Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

It is with enormous pride that we present to you the *Columbia Journal of History*'s Winter 2023-24 issue. The following edition is the result of countless hours of work dedicated by our masthead and the published authors. We are greatly appreciative of all those involved for their tireless diligence to create this collection of outstanding undergraduate scholarship.

This issue embodies our journal's two-pronged mission, which guides all of the work done by the masthead. At the Journal, we aim to provide a platform to highlight excellent pieces of undergraduate research in the field of history. We also strive to provide opportunities for Columbia students interested in history to gain crucial experience within the world of academic scholarship.

The five articles we selected for the Winter 2023-24 issue cover a diverse array of topics. Sahil Bhagat explores the carceral experiences of South Asian convict laborers in the British Strait Settlements colonies, and Jackson Karas conducts an in-depth analysis of the connection between ideology and military doctrine within the Red Army of the Russian Civil War. Shifting to the 19th and 20th centuries of the United States, Annelie Hyatt interrogates the role of Chinatown restaurants in transforming perceptions of "the Chinese." Utilizing innovative approaches in their study of social movements, Vladimir Bejdo examines the Catholic Church's role in the formation of the Irish Catholic class, while Janis Parker analyzes discourses on Black genocide in America. We are honored to publish this outstanding scholarship and look forward to our authors' work reaching a broader audience.

We owe many thanks to the diligent efforts of our editors, who have devoted numerous hours over three rounds of edits to meticulously refining the diction, structure, and citations of the articles you will soon read. It is a privilege to work alongside such brilliant editors. We are also indebted to the talent and commitment of our authors: Vladimir, Sahil, Annelie, Jackson, and Janis. Their exceptional analysis and thorough research were integral to the creation of this issue.

We invite you to enjoy the result of our hard work and dedication.

Sincerely,

Lucy Brenner and Ruya Tazebay
Editors in Chief

About the Authors

VLADIMIR BEJDO recently graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in political science with a focus in law, societies and justice. He is interested in socio-legal scholarship and retains a particular interest in the study of emerging rights issues and legal mobilization, contemporary constitutionalism(s), and novel empirical, interdisciplinary approaches to the study of law. His thesis on the European Court of Human Rights and its jurisprudence on the permissibility of political party proscription earned the University's Daniel S. Lev Award for Best Honors Thesis in Political Science; while at the U.W., he was also named a Katz Scholar in the Humanities. He was recently a Data and Policy Summer Scholar at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy, where he analyzed the regressivity of property taxation in Chicago. He intends to pursue a J.D. this fall.

SAHIL BHAGAT is currently a graduate student working towards a degree in International and World History at Columbia University and the London School of Economics and Political Science. A recent graduate of the University of St Andrews with a degree in International Relations and Modern History, Sahil has research interests in diasporic mobilities, identity formation and incarceration in the world of the Indian Ocean. His current dissertation project looks at anticolonial networks and plantation uprisings in colonial Malaya and Singapore in the mid-20th century, with a focus on the South Asian plantation labour experience. After graduation, Sahil plans on pursuing a PhD in history.

ANNELIE HYATT is a senior at Barnard College who studies English and History. She is interested in intellectual and cultural history, with a specific focus in 20th-century East Asia. In her spare time she often chooses to write, read, watch old films, and practice kendo.

JACKSON KARAS is a Junior at Georgetown University in the College of Arts and Sciences studying history and philosophy. His primary interest in history is military history, specifically the Napoleonic Wars. He also is fascinated by the intellectual history of the 19th century, and the development of modern ideologies on both left and right of the political spectrum. In philosophy, he is most well read in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche and its potential connection to later far-right political movements and philosophies. Jackson is currently working on a research project which illustrates the connection between Napoleon III and later anti-democratic political movements on the far-right. At Georgetown, he is a member of the Georgetown University Lecture Fund, a club dedicated to bringing prominent speakers and facilitating discourse on campus.

JANIS PARKER recently graduated from the University of Richmond with a BA in History and Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies. She is interested primarily in twentieth-century histories of the U.S. carceral state, including incarceration, policing, and capital punishment, and how race and gender intersect within the criminal legal system. She also focuses on how discourses on racial and sexual violence within the carceral state have situated the United States into transnational and international discussions about human rights. Since graduating from the University of Richmond, Janis is pursuing her MA in History at Villanova University. She plans to continue on for her PhD in History after graduation.

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NEW YORK AND THE DRAFT RIOTS OF 1863: SECTARIAN UNDERCURRENTS IN LATE 19TH CENTURY IRISH CATHOLIC POLITICAL IDENTITY FORMATION

Vladimir Bejdo

Abstract

Narratives of the New York Draft Riots of 1863, one of the largest incidents of mass civil violence recorded in American history, understandably focus on the fact that the riots were, ultimately, race riots—a week of unprecedented unrest driven by variety of factors, including the ethnic and class position of their participants, many of them being working-class, Democratic, Irish Catholic immigrants. Influential renderings and analyses of the Riots, however, do not meaningfully consider a potentially revealing determinant in the political and social formation of the Irish Catholic class that has been said to drive much of the activity of the riots themselves—the political and social activity of the Catholic Church as an institution and corporate body, prior to and during the Riots. A review of key texts in the literature on the Riots presents different narratives concerning what, if any, role the Church may have had in the Riots. This presents an opportunity for narrative reconciliation which I seize upon to argue that the Church had an influential role in cultivating anti-abolitionist and anti-Black sentiment as a reaction against political and social trends tied to American Protestant political traditions.

Introduction

Narratives of the New York Draft Riots of 1863, one of the largest incidents of mass civil violence recorded in American history, understandably focus on the fact that the Riots were ultimately race riots. They constituted a week of unprecedented unrest driven by a variety of factors, including ones related to the social position of their participants, who were largely working-class, Democratic, Irish Catholic immigrants. The most immediate cause of the Riots may have been a negative reaction to the Enrollment Act of 1863, whose substitution and commutation provisions effectively created a novel system of national conscription that placed the burden of conscription squarely on the working class; beyond this, outright hatred towards the Black population of New York or even Southern sympathies among New York's largely Irish Catholic Democrats have also been offered as potential causes of the Riots in scholarship.[1] However, influential renderings and analyses of the Riots do not meaningfully consider how the political and social activity of the Catholic Church and its communicants could have primed Irish Catholics for participation in the Riots. A brief review of three key texts on the Riots—two seminal monographs on the topic and the only extant article addressing the role of the Church in the Riots—provides three different narratives concerning what, if any, role the Church may have had in the Riots. This presents an opportunity for narrative reconciliation, which I seize to further a unique understanding of the role the Church played in the formation of opinions in the Catholic public through the socio-political activities of its communicants and clergy, as expressed in the Draft Riots of 1863.

I argue that the Church had an influential role in cultivating lasting anti-abolitionist and anti-Black sentiment, which compounded pre-existing tensions with socio-political trends tied to Anglo-American Protestantism. I first examine top-line scholarly renderings of the role the Church played in the Riots to frame my review of primary sources—scrutinizing the historical record to reveal an interplay between ethnicity, religion, and politics, which set up the requisite social conditions in the Catholic public that made the New York Draft Riots possible. I note the ways that Catholics in America formulated their opposition to abolitionism as a response to Anglo-Protestant nativism and progressive social reform movements. Irish Catholics perceived these as a double threat of American reproductions of the English Protestant rule they experienced in Ireland. I then look at the time of the Riots themselves, taking note of the ways religion

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[1] Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6.

was invoked in racial violence in the Riots and the degree to which the Church was involved in the Riots. I suggest that the Church came to soften its stance against abolitionism to protect itself against accusations of disloyalty, an extant concern prior to the beginning of the Civil War. Importantly, I suggest that these changing political positions on the part of the Catholic public were part of a claim to inclusion in a white, American polity. Post-Riot shifts away from virulent anti-abolitionism appear to be an implicit recognition of the destructive effect the Riots had on the Black public of New York, which created an opportunity (which the Catholic public seized) to consolidate their political power in a new, wholly white social and political domain. To conclude, I look at the political aftermath of the Riots. The Orange Riots of 1870 and 1871 serve as instructive cases which suggest that the Riots could be viewed as a part of a longer-term struggle against an Anglo-Protestant ruling class. A post-war continuation of religious animus expressed through political violence, the Orange Riots offer insights into how the conflict over the tenuous inclusion of Irish Catholics into New York's political society and white social majority, which the Draft Riots were central to establishing, continued to have a distinctly sectarian character. Though I make no direct claims about the role the Riots played in Irish Catholic identity formation in 19th century America, or any claims suggesting an overriding importance to Catholicism in the instigation of the Riots, I ultimately suggest the historical record surrounding the role of Catholics in the Riots reveals a cross-cutting dynamic which interacts with race and ethnicity that seems to have not been wholly captured in the field literature of the topic, an omission I consider worthy of further study.

Competing accounts in 'authoritative' literature; a need for narrative reconciliation

Two seminal long-form studies of the Draft Riots have presented conflicting arguments on the Catholic Church's role in the Riots. One interpretation suggests that the Church merely amplified or reproduced the various political and social sentiments that drove the Riots, while another suggests it played no role at all in the instigation of violence at the time of the Riots. Both accounts sideline the role that religion may have played in the Riots, focusing more closely on the strong race and class dimensions of the Riots instead. These two influential accounts are incompatible with one another and are not necessarily well-substantiated within the literature, suggesting an opportunity for their reconciliation with the historical record. To frame that work, these competing claims about the role of the Church must be examined further.

At one end of the spectrum, Iver Bernstein's "polyvalent, multilayered" 1990 text on the subject provides a nuanced understanding of the role the Catholic Church played in the Riots, though one which is tangential to his analysis of the Riots.[2] Bernstein's evaluation of the Riots suggests that "Catholic loyalties mattered" in shaping the course of rioting; as the Riots grew in intensity by the middle of Draft Week, documentary evidence suggests that some rioters began "proclaiming Irish and Catholic identity as an explanation or legitimation for their attacks."[3] Bernstein notes that part of the strategy undertaken to quell rioting by state authorities involved calling upon the soft power of the Catholic episcopate, a request made by Governor Horatio Seymour on the very first day of rioting.[4] Ultimately, this response came days later at the very end of Draft Week in the form of a speech by the Archbishop of New York, John Hughes, calling upon rioters to "change the government through constitutional and not revolutionary means."[5] For Bernstein, the Archbishop's response to the Riots and its circumspect tone demonstrates the "conciliatory style" that had become "the dominant mode of social relations" among New York's political elite by the end of the Riots.[6] However, this interpretation obfuscates the fact that the Archbishop's actions demonstrate a quiet accession of the role the Church may have played in shaping the Riots, including through its official silence.

To that point, Bernstein's most important contribution is his point that for the Irish Catholic working class, their place in American society—one dependent on an ability to stake a claim on "legal guarantees for white men"—was found "in amalgam with a religious culture contemptuous of the Republicans and their black 'contrabands'" established by Catholic leaders.[7] Catholic leaders were thus agenda setters in an effort to secure a new social and political position for Irish Catholics, doing so within the confines of an internal political culture hostile to the cause of emancipation. This agenda-setting function on the part of Catholic leadership, for Bernstein, had been expressed in the discourse of the Catholic public prior to the Riots.

Bernstein notes that in the lead-up to the Riots, "the anti-Republicanism and racism of the Catholic press began to crescendo," with racism and fears of labor replacement finding "lively confirmation" in "the Catholic community."[8] Though his text broadly

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[2] Graham Hodges, review of *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War,* by Iver Bernstein, *New York History* 71, no. 3 (1990): 327–29.
[3] Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 33.
[4] Ibid., 51.
[5] Ibid., 62.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 113.
[8] Ibid.

focuses on crafting a tight, "politically inscribed class interpretation" of the Riots, the few remarks made in his text that speak to the role of the Church suggest that at a latent level, the Riots were an occasion for violence that was defined by the Irish Catholic character of its instigators.[9] His remarks suggest that the institutional power of the Church may have played a role in bringing the Riots to their eventual close. Most importantly, though, they suggest that the Church fostered a peculiar political culture among its faithful, which was at once anti-Republican, anti-abolitionist, and anti-Black, and yet claimed to bear allegiance to the Union at a time when those attitudes were tied closely to the cause of secession. Though sparse in comparison to other topics of discussion in the monograph, these remarks do not entirely dismiss the role of the Catholic Church in forming the social context for the Riots, suggesting several claims to that effect which merit further elaboration.

On the other hand, another seminal account of the Riots, Andrew Cook's 1974 text, The Armies of the Streets, maintains a completely different record of the role that the Church's clergy and institutions may have played in the Riots. Although Cook's text at the time of publication was said to be "as complete an account as we are likely to require" of the Riots, touching "on virtually every incident of the hectic days," Cook spends only a single paragraph talking about the role of the Church in the Riots, in which he totally dismisses the notion that the Catholic press and clergy actually played any role at all in setting up the conditions for conflict, claiming that there was "a severely limited amount of truth in this accusation."[10] For Cook, the press's "influence was small," and the role of the Church in encouraging "loyalty to a country's legitimate government" outweighed actively disloyal activity. Cook calls on the actions of "many of New York's Catholic priests" in the Riots as support for his claim, saying that they "went out into the streets and used all their influence to abate the fury of the mob." As for the episcopate, he recalls how Archbishop Hughes visited the Vatican at the behest of the Lincoln administration in 1862 "to work for the Union cause" as a factor redeeming him from any criticism for his role in the Riots.[11] If anything, this account stands in striking contrast to the suggestions made by Bernstein. Cook's remarks on the Church, taken in isolation, essentially refute the idea that the Church played any real role in the Riots. In contrast to

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[9] Hodges, review of *The New York City Draft Riots*, 328.

[10] Philip English Mackey, review of *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863*, by Adrian Cook, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 4 (1974): 529–30; Robert J. Imholt, review of *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863*, by Adrian Cook, *Civil War History* 20, no. 3 (1974): 266; Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 204.

[11] Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 204.

Bernstein, Cook's narrative questions the suggestion that any of the pre-riot activity of the Church was meaningful.

It should be noted here again that the engagement of both these seminal works with the actions of the Church was relatively tangential to the rest of the works. However, given their place in the field literature, the stark opposition of these two narratives suggests a need to revisit the record for further inquiry. There exists another starting point for an exploration into the historical record—the only work that specifically attempts to approach the question of the role the Catholic Church played in the New York Draft Riots of 1863. Albon Man's 1951 article on the topic, working almost exclusively from primary texts, points to yet another account that could partially reconcile the above narratives. While granting, like Cook, that some accounts have "exaggerated the influence of the Catholic clergy and press" on the Riots, Man points out the particular role the Catholic clergy in New York played in the advancement of their anti-abolitionist cause.[12] Like Bernstein, Man argues that the demands of nationalism turned the clergy towards conciliation with the establishment. Yet Man also insists that actions indicating this change in attitude, including the Archbishop's trip on behalf of the Union to which Cook refers, were badly received among Catholics.[13] Man suggests that Catholic leaders who found expression in the burgeoning Catholic press ultimately bolstered anti-abolitionist tendencies among New York's Irish population. At the same time, when this "agitation bore fruit in the draft riots," he echoes Cook in maintaining that local clergy "worked to restrain the mobs" on the ground, albeit doing so only sporadically.[14] A review of Man's account suggests that Cook and Bernstein's arguments can be reconciled together in an account of the Church's actions. However, Man's account, focusing mostly on the role of episcopal authority and on the rhetoric of the press in its analysis, does not fully address the way that ethnicity and religion worked to scaffold the social conditions that led up to the Riots, something only Bernstein begins to do decades after Man's time of writing. Thus, we are still left with several open-ended questions. How did ethnicity and religion interface in the course of the Riots? Beyond a simple claim to inclusion in a white racial order, how did the subject position of Irish Catholics in particular influence their expression of anti-abolitionist sentiment? How did religious animus find expression in the course of the Riots themselves?

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[12] Albon P. Man, "The Church and the New York Draft Riots of 1863," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 62, no. 1 (1951): 34.
[13] Ibid., 40.
[14] Ibid., 50.

The rest of this work will approach these questions by examining relevant selected sources in the historical record. I will first explore the place of the Church and its parishioners in New York, establishing its basic opposition to the social and legal reformism of its Protestant opponents. I will examine the ethnic character of the Church to explain its exclusion of free Black people from its flock as an initial condition which speaks to the racialized religious landscape of the city. I will also seek to establish ways in which sectarian conflict between Protestants and Catholics inflected conflicts over the question of slavery in the United States, casting the cause of abolition as not merely a Protestant cause but also as an extension of British imperialism, giving Irish Catholics additional justification for their pre-Riot grievances. In sum, I will then establish how the political positions held by the Church were shaped by the specter of nativism. This focus will bring to the fore the issue of social and political inclusion, which Bernstein alludes to in his text as another reason why the anti-abolitionist position was justified in aiding the formation of a uniquely Irish subject position that claimed to belong in the American nation. I will then move to address the action of the Church in the Riots themselves, showing that its turn away from anti-abolitionism was a chiefly tactical move to avoid risking accusations of disloyalty, which would jeopardize its position in a volatile, Anglo-Protestant social context.

The social and political positions of the Catholic public, pre-Riots

As an initial matter, it is worth considering what positions, whether stated or implicit, the Catholic public held regarding the institution of slavery and its abolition before the Civil War. The historical record reveals that, within the Catholic public, calls for abolition by reformists were seen as distinctly Protestant. Framed as a Protestant movement, abolitionism became anathema to Catholics. They cast abolition as a morally and theologically abhorrent cause, thus establishing a basic moral tension that undergirds Catholic visions of the events leading up to the Draft Riots. Several popular authorities in the Catholic public had long defended the institution of slavery, intertwining their critiques with implied strikes at Protestant social reformism. Orestes Brownson, for example, a convert to Catholicism and renowned apologist for the Church in America, wrote extensively in defense of slavery, expressing opposition to the spirit of Protestant moral reformism in the process. In his discussion of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Brownson suggests that, as a matter of Christian obedience to properly constituted government, slavery—a legal, though immoral institution—was a sin to be

tolerated, contending that "we cannot make this world a paradise, and all its inhabitants saints, as foolish Puritans dream," repudiating the reformist spirit implied in Protestant Republican rule as a sign of an evil even greater than (legal) slavery.[15] Brownson considered abolition to be an arrangement that was just by virtue of the fact that it was made legal by popular government; not only was slavery not to be tampered with, but abolition was akin to a call for anarchy, a fruit of "the maddest madness conceivable … which proposes to abolish slavery and secure freedom by abolishing law or government."[16] In his view, to interfere with slavery would be akin to an unwarranted mass confiscation of private property.[17] Abolitionism and its adherents were to be considered blasphemous, with their opposition to the establishment understood to be an immoral repudiation of the values and social institutions necessary to a well-ordered society.[18]

These convictions were potentially associated with the practical maintenance of the Catholic Church in New York as a white body through its exclusion of Black Catholics. Black Catholics were already a minority in the majority-Protestant Black population. Even among Black Catholics, few engaged with organized Catholic institutions. Largely marginalized in what was a primarily Irish (and to a lesser extent German) diocese, the Black Catholic perspective has survived in parts of the historical record. Primary accounts from Black Catholics suggest that they believed Archbishop Hughes "'does not consider the Black race to be part of his flock.'"[19] The Most Rev. Archbishop was known by white and Black people alike to "hate the black race so much that he cannot bear them to come near him."[20] In the institutional history of the Church in New York, Black parishioners were only granted their own parish in 1883, long after the establishment of ethnic parishes for European immigrants to New York.[21] Black individuals, even the minority of whom identified as Catholic, were largely kept out of the institutions of the Church long before and during the time of the Riots, reinforcing racial and religious divisions. Not only was the social context of the Riots influenced by long-standing religious disputes on the 'slave issue,' but religious divisions were also highly racialized: Black people and abolitionists largely had Protestant identities, and Catholics, being mostly Irish, defended the status quo as a matter of holy doctrine.

