, the book is commendable in its attempt to elaborate on the relationship between the eugenics movement and Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious leaders. While it does presume some prior knowledge in its readers – for example, the history of the Jewish reform tradition – it is generally accessible and straightforward. Sections could be taught with relative ease to an undergraduate class. Graduate students with little background in the history of eugenics will also likely find the book helpful in understanding the way eugenics and religion interacted in the 20th century. However, specialists will likely find the book to be unnecessarily confined in its understanding of the scope of eugenics and its impact on society.

How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs: The Syrian Congress of 1920 and the Destruction of its Historical Liberal-Islamic Alliance. By Elizabeth F. Thompson. (New York: Grove Press, 2020. 496 pp., preface, the setting, the players, note on nomenclature, spelling, and transliteration, abbreviations used for archival sources, maps, images, epilogue, appendices, acknowledgments, for further reading, notes, index.)

Katie Laird

It’s not often that historians writing in the twenty-first century can lay claim to being the first to anything, as most fields have already been well trodden by many worthy predecessors. But Elizabeth F. Thompson lays claim to the elusive privilege in her newest book, *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs: The Syrian Congress of 1920 and the Destruction of its Historical Liberal-Islamic Alliance*. In this sizable volume, which includes an appendix of the Syrian 1920 Constitution, a list of further reading for general readers, and extensive footnotes, Thompson is the first to tell (in English) the unknown story of how western powers actively prevented Syria from forming its own democratic government after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Countering entrenched stereotypes and widespread assumptions that essentialize Arab culture as antithetical to democracy and naturally prone to sectarian strife, Thompson demonstrates the many ways Greater Syria (present day Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine) fought to form a democratically elected constitutional monarchy after joining forces with the Entente powers during WWI to defeat their Ottoman rulers in exchange for independence. Thompson’s narrative is a dense, but fast-moving account built on painstaking details of each betrayal, abandonment, and violation of international law committed by the western powers during the Middle Eastern land grab, which Thompson argues was motivated largely by European leaders’ need to return to their war ravaged constituents with some sort of reward for their millions dead. Ever hopeful and trusting of westerners’ belief in their own laws and self-proclaimed “liberal” values, Thompson reveals the lengths to which Syrians went to convince the West that they deserved independence and were “liberal” enough to qualify as a nation state in the new world order. After electing a congress, Faisal I bin Al-Hussein was elected as king, and the first Syrian congress wrote a constitution guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens, irrespective of religion or race; Islam was declared the religion of the monarch but not of the state; and the monarch was held strictly accountable to congress. They aspired to create the United States of Arabia, based loosely off a federal system similar to that of the United States of America, which could be tailored to encompass pan-Arab unity along with desire for regional autonomy.

Thompson’s account paints the Syrian congress, which European powers repeatedly refused to recognize, as a governing body engaged in the purest form of the democratic process: vigorous debate followed by carefully crafted compromises. She plunges readers into the heart of these debates, such as those surrounding the question

of female franchise. One can feel the tension between the opposing parties rising to an “uproar” when the conservative Islamist deputies storm out of the room after “the champion of women’s rights,” Sheikh Sa’id Murad of Gaza, points out that the Europeans were using Syrian treatment of women as a justification for their continued presence in Syria (219). In another passage, Thompson describes the election campaign to the first Syrian national congress as a “passionate affair,” and the streets “exploded with the political excitement.” (110) This enthusiasm held even in the face of vigorous efforts by British and French authorities to prevent the elections, with Syrians simply moving their meetings underground and electing a full congress in defiance of European opinion on the matter.

Perhaps one of Thompson’s most important contributions is her discussion of Syrian success at bridging the many wide gaps of difference that separated the competing communities throughout the country to form a unified push for independence. This success presents an especially meaningful contrast to the common image of conflict as endemic to the region. Instead, Thompson shows that it was in fact the Europeans whose policies enshrined a “sectarian project” in Syria, one in which both the British and the French aimed to establish and maintain strictly segregated and reified groups defined solely by religion, such as the Maronite Christians in Lebanon and the Jewish population in Palestine (205). The Syrians, by contrast, fought against these efforts to divide their communities. Through their constitution they managed to deviate from centuries of Ottoman tradition, continued by Europeans, by “disavowing the primacy of Muslim over non-Muslim.” (33) Even those devout Muslim leaders in Faisal’s administration, such as Rashid Rida, were convinced that democracy would not only keep Syrian officials from following in Iran and Egypt’s footsteps by selling out to Europeans, but that Islam demanded government conducted by the choice of the people.