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[15] Orestes Augustus Brownson, *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson: Politics*, vol. XVII (Detroit: T. Nourse, 1885), 19.
[16] Ibid., 20.
[17] Ibid., 20-21.
[18] Brownson, *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson,* 26.
[19] Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 24–25.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

The Archbishop of New York, the Most Rev. Hughes, openly accused Protestant clergy "of abolitionist proclivities," calling them "infidels and fanatics."[22] This was all couched in the notion that advocating for abolitionism was a form of "private judgement in matters of religion" and considered morally unacceptable for Roman Catholics.[23] It is evident that the disagreement over slavery was not just about the institution of slavery. It was also a fundamental conflict between the position of the Catholic Church, which at a minimum tolerated slavery out of deference to the government, and that of its abolitionist, Protestant opponents. Hence, the Riots that ensued depended on an ideological stage, which the Catholics had played a significant role in setting long before the Riots occurred.

At times, Irish Catholics understood Protestant abolitionism as stemming from British influence. In the Catholic consciousness, the threat of abolition and its Protestant associations was perceived as a threat of eventual Anglo-Protestant subjugation, similar to that which the Irish experienced under English rule. An illustrative example of this point comes from a piece in the Boston *Pilot,* a prominent Irish Catholic newspaper distributed in the Northeast.[24] In an issue published in the beginning of December 1859, the paper included a piece titled "Exeter-hall and Brown, Beecher & Co." that made allusions to both Exeter Hall, the meeting place of the Anti-Slavery Society in London, and American abolitionist figures like John Brown and Henry Ward Beecher. The article portrays abolitionism as an Anglo-Protestant plot to engage "a lever wherewith to do mischief in this country."[25] It suggests this plot to be like the attempts to 'divide and conquer' Ireland through the diffusion of Protestantism. Drawing from shared, inherited Irish experiences, works like this in Catholic newspapers explicitly try to draw parallels between Catholic subjugation by Protestants in Britain to justify their opposition to policies advanced by Protestants in the United States. This context of nativism elucidates why the organized Irish Catholic citizenry of the States began turning against abolition: it was seen as a racial alignment and a continuation of Old World conflicts. This position was substantiated on its own terms and invoked principles that supposedly *demanded* an anti-abolitionist stance as a matter of Divine law. Catholic anti-abolitionism in New York, then, was rooted in an interlocking set of convictions. It was driven at once by theological positions on the exercise of private judgment and the propriety of moralistic movements for social reform, a fear of Anglo-Protestant rule rooted in a collective

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[22] Madeleine Hooke Rice, *American Catholic Opinion in the Slavery Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 98.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Hooke Rice, *American Catholic Opinion in the Slavery Controversy*, 103.
[25] "Exeter-Hall and Brown, Beecher & Co.," *Pilot*, December 3, 1859, Boston College Libraries.

memory of dispossession under the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, and, to an extent, the racial and ethnic character of the Church in New York, which was as thoroughly Irish as it was Catholic—to the exclusion of all others.

Concerns regarding this anti-abolitionist position began to emerge around the time of the Civil War, as resistance to abolitionism became linked with disloyalty and the attendant outsider status that carries—a stigma that Irish Catholics had been trying to prevent when under nativist attack prior to the War. Brownson, speaking *against* an abolitionist at the Cooper Union in New York in May 1863, a month before the Riots, acknowledged the unwise and impolitic nature of anti-abolitionist tendencies within the Catholic community given nativist suspicions of a treasonous Catholic alignment with the cause of secession during the Civil War. Speaking during the course of the Civil War, Brownson makes note of the Archbishop of New York's attempt in 1862 to course-correct on "a decidedly national ground" in his eventual defense of the draft but notes that this cost the Archbishop his "popularity with his own people."[26] Stuck at an impasse prior to the Draft Riots, the Catholic public was navigating a very particular balancing act of opposing abolitionist reformism while seeking protection against nativist claims that being anti-abolition rendered Catholics treasonous and dangerous to a Protestant polity.

In response to this tension, Brownson delivered an impassioned attack on the lack of episcopal coordination to support the war effort in an attempt to save Catholics from nativist attacks. Here, Brownson importantly notes that the Catholic press published "mischievous fiction" during the war, suggesting, among other things, that Republicans would "turn round and put down the Catholic religion in this country, as if there was, or could be, any natural relation between professing the Catholic religion and the holding of slaves."[27] Notably, Brownson points out that Catholics "have confounded opposition to political abolitionism with the defence (sic.) of slavery itself, and mistaken fidelity to their party for loyalty to the nation," noting that the Civil War irreversibly linked "the Slavery question" to the defense of the state against rebellion—rebellion being a most un-Catholic action, which even an anti-abolitionist like Brownson could not find theologically defensible.[28] Brownson's remarks suggest that in answering this political double-bind between undesirable nativist and abolitionist pressures, the Catholic *public* seemed to be increasingly headed towards a *defense* of their anti-abolitionist, anti-Protestant position. This stands in stark contrast to notions of a cautious turn towards unionism (and political safety), which seem to have originated from the

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[26] Orestes Augustus Brownson, *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, vol. IV, Third New York Series (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1863), 370.
[27] Ibid., 371.
[28] Ibid., 373, 378.

episcopate, evidently widely unsupported among the corporate body of Catholics themselves. This conflict between the public and the institutions of the Church in response to the demands of the Civil War framed the terms of the Church's involvement in the Riots. Importantly, the conflict also foreshadowed the significance of a resolution to the Riots that favored Catholic popular and institutional political power in a newly-refashioned, distinctly whiter polity in the aftermath of the Riots.

Draft Week: racial violence, sectarian characteristics

An analysis of the Riots themselves reveals how religious, social, and political tensions found expression through violence and begins to provide an account of how the Riots helped produce the social conditions necessary for Irish Catholic political ascendancy in New York. The anti-abolitionist attitudes fostered by Church leadership before the Riots prefigured the stochastic, intense nature of the violence that rioters exacted upon New Yorkers during Draft Week itself. The historical record reveals that the Riots had catastrophic effects on New York's Black community, yet closer scrutiny reveals that this violence also bore anti-Protestant characteristics, which made Protestant religious and social institutions—Black and white alike—targets of violence. Out of a reading of the muddled aftermath of the Riots, the apparent unwillingness of Archdiocesan leadership to take a decisive stance against rioting can be better understood as an attempt to seek its self-preservation against the demands of a Protestant elite *and* an increasingly assertive Catholic populace. The events immediately following the Riots depict a mobilized Irish Catholic public that had secured power under its own terms, substantiating it through assertions of a Democratic, Catholic, and local identity not reproduced elsewhere or tolerated in dioceses beyond New York. The Church was left to contend with a post-Riot reality, working within its contours at a liminal time for Catholics in New York. This examination highlights the Church's role in nurturing anti-abolitionist sentiments that set the stage for the violence of Draft Week.

The questionable anti-abolitionist position of Church leadership was broached mere days before the Riots on June 9, 1863. On the side of the abolitionists, Horace Greeley's *New York Daily Tribune* published an open letter directed to the Archbishop of New York. Titled "A Friendly Letter," Greeley's missive charges that the Archbishop "for some thirty years" had "wielded an immense influence" over Catholics and that Roman Catholics "for years have been and to-day are foremost in the degradation and abuse of this persecuted [African-American] race… in abusing them by mobs and assaulting them

in the streets."[29] Greely thus interrogates the Archbishop, "I ask you most earnestly –
Have you done your *duty in the premises?* (sic.)"[30] The anti-abolitionist sentiment of the
Catholic episcopate, at this point well established, was not lost on Greeley, and neither
was the capacity of the community of believers for violence, which makes good on that
sentiment. If anything, a report like this merely bolsters the notion that, from a
top-down perspective, Catholic leaders did little to improve the cause of race relations in
New York, despite the power they held over the political life of the Church which would
allow them to work towards doing so.

It should be noted that Greeley here was writing just before the Riots themselves had
truly begun. There is no need to mince words about the nature of the Riots. It is well
established that over a span of four days, the Riots constituted a period of virulent
violence which succeeded primarily in doing one thing: "making the public life of the
city a more noticeably white domain," in which the rioters—largely Irish Catholics—were
now included.[31] The violence exacted on the Black residents of New York over the course
of the Riots was so extensive as to cause the exodus of much of the city's Black
communities. By the end of the Riots, the city's Black population had fallen
precipitously to levels not seen since 1820.[32] Some Black New Yorkers remained within
city limits, fleeing to "safer Republican or German districts," whereas others left the city
entirely, with hundreds "reported to be living in woods on the outskirts of the city" as
employers proceeded to fire Black employees and landlords proceeded to evict Black
tenants in a bid to avoid attracting rioters to their enterprises and properties.[33] The Riots,
at their core, became a wholesale bid to excise Black life from the city of New York
through violent means, even if the Riots were in part inspired by a myriad of non-racial
factors and could be read as events of class and political sectional violence. Even so,
religion was another factor intersecting with race. The religious tensions building thus
far began to find expression in the violence of the Riots, as the largely Catholic rioters
attacked the Protestant institutions which were believed to support abolitionism and
challenged their claims to political inclusion, which were made on principally
anti-abolitionist and anti-reformist terms.

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[29] Horace Greeley, "A Friendly Letter.," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 9, 1863, Chronicling America: Historic American
Newspapers, Library of Congress.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2004), 288; Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 192.
[32] Ibid., 286.
[33] Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 66; Kevin McGruder, "A Fair and Open Field: The Responses of Black New
Yorkers to the Draft Riots," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 37, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 21; Harris, *In the Shadow of
Slavery*, 285.

Though merely a rather specific part of the violence of the Riots as a whole, rioters did indeed inflict destruction on Protestant institutions during the course of the week. The churches of traditionally white Protestant denominations were sometimes targeted, as with St. John's Episcopal Church, which was "chosen as a target by the rioters because it housed a religious school for black children."[34] St. John's was spared from destruction only because its rector "commanded enough prestige and influence" to secure its military protection.[35] This example is perhaps important for its dual significance, which exemplifies the alleged linkages Catholics projected onto Anglo-Protestant institutions. To them, these institutions weren't merely symbols of the Protestant upper class; they were also institutions that sought after the kind of moralistic Protestant reformism that was viewed with deep suspicion by the Catholic public. Recall, too, that Irish Catholic views of Anglo-Protestant institutions not only reflect differences in religious doctrine but also reflect a tendency to project Old World conflicts—where Anglo-Protestants constituted not just an influential elite but represented an existential threat to Catholic survival—onto an American context. The targeting of an Anglican church ministering to Black children is then fraught with meaning that can only be interpreted out of the legacies that had primed Irish Catholics for participation in anti-Protestant violence.

Black churches and their ministers were targeted as well, with extensive rigor, in a manner consistent with both anti-Black and anti-Protestant sentiments which were driving the activity of the Riots. Though incidental to some of the larger incidents of the Riots, including the destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum and the lynching of "at least a dozen blacks," the destruction of these physical churches and church communities—an additional vector of racial terror targeting the Black population during the Riots—was still part of the program of the Riots themselves.[36] In the aftermath of the Riots, an assessment of the damage incurred by these institutions was posted in the *Anglo-African,* a periodical published by free Black Abolitionists in New York. Its August 1st issue, published after the Riots, chronicles a laundry list of closed churches, with their pastors having fled to various corners of the Northeast. Among these were the Abyssinian Baptist Church and the Zion Baptist Church, whose pastors fled with their families for New England, and a number of smaller churches that closed indefinitely.[37] The violence that the Riots exacted on the Black community thus also ended up being translated, in some instances, into actions consistent with an anti-Protestant animus,

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[34] Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 48.
[35] Ibid.
[36] James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 360.
[37] *The Anglo-African*, August 1, 1863, quoted in McGruder, "A Fair and Open Field," 23.

given how Protestantism was conflated with support for the abolition of slavery and the attendant possibility of increased Black engagement in social, civic life. The implication of anti-Protestantism in the Riots can be mapped onto the through-line of religion's place in this racial violence. Anti-Protestantism manifested in attacks against both upper-class Anglo-Protestants and the Black Protestant population that existed within the city, which made up much of the violence enacted during the Riots.

In response to the Riots and abolitionist, Protestant criticism, Archbishop Hughes's ambivalent address to the Catholic community in *The New York Herald* reflects the Church's struggle in repositioning itself on social issues like abolition during the Civil War era once faced with a context which rendered its positions treasonous and threatened Catholic inclusion in a white, American polity. Acting partially in response to Greeley's pre-Riot accusations that Catholic leadership actively fostered anti-abolitionism and did little to prevent the Catholic faithful from engaging in racial violence, Archbishop Hughes published a short address "to the Catholics" published in *Herald* on July 16, 1863—the last day of the Riots.[38] Placed directly after proclamations from the Governor and the Mayor of New York, the Archbishop's letter speaks clearly to an ambivalence in the official Church response to the Riots, perhaps one linked to the same ambivalence in the reconfiguration of the Church's position on social issues like abolition more generally during the time of the Civil War. The directive begins not with some broad statement about the Riots but rather with a direct reference to Greeley's paper. The Archbishop wrote that "in spite of Mr. Greeley's assault upon the Irish, in the present disturbed conditions, I will appeal not only to them, but to all persons who love God and revere the holy Catholic religion… to dissolve their bad associations with reckless men."[39] And yet, the power of the Archbishop's exhortation is muted as he then moves to suggest that Greeley and the Protestant, abolitionist, Republican order Greeley represents were motivated by anti-Irish bias, feeding one of the long-term, core contentions lodged in the Catholic public against the Anglo-Protestant order which constituted American society.

Significantly, the rather tarried and half-hearted response of the Archbishop to the Riots did not go without note, especially in the context of the overall institutional reaction—or lack of reaction from the Church—to the Riots. One of the first accounts of the Riots, first published in 1873 by Joel Tyler Headley, associate editor of Greeley's *Tribune*, points this out rather explicitly as the "lukewarmness" that characterized the

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[38] Man, "The Church and the New York Draft Riots of 1863," 46.
[39] John Hughes, "Archbishop Hughes to the Catholics.," *The New York Herald*, July 16, 1863, Library of Congress.

Archbishop's address.[40] As Greeley did before the Riots, Headley condemned Hughes for not taking a "more active part than he did in quelling this insurrection" and for expressing the same contempt for the rioters exacting violence on the street as he did for Greeley and his Protestant ilk.[41] Indeed, Hughes's address came on the last day of the Riots. Greeley and Headley do well to point out that the Church had the institutional capacity—mainly through persuasion in para-church media or from its pulpits—to prevent or otherwise tamp down on the scale of the rioting by addressing their followers, who made up much of the rioters during the week and had long been primed for engagement in such types of violence. Hughes's contemporaries indicate here an episcopal complicity in the commission of the riots. Yet, further reports from the ground only complicate the picture, suggesting that the Archbishop's ambivalence could be an intentional attempt to best assess a path forward when faced with the aftermath of the Riots, ultimately doing so in the interest of securing and maintaining Irish Catholic political power in a social context refashioned by the Riots.

The residual violence of the week seems to indicate that neither Hughes's address nor the end of the rioting was sufficient to bring the violent expression of sectarian tensions to a close. Even after the admonition (or at least nominal repudiation) of the violent turn of the Riots from the episcopate, the issue of the *Daily Tribune* published the day after the end of the Riots, on Friday of Draft Week, recalls incidents where, in order to prevent harm to themselves, people asked to identify their loyalties were expected to answer that they were "Democratic Catholic," rather than "for the Union."[42] The end of rioting was, then, in part upheld on terms dictated not by a ruling Republican elite but rather by a Democratic populace that valued local, ethno-religious rather than national loyalties. Perhaps in a turn towards conciliation, copy-cat attempts at inciting Riots elsewhere in the North were in fact successfully prevented through appeals by Catholic authorities, such as in Flushing, where Black residents were spared from violence after making clear to a local Catholic priest their willingness to protect themselves against Catholic mobs, or in Troy, New York, where a priest prevented an attack on a Black church through his own intervention.[43] Other such uprisings were subsequently prevented by Catholic clergymen "in Jersey City, Hudson City, and Hoboken, New Jersey," and bishops in Buffalo, Boston, and Cleveland also issued pastoral letters to the

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[40] Joel Tyler Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712 to 1873: Including a Full and Complete Account of the Four Days' Draft Riot of 1863* (New York: E. B. Treat, 1873), 256–57.
[41] Ibid.
[42] "'Are You for the Union?' -- The Garroter's Question.," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 17, 1863, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, 17.
[43] McGruder, "A Fair and Open Field," 20; Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712 to 1873*, 257.

same effect.[44] Though the institutional response of the Church in New York was lacking during the Riots themselves, it seems as if the institutions of the Catholic Church were more willing to engage in attempts to draw back from violent engagement outside of New York. This weakens the claims of the accounts of the Church considered at the beginning of this work, suggesting that the Church played little to no role in influencing rioting. The action diocesan authorities beyond New York took to prevent similar riots elsewhere suggests myriad examples of the way the Archdiocese *could* have prevented or quelled rioting through its pastoral functions. In comparison, the lack of Archdiocesan action in New York could be read as a dereliction of its pastoral duty or even as a silent endorsement of rioting.

On the Sunday after the Riots, the *Tribune* devoted a portion of its coverage to this very turn of events on the part of the Church. Importantly, the report, which included notes from the sermons delivered by Catholic clergy to their flocks on the matter of the riot, concludes that in "many of them the Priests strongly denounced the recent disturbance from their pulpits."[45] At first glance, this corroborates the notion that, eventually, the Church came around and used its institutional power to tamp down on the notion of political violence. However, among the columns of notes taken on the various sermons delivered across the Archdiocese that Sunday lies a very small yet significant note regarding the Cathedral; it just so happens that on that Sunday, "Archbishop Hughes and Vicar-General Starrs were present, but there was no allusion to the riot in the sermon."[46] The relative ambivalence of the episcopal office towards the position of the Church on the Riots was thus left without much closure at the end of Draft Week. Though the story of the Church's involvement in the Riots essentially ends here, the silence of Archbishop Hughes is not itself without import.

If anything, this pregnant silence suggests an attempt at self-preservation from wide-ranging attacks on not only Catholic figures of authority but against the Catholic community of believers itself. Recall the maneuvers away from bright-line anti-Protestant, anti-abolitionist, and racist sentiments the Church trafficked in, as an institution and as a body of communicants, prior to the beginning of the Civil War. The context of the Civil War rendered the Church and its institutions fellow travelers for the traitorous cause of a seceding South, a dangerous position for a largely immigrant population to inhabit. Yet it only inhabited this precarious position as a result of its attempts to engage itself in contentions over social issues in a political order dominated

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[44] Man, "The Church and the New York Draft Riots of 1863," 49.
[45] "Roman Catholic Clergy on the Riot.," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 20, 1863, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress, 2.
[46] *New-York Daily Tribune,* "Roman Catholic Clergy on the Riot."

by Anglo-Protestants. The Church faced pressures from a dominant Anglo-Protestant public to conform to its commitments, but also faced pressures from within—from a politically-activated, violent Catholic public seeking to secure a place in the white domain the Riots succeeded in producing in New York. The Archdiocese's circumspect stance towards formulating a Catholic response to the Riots may have been a direct result of these competing pressures. Church leadership needed to respond to elite Protestant charges that it fostered persistent, treasonous anti-abolitionism and racial violence among its ranks, doing so reluctantly in a spirit of self-preservation that ultimately saw these charges as products of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice. At the same time, it had to contend with a populace that had not only engaged in anti-Black and anti-Protestant violence but had secured power, both during and immediately after the Riots, on their own terms as Democrats and Catholics.

Conclusions: the continued salience of sectarian conflict; implications for field literature

Reckonings of the aftermath of the Riots typically focus little on the workings of the Church, either as an institution or as a corporate body. This is not to say that Catholic identity itself lost salience after the Riots, however. If anything, the suppression of the Riots actually secured New York's status as a Democratic, Catholic city. Bernstein suggests conservative powerbrokers only managed to maintain the legitimacy of their Republican rule by rejecting national Radical Republican demands for extended military intervention in New York, a quiet concession of their eroding political power in the face of the pro-war, Irish Catholic Democratic political machine found in Tammany Hall and a politicized, militant Irish Catholic working class.[47] The outcome of the Draft Riots for the Catholics of New York was, in part, found in the success of Democratic, Catholic politics—in the formation of a political bloc in direct opposition to the Anglo-American Protestant social landscape of the United States. Catholics began building up political capital in a whiter social and political domain, formed at the cost of removing Black people from their contemporary reality. The resolution of the Riots was, in a backhanded way, beneficial to strengthening the precarious social and political position that the distrusted, outsider Catholic population inhabited prior to the Riots.

The security of that position, however, did not go without challenge. The history of the sectarian conflict between Protestants and Catholics continued on in the 19th century with the Orange Riots of 1870 and 1871. This time, political violence was to be

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[47] Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 259–260.

explicitly sectarian, centered around Catholic opposition to Protestant commemorations of the Battle of the Boyne—a battle that cemented Protestant rule in Ireland. Protestant publications spared no effort to "summon the collective memory of frightened New Yorkers for a massive campaign against the Irish and Tammany" in the lead-up to the Riots. For them, the Riots of 1863 were a dangerous example of what the consolidation of Catholic political power meant in practice and what it could do to its chosen enemies.[48] In the buildup to the Orange Riots of the 1870s, many Irish Catholics believed—much like the Catholic reaction to Anglo-Protestant social reformers in the time leading up to the Draft Riots—that "English and Irish Protestants sought to 'Anglicize' America."[49] Protestants participated in the Orange Riots with a distinctly nativist attitude, drawing on memories of the Draft Riots to cast the Irish Catholic population and political machines of New York yet again as undesirable and subversive. These nativist Protestants made specific appeals to the real, sweeping violence and racism of the rioters in 1863 as proof of what could happen to *them* if the power of what they termed "the Irish Catholic cancer" was not suppressed.[50] The Riots of 1863 may have secured the political power of Irish Catholics in an otherwise Anglo-Protestant social sphere, but their long-term aftermath, as seen in the mimetic, rhetorical reproduction of the Draft Riots in the Orange Riots, suggests that the position Catholics had secured in a Protestant society continued to be tenuous after the Civil War. Securing a place in the white domain did not by any means diminish the threat that nativism posed to Catholics. In fact, the Orange Riots seem to indicate that the Protestant public confronted by the Catholic political ascendancy secured in New York during the Draft Riots reproduced many basic elements of the sectarian conflict that existed preceding the Riots, from nativist suspicions targeting politically active Catholics substantiated through Catholic violence to Catholic fears of a Protestant Ascendancy redux in America. Ultimately, the nature of this conflict called into question the position of Irish Catholics in New York's political society amid a reconfiguration of conflict among sectarian, ethnic lines.

All in all, this examination of the record reveals that the Draft Riots of 1863 were an important event in the history surrounding the political place of Irish Catholic identity in 19th century New York, alongside their well-studied importance as major incidents of the Civil War and in a greater history of racial violence. The anti-abolitionist, anti-Protestant, and anti-Black features of Catholic political engagement prior to the Civil War set up the socio-political environment for the Riots. By casting these positions

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[48] Michael A. Gordon, *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 57.
[49] Ibid., 69.
[50] Ibid., 81.

as ones substantiated by doctrine and by a need to protect the Catholic public from the familiar threat of an Anglo-Protestant upper class, the Catholic public and clergy played a role in tying the very notion of Catholic identity to those ideological stances by the time of the Civil War.

The context of the Civil War and the threat of nativism spurred a shift in this messaging. Acts sending a clear message of opposition to the Riots were seen both prior to the Riots, as with Archbishop Hughes's endorsement of conscription in 1862, and during the Riots in the willingness of *some* clergy (though not of the episcopate) to prevent rioting or to at least thoroughly denounce it after the fact. However, these efforts were overshadowed by the meaning of the Riots for Catholics more generally. Field literature suggests that the Riots and their effects on the Black Protestant community of New York helped secure white domination of the city, and additional analysis suggests that the sectarian aspect of the Riots was potentially linked to Catholic efforts to stake their claim to political power in the newly configured, overwhelmingly white social landscape. The Church's ambivalence towards discouraging rioting can then be read as the institution's indirect way of securing a place for itself in opposition to the threats of nativism and an Anglo-Protestant public at the continued expense of a racially integrated social and political domain. The continuation of sectarian rioting, as seen in the Orange Riots, suggests that the strengthened consolidation of Irish Catholic political power resulting from the Draft Riots of 1863 was still being actively contested on ethnic, sectarian lines later into the 19th century. This indicates the importance of the political reconfiguration that took place during the Riots in 1863 and can be traced in part to the institutional actions of the Catholic Church before and during the Riots.

In sum, this view of the Church and its active role in crafting an ascendant Catholic political faction in New York provides another narrative on the role of the Church in the Draft Riots that has not been captured in current field literature. The actions of the Church suggest that it played a key role in engaging in public discourse over then-contemporary social issues, including abolitionism and the propriety of moralistic social reform. This ultimately secured the Church a place of power in the local political order in New York even after the issue of emancipation became a foregone conclusion. Unlike what Cook and Man ultimately suggest in their analyses, the Church was far from playing a pacifying role in the Riots. Rather, its actions can be better seen as being consistent with a kind of calculating, feigned ambivalence, which obfuscates the role the Church truly played in the Riots. Similar to Bernstein and Man's suggestions of a 'conciliatory' tone spurred by the demands of nationalism, I suggest that the Church's eventual turn away from hardline anti-abolitionist and anti-reform rhetoric towards a

rhetoric of official ambivalence was driven by a demand for self-preservation in a nativist, Anglo-Protestant social and political context. Notably, my analysis suggests that this ambivalence identifies the moment of the Riots as a moment of political identity formation for Irish Catholics in New York. The political reconfiguration that took place through this period of ambivalence, along with a later legacy of religious conflict over the increased influence of Catholic political power in New York, indicate that the Catholics of New York may have navigated those demands to the effect of becoming a unified front within a white social sphere in opposition to an Anglo-Protestant public. While not the central feature of the Riots, the interaction of sectarian identity and violence with the events of Draft Week suggests a greater salience to the political power of religion than current field literature considers and can serve to place the Riots as a significant event in the broader history of Irish and Catholic politics in New York.

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Convict Only by Name: Status and the Governance of South Asian Convict Labourers in Straits Settlement Territories

Sahil Bhagat

Abstract

The 18th and 19th-century Indo-Pacific world was marked by a notable use of convict labour for the development of remote colonies for Western colonial powers. This penal system transformed entire landscapes as thousands of prisoners were transported as sources of cheap labour. This essay focuses on the carceral experiences of South Asian convict labourers in the British Strait Settlements colonies (Penang, Malacca and Singapore). Taking a keen focus on the unique position these penal labourers held with enhanced privileges that marked them separately from civil prisoners or penal labourers in other colonies. Status held a dual purpose of both elevating the social position of the convict labourer but also ensuring the creation of a docile labour force for the colonial government. The greater aim of this essay is to illuminate the diverse experiences of the convict labourer and challenge the view of their experience as one in a sea of a thousand unrecognised faces.

Introduction

In the 21st century, it might be difficult to imagine incarcerated labour as being responsible for the construction of entire cities. However, within the 18th and 19th centuries Indo-Pacific world, this was not an uncommon sight. The Indo-Pacific penal transportation system of the 18th and 19th centuries transformed entire physical landscapes, with the movement of thousands of prisoners as sources of cheap labour. Existing scholarship on penal transportation tends to focus on the European convict experience in British Australia and French Guiana with the commercialisation of popular literature such as *Papillon*.[1] However, recent scholarship authored by Anand Yang, Clare Anderson, and Anoma Pieris has shifted focus from European penal transportation to the experiences of the South and East Asian populations, with a keen focus on the Indo-Pacific region.[2] The colonial penal structure was not homogenous: the experiences of penal labourers differed based on their host settlements, the nature of their labour, and relationships with the existing population of the colony.

Within the geographic scope of this essay, the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), penal labourers existed in a unique space of virtue, possessing the capacity to build a new status and sense of self that was unique to local imprisoned populations, local labourers, and overseas penal labourers in other settlements. Therefore, I argue that South Asian convicts in the Straits Settlement colonies of Penang and Singapore held a status above that of an ordinary prisoner or penal labourer in any other colony. This elevated status reflects their utility as labourers in their (unwilling) construction and maintenance of the British Empire in Southeast Asia. However, the British convict administrators created this elevated status to maintain the labourer's longevity, docility, and profitability to benefit the colonial-capitalist system. Convicts held an elevated status but only within the boundaries of the colonial racial and administrative hierarchies to ensure their submission. Therefore, this essay unravels the nature of convict elevated status, focusing on the privileges it provided and the boundaries of its exertion. Status, in the context of this essay, is interpreted as the social and economic privileges provided by the colonial penal system to the labourers. Rather

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[1] Henri Charrière, *Papillon* (New York: Avon Books, 1970).

[2] Anand A. Yang, *Empire of Convicts: Indian Penal Labour in Colonial Southeast Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021); Anand A. Yang, "Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (Jun. 2003): 179-208*;* Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009); Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (eds.), *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Clare Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius, 1815-1853* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

than being codified in law, this form of status was utilised as an unofficial correctional tool that correctional officers, the colonial administration, and foreign visitors accepted. It was accepted because the colonial administration (knowingly) relied on these labourers to build the physical infrastructure of their colonies.

I investigate this question in two parts. The first half looks at the nature of convict labourers' elevated status, while the second half analyses the limits of this status within the confines of the colonial capitalist structures of power. Within the first half, I detail the social and economic privileges enjoyed by convict labourers as evidence of this status. I highlight how the Singaporean Convict Lines were spatial representations of status in comparison to the colony's civil prisoners. Next, I evaluate the personal and religious privileges that saw convicts modifying, and even, defying the urban fabrics of the colonies. I compare these privileges to fellow convict labourers in Mauritius. In the second half, I explore the limitations of convict status through colonial and racial hierarchies. I highlight the coercive nature of this status, which the colonial government used to submit the convict to lengthy bonded labour. I demonstrate how perceived convict utility enabled the commodification of their bodies to provide social privileges for colonial administrators. Then, I argue how the construction of an elevated status held the primary means of disciplining convict behaviour, not promoting individual freedoms. Finally, I establish the limitations of convict freedoms within the colonial legal system that aimed to preserve colonial racial hierarchies.

Historiography of Penal Labour

Penal labour and incarceration have been analysed through psychological, sociological, and historical lenses, highlighting the political, legal, and economic frameworks that constructed coercive systems of power. Historical scholarship often references Foucauldian interpretations of the Panopticon and Heterotopia as reflections of disciplinary power, constructing physical and social conditions (prisons) that effectively control and displace unwanted people.[3] Envisioned by Jeremy Bentham and further theorised by Michel Foucault, the Panopticon is a prison structure built to be a perfect prison system where each inmate is constantly monitored through the architectural design of the prison, but cannot see anybody else (neither fellow inmates

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[3] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Pantheon Books, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Pantheon Books, 1970); Frank Dikötter, "Introduction," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, ed. by Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 9; Clare Anderson, "Introduction," in *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies*, ed. by Clare Anderson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 38-40; Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

nor the guards).[4] It was an architectural design that supported the permanent surveillance, as it forces the inmate to constantly act on good behaviour, never knowing which of their actions is being monitored.[5] However, Frank Dikötter, a historian of modern China, argues that despite the Panopticon's application into Euro-American carceral studies, this framework is not applicable to colonial penal colonies.[6] He asserts that penal transportation existed with porous boundaries where convicts could collude with guards, exchange ideas, construct their own social hierarchies that undermined "perfect systems of control."[7] The panopticon angle provides a metropole-centric view of power and does not account for the ability of agents to negotiate their position around the desires of the metropole, especially within the context of penal colonies. For Peter Redfield, a cultural anthropologist whose work focuses on penal colonies in French Guiana, the penal colony disrupts the spatial reconfiguration of the Panopticon as natural geography is a much more significant surveillance force than architecture.[8] He highlights that the penal colony is not an "anti-panopticon", but a layered process in which the metropole "reposition(s) the body" of the offender.[9] Punishment is "invisible" in which prisoners are displaced to a "shadowed" location during the process of displacement, and yet the work conducted in the penal colony is also done in a very "visible" public display.[10]

Recent scholarship has attempted to view the penal experience as common across the Indo-Pacific and the globe. Clare Anderson, one of the most prolific authors on Indian Ocean convict and indentured networks in Mauritius, highlights how penal transportation occurred based on four governing principles: the displacement of unwanted political or criminal individuals from home states, the use of penal labourers to expand the empire, the use of gender and race relations in the organisation of penal labour, and the existence of political resistance constructed by new solidarities of imprisonment.[11] These principles have been applied to case studies such as the French penal colonies in South America and Polynesia, British penal colonies in Australia, North America, Mauritius, Burma, Malaya, and Singapore, and will be applied in the

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[4] Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment,* 215.
[5] Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment,* 215-216.
[6] Dikötter, "Introduction," 9-10.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Peter Redfield, "Foucault in the Tropics: Displacing the Panopticon," in *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 54.
[9] Ibid, 54-59.
[10] Ibid, 59.
[11] Clare Anderson, "A Global History of Exile in Asia, c. 1700-1900" in *Exile in Colonial Asia: Kings, Convicts, Commemoration*, ed. Ronit Ricci (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 33.

case studies explored in this essay.[12] Although Anderson provides a valid explanation of the reasons behind the British institutionalisation of the convict system as a replacement of the slave trade, these arguments tend to homogenise the convict experience, despite the diversity of penal colonies that house newly arrived convict labour.

Scholarship surrounding penal transportation in Southeast Asia has recently investigated the unique social and administrative dynamics that governed the experiences of South Asian penal labourers in Penang and Singapore. Clare Anderson, Anoma Pieris, and Anand Yang have significantly contributed to recognising the unique social positions, labour dynamics, and identities held by South Asian convict workers in the Indo-Pacific. Anderson and Pieris recognise examples of unique statuses held by Indo-Pacific convicts, but they tend to view status as a social category attributed to the convicts' pre-incarcerated identity, where their royal, military, or revolutionary background warranted preferable treatment from the colonial administration and fellow convicts.[13] Yang, one of the earliest scholars of convict labour in the Straits Settlements, argues that the utility of convict labour was the basis of constructing an elevated convict status and identity.[14] According to Yang, convict labourers viewed themselves not as *bandwars* (prisoners) but rather as *naukars* (workers of the company).[15] Although this essay does not focus on convict labourer's self-perceived identities, I recognise the centrality of labour in constructing an elevated institutional status for the convict. I distinguish between identity and status, with the former consisting of self-perception and self-projection, and the latter being an institutionally provided position with its own set of privileges within the colonial hierarchy. Rather than establishing a relationship between status and pre-incarcerated identity, as many have already done, this essay focuses on the British's construction of an elevated status in relation to the perceived utility of convict labourers to the colonial enterprise, while also demonstrating the boundaries of convict status, as the convicts still remained subjugated under a racialized and gendered system of incarceration.

This essay does not wish to challenge assumptions of the unfree and coercive nature of colonial penal institutions by asserting the existence of convict labourers' elevated status. Status, as this essay will demonstrate, is a form of carceral power employed by the

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[12] Carol Liston, "An Exile's Lamentations? The Convict Experience in New South Wales, Australia, 1788-1840," *Exile in Colonial Asia: Kings, Convicts, Commemoration*, ed. Ronit Ricci (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 193-219; Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean*, 5-10; Stephen A. Toth, *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas, Penal Colonies 1854-1952 (*Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 21-39; Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 12.

[13] Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 96-98; Anderson, "Exile in Asia," p. 38; Pieris, *Hidden Hands,* 38-39.

[14] Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 96-97.

[15] Ibid.

colonial metropole. This essay is meant to illuminate the diversity of penal experiences, driven by the unique ecological, political and social contexts of the Straits Settlements that governed convict lives. The wider importance of this essay is to unravel the experiences of the convict labourer and challenge the view of their experience as one in a sea of a thousand unrecognised faces.

Convict Labour Across the *Kala Pani*

The British East India Company acquired the island of Penang in 1786, after which came the task of constructing a livable settlement that could sustain a settled British population. One of the largest impediments to the settlement's construction was the lack of labour. The transportation of a migrant labour force resolved the short labour supply issues the British were facing upon arriving at the peninsula. According to George Leith, the Lieutenant-Governor of the island in the early 19th century, Penang was largely barren with limited existing infrastructure and a limited workforce willing to assist the British in constructing a settlement for such low wages.[16] The East India Company needed a workforce willing to terraform the island's geography to suit the settlement and the economic needs of the company at a low cost.[17]

Convicts were transported from Bengal, Madras, and later Bombay Presidencies where they were charged with banishment for crimes such as political challenges to the state, robbery, murder, fraud, and more egregious crimes in the eyes of British courts.[18] The transportation of convicts was viewed as an adequate punishment due to the public dread of transportation. Transportation to a different colony meant crossing the *kala pani* (the black waters), a feat viewed by upper and lower-caste Indians as the physical and spiritual displacement of individuals from their origin.[19] According to Superintendent of Convicts John McNair:

> To the native Indian it meant a severer punishment than to the European for to be sent across the '*kala pani*' or 'black water' in a convict ship or 'jeta junaza', or 'living tomb' as they call it, meant, especially to a man of high caste, whether of the right or left hand section, the total loss to him of all that was worth living for. He could never be received in intercourse again with his own people, and so strong as the caste ideas of ceremonial uncleanness that it would be defilement to

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[16] George Leith, *A Short Account of Settlement, Produce and Commerce of Prince of Wales Island in the Straits of Malacca* (London: J. Booth 1805), 3-4.

[17] East India Company, *Memorandum of the improvements in the administration of India during the last thirty years; and, The petition of the East India Company to Parliament* (London: W. H. Allen, 1858), 39.

[18] John F. A. McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders* (London: A. Constable & Co, 1899), 11-12.

[19] Ibid., 9.

his friends and relations even to offer him sustenance of any kind, and he was in point of fact excommunicated and avoided.[20]

Banishment meant a complete social isolation of the individual from their community, with no chance of being able to reunite with their family or friends. Anderson argues that in addition to the need for labour, penal transportation was a show of colonial strength, demonstrating the ability to remove unwanted people from their original societies.[21] The transportation of "unwanted" South Asians held a dual purpose of both removing unwanted criminals from the imperial centre (British Bengal) and "reforming" the actions of the offender through hard labour. As McNair boasted, the transportation of convicted individuals was designed for the colonial government "to protect society against evil-doers," highlighting a pseudo-paternalistic desire to "reform" the convict with "successful criminal discipline."[22] As with most penal colonies, the government's application of the colonial moral authority to construct a heterotopic urban environment also encouraged the enactment of penal transportation.