But French greed, British betrayal, and American indifference combined to produce an imperially-motivated invasion by France in 1920. King Faisal was stripped of his title and exiled, and the democratically elected congress was dissolved. As the old definition of sovereignty belonging to the imperial powers persisted, Thompson argues, the mandates could (and did) “become fig leaves for old-fashioned colonialism.” (89) But at no point were the Syrians deceived by those fig leaves. As he was forced from the country he had helped liberate and unify, King Faisal left a letter with the French General Gouraud in which he promised that, “If today’s nations lived in the Middle Ages -- where force alone made the law and where the sword alone settled conflicts -- your conduct would conform to the established law. But if the Great War that we waged alongside the Allies to obtain our freedom and independence has actually reached its goals of consecrating rights by law and abolishing militarism ... then the French force occupying the Eastern Zone, which I rule, must be considered an instrument of oppression and must be treated as such” (288).

Black Women, Citizenship, and the Making of Modern Cuba. By Takkara Brunson (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2021. xxi + 191. acknowledgments, images, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index.)

Dani McIvor

Takkara Brunson’s *Black Women, Citizenship, and the Making of Modern Cuba* is a welcome corrective to the limiting lens that can often plague scholarship of Cuba. In a field where the 1959 Revolution and its bearded protagonists can take up most of the oxygen, a study that examines the role of black women in forging democracy adds valuable insight. From the time of emancipation, Afro-Cubans fought to further their citizenship rights and to challenge negative racial stereotypes that were used to justify political and economic exclusion. This work focuses on how black women advocated for their civil rights and improvement of material conditions through the press, community organizations, labor movements, and other avenues of civic engagement. Brunson’s study illuminates how these women shaped the social and political movements they became involved in as they advocated for equity across racial and gendered lines.

Brunson’s analysis begins with the abolition of slavery and the Pact of Zanjón in 1878, which set the stage for the creation of a black public sphere. A tradition of Afro-Cuban periodicals and magazines developed throughout the colonial period into the early republic, allowing lettered women to contribute to the discourse around the forging of black political participation. Brunson outlines how Cristina Ayala, Úrsula Coimbra de Valverde, and other upwardly mobile black women sought to present themselves and their peers as intellectually and morally capable through their writing. A recurring theme of their contribution to this discourse was the idea of “racial regeneration.” This was a concept that emphasized political and economic advancement through personal responsibility and rigid standards of morality in order to earn a place in Cuban social and political life. Accompanying photographs in black periodicals depicted “respectable” women in graduation robes and professional attire in order to highlight modern refinement and combat stereotypes of racial inferiority. This strategy was put forward to convince elite whites that black Cubans could play a role in the developing democratic project.

The second half of Brunson’s work focuses on the period between the political and economic crises of the 1930s and the Revolution of 1959. The strategy of racial regeneration fell out of favor as avenues of political participation widened beyond elite black women. Working-class women organized to advocate for better working conditions and critique corruption and racial discrimination. Perhaps most interesting is the final chapter on women’s organizing through the Communist party and labor unions. Through this lens, Brunson is most successfully able to make the case for the agency of non-elite

black women. While they did not coalesce around racial lines, getting involved in labor organizations was a way to challenge the poor working conditions that many black women faced. African-descended women were the most likely to experience economic precarity, making a fraction of what white women made. These economic grievances mobilized black women to raise funds to support unions, organize within the Communist party, and rally behind those fighting corruption in state institutions. Teresa García is one of the women profiled by Brunson in this chapter in order to make an argument about the larger impact of these organizing efforts. García was the leader of the tobacco stemmer's union in Havana, and a high-ranking member of the trade union federation. She and other labor leaders organized a campaign for more equitable pay for tobacco workers, many of them black women. García and her allies were able to negotiate a 25% pay increase – a serious victory for women of color and other laborers in the industry.

Brunson's scholarship is a fascinating and accessible analysis of both the fluidity and limits of Cuban political development. Black women held a unique place in the national citizenry – their concerns were often ignored by the white feminists that excluded them from their organizational strategies. They were also expected to adhere to the myth of racelessness that permeated Cuban society when vocalizing their demands for better political and material conditions. However, these women were still able to carve out spaces for agency and advocacy, and challenge both racism and sexism through a number of mediums. By crafting a nuanced and intersectional argument about the efforts of black women, this work greatly adds to our understanding of struggle for equity in Cuba in the decades leading up to the Revolution.