Upon arrival, convict labourers were assigned to a specific department or individual, engaging in departmental and domestic work for a specific household.[23] The costs of their transportation, maintenance, and support were to be upheld by the government (the Indian Presidencies that banished them).[24] Labourers were categorised into different classes depending on their length of service and level of "good" behaviour, controlling the leniency or harshness of treatment received.[25] Labourers held a range of jobs. Those who worked under private employers could be gardeners, tailors, carpenters, well diggers or domestic servants.[26] On the other hand, labourers who worked for the government could be snake and tiger killers, firemen, construction workers, nurses, scavengers, blacksmiths, road builders, and more.[27] Within construction sites, labourers were assigned the role of either *Tindal* or *Sirdar*. *Tindals* were commanders of the *Sirdars* (normal labourers), receiving extra responsibilities and higher wages (10 rupees instead

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Anderson, Clare, "Sepoys, Servants and Settlers: Convict Transportation in the Indian Ocean, 1787-1945," *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, ed. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 189.

[22] McNair, *Warders,* 159-161.

[23] Kernial Singh Sandhu, "Some aspects of Indian Settlement in Singapore 1819-1969," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 2 (May 1969), 194-195.

[24] *Straits Settlements Blue Book for the Year 1873, 1874*, Department of Statistics, Government of the Straits Settlements, 22.

[25] Kernial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 137-138.

[26] Ibid., 138.

[27] Ibid.

of 1 for the *Sirdar*).[28] Upon completing their terms of labour, convicts would receive a ticket to leave, where they could return to their states of origin.[29] Some returned, but many remained in their colonies of internment, already having families, holding property, owning private businesses, and reconstructing their lives in their new host lands.[30]

Convicts' Elevated Status in the Straits Settlements

Convict Lines as Spatial Representations of Status

The translation of the labourers' perceived necessity into an enhanced social status is evident in the spatial representations of convict status. After arriving at the colonies, labourers were settled in separate compounds typically called "Convict Lines". The physical structure of the lines developed from attap-style dwellings to huge compounds that could accommodate hundreds of labourers.[31] Lines were unique to penal colonies as they became physical representations of elevated convict status due to their distinct position and structural features that differed from a civil prison. This is especially applicable when comparing the compounds of the Singapore Convict Lines located on Bras Basah Road and the Pearl Hill Civil Jail. These two structures physically represented the convict labourers' elevated status above the civil prisoners.

The Singaporean Convict Lines located on Bras Basah road was the primary residence of convicts when not engaged in labour in other areas of the colony.[32] It was uniquely placed close to the European district, where the upper-class European population resided, travelled and worked.[33] Its proximity to the upper echelons of Singaporean society and geographic centrality resulted in a striking physical closeness between the convict and freed population. Positioning the convicts' domicile and working premises so close to European residences implies a large degree of trust that the colonial population held over the convict department and the convicts who resided there. Travellers visiting Singapore often encountered the compound and some even noted how dominant the compound building was.[34] Lines, especially on Bras Basah road, were incredibly large compounds, with the largest compound in the colony during the

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[28] T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca viz Pinang, Malacca, and Singapore; with a history of The Malayan States on the Peninsula of Malacca,* vol. 2 (London: J. Murray, 1839), 154.

[29] Yang, *Empire of Convicts*, 193.

[30] Ibid., 198-199.

[31] Roland Braddell, Gilbert Brooke, and Walter Makepeace, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1921), 283.

[32] Ibid.

[33] See Map 1: Singapore Town Plan

[34] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account,* 68.

19th century crossing four major streets (Bencoleen, Waterloo, Queen and Victoria).[35] The compound held a convict hospital, a lunatic asylum, women's ward, house of correction, the convict jail itself, and a working shed.[36] Boundaries of the compound were also porous: sheds for animals and some workshops were located outside the compound on an adjacent plot, expanding the boundaries of convict movement even further.[37]
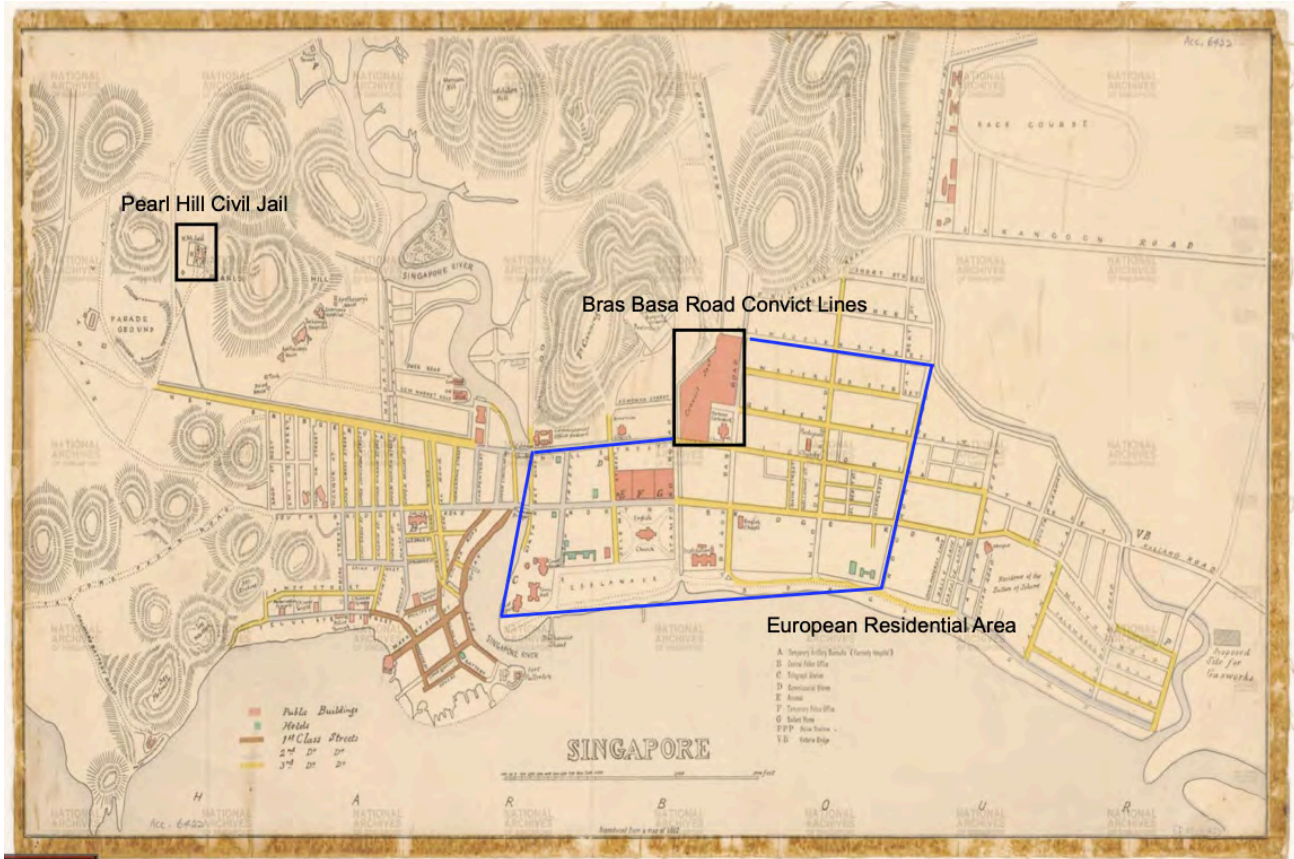
Fig. 1. Map of Singapore showing the locations of the Bras Basa Road Convict Lines and Pearl Hill Civil Jail. Image from National Archives of Singapore, Jules M Monoit, 1862.

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[35] See Map 1 and Map 3; Braddell, *One Hundred Years,* 513; Pieris, *Hidden Hands,* 48; J.T. Jackson, 1843, IOR:X/3349/2, British Library [drawn by author].

[36] Pieris, *Hidden Hands,* 50-51.

[37] Ibid.

Fig. 2. Map of Pearl Hill Civil Jail and the jail's floor plan in 1848. Image drawn by Anoma Pieris, in *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Hawaii, 2009), 80.

Fig. 3. Map of the Bras Basa Road Convict Lines Compound in Singapore in 1857. Image drawn by Anoma Pieris, in *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Hawaii, 2009), 89.
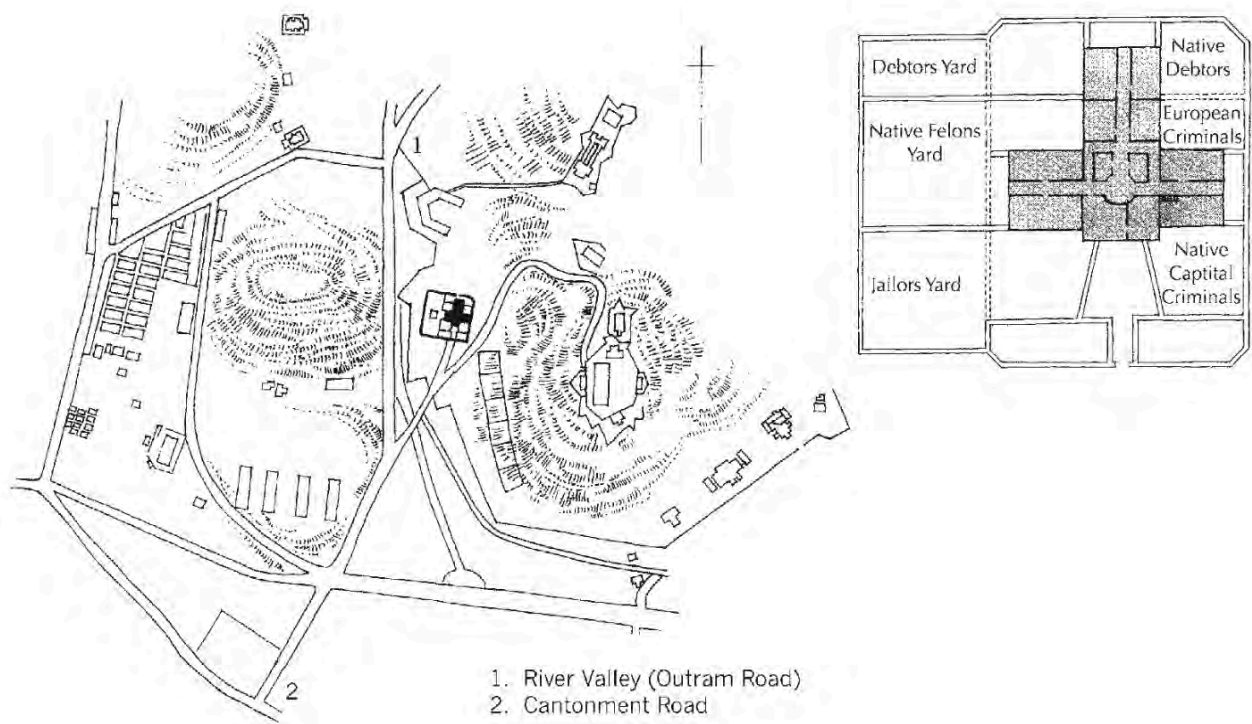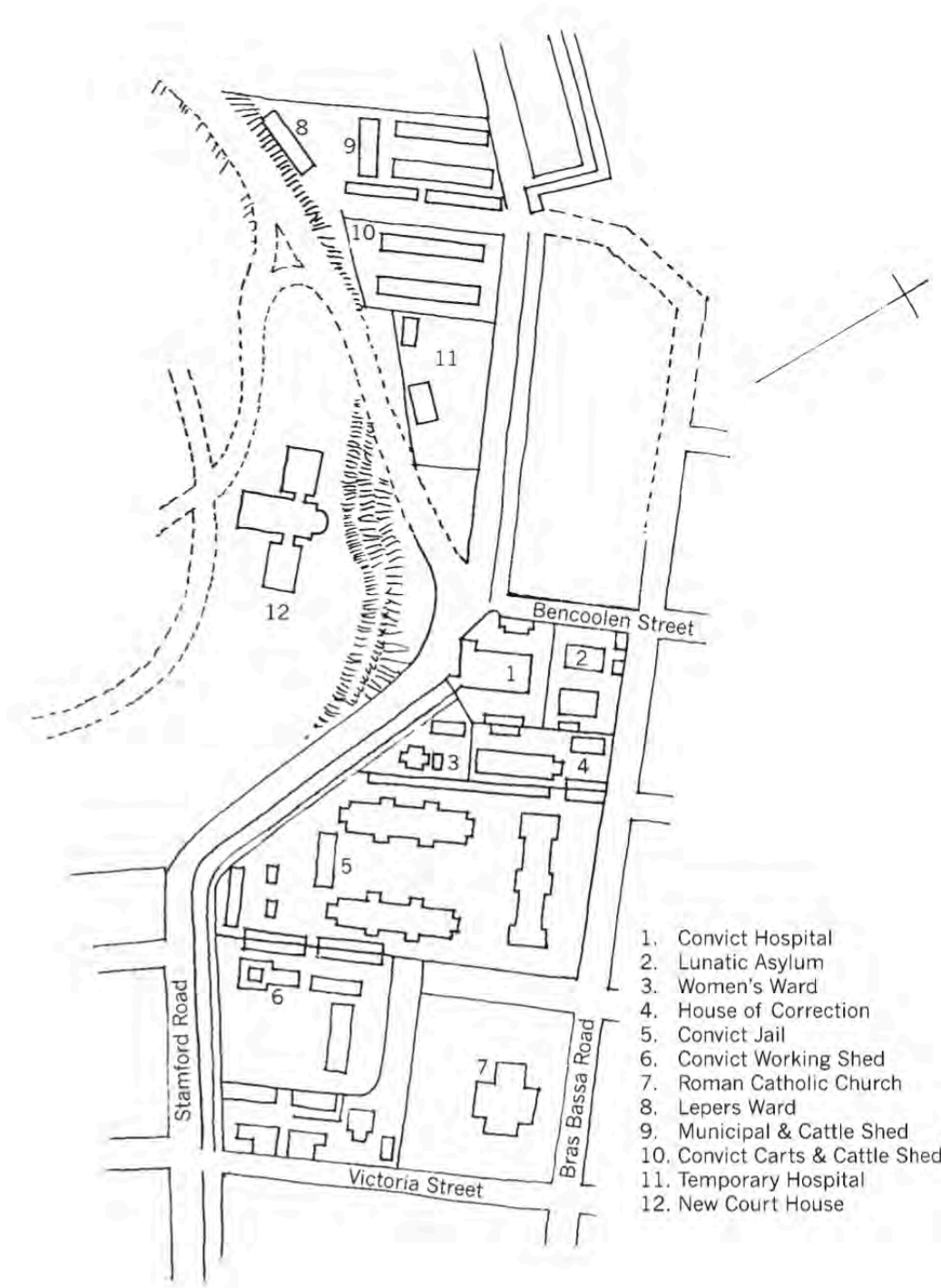
The operational structure of the lines was also unique to the colony because the boundaries of convict domestic space were not clearly designated. Higher-status convicts (*tindals*) had more freedom to reside and travel outside the compound, allowing them to construct their own *kampongs* (villages).[38] As long as they arrived back for roll call and their work, they were permitted to enter and leave as they pleased.[39] John McNair, the previous Superintendent of Convicts, recalls that upon the proper establishment of the convict labour system post-1827, "all the prisoners were in a somewhat lax system of association, except for those undergoing punishment in cells."[40] Labourers acted as their own supervisors where "the choice of warders was made from those classes best suited for the control of their fellow-prisoners, especially in the outstations, or 'commands' as they were called, where gangs of convicts were placed under their control in the construction and repair of roads or in stone-quarrying."[41] Labourers oversaw themselves, ensuring that they abided by all the necessary rules and attended their places of work regularly. This relative freedom of movement and self-governed operational structure of the lines required an element of trust of convict labourers, which reflected their perceived "utility" as effective and necessary labourers of the colony.[42] However, it should be noted that the structure of self-monitoring was greatly influenced by colonial understandings of inter-caste relations and was conducted to limit the costs of the convict department rather than being based on humanitarian grounds.

In comparison, the Pearl Hill Civil Jail was a structure built to confine, isolate, and displace unwanted populations from the freed population.[43] The civil jail was built on the foot of Pearl Hill, on the far north-western edge of the original settlement, miles away from any residential district and only accessible by a single dirt track road. Built with high concrete walls, the jail was built to hold unwanted individuals and prevent interaction between prisoners and the free population.[44] Unlike the convict lines, the civil jail did not allow close contact between the free and unfree populations. Prior to its expansion in 1875, the civil jail was a single building holding separate wards and yards for different ethnicities (European, Malay, Chinese, Indian).[45] The operational structure of the civil jail further enforced a penal hierarchy as convict labourers were routinely

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[38] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 87

[39] Ibid.

[40] McNair, *Warders*, 17-18.

[41] Ibid, 17-19.

[42] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 40.

[43] See Maps 2 and 3. The relatively compact, controlled and highly surveillance Pearl Hill Civil Jail compared to the open, large and un-policed Convict Lines spatially represents the different social positions held by civil prisoners compared to convict labourers.

[44] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 87-88.

[45] Ibid, 80-88.

employed as guards for the civil prisons. As most of the labourers were of South Asian descent and trusted by the prison administration, they would be employed to guard the compound which consisted of prisoners who were primarily of Malay and Chinese heritage.[46] Convict labourers' elevated status was not only reflected in their capacity for mobility, but also in their capacity to enforce colonial carceral control over other incarcerated populations. Their ability to oversee a multiethnic population demonstrates their ability to cross ethnic boundaries. The convict lines' position and structural properties demonstrate that elevated convict status did not only exist for convicts within the boundaries of the lines, but permeated throughout the colony, revealing convict labourers' clear authority and status over civil prisoners.

Personal and Religious Privileges

In addition to the privileges afforded by the convict lines, the status of convict labourers in the Straits Settlements provided privileges of mobility, religious expression, and economic enhancement. Much like the lines, convicts enjoyed a large degree of free movement around the colony.[47] Pieris notes the irony of the position of "free populations" who "had the least physical freedom."[48] She writes that "European and immigrant settler communities were contained within a city grid in their cellular institutions or their native enclaves, under the panoptic scrutiny of government," while Indian transportees status "increased their mobility and produced alternative forms of urban subjectivity and knowledge through the scope and scale of their collective labor."[49] Within Singapore alone convict labour built and renovated buildings such as the St Andrews Cathedral, Government House (present-day Istana), Fort Canning, the Court House, the General Hospital, the Central Police Station, the Post Office, and many more major civil, military, and religious institutions.[50] This meant that public, religious, administrative, and private spaces were accessible as long as their labour was desired in those spaces. Although the Straits Settlements were prisons for convict labourers, the colony's need for a mobile and flexible labour force entailed that they could traverse the racial boundaries demarcated on the colony's urban environment.

Freedom of movement also entailed the ability for labourers to enjoy personal privileges that disrupted the social fabric of colonial urban spaces. A significant example

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[46] McNair, *Warders,* 23-24.
[47] Braddell, *One Hundred Years,* 282; *Penang: Letters to London: B5, Jan. 1819 - Aug. 1820,* Straits Settlements Records, Raffles Museum and Library, National Archives of Singapore, 276-278.
[48] Pieris, *Hidden Hands,* 128.
[49] Ibid, 128-129.
[50] Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 185.

of this was the freedom of movement and cultural expression afforded to convict labourers when celebrating *Muharram*. *Muharram* (or *Mohurrum*), traditionally a festival for Shia Muslims, commemorated the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Husain, in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.[51] Pieris highlights how this festival was "appropriated by both convicts and immigrant settlers" of multi-faith backgrounds for Indian migrants.[52] The inclusion of groups of multiple faiths, backgrounds, and carceral statuses represents the alteration of the original religious and communal boundaries to suit the needs of the highly pluralistic convict population. The convicts were provided with a ten-day holiday which involved huge public gatherings for processions, theatrical plays, and occupied main arteries in both Penang and Singapore.[53] These processions and the freedom to celebrate cultural festivities allowed convicts to replicate their home environments in their place of imprisonment. However, convicts at times took advantage of these privileges, as Muharram processions frequently turned violent between convicts and different migrant communities, or even between convicts and the police.[54]

A typical procession in Singapore involved the marching of labourers through the town carrying a *taboot* (coffin) to hold the symbolic martyrs of the Battle of Karbala.[55] Due to the number of participants, size of the procession, and the noise created from the procession, *Muharram* was a time when convict labourers could disrupt the ordinary urban life of Singapore, at least for the European residents. The Resident Councillor of Singapore was displeased with the way *Muharram* was celebrated as,

> they [convict labourers] were allowed to indulge in their Saturnalia without restraint, their *taboot* was the gayest, and their processions the noisiest to be seen on public streets…Large gangs are dispersed over the country in open lines, without any adequate guard or control over them, and these persons can have very little feeling of restraint. They look upon themselves as superior to the rural population and fully demonstrate this by their behaviour. Whatever may be the theoretical rules for their management, practically they are allowed a degree of liberty and freedom from discipline which is inconsistent with their status as convicts.[56]

There were a number of ways that *Muharram* processions disrupted the urban fabric of Singapore according to the Resident Councillor. It was firstly conducted without enough

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[51] Pieris, *Hidden Hands,* 165.

[52] Ibid., 158.

[53] Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 181.

[54] Pieris, *Hidden Hands,* 181-182.

[55] Yang, *Empire of Conifcts,* 181.; Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore,* vol. 2 (Singapore: Fraser & Neave, 1902), 631.

[56] Ibid, 631.

control and oversight by the colonial government. As a result, labourers took up too much space on streets, played their music too loud and "dressed up in all sorts of fantastical and often indecent costumes."[57] They not only disrupted the urban day-to-day proceedings of the town, but also challenged colonial moralities through music, costume design, and performances during the processions. Another disruption from Muharram was the freedom convict labourers felt they possessed that challenged their position as convicts. The way they celebrated pushed the boundaries of what their status allowed them to have. They were not supposed to feel liberated or too free to disrupt. The colonial government expected a form of restraint that was consistent with their status as convict labourers. There was a clear fear of a potentially empowered convict labourer who was encouraged to push the boundaries of their status, threatening both their position and the colonial government.

By 1856, these disruptions became too great for the colonial government as they attempted to impose a variety of restrictions on the way *Muharram* was to be celebrated. In Singapore, the colonial government attempted to restrict the *Muharram* processions to within the convict lines, cantonment, and temples to avoid disruption on the streets.[58] They had also restricted the ability of fourth or fifth class convicts from taking part in these processions, viewing religious celebration as a privilege that could only be given to certain well-behaved convicts.[59] Finally, they attempted to regulate when specific religious groups could celebrate—"two days for Hindus of the second, third, and sixth classes for Holi and two for Dashera, and four days for Muslims of these same classes for Mohurrum."[60] By 1856, these restrictions became too much and convicts began to spill out of their convict lines with *taboots* and attempted to march towards Government House and the house of the Resident Councillor.[61] Although their procession was eventually pushed back and the labourers were convinced to go back to their lines, this was the first act of formal convict protest against the colonial government. It even convinced the colonial government to roll back on their restrictions and allow convicts to continue their processions on the streets.[62] Convict labourers used *Muharram* as a symbol of their personal freedoms and took *Muharram* processions as a space to voice restrictions being imposed on them, which scared the colonial government. In the aftermath of the 1856 disturbances, the Governor commented that restricting the

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[57] Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 181.

[58] Ibid; "Calcutta," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advisor,* Newspaper SG, 4 December 1856, 8.

[59] Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 182.

[60] Ibid, 182.

[61] "Calcutta," *The Singapore Free Press,* 8.

[62] "The Free Press," *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advisor,* Newspaper SG, 27 August 1857, 3.

processions would, "have the effect of needlessly exasperating the convict body, and of driving them to acts of desperation more dangerous to the peace and good order of the town."[63]

This was not the only time *Muharram* became a space of violence, as rioting had begun in 1852 and continued with the 1867 Penang Riots, which saw the fighting break out between the two Indo-Malay secret societies, the Red Flag and White Flag society, during Muharram.[64] Although the ability to enact violence was not a privilege afforded to convicts through their status, convict labourers took advantage of both the relative freedoms afforded to religious celebration and the general anxiety British residents had over regulating religious expression to air out grievances against either the British government or within their communities. *Muharram* was equally a political event, where convicts could disrupt the urban fabric of everyday life and vocalise discontent.

The benefits convicts enjoyed in the Straits Settlements extended further after the expiration of convict imprisonment periods. Convicts had a choice to either stay in the colony of their service or return home.[65] Due to the lengthy incarceration periods, labourers constructed strong social, economic, and familial bonds with their hostland that encouraged many to remain in the colony.[66] Upon receiving their freedom, convicts were provided with government grants to start their own businesses, buy land, accumulate wealth, and travel freely outside of the settlement of their incarceration.[67] In his accounts of his travels in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, John Cameron details an encounter with a freed convict named Tickery Bandah. Bandah claims to be part of the Kandy royal family in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) and was transported to Malacca as a convict labourer.[68] Upon gaining his freedom, Bandah maintained a high status within convict society. He opened his own shop, provided legal advice to convicts and freemen alike, opened a legal library for residents of Malacca, and even began correspondence with the King of Siam due to his Ceylonese royal heritage.[69] The account and story is likely exaggerated, and is not the standard experience of most freed convicts in the colony. However, it does illustrate how freed convicts were able to construct new lives and integrate into the societies of their host lands. It was not outside the colonial

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*. 181-182.
[65] Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 3.
[66] Ibid, 48.
[67] McNair, *Warders,* 41; John F. A. McNair, *Perak and the Malays: "Sarongs" and "Kris"* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1878), 446; Yang, *Empire of Convicts,* 206-207.
[68] John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: being a descriptive account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; their people, products, commerce and government* (London: Smith, Elder, 1865), 376.
[69] Ibid, 376-380.

imagination for freed convicts to hold an elevated social status amongst the colonised population.

In contrast, freed convicts in penal settlements such as Mauritius had difficulty remaining in their hostlands after their sentence was completed. The Mauritian colonial government often debated the utility of convicts as freed individuals in the colony, usually preferring most convicts to be sent immediately back to India.[70] Those who did remain had to receive permission from the government, predominantly by becoming an indentured servant to prove their utility.[71] Anderson's analysis of Mauritian convict labourers' experiences contrasts with the experiences of Straits Settlement convicts, who were strongly encouraged to settle towards the inland Malayan peninsula by the colonial government.[72] The comparative analysis highlights the unique position held by South Asian convicts of Southeast Asian penal settlements compared to convicts of Mauritian settlements. The extension of colonial power in Mauritius was reflective of a dominant desire to restrict convict agency. While in the Straits Settlements, former convict labourers could rebuild their own lives, create families, own land, build businesses, and establish a community. This demonstrates the unique position that Straits Settlement convict labourers held compared to labourers in other penal colonies.

Limitations of Convicts' Elevated Status

Although Straits Settlement convict labourers enjoyed an elevated status in comparison to civil prisoners and convict labourers in other penal colonies, they only enjoyed an elevated status insofar as their labour was useful to the British imperial government. As previously discussed, labour was the basis of convict utility and of how convict labourers' elevated status was constructed. This section will explore how convicts were commodified agents of the empire, how status became a means of maintaining convict utility, and how the colonial legal system worked against protecting the rights of convict labourers.

Convicts as Agents of Empire

The British administration's extensive use of convict labour in all of its Indo-Pacific penal settlements was a means of expanding and maintaining the empire.[73] Expanding the empire entailed not only its political expansion but also expanding the profitability of

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[70] Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean,* 121.
[71] Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean,* 122-123.
[72] McNair, *Perak and the Malays,* 446.
[73] Anderson, "History of Exile," 33.

the colonial enterprise. Therefore, an additional element of the colonial views and treatment of convicts is the commodification of their bodies and labour. Convict labourers were viewed as commodities that held costs and profits associated with their usage. Their transportation and labour were supported so long as they were useful to the empire. I argue that convict labourers were not only agents of empire but also commodified imperial products themselves, who were viewed as profitable commodities used to enrich the empire.

An example of convict labour value is its association with colonial status. Convict labourers not only held an elevated status of their own but also symbolised status for the colonial officer, office or administration who used them. Transcripts written by officials of Penang in 1825 reveal the number of convict labourers assigned to each individual or office in the colony.[74] The number and degree of "quality" of convicts were awarded to individuals based on their position within the administrative hierarchy.[75] The allocation of convict labourers to each individual or office reflected their status within the colony. The governor, as well as first and second members of the council, held the largest concentration of convicts per individual with 60, 30 and 30 convicts per individual respectively.[76] These three figures were the most valued members within the colony's administrative hierarchy. The military appeared to be the second most important group in the colony: the commanding officer of troops received eight convicts, European officers received 16 convicts in total, and senior military officers received 40 in total.[77] The military received 25 per cent of the total "personal" convicts awarded to individuals in the colony.[78] What this reveals is how convict labourers represented the colonial administrative hierarchy. The governor, top administrators of the council, and the military were regarded as those with the highest status, warranting the need for convicts as assistants to their professional and personal needs. Even though convicts held an elevated status of their own in their respective penal hierarchy, they also represented the administrative status of officials within the empire. The more convicts awarded to an individual, the higher their place in the social strata of colonial society.

Statistical administrative records of the Straits Settlements demonstrate the commodified nature of convict labour based on the cost of their maintenance and the revenue generated by their labour to the colonial administration. The Straits government

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[74] *Penang Consultations: A18, Jul. 1823 - Jul. 1825*, Straits Settlements Records, Raffles Museum and Library, National Archives of Singapore, 879-893.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid, 883-884.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

supported the cost of transportation, food, clothing, allowances, bedding, and any additional basic necessities the convict needed to survive.[79] The *Straits Settlements Blue Book of the Year 1873* indicates that convict labour cost 88,283 Singaporean dollars.[80] The Blue Book was a statistical report that accounted for all the costs of the colony—the convict department was one of many departments that had costs of maintenance. These costs were typically weighed against the "revenue" generated by the convicts from public works and the labour conducted. Within the same statistical report, the revenue generated by convicts based on their work on the Store Department, Prison Department and Public Works amounted to 7,329 Singaporean dollars, demonstrating a huge loss of revenue compared to costs.[81] Between 1872 and 1873, the British government saw a 54% increase in costs of maintaining convicts.[82] The elevated costs and decreased revenue generated by the convict population encouraged the colonial administration to acquire other forms of cheap labour, specifically migrant Chinese labourers.[83] These costs also occurred during a time when the colonial population was changing attitudes towards the prevalence of convict labourers in Straits society. As Yang argues, "The emergence of Singapore as a thriving port city by the mid-nineteenth century led many of its prosperous residents to reassess their support for its convict population and to harp on the dangers of the potentially volatile population mix that this group of Indians created."[84] These opinions were supported by an anxiety over controlling the convict population in the aftermath of the multiple *Muharram* riots in the 1850s and the transportation of former mutineers in the 1857 sepoy rebellion, an event that deeply ingrained fear in the British public.[85] The reduced importation of convicts and mass pardoning of existing convicts in the Straits Settlements also represented a market shift towards transforming the peninsula into a plantation economy, marked by the rise of Indian and Chinese indentured servants arriving in the region.

What these statistics highlight is the commodified nature of the convict labourer, viewed primarily as a statistic within the colonial administration. Although an elevated status did exist for those labourers, that status, and even position as a labourer, only remained as long as they were seen as useful for the British administration. Once their utility expired, the entire convict structure was abandoned. This process of assigning

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[79] *Blue Book,* 41-46.
[80] Ibid, 41.
[81] Ibid., 46.
[82] Ibid., 84.
[83] Clare Anderson, "The British Indian Empire, 1789-1939," in *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies*, ed. Clare Anderson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 497.
[84] Yang, "Indian Convict Workers," 204.
[85] Ibid., 204-205.

status on the basis of utility links to Christian De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein's argument about defining convict labour. For the two authors, convict labour consists of the commodification of labour and the removal of an individual's right to freedom.[86] This commodification process within penal colonies lays the groundwork for indenture and free labour to take place within that space.[87] Therefore, convict labourers, no matter the status they held, are constructed as commodities that are constantly evaluated as either profitable or unprofitable, waiting to be replaced with other systems that are seen as politically more stable or economically more profitable.

Elevated Status as a form of Maintaining Convict Utility

The status and personal privilege afforded to convicts was strategically used to maintain convict obedience and submission. Prisons and penal colonies were not only places to confine unwanted populations, but also spaces to test disciplinary methods on its colonial subjects. Prisons were laboratories for social experiments where the administration could test the best methods for controlling a population and exerting power onto the wider population they governed.[88] Penal colonies in the Straits Settlements invented new division categories for convict labourers to erase existing cultural solidarities and differences. Artificial solidarities were imposed and constructed that best suited the colonial rationale, dismantling existing socio-cultural linkages to make them more docile for the colonial administration.[89] The colonial government required a docile workforce to ensure that the labourers could be utilised as efficiently as possible.[90] Therefore, the construction of an elevated status was a method of maintaining convict utility, establishing the boundaries of convicts' physical, social and personal privileges.

The new physical landscape of the Straits Settlements and new social conditions the labourers had to acclimatise to dismantled existing social strata and solidarities to ensure passivity. Docility is defined here as the capacity for colonial overseers to limit the potential frequency and scale of resistance of convict labourers to working demands. The large and relatively open lines constructed for convicts to work and reside in reduced the need for escape as they were not enclosed or "locked up". This contrasted conditions in civil prisons in the colony where the convict population was removed from the civilian

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[86] Christian De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein, "Writing a Global History of Convict Labour," in *Global Histories of Work*, ed. Andreas Eckert (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 50.
[87] Ibid., 53.
[88] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 14-16.
[89] Ibid, 93-94.
[90] Ibid, 128-129.

population.[91] The new positions of social status were not constructed based on caste, religious background, or existing economic wealth of the convicts, but instead on their "docility" and utility as labourers. Within the six-tier hierarchical system introduced by John McNair, those who existed at the top of the hierarchy "consisted of trustworthy convicts," entailing a docile and passive service to the administration.[92] They were provided with added freedoms including free movement, obtaining capital and starting their own family, enticing convicts into good behaviour for better benefits.[93] Of course, there were limits to these privileges on the basis of their class, their movement was limited to their ability to regularly attend muster, the capital they received was extremely limited, and the kinship ties they could create were limited to those of a similar class, religious group, or convict status. Those who existed lower in the hierarchy were either newly arrived convicts, convicts "degraded from higher classes" who needed stricter oversight, or "invalids and superannuated convicts" who proved to have low utility as labourers.[94] These groups were given the most restrictions, the most distance from the general population, and the highest levels of observance from colonial officers. Even within the labour corps, the position of *Tindal*, was based on the docility and utility of the convict.[95] Governing convicts through the authority of a *Tindal* maintained order as labourers would believe that they were being governed by their fellow convicts rather than directly from a European overseer.

The construction of internal hierarchies among penal labourers occurred in most penal settlements in the region. Anderson's assessment of Mauritius highlights the use of well-behaved convicts as "commanders" amongst the rest of the convict population on plantations.[96] These labourers were paid more and afforded more responsibilities and privileges due to their elevated position. This system encouraged the "good" behaviour of convict labourers, who were provided with enhanced benefits for their passivity, docility, and utility as labourers for the colony. Although their freedoms were never as expansive as those of the Straits convict labourers, a similar practice of convict management prevailed between penal colonies.

Providing capital and land to labourers after the termination of their sentence ensured that former convict labourers could remain useful for the colonial government. McNair attributes the success of the British in colonising the northern Malaysian state of

[91] Mira Rai Waits, "Imperial Vision, Colonial Prison: British Jails in Bengal, 1823-1873," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 77, no. 2 (2018), 153-155.

[92] McNair, *Warders*, 84.

[93] Ibid, 4-5, 44-45.

[94] McNair, *Warders*, 84-85

[95] Ibid, 18.

[96] Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean*, 55.

Perak to the settled former convict population as, "the Government in encouraging the Indian convicts, now on a ticket-of-leave at Singapore, to go up the country, furnishing them with money for the purpose, and giving them tracts of land to cultivate."[97] The Indian population, who were predominantly agricultural workers, were only given value because "a great deal would have been done to render them useful to the state, and give additional security to life; while making the place better, they would have been forming a nucleus to which there would have been some encouragement for other people to flock."[98] It was also a way of building a connection between the British and the Malay population in the interior, specifically attempting to "find the mass of the chiefs and people yielding due respect to the laws and institutions" of the British to increase "the profit and advantage" from colonisation.[99] These former convicts were used as early colonists, making the interior of the peninsula habitable for British settlement as they learned about the area, created infrastructure and developed a reliable food supply. The colonists took advantage of the convict's severed connection to their ethnic homeland, their lack of capital, and existence of a new family on the peninsula to reap more value out of them as unwilling agents of empire. With the assimilation of former labourers in the interior of the peninsula, British authorities were able to utilise them to facilitate the construction of the Federated and Unfederated States of Malaya, which became the established governing system for the peninsula in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Status, and the privileges associated with that status, thus became a tool constructed by the colonial administration to maintain the utility of convicts as agents of the empire. According to Pieris, penal settlements became social experiments to successfully contain and pacify an initially resistant group.[100] By creating a docile and passive workforce and controlling the large population of migrants, convict labourers became much more effective labourers for the colonial administration. This is not to argue that resistance did not exist. Yang highlights the importance of Khurruk Singh and Bhai Maharaj Singh as displaced resistance fighters in Singapore.[101] Pieris additionally highlights the unconventional and silent methods of resistance to coercive and labour intensive tasks that were forced upon convicts by their employers.[102] The elevation of convict status was not conducted purely out of the perceived value of convicts but as a means to ensure some form of labour-loyalty and control. Much like walls are utilised in prisons to

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[97] McNair, *Perak and the Malays*, 446-447.
[98] Ibid, 447.
[99] Ibid, 447-448.
[100] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 63.
[101] Yang, *Empire of Convicts*, 143-144.
[102] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 19-20.

control the movement of prisoners, status – and the privileges that came with it – became a tool of carceral control over the bodies, movement, and direction of labour convicts in the Straits colonies.

Racialized Boundaries of Convict Status

Convict status held so long as it did not threaten the legal, physical, and economic safety of European subjects, as legal and administrative institutions worked to maintain a strict racial hierarchy of the European-based population above their Chinese, Indian, and Malay subjects. Unsuccessful attempts made by convict labourers to file complaints against brutal treatment by their overseers through judicial or administrative frameworks highlight this limitation.