Mass Political Culture Under Stalinism: Popular Discussion of the Soviet Constitution of 1936. By Olga Velikanova. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018. xv + 250 pp., acknowledgments, sources, images, tables, glossary, index.)

Pasuth Thothaveesansuk

In *Mass Political Culture Under Stalinism: Popular Discussion of the Soviet Constitution of 1936*, Olga Velikanova studies the political discourse surrounding Stalin's Constitution in 1936. She investigates the diversity of political views within Soviet society through the perspective of popular opinion. The book argues that campaigns associated with the constitution unleashed a political culture that shows the ability of the Soviet citizen to engage in autonomous thinking with liberal ideas. This study relies upon a careful interpretation of archival materials containing Soviet state agencies' recording and surveillance of political commentary. Noting their limitations, Velikanova triangulates them with foreign intelligence reports and other testimonies. Regardless, the constraints on the empirical foundation influence the qualitative nature of her work and inform her decision to write about popular rather than public opinion. (23)

The book first recounts the origins of the Constitution of 1936. Velikanova contextualizes the ideas for reform within the larger "moderation" during the mid-1930s after collectivization and famine. She highlights this shift as a desire for internal social stability in service of, and not to move away from, Marxism-Leninism. (45) The constitution also allowed the Soviet Union to project itself internationally as democratic against the rising tide of fascism. (50) Nevertheless, the primary goal remained to reflect the new Soviet society at home and celebrate the "victory of socialism." (54) Velikanova argues that the evidence shows that Stalin genuinely believed in the ideological purpose of the constitution. She notes that no document supports the more cynical reading that the state deliberately sought to mislead the public. (57) Yet, the controlled democracy did allow the Kremlin to legitimately remove older functionaries whom Stalin distrusted or deemed inefficient. (65)

The Party launched the constitution with a campaign for the public to discuss it at local soviets alongside reporting of criticisms about any inefficiencies or discontent with working conditions. Beneath concerted comments and routine rituals, Velikanova argues that these campaigns allowed for some level of autonomous political expression in Soviet society. (79) She builds upon the works of Sheila Fitzpatrick and Stephen Kotkin to show that, while some of these Soviet citizens chose to "speak Bolshevik," others accepted the ideological line and took it as an opportunity for self-betterment and remove bureaucrats they disliked. As part of the push for public political commentary, the state also appealed to a broader, more universal identity of a common Soviet *narod* now that socialism has overcome class and national boundaries. (107) In contrast

to Cold War-era scholarship, Velikanova does not see this as social atomization in a totalitarian setting, instead autonomous expression led to new horizontal bonds.

Turning towards popular perception, Velikanova illustrates how democratic components of the constitution sparked a liberal discourse as people became aware of their rights. (128) Not only did Soviet citizens seek to gain the proposed statutory rights, but rights rhetoric also became a tool for dissidents, such as those who protested the 1936 ban on abortion. (158) While society remained illiberal, this narrative suggests some liberals did exist as a political (sub)culture during the Stalinist period. Standing in opposition to liberal voices, those who benefited from the regime as well as younger fervent believers expressed discomfort with the pluralism some sought to derive from the constitution. Instead, they stood with the dictatorship of the proletariat and did not want to undergo another restructuring of society. (199) The polarizing liberals and illiberals do not in any way resemble a free democracy, but they do reveal some level of diversity within Soviet political culture.

Stalin ultimately put an end to this period of popular discussion and abandoned the attempt of constitutional rule. To him, the diversity of views disclosed a disharmonious society. Velikanova suggests that the Spanish Civil War amidst growing international tensions also contributed to a fear for “fifth columnists” in Soviet society. (229) Although this political culture might have resembled a small part of society, it underscores the book’s argument that the effects of this discourse did influence Stalin’s decision to change course. On to the “road to Gorbachev,” the author mentions that this liberal political culture might have provided the basis in society for glasnost and perestroika that would come half a century later. But perhaps the more interesting legacy for contemporary concerns lies not in the existence of a proto-glasnost movement, but in the illiberals who came out in opposition to the constitution, as citizens in post-socialist societies as well as those in liberal democracies alarmingly turn towards autocrats at the ballot box.