An 1828 case made by Indian convict Neemut Khan against a white convict, Joseph Warn, exemplifies how the colonial legal system worked against the convict if he or she were to challenge actions conducted by the European population, free or incarcerated. Khan approached the Superintendent of Convicts, Geo Lawson, on the evening of the 13th of September, claiming to have been severely beaten by Warn.[103] In addition to these accusations, Khan claimed that Warn had also extorted a hundred Singaporean dollars from him. These accusations were supported by another Indian convict, Seedha Mehta, who had bruises from Warn's beatings and also claimed to have had 79 dollars extorted from him.[104] All three convicts were working under the Executive Officer of the Royal Engineers– Khan and Mehta as *Sirdars* and Warn as a clerk. The superintendent filed a complaint for the convict labourers to the governor against the Officer of the Royal Engineers. The British Superintendent concluded his complaint by asserting that the executive officer of the engineering corps was also partially responsible for the death of an Indian convict named Cassee Sirdar, who was seen to have drowned in the lake after a severe beating from the officer.[105]

However, Lawson was chastised by both the Executive Officer of the Royal Engineers and the Inspector General in charge of overseeing the case. Upon questioning Warn, the Inspector General did agree that Khan was beaten, but claimed that "I have no doubt that he [Khan] deserved punishment" without displaying or questioning the justification behind the level of punishment.[106] Regarding the extortion, the Inspector General supported Warn's statement that "he had never borrowed one dollar from Neemut Khan

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[103] *Penang, Singapore and Malacca Consultations: A56, Sep. 1828 - Oct. 1828*, Straits Settlements Records, Raffles Museum and Library, National Archives of Singapore, 209.
[104] Ibid, 209-210.
[105] *Penang, Singapore and Malacca Consultations: A56*, 211.
[106] Ibid, 549.

in his life," automatically believing the claims made by Warn without any further investigation against the claims made by Khan and Mehta.[107] The case of Casee Sirdar was also dismissed because it was unprecedented to accuse a superior officer of the murder of a convict. The inspector berated the superintendent for believing the accusations of the Indian convicts, going over the executive officer's authority and removing Khan and Mehta from the authority of the Executive Officer of the Engineers.[108] To quote the Inspector General, "Although the desire of the Superintendent to protect the unfortunate people under his charge from oppression is highly [blank], he should, I think, be careful, not to give too ready evidence to the stories he hears from them."[109] The fate of Khan and Mehta is unknown in further documentation as they were instructed to return to the Engineers and further questioned by the inspector general about their accusations. The Inspector General recommended that Warn have his convict attendee removed and remarked that he will "instruct the Executive Engineer to confine Mr Warn to his duties as a Writer, and allow him no interference with the people or works of the Department.[110] However, there is no further evidence to show whether the Executive Engineer, who denied any of these claims, actually followed these instructions.

What this case demonstrates is the reaction of the colonial administrations to the challenges of officers within the imperial hierarchy. The case brought forth by the superintendent depended on whose claim was more believable because of the lack of concrete evidence or eye-witness testimony. Racial prejudice may have played a role in the Inspector General's evaluation, as he was willing to believe the Executive Officer of the Engineer's claims over the cases of the multiple convict labourers who testified against him, without a strong justification of why he believed the former over the latter. His belief in Warn's testimony over Khan and Mehta's, despite all subjects being employed as convict labourers, affirms the racial hierarchy embedded within the convict hierarchy. Even Warn's fate, as someone who could still maintain his personal privileges and simply be reduced to desk duty, can be seen as light compared to the fate of convict workers who had been banished for the exact same crimes as Warn.

The additional case against the officer of the engineering corps represented a challenge to administrative actors, and the dismissal of Lawson's accusations is indicative of a desire to protect administrators from accusations from their subjects, reinforcing a strict hierarchy between the officer and convict. More favourable views and preferential

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid, 552-554.
[109] Ibid, 552.
[110] Ibid, 550.

treatment towards European settlers, free or unfree, superseded any of the privileges afforded to Indian convict labourers. Within the colonial legal system, racial hierarchies prevailed to assist the European colonial population. Asian convict labourers' elevated status was limited by their disadvantaged position within the colonial racial hierarchy. The policies presented in the first chapter highlight privileges that primarily concern the direct lives of the labourers rather than their interactions with other populations. Additionally, those privileges were never enshrined as legal rights, which meant that they could be ignored and convicts could be routinely exploited without repercussions. Their elevated position existed so long as it didn't challenge the racial and administrative hierarchies that existed above the position of the convict. The colonial racial hierarchy superseded any social hierarchies that were constructed within the Straits Settlement penal system. When interacting with European free and unfree populations, South Asian convict labourers were always below their European counterparts, thus highlighting how social and legal frameworks were institutionalised to preserve the power of European populations and government officials over the convict labourer.

Conclusion

The unique position held by convict labourers in the Straits Settlements enabled the construction of an elevated status above the level of a local civil prisoner or penal labourer in other penal settlements. Their elevated status included spatial, social, and economic privileges; however, this status was hinged on the perceived utility of convict labourers. Convict status existed so long as labourers remained productive for the empire and did not challenge administrative and racial hierarchies. As colonial-capitalist interests governed the permanence of this status, the colonial administration held the power to exploit status as a means of ensuring the submission of the convict labourer.

The goal of this essay is to expand on existing historiography and provide examples of the unique experiences of convict labourers in the Straits Settlements that challenge assumptions of penal labourers being simply rebellious but unfree agents of empire. The convict experience differed based on the political, economic, and social conditions of the settlements that hosted them, creating new social dynamics and positions that were equally important in governing convict lives. Convict labourers contributed to the reform of the penal structure by transforming the spatial, social and economic conditions that governed their experiences. The coercive and discriminatory practices of the convict labour system were meant to restrict, discipline, and punish the penal labourer into docility. This research intends to encourage further scholarship on the unique social, political, and economic conditions that existed in other penal settlements,

expanding on the literature and constructing a nuanced understanding of the global penal transportation system.

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Eating the Slum: The Relationship between Sinophobia and the Chinese Restaurant in the Early 20th-Century United States

Annelie Hyatt

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the crucial roles played by Chinatown restaurants in shifting perceptions of "the Chinese" in the 19th and 20th centuries of the United States. First, I will examine the political roots of Sinophobia in the United States. Next, I will examine the role that Chinese restaurants played in the larger Chinatown neighborhood in the first three decades of the 20th century, arguing for its enduring significance and symbolic weight. While Chinatown restaurateurs tried to familiarize white Americans with Chinese culture, they also profited from orientalist stereotypes and stoked the American taste for the exotic in their advertisements. Finally, I will examine the phenomenon of slumming in Chinatown, which became popular in the early 20th century, once again examining the Chinese restaurant's role in perpetuating and pushing against this pursuit. A close examination of Chinatown food culture in the first half of the 20th century reveals that Chinatown restaurateurs absorbed orientalist stereotypes into their business model while also working to dismantle them.

Introduction

In the mid-19th century, Chinese traders and sailors began to arrive on the shores of the continental United States en masse, most of them single men searching for employment.[1] In China, the Opium Wars of 1840-1860 created political unrest, and, compounded with famine and natural disasters (most notably the North China Famine of 1876-1879), drove many to leave their homeland as the state struggled to adequately address the crises.[2] 'Chinatowns' began to materialize in waterfront regions of the United States immediately thereafter, most notably in San Francisco and New York. The existence of these districts was precarious from their inception: not only was Sinophobia rampant in the United States, but the neighborhood's predominantly male population (a 20:1 ratio of men to women in New York's Chinatown district during the 1860s) meant that the handful of women roaming the streets were likely either prostitutes or servants.[3] In addition, the presence of opium dens, prostitution, and gang activities convinced many people that Chinatown was an irredeemable slum.[4] Chinese business owners, most of whom were men with spouses and children, sought to rectify Chinatown's image. Business owners did so not only to increase the prosperity of their business, but also to create a hospitable environment for their families.[5] Ironically, these efforts often relied on orientalist imagery and tropes in their publicity campaigns, further cementing the stereotyped perception of Chinese foodways, culture, and people.

The goal of this essay is to examine how Chinatown restaurants played a crucial role in constructing the shifting perceptions of "the Chinese" in the U.S. in the 19th and 20th centuries. Scholarship already exists on the subject: Erica J. Peters, in her article "A Path to Acceptance: Promoting Chinese Restaurants in San Francisco, 1849-1919," argues that Chinese restaurants attracted positive attention from white patrons and the press by cultivating dining spaces that both channeled the exotic aesthetic of premodern China while also resisting negative Sinophobic stereotypes regarding filth.[6] In "Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as Social Accomplishment," Shun Lu and Alan Fine argue that non-Western food in Chinatown differed from other ethnic culinary enterprises because it "[relied] primarily on an external rather than internal

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[1] "Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts," Office of the Historian, accessed May 8, 2023.
[2] Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, "Tough Choices: Grappling with Famine in Qing China, the British Empire, and Beyond," *Journal of World History* 24, no. 1 (2013): 136. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43286248.
[3] "The Story of Chinatown," Chinatown Research Guide, accessed May 8, 2023.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 no. 3, (1974): 393.
[6] Erica J. Peters, "A Path to Acceptance: Promoting Chinese Restaurants in San Francisco, 1849–1919," *Southern California Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (2015): 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1525/scq.2015.97.1.5.

market…[permitting] clients to believe that they have had an 'exotic encounter'."[7] Li Li concurs in her paper, "Cultural and Intercultural Functions of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West," stating that "virtually all studies of foodlore that go beyond the regional recipe books take the contextual, culturally constructed dimension to be at least as important as the food themselves—often more so."[8] However, while much scholarship has acknowledged the role of the Chinese restaurant in reinventing Chinatown's image during the first half of the 20th century, the complex relationship between Sinophobic stereotypes and Chinese exoticism in the context of the Chinatown restaurant requires further exploration.

First, I will examine the roots of Sinophobia in the United States, tracing it to both the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 as well as municipal policies that sought to relegate Chinese neighborhoods to the fringes of urban life, a form of disinvestment which contributed to the rise of crime and sordid activities in the Chinatowns. Next, I will examine the role of Chinese restaurants in the operationality of Chinatown neighborhoods in the first three decades of the 20th century. It appears the restaurant has an enduring significance and symbolic weight in Chinatowns: while owners tried to familiarize white Americans with Chinese culture, they also profited from orientalist stereotypes and stoked the American taste for the exotic when advertising their businesses. Meanwhile, Chinatown restaurateurs tried to compete with the neighborhood's dangerous stereotype that was promulgated by Tong warfare, the name given to inter-gang (*tong*) conflicts that occurred among Chinese immigrants starting from the 1840s.[9] Finally, I will examine the phenomenon of slumming in Chinatown that became popular in the early 20th century, once again investigating the Chinese restaurant's role in both perpetuating and pushing against this pursuit. A close examination of Chinatown food culture in the first half of the 20th century reveals that Chinatown restaurateurs absorbed Orientalist stereotypes into their business model while also working to dismantle them.

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[7] Shun Lu and Gary Alan Fine, "The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment," *The Sociological Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1995): 536.

[8] Li Li, "Cultural and Intercultural Functions of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West: 'An Insider's Perspective,'" *Western Folklore* 61, no. 3/4 (2002): 329. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1500426.

[9] Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," 379.

The Consequences of Sinophobia during the Early Chinatown Years

At the turn of the 19th century, many regarded New York City's Chinatown as one of Manhattan's most depraved and obscene neighborhoods, and desired to quarantine it from the larger metropolitan area.[10] The rise of predominantly Chinese neighborhoods in U.S. cities coincided, unsurprisingly, with the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which instituted a 10-year ban on Chinese laborers immigrating to the U.S.[11] The Act furthered the burgeoning anti-Chinese rhetoric in the U.S., which was notoriously enshrined in the political cartoons of the time. Thomas Nast, widely considered to be the "Father of the American Cartoon," captured the worst of American society's Sinophobic stereotypes in his cartoon "The Coming Man," published a year *before* the adoption of the Chinese Exclusion Act.[12]

Fig. 1. "The Coming Man" by Thomas Nast, depicting a Chinese immigrant in traditional Qing garments. [13]

At the time, the "Chinaman" figure in American culture donned the queue favored by the Qing-era Manchu, in addition to other Manchu garments such as a colorful surcoat (*magua*, here pictured erroneously with three points) and roomy trousers. The

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[10]Ibid., 386.

[11] "Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts," Office of the Historian, accessed May 8, 2023.

[12] "The Historic Elephant and Donkey," *The New York Times*, August 2, 1908, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1908/08/02/106774821.pdf.

[13] Fig. 1. Michelle Walfred, "The Coming Man," Thomas Nast Cartoons, April 2014, https://thomasnastcartoons.com/2014/04/03/the-coming-man-20-may-1881/.

figure's purported monopoly over laundries and textile manufacturers is expressed, too, by his domination of the cartoon's frame. His dramatized largeness, especially compared to the covertly drawn men in the cartoon's backdrop, embodies the claustrophobic reaction of many Americans to incoming Chinese immigration. The man's playful wink, partnered with a smile of crooked teeth, intimates that Americans considered Chinese immigration to be an intentional threat to Western power, one especially prominent considering that China and California are only separated by the Pacific Ocean. Beyond the Chinatowns that surfaced in the American West, Chinese immigrants were subject to suspicion across American society, and the desire to quarantine them in U.S. metropolitan areas increased steadily into the 20th century. San Francisco responded to this desire by passing an ordinance which "provided for the removal of the Chinese population to a prescribed section in South San Francisco, a district located on the outskirts of the city. The order declares it unlawful for any Chinese person to locate, reside, or carry on business within the city limits except in the district designated."[14] The urge to police and contain Chinese presence in U.S. cities resembles disease containment strategy, framing the Chinese as virulent agents that had the potential to infect the cleanliness and order of the rest of the city. In a *New York Times* article titled "For a New Chinatown," one New Yorker wrote:

> No Franciscan of those parts could pass from his business to his home or back again without passing through it. What is more, his womankind could not 'go shopping' without traversing it. Our little Chinatown, on the other hand, modestly withdraws itself where nobody need ever enter who does not betake himself to it for the express purpose.[15]

The government sought to manage Chinese presence in the United States through urban planning, which reified their desire to protect residents by limiting their encounters with Chinese residents. This separatist ideology effectively transformed Chinatown into a ghetto, and further indicated the extent to which the United States government and the American people viewed the Chinese as a threat on both a political and personal level. Not only did Americans regard Chinatowns as dangerous for women due to the neighborhood's predominantly male population, but they also considered Chinese men to be an assault on American masculinity. The existence of Chinatown not only infringed upon a man's capacity to conduct his business at will—traversing through the

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[14] "For a New Chinatown," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1906, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1906/08/08/101793392.html?pageNumber=6.
[15] Ibid.

neighborhood not being a part of his job description—but it also threatened the well-being of his women, with whom he had a proprietary relationship. The unspoken fear voiced by the male writer was that white women were doubly at risk for being assaulted in Chinatown and tempted by other men, considering the neighborhood's largely male population. By contrast, the writer praised New York's Chinatown for being "little" and "modestly [withdrawing]" itself. This effeminate portrayal of Chinatown comforted the sensibilities of American men, in addition to lessening its political threat. That Chinese people and culture could only interact with American people with their consent, demonstrating the degree to which Americans perceived Chinese culture as an incontrovertible ill, or a guilty pleasure; while feasting one's eyes on the Oriental novelties could be fun upon occasion, accepting Chinese people and their culture into a part of the daily American reality would be an assault upon their freedom.

As previously mentioned, the impact of this rampant Sinophobia transformed Chinatown into an impoverished ghetto, its crime rates soaring due to the apathetic attitudes of municipal organizations toward the neighborhood's residents.[16] Many people regarded the residents of Chinatown as being unsophisticated in their taste. In "For a New Chinatown," the author wrote that "the requirements of an unmarried Chinaman for lodging would be fully met as to space by the space allotted to a passenger in a Pullman sleeper…their wants are modest. The houses must be as densely inhabited, in proportion to the size of the inhabitants, like beehives."[17] The low standards of Chinese people were used as evidence of their animality (note the author's comparison of their houses to "beehives"). While the American may have wanted more out of his lodgings due to his development of taste, the "Chinaman," with his cultural paucity, needed nothing in order to be content. This description of Chinatown houses was not only a commentary on the substandard lifestyles of Chinatown residents, but it also underscored the lack of women in the neighborhood. Transcendentally, in the Victorian era, European and American women were seen as the guardians of the home, responsible for stoking the spiritual hearth to which a man would return after a harsh day in the cut-throat outside world of commerce. Moreover, it was also expected for them to display their family's social status by purchasing ornate furniture for the home or wearing expensive clothing, with men often opting for a more drab, sartorial style that emphasized their belonging to a democratic order of brothers rather than to a

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[16] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 no. 3, (1974): 377.

[17] "For a New Chinatown," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1906, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1906/08/08/101793392.html?pageNumber=6.

specific class, the latter of which was redolent of old, unearned money.[18] Without women, as was the case for most of Chinatown society, men supposedly lost their sensitivity to class and reverted to a more philistine lifestyle. Not only were Chinese men considered barbaric by the wider American public, the press's comparison of Chinatown households to beehives suggested that all Chinese people were disposable or interchangeable. This belief turned lethal when translated into practice, as demonstrated when a fire leveled the houses of a great number of Chinatown residents in 1908. A *New York Times* writer wrote, "...the fire companies which were ordered out soon appeared but the slow actions of the firemen in getting water on the flames seemed to indicate that they were not over anxious to save the buildings. The fire continued spreading until it had consumed 25 buildings, which a short time before had housed 1,000 Chinamen."[19] Although municipal authorities certainly allotted resources to Chinatown, the anti-Chinese sentiments of municipal workers prevented them from saving the Chinatown residents; in short, their personal grudges led to a city-wide tragedy and certainly a political embarrassment for the New York Fire Department. Ultimately, the negligence of NYFD personnel toward saving these Chinatown buildings underscores how expendable Chinese people, and specifically single Chinese men, were regarded to be within American society. Police laxity in Chinatown facilitated the creation of a crime-ridden environment, with Chinatown residents imperiled by unceasing gang violence. One report from 1897 chronicled the explosion of feud tensions in Chinatown, in which "friends of the two [gangsters] poured out of basements, windows, and doors. Chu Woy with an ax chopped Lee Hung Tai on the shoulder and knocked down others. Tock was cut in the leg with a knife. Several arrests were made."[20] This graphic description encapsulates the appalling level of crime that government officials permitted in Chinatown, while also imbuing the neighborhood with a treacherous mystique. The rampant crime, in addition to the sensational coverage of it, contributed to the mythologization of Chinatown in the American consciousness. In the scope of reality, however, the residents of Chinatown saw their home portrayed as a neighborhood devoid of dignity and civic order. The brash publicity relating to Chinatown's violence erased the fact that there were many people, including Chinese merchants and entrepreneurs, who were trying to make a living beyond the reach of the Tong warfare of the feuding gangs.

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[18] Elizabeth Langland, "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel," *PMLA* 107 no. 2 (1992): 291.

[19] "Fire in Chinatown," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1887, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1887/07/26/100924500.html?pageNumber=3.

[20] "Feud in Chinatown," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1897, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1897/09/04/102061426.html?pageNumber=7.

The Symbolic Weight of the Chinese Restaurant

The Chinese restaurant served as the symbolic essence of Chinatown to outsiders. While the American public tried their best to avoid the reaches of Tong warfare, the Chinese restaurant was an innocuous space they could frequent while still providing consumers with the sensibility of Chinatown without danger. Painter Max Weber's (1881-1961) depiction of a Chinese restaurant in his 1915 painting *Chinese Restaurant* aptly captures the American public's conception of the space.

Fig. 2. *Chinese Restaurant* by Max Weber, depicting a Chinatown restaurant of the early twentieth century in the cubist style. [21]

Max Weber's rendition of the Chinese restaurant through cubism depicts a place shot through with chaos, deeply fractured and confused at its core. If one peers at the painting more closely, one can recognize the black and white tiling that many Chinese restaurants boasted, as well as the signature colorful wallpaper. The painting also raises the importance of aesthetics to the Chinese restaurant: although representing a food establishment, Weber chooses to exhibit the restaurant's interior design instead of any dishes. The Chinese subject of this painting also complicates Weber's modernist

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[21] Fig. 2, Max Weber, *Chinese Restaurant*, Oil on canvas, 1915, Whitney Museum of American Art, https://whitney.org/collection/works/3270.

techniques, as his portrayal of a vibrant setting constantly in motion has Sinophobic implications. More than expressing the chaotic experience of everyday life, Weber insinuates that there is a facet of Chinese culture that is incoherent and cacophonous, and, most importantly, irreconcilable with our own reality. Max Weber's portrayal of the Chinese restaurant typifies this inchoate understanding of Chinese culture.

However, the relationship between Chinese restaurants and Chinatown at large was tenuous, as Chinese merchants were simultaneously complicit in the neighborhood's gang activity while also acting as one of its staunchest challengers.[22] Restaurateurs paid membership dues to gangs to ensure protection, thus enabling them to finance their operations. However, this did not prevent Chinatown merchants from opposing the rampant violence that occurred within their neighborhoods during the first thirty years of the 20th century, specifically in the dense Chinese quarters in New York City and San Francisco.[23] Restaurateurs' choice to rely on gang protection rather than the police demonstrates their mistrust of the city to protect them. According to UCLA sociology scholar Ivan Light, the "disorderly businesses attracted rowdies, drunks, thieves, opium addicts, and other undesirables who rendered the area unsuitable for normal family life."[24] A particularly violent subsect of undesirables were Tongs, fraternal societies in Chinatowns that engaged in violent gang disputes beginning in the late 19th century.[25] Many restaurants knew that Tong warfare prevented Chinatown from becoming a respectable neighborhood, rendering it shameful in the eyes of the public and proving a significant obstacle to nurturing a family-friendly environment. The restaurateurs and Tong gangsters represented two sides of Chinatown that struggled to coexist. While Tong gangsters believed that they kept the neighborhood and its residents under their thumb—which surely was the neighborhood's portrayal in the press—the restaurants offered an alternative model for Chinatown that enabled it to be a safe and economically successful neighborhood, while still subject to orientalist rhetoric and bouts of crime.

Chinese restaurateurs worked to enhance the image of their establishments in the eyes of the American public. Some restaurants sought to cleanse the Chinese image in America by disseminating their recipes, thus demystifying the food served in Chinese restaurants and stimulating the American public's interest in it. These establishments were not just limited to those within Chinatown's borders but extended to all Chinese restaurants across America, who undoubtedly also suffered from the economic and social

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[22] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 no. 3, (1974): 382.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

effects of Sinophobia. The owners of Chin Lee, a restaurant establishment in Midtown Manhattan that opened in the 1930s, published a recipe booklet called *A Chinese Art*, which taught Americans how to prepare some of the restaurant's most beloved dishes, including chop suey. In the book's introduction, the restaurateurs wrote:

> As far as they are aware, CHIN LEE and Chin's are the first Chinese restaurants to enlighten the public on the mysteries of the culinary art of China with literature such as represented by 'A Chinese Art.' It is in line with their policy of 'service plus' to their patrons.[26]

Just as New York City's Chinatown was praised by the New York Times for accommodating residents by isolating itself in the larger metropolitan area, Chinatown restaurants sought to build a patronage based on a commitment to stellar service. Their hospitality privileged the white American consumer over the Chinese worker. This favoritism is evident when one considers that chop suey, one of the most famous dishes in Chinese restaurants, was created to appeal to American palettes rather than Chinese ones, with the Chinese finding it unappetizing.[27] Chop suey is a dish that originated from the cuisine of poor Toisan farmers, members of a Han Chinese group that resides in Sze Yup (四邑), the four historical countries in the Jiangmen Prefecture. The farmers called the dish *tsaap slui* (雜碎) — a term that literally translates to "entrails and giblets."[28] Many Chinese people viewed the dish, a random melange of meat and vegetables, as a "bastardized Cantonese stir fry" rather than a dish that accurately reflected what they used to eat in their homeland.[29] In any case, Chin Lee's "A Chinese Art" tried to dismantle the stereotype that Chinese culture was immutably foreign and incomprehensible to its American audience, as many people still associated dishes such as chop suey with exoticism. Counteracting Max Weber's portrayal of a Chinatown restaurant as a center of mayhem and incoherence, part of the "service" that Chin Lee provided included rendering Chinese food and culture as a whole palatable to an American audience, thus restoring their sense of mastery over Chinatown and its products. Despite this increased sense of agency, the Chinese culture that Chin Lee exposed Americans to in "A Chinese Art" was heavily Americanized and catering to non-Chinese consumers in an urban American market.

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[26] A Chinese Art (New York City: Sino-American Service, 1927), 1.

[27] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 no. 3, (1974): 384.

[28] Brianna Wellen, "The Rise and Fall of Chop Suey," The Takeout, accessed April 2023.

[29] Oliver Wang, "From Chop Suey to Haute Cuisine: A Case Study in American 'Ethnic Food,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 20, 2017, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/from-chop-suey-to-haute-cuisine-a-case-study-in-american-ethnic-food/.

However, this does not diminish the concretely beneficial effects that Chin Lee's recipe booklet and others like it had on the Chinese image. In the introduction, Chin Lee stated that they wanted the booklet to demonstrate "how seriously the Chinese chefs take their art and what a great tradition they have. All traveled epicures agree that the Chinese excel in their cookery. A Chinese feast sometimes consists of as many as two or three hundred dishes, each with a flavor and fragrance of its own."[30] American Sinophobia often stressed the similarity of all Chinese people and products of Chinese culture, as evidenced by the "beehive" depiction of Chinatown housing in the aforementioned *New York Times* article; however, Chin Lee's description of Chinese dishes that "each [had] a flavor and fragrance of its own" illustrated the diversity of Chinese culture and its tendency to evade stereotypes. Though the food served in Chinatown restaurants was not necessarily emblematic of traditional cuisine, Chin Lee demonstrated that the dishes nevertheless expressed the innovative nature of Chinese chefs and could thus be considered an important product of Chinese culture in its own right. Chin Lee also argued that "just as the art of painting and sculpting can flourish only when the public takes an interest in it, so the art of distinguished cookery needs an appreciative and particular clientele to be at its best."[31] As stated previously, many people considered the Chinese presence in the United States to be a direct threat to domestic American workers, noting that their swift entry into certain industries (such as the textile and laundry service industries) at significantly lower rates resulted in the displacement of other workers. However, by asserting that Chinese restaurant industries could only flourish with the patronage of the American public, Chin Lee reframed Chinese-American relations in the United States as being cooperative instead of combative. By asserting their need for an "appreciative and particular clientele," Chin Lee suggested that Chinese food was a delicacy that required a worldly and dignified audience, not a guilty pleasure in which only people of lower classes, such as criminals and prostitutes, would partake.

Just as Chinese restaurants catered to an American audience with the creation of dishes such as chop suey, their menus also exhibited the consumer-oriented model of their business. Wah Kee's Restaurant, situated on Doyers Street in New York Chinatown, typified most Chinatown restaurants in the early 20th century in its innovative menu format.

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[30] A Chinese Art (New York City: Sino-American Service, 1927), 1.
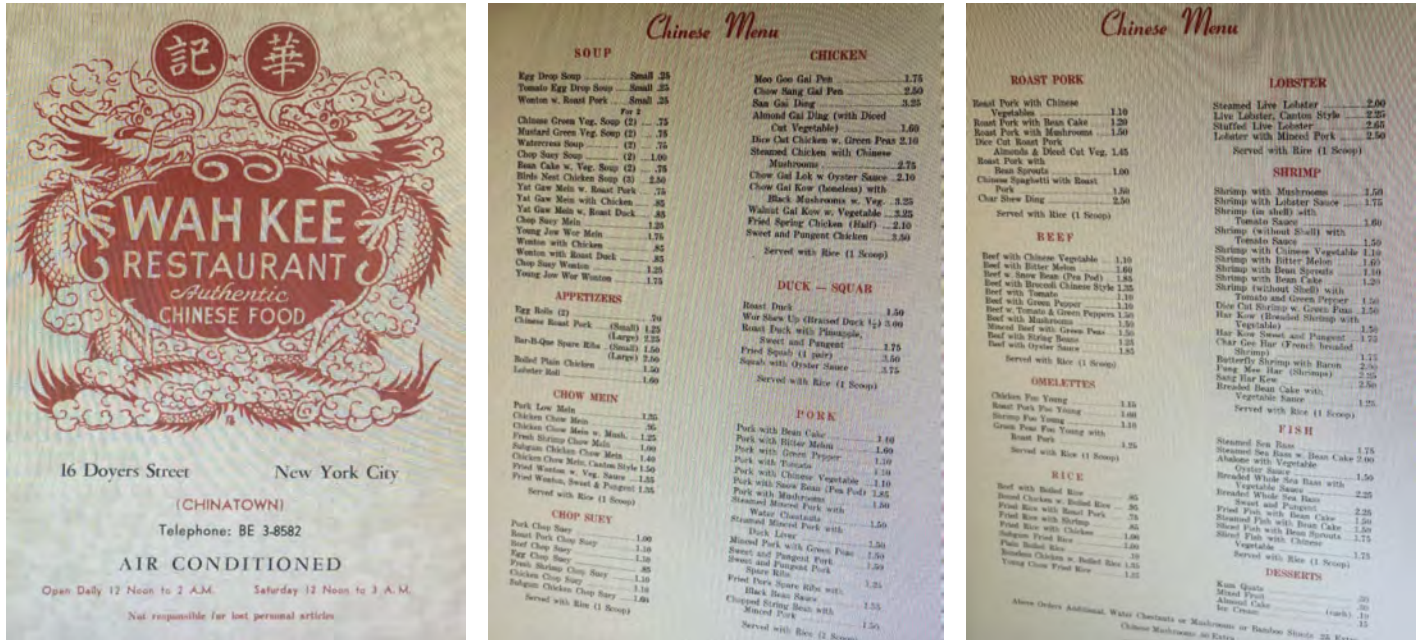[31] Ibid.

Fig. 3. Menu of Wah Kee Restaurant during the 1900s. Menu Collection of the Museum of Chinese in America. [32]

While it had the same subsections as many traditional menus, such as Soup and Appetizers, the rest of their menu offerings were divided in a manner tailored perfectly to the convenience of the American consumer. Not only did it offer chow mein and chop suey, two of the most popular Chinese dishes in the U.S. at the time, but it also offered every iteration of the dishes that a consumer could want. Moreover, the menu categorized dishes based on the meat used for the easiest consumer experience. Through this format, the classic menu of the Chinese restaurant lowered the barrier of entry for the American diner, who needed only to know what type of meat they wanted to eat for them to choose a dish on the menu.

Besides catering to an American audience, Chinese restaurants harnessed Orientalist sentiment in New York to attract customers. Part of the illusion cultivated by the owners of Chinese restaurants was that their establishments were bastions of ancient Chinese culture, regardless of the extent to which they altered their dishes to suit American tastes. Consider the cover art for *A Chinese Art*:

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[32] Fig. 3, Wang Kee Restaurant, New York, Menu, Web, accessed April 2023.

Fig. 4. Cover Art of Chin's Menu, 1900s. Menu Collection of the Museum of Chinese in America. [33]

Although the dishes featured in the book, such as chop suey, had been invented in recent decades to satiate American palettes, the illustration on the front, which depicts a group of women feasting in a pavilion from a traditional woodblock print, provides the illusion that these dishes are emblematic of ancient Chinese flavors and cooking techniques. The font used for the title also evokes an Oriental theme, its "chop style typeface" reminiscent of bamboo as well as the strokes of Chinese characters. Such stylistic details convince the consumer that the food in Chinese restaurants reifies the "aura" of ancient China (as used in the Walter Benjamin sense) regardless of whether it delivers on that promise or not. Another example is the cover art for La Choy Cookbook, published in 1957.

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[33] Fig. 4, *A Chinese Art* (New York City: Sino-American Service, 1927), 1.

Fig. 5. Cover Art of La Choy's Cookbook, 1900s. Menu Collection of the Museum of Chinese in America. [34]

Although La Choy Cookbook also aims to teach Americans how to recreate Chinese recipes in their own kitchens, it still employs the stereotyped mystique of Chinese culture in order to sell its product. Moreover, the cookbook also availed itself of the "Chinaman" caricature promulgated in racist Sinophobic cartoons. While these words, choices, and images were, of course, not used for Sinophobic purposes, the restaurateurs' manipulation of preexistent Chinese stereotypes in the American consciousness enabled them to reclaim orientalist stereotypes to inspire interest in their "exotic" products.

Beyond their reclamation of Sinophobic stereotypes, Chinese restaurants also sought to transform the image of Chinatown from being a contaminated, crime-ridden district into that of a neighborhood that was clean, orderly, and prosperous. One of the restaurants that constructed itself in the aspirational image of Chinatown was Port Arthur Restaurant, a Mott Street locale that was once known as the "world's best known Chinese restaurant."[35] In a copy of its menu, the owner wrote:

> In compliance with the public's long desire for a refined Chinese Restaurant, our management has taken the greatest of care, regardless of expense, to create the finest Chinese Cafe in America...we sent our special envoy to Canton to order and superintend the manufacturing of our Teak wood and pearl inlaid furniture and

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[34] Fig. 5, *La Choy Cookbook* (1950s).

[35] *Port Arthur Restaurant, 7-9 Mott Street, New York City. World's best know Chinese restaurant, celebrated for its food,* 1900-1945, Postcard, New York Public Library, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/7a8b7780-b3ba-0132-3b6a-58d385a7b928.

pure gold carving works. There is no other eating house in the United States possessing such work and furniture, as we stated. Your visit and inspection are always welcome.[36]

For Port Arthur Restaurant, a refined Chinese establishment was defined not only by the food that it served, but also its furniture and interior design. Max Weber's *Chinese Restaurant* also raises the importance of aesthetics to the Chinese restaurant: although representing a food establishment, Weber chooses to exhibit the restaurant's tiled floors and colorful wallpaper instead of any dishes. Port Arthur's obsession with opulence may indicate the deep embarrassment about their lower-class neighborhood that haunted the residents of Chinatown, as the disinvestment in their neighborhood came hand in hand with rampant crime, prostitution, and gang violence. The portrayal of opulence also indicates a disavowal of the hegemony of Tong gangsters, as well as an assertion of Chinese promise in the United States. Moreover, it distanced the Chinese from their stereotype as a people of modest wants and restored their dignity by associating them with lavish decor and abundance. Port Arthur's encouragement of "inspection" demonstrates their confidence in the cleanliness of their establishment while responding to Americans' perennial fear concerning the sanitary condition of Chinese restaurant food.[37]
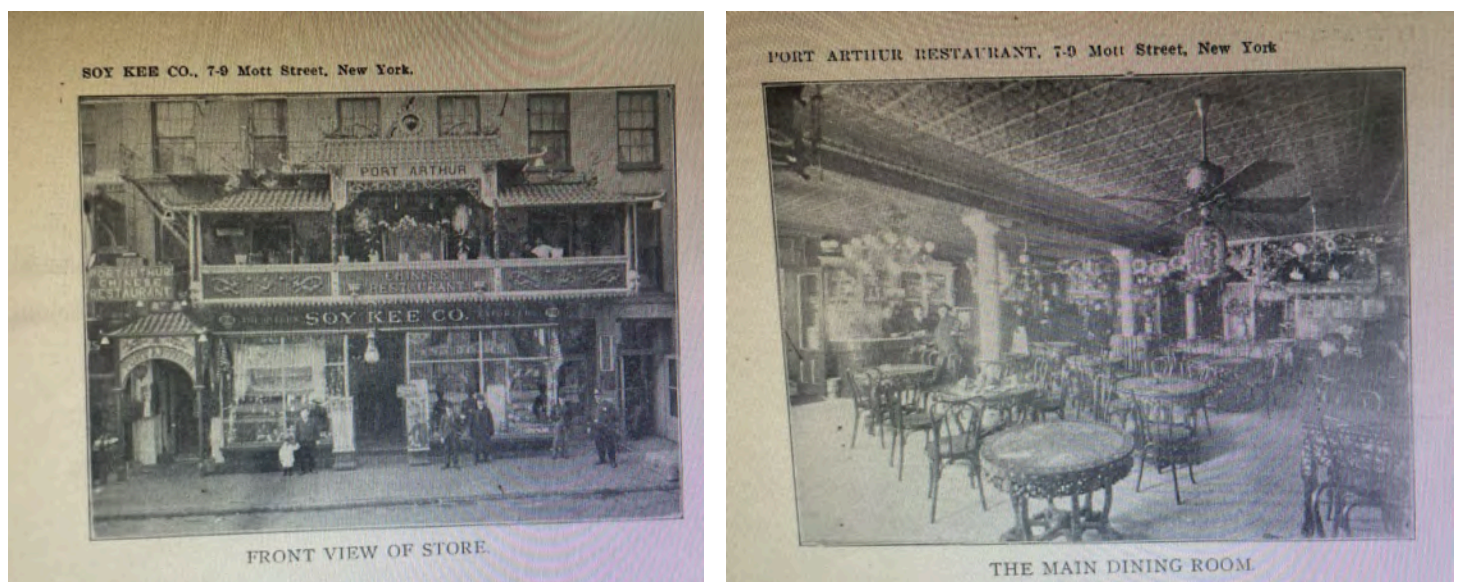
Fig. 6. Images Displayed in Port Arthur's Menu, 1900s. Menu Collection of the Museum of Chinese in America. [38]

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[36] Port Arthur Restaurant, New York, Menu, Web, accessed April 2023.
[37] Steuart M. Emery, "Chinatown is Chinatown Still," *The New York Times*, September 7, 1924, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1924/09/07/98807121.html?pageNumber=128.
[38] Port Arthur Restaurant, New York, Pictures, Web, accessed April 2023.

The front view of Port Arthur Restaurant boasted the classic roof of a pagoda building, causing it to stand out among the other, Western-style buildings. This stylistic architectural feature was once again an instance of self-orientalization, associating Port Arthur's food with the mysterious and grandiose history of China. The inside of Port Arthur Restaurant was as ornate as they claimed in their booklet, intimating to American consumers that they were entering a place of high culture. Furnishing their restaurant with ostentatious furniture was essential for Chinese restaurants to dispel their association with crime and destitution, which was the reputation of the Chinatown neighborhood at large. Knowing that Americans were far from accepting Chinese food as part of the cultural mainstream, Chinatown restaurateurs harnessed the American desire for the exotic in order to sell their products.

The American Reaction to the Rehabilitation of Chinatown

Chinese restaurateurs' attempt to self-orientalize at the turn of the 20th century was coeval with the public's desire to find the "real Chinatown" submerged underneath the neighborhood's new, sanitized presentation. The fumigation of Chinatown was not only the product of efforts by the neighborhood's mercantile class, but also the direct result of intrusive laws passed by municipal governments. The San Francisco mayor enacted a law which stated:

> "The residents of Chinatown are requested to keep their places as clean as possible, and the order is given that no garbage or dirt is to be dumped into the street. Under the stimulus of this notice, Chinatown is assuming a cleaner appearance than it has for many weeks, and the various stores and places of interest are being put in order for an inspection by the Sir Knights."[39]

This law, particularly in its power over residents' domestic spaces, violated the privacy of Chinatown residents and turned their homes into places that needed to be managed. While the net positive effect on the neighborhood's cleanliness was undeniable, as the neighborhood soon came to be seen, according to one *New York Times* article, as a "quiet, orderly, district— thoroughly Americanized,"[40] this did not stop people from insisting that no matter the quality of the Chinatown district, the Chinese were incapable of truly assimilating to American culture. According to a *New York Times* article ironically titled "Chinatown's New Americans," the writer argued that,

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[39] "Cleaning Chinatown," *The New York Times*, August 1883, https://www.nytimes.com/1883/08/22/archives/cleaning-chinatown.html.
[40] Ibid.

Chinatown's men have become Americans as far as clothes can make them, but their past crops up at many points to make the transformation incomplete. For all their decorum, which seems to make them unobstructive at least as far as their intentions can dictate, and for all the similarity of their costumes, to hundreds of New Yorkers they still play a part in keeping the city cosmopolitan.[41]

Assimilation in the U.S. became a double-edged sword for the Chinese. Although municipal governments punished the Chinese for not conforming to American society through disinvestment in Chinatown neighborhoods, the public criticized their attempts at conformity for being imitations that could not overcome their inherent deviation from the native-born American citizen. The perceived difference of Chinese people was no longer limited to cultural disparities, but instead pathologized as an inborn, insurmountable incongruity between the two groups. The author's insistence on the Chinese people's inability to assimilate into American culture reveals the need to exoticize them in the American consciousness. The author continues, stating that

...[The Chinese] are at work trying to do as the New Yorkers do. And this is where the past plays them false. They buy the same kind of hat that the young men from Mulberry Street buy, but the habit of wearing hats in the exact manner affected by the neighborhood hero is missing; to them the angle tilt that means everything to the others, means nothing; the hat is worn as the Cousin Willie of burlesque shows wears his.[42]

As it became possible to gain cultural capital through sartorial means, Americans tried to safeguard their status by creating increasingly arbitrary rules of status symbolism that the Chinese struggled to imitate. According to McCarthy, their "past" betrays them because they are not native-born Americans, making American culture entirely impossible to attain.[43] The white American public retained power by investing belief in the idea of a coherent American-born culture, since they believed they were being pushed out by immigrants in their own economic sphere. The unchangeable "past" of immigrants was the trump card of native-born Americans; the futility of immigrant assimilation created a permanent excuse for their surveillance and subjugation. Indeed,

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[41] "Chinatown's New Americans," *The New York Times*, February 23, 1930, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1930/02/23/96057840.html?pageNumber=89.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Miles McCarthy, "The Trip to Chinatown," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1922, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1922/10/08/107071877.html?pageNumber=101.

the burlesque of Chinese assimilation only served to highlight their exclusion from, rather than facilitate their inclusion into, American culture.

The Relationship between Tourism and Crime in Chinatown

Tourism in Chinatown capitalized on its exotic image, using its lurid history of crime to attract people to the neighborhood. Since its inception, tourism in Chinatown has been the subject of moral scrutiny. According to the *New York Times* article by Miles McCarthy:

> Our New York Chinatown, indicated by the confines of the Pell, Doyers, and other noisome byways, is the nearest the small-purpose individual will ever get to China, so he listens to the silver-toned barker, buys his seat...and returns full of wisdom. He is wise enough to never go again. The land of the joss has always held a 'pull'.... Even Chinese lanterns should be no inducement for a clean-souled white man to peer behind doors meant to conceal the ravages of cocaine and sizzling opium.[44]

For Miles McCarthy, a tour of Chinatown was as much a moral lesson for tourists as it was a source of entertainment. While tourists might enjoy the sights, they also learned to regard Chinatown as a place inhospitable to permanent residency. The visit to Chinatown was also a test of moral strength for the American. Despite the "pull" that Chinatown has, similar to that of the temptresses that roamed the neighborhood's streets, the American risked losing the purity of their soul by venturing too deeply into the district. Of course, part of the thrill of going to Chinatown was "[obtaining] a firsthand glimpse of Oriental depravity." [45] While Tong gangsters were ambivalent to the increase in tourism, many Chinatown restaurateurs welcomed the increase in outside attention, as "rubbernecking whites [represented] potential customers for Chinese restaurants."[46] Thus, the mythology of Chinatown violence turned into a prosperous commercial venture, and was another instance of the Chinese co-opting their stereotypes. Ivan Light wrote that:

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[44] Miles McCarthy, "The Trip to Chinatown," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1922, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1922/10/08/107071877.html?pageNumber=101.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 43 no. 3, (1974): 380.

Sometimes the guides actually hired Chinese to put on shows for their customers. A favorite show was a knife-wielding scuffle between 'opium-crazed' Chinese in dispute over a slave girl. At other times, the guides explained that rumors of a tong war and police raids had caused a temporary suspension of the usual routine of depravity. In either case, the occupation of the guides tended to keep alive unflattering stereotypes of Chinese which residents and merchants alike had cause to deplore.[47]

These stories, which underscore the degree of Sinophobia in the United States at the time, perhaps stress the severity of Chinese immiseration in New York that they would perform jobs that so demeaned their race. Directly or not, Chinese restaurateurs and merchants derived much of their original customer base from people who bought into these Sinophobic trends and engaged with Chinese culture as an exotic object, as will be examined in the final section of this essay.

Emery's "Chinatown is Chinatown Still" and The Culinary Practice of Slumming

In particular, American tourists practiced slumming as a means of uncovering the "real Chinatown," which many felt had been concealed by the municipal forces' sanitization of these neighborhoods. In Stuart M. Emery's *New York Times* article, he contemplated the realism of Chinatown tourism and wondered:

> And what is it like today? Do the tourists who in the hundreds go flocking down its streets at night see anything of the real Chinatown? Has it changed to a quiet, orderly, district—thoroughly Americanized, and at last seeking not the opium pipe or the private revenge of enmity, but the solid dollar of trade?...we [did not] have to wait long before there came evidence that in the 'submerged tenth,' they are still submerged. Raddled of face, lurching blindly, a ragged figure came out of nowhere and staggered alongside the party. A series of broken mutterings were emerging from his lips. 'He shot my brother—he shot my brother—he shot—'...it appears that the New York's night is the Chinatown's day—all night long through the streets the Orientals wander, gathering on corners and conducting their business in the stores long after the rest of the city has gone to bed.[48]

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Steuart M. Emery, "Chinatown is Chinatown Still," The New York Times, September 7, 1924, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1924/09/07/98807121.html?pageNumber=128.

Again, Emery portrays the orderly image of Chinatown as a mirage concealing the real, gritty one that emerges when the American public isn't watching. Ironically, the real Chinatown that Emery illustrates for the reader is more theatrical than its "false" counterpart. This operatic depiction of the neighborhood discloses Emery's, and by extension the American readership's, lingering fears about Chinatown's threat despite the refurbished appearance of the neighborhood. Moreover, it indulges the Sinophobic sentiments of the American public; by regarding the Chinese as truly irredeemable, Emery and his companions can rest assured of native-born Americans' moral superiority.

Emery posits the Chinese restaurant as an all-encompassing metaphor for the purported masked odiousness of the Chinese people. In the article, Emery's guide draws a distinction between the clean, sanitized restaurants, which tourists frequented, and the begrimed eateries that represented the "real Chinatown" devoid of pretense and public pandering. Emery wrote:

> A short distance down the street blazed the lights of a great restaurant sign. 'If you go there,' said our guide, 'you'll be doing what nine out of ten visitors who come down here do. You'll get clean service, clean table-cloths and the same kind of food you'd get in any Broadway chop-suey palace. You'll see almost nobody but tourists. I'll take you to a place that'll be dirty all right, but will serve real Chinese food as good as they make it.' We were around the corner in another moment, climbing flight after flight of stairs, through an atmosphere that seemed a combination of all the less choice odors in the world. There came from behind the door a crash and rattle of a kitchen in full blast—we emerged into a small, close, top-floor room with mirrors on its walls. At tables here and there clustered groups of men and women whose faces were not such as to inspire confidence on a dark night.[49]

Emery's guide distinguishes "real Chinese food" from chop-suey, acknowledging that the Chinatown that existed after the turn of the 20th century came out of the desires of the American public. Finding "real Chinese food" did not just satiate American desires for the exotic and authentic but also validated their preexistent Sinophobic stereotypes. The restaurant that Emery and his friends encounter is similar to the restaurant depicted in Max Weber's *Chinese Restaurant* painting, the "crash and rattle" reminiscent of the fractured, busy setting that Weber expresses. That the repugnant qualities of the Chinese restaurant corroborated the establishment's authenticity reinforces the notion that

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[49] Steuart M. Emery, "Chinatown is Chinatown Still," The New York Times, September 7, 1924, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1924/09/07/98807121.html?pageNumber=128.

Emery, and the American public by extension, was reluctant to let go of its perception of the Chinese as dirty people who produced low-quality products. Moreover, the American public wanted to ignore that it was municipal policies which ghettoized Chinatown, rather than it being a self-imposed condition. Chinese restaurants retaining vestiges of Chinatown's criminal past was not just a metaphorical statement, but one often meant literally by its proponents. Emery's story continued as the guide and group members entered the restaurant and sat at one of the tables:

> 'That bird,' remarked our guide as the sing-song stopped and the yellow newsboy went on his way, 'used to be a gun-toter for one of the killers down here during the tong war. The killer would go out and mark down his man and then his little mule—that what's we call a Chink—would pop up and slip him a gun just before he wanted to shoot...'[50]

Even the waiter, a reformed gun-toter, retained memories of a bleak, violent Chinatown he carried with him. The proximity of Chinese tourists to the dangerous history of Chinatown was a source of thrill, as evidenced by the detailed description that could have been pulled from the scene of a crime film. The neighborhood's mystique springs out of the idea that a cold-blooded killer hides behind the obsequious face of a waiter, both an alluring and untrustworthy reality that stimulated American sensibilities. The exhilaration of slumming was the exhilaration of traveling through Chinatown itself.[51]

As the article progresses, Emery and his tour group finally receive their food. Emery recounted, "By now the courses were arriving and we ate. Exactly what we ate is a question. The most popular guess appears to be chicken, with bamboo shoots a close second. But whatever it was, it was good."[52] Although Emery finds the meal delicious, the incomprehensibility of the food is crucially preserved. The inscrutability of the Chinese is the final, enduring Sinophobic stereotype, lasting through Chinatown's rehabilitation and commercialization. Keeping its permanent reputation as being "other," Chinese food and culture never truly assimilates into the American mainstream.[53]

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Li Li, "Cultural and Intercultural Functions of Chinese Restaurants in the Mountain West: 'An Insider's Perspective,'" *Western Folklore* 61, no. 3/4, 2002, pp. 343. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1500426.

[52] Steuart M. Emery, "Chinatown is Chinatown Still," The New York Times, September 7, 1924, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1924/09/07/98807121.html?pageNumber=128.

[53] Ibid.

Conclusion

The treatment and perception of the Chinese restaurant in American culture has acted as an indicator for changing perceptions of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. Chinatown restaurateurs exploited their exoticized status in American culture, associating their food with ancient Chinese culinary tradition despite its many accommodations to an American consumer base. However, more than simply participating in self-orientalization, Chinese business owners worked to turn their district from a crime-ridden neighborhood into one that was economically prosperous and inviting to outsiders. Chinese restaurateurs had a complex relationship with Chinese stereotypes in the United States, their manipulation of Sinophobic stereotypes complicated by their desire, and perhaps inability, to escape them.

This paper excludes the trajectory of the category "Asian-American" in the United States, which emerged in the middle of the 20th century and has risen in national importance ever since. Further research could examine other industries in which Asian business owners or companies similarly co-opt exotic stereotypes to promote their own products, a subject explored in Sheridan Passo's books *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies*, *Geisha Girls* and *Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient*. Another work relevant to this question, Matt Alt's *Pure Invention: How Japan Made the Modern World*, chronicles Japan's rise to cultural supremacy from the post-war period to the early aughts. However, we need not merely turn to books to find evidence of this shift toward Asian fetishization in our modern zeitgeist: the rise of anime and J-fashion, and more recently K-Pop, K-dramas, and Korean beauty products, demonstrates that China is no longer the sole object of the American public's craving for the exotic. Nor is this a fact to be mourned: while tactics of self-orientalism may be deemed tragic when explicitly cast in the public eye, Asian people remain in control of their own global image, capable of monetizing the stereotypes that persist against them. The Chinatown restaurant is a historical microcosm of Asian self-determination in global culture, demonstrating how a taste for the exotic can become a tool of the minority.

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IDEOLOGY AND THE RED ARMY: MARXISM-LENINISM, THE ARMY, AND THE STATE DURING THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

Jackson Karas

Abstract

In this paper I aim to elucidate the connection between ideology and military doctrine through the example of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. In particular, the attitudes of Lenin and Trotsky toward the Red Army and warfare, drawn from primary sources, are analyzed in conjunction with their broader theories of global revolution. The consolidation of revolutionary militias formed in 1917 into what would eventually become the Red Army is itself indicative of the important distinction between the historical moment of revolution, and the notion of revolution as an enduring political project. Most critically, the Red Army did not simply act as a frontline military formation, but also as the instrument through which an ideal Leninist society would be formed. The method the Red Army would use was a campaign of selective terror, transforming arbitrary violence into Soviet state power. Importantly, this practice of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War would have implications beyond 1917, and impact future Soviet statecraft as the revolution crystallized into centralized statism.

Carl von Clausewitz's famous thesis was that war is merely politics conducted by separate means.[1] This understanding of war and military affairs brings the question of the role of war and the armies which fight them to center stage relative to political ideology.[2] The Red Army, by its very name, was an embodiment of Clausewitz's principle as it was an ideological army. Vladimir Lenin, head of the Bolshevik party and thus the head of overall strategy of the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, engaged with Clausewitz's writings and addressed this very idea in his notes to *On War*.[3] In the formation of the Red Army, the extent of its political nature—such as the Bolshevik conception of class, the state, and revolution—became the topic of significant controversy among the Bolsheviks in the aftermath of the October Revolution. While certain components of the Army were markedly ideological and deeply intertwined with politics, it was not always clear what exactly these "politics," or prevailing ideologies, really were. In many respects, the debates regarding the composition of the Red Army and its system of war mirrored larger debates among the revolutionary left about the role of the state and the tactics of revolution. For the Bolsheviks in particular, the Red Army paralleled the state by providing the revolution with the necessary instrument to realize the socially transformative aims of Marxism-Leninism. Forged in the Russian Civil War, the Red Army acted as the embodiment of the Soviet state and simultaneously as its social scalpel.

In this paper, I will analyze the influence of Marxism-Leninism on the development of the Red Army, its organization, and military doctrine. Specifically, I will consider Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky's ideological conceptions of how war related to the state and class struggle, and how this was reflected within the Red Army. Lenin, as the intellectual and political leader of the Bolshevik party, is representative of the "party line" of Bolshevism. In political writings and speeches at party congresses, Lenin outlined his vision for the Red Army and how the civil war would be used as a political tool.[4] Additionally, Trotsky acted as Lenin's chief of the army, and thus sought to integrate the broader political vision of the Bolshevik party into the organization and action of the

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[1] Carl Von Clausewitz, "On the Nature of War," in *On War*, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 88. Clausewitz was a Prussian military theorist.

[2] This is, of course, not how Clausewitz himself would have understood his theory, as the political context in which he wrote was drastically different to that of early twentieth century Russia. Politics, for Clausewitz, related more to foreign policy aims of different states. However, as the realm of "politics" expanded overtime, its relationship to military affairs would as well.

[3] V.I. Lenin, "Notebook of Excerpts and Remarks on Carl von Clausewitz, *On War and the Conduct of War*," in V.V. Adoratskii, V.M. Molotov, M.A Savel'ev, eds., Leninskii sbornik (Lenin Miscellany), (2nd ed., Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), XII, 389-452. Translated and edited by Donald E. Davis and Walter 8.o. Kohn.

[4] Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914-1921* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 153-172.

Soviet armed forces. Trotsky illustrated his vision for the Army through orders to the front, and wrote longer texts in debates with political opponents among the revolutionary left over questions of army structure, doctrine, and operations.[5] Taken together, Trotsky and Lenin illustrate how the apex of the Bolshevik party understood the Civil War and the role of the Red Army within it. It is my contention that while the military command of the Red Army represented a significant continuity with imperial Russia, the Marxist-Leninist understanding of class, the state, and revolution significantly influenced the purpose and structure of the armed forces under the Bolshevik regime. This had implications beyond the military sphere for the Bolshevik revolutionary project and impacted the nature of Soviet state power itself.

Historiography

There is a breadth of historical research on the Russian Revolution and the question of an ideological army. However, available investigations and materials fall short of putting forward a strong thesis as to the specific ideological components of the Red Army in tandem with their future implications. Primarily, works by historians Peter Holquist, Laura Engelstein, Rex Wade, Amir Weiner, and Sheila Fitzpatrick offer differing perspectives on the significance of certain Red Army practices in shaping the Russian Civil War. I seek to build on these authors by uncovering the ideological underpinnings of the organization of the Red Army and the Army's fundamental purpose. Engelstein and Fitzpatrick, in taking a broader view of the Russian revolution, do not focus explicitly on the details of military debates among the revolutionary left. Additionally, Holquist, Wade, and Weiner, although they appreciate the importance of military considerations in forming the character of Soviet statecraft, are hesitant to look at Marxism-Leninism as a direct antecedent of this occurrence. I seek to combine these two approaches and focus on specific ideological tenets of Marxism-Leninism, which found direct corollaries to the Red Army. Finally, I reintegrate this understanding into the view exhibited by Holquist and Weiner that the practices of the Red Army in the Russian Civil War laid the groundwork for future Soviet statecraft under Josef Stalin.[6]

This paper expands upon certain conclusions drawn by Holquist in his work *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*. In particular, the major conclusion of Holquists' work was that the arbitrary violence of the Red Army in

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[5] Leon Trotsky, "Introduction," *How the Revolution Armed: The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky*, translated by Brian Pearce, vol. 1 (London: New Park Publications, 1981), 1-10.

[6] During the Russian Civil War, Stalin was a prominent member of the Bolshevik party and held military commands, most notably in Tsaritsyn, for most of the war. He later rose to Premier of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death.

rear areas of the front was an antecedent to Stalin's approach to the food issue in the 1930s. Holquist places emphasis on a "shared heritage" of popular mobilization practices that stemmed from Russia's total war experience in 1914. However, in doing so, Holquist makes the question of the Russian Civil War, and the practices that stemmed from it, independent of ideology. The fundamental thesis of Holquist's work regarding specific practices surrounding food supply control, political violence, and population surveillance lies in the background of the general structure of my own work. My goal is not to contradict Holquist but rather to add a more explicitly ideological analysis to his understanding of the Red Army during the Civil War. Specifically, I draw upon the writings of Lenin and Trotsky in order to provide the missing ideological piece in how Holquist represents the Russian Civil War.

In addition to Holquist, I draw on Engelstein's analysis of the early events of the revolution from a military perspective, particularly in relation to the Red Guards and their eventual fate. Engelstein draws a general sketch of the development from party militia into state army, which culminated in the Red Army as the "embryonic" form of the new society.[7] Additionally, Engelstein's discussion of the Red Terror as arbitrary political violence to substitute formal political procedure works well with Holquist's thesis in drawing the connection to the future trajectory of Soviet statecraft.[8] However, Engelstein's weakness is in representing Lenin and the Bolsheviks as married to the practical. In Engelstein's work, Trotsky, Lenin, and other party leaders appear as Machiavellian nihilists, a view that mischaracterizes the content of their writings. I aim to improve Engelstein's characterization of the relationship between war and Bolshevism by situating the concept of the Red Army in a broader stream of a Marxist-Leninist understanding of war. Additionally, it is important to establish that the development of the Red Army was not a foregone conclusion, as significant alternatives arose, which the revolutionary left seriously considered. The Red Terror was a way to delineate enemies external to the revolution and internal to it as well.

Although not consulted in the writing of my paper, there are several other works that address the Red Army in a similar manner. In particular, Wade's work *The Russian Revolution, 1917* largely frames the question as a transition from Soviet power to Bolshevik power. However, Wade largely situated this transition as occurring before the end of the Russian Civil War in the political contests between Bolsheviks and more moderate politicians, a thesis which I seek to complicate by emphasizing the role of the

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[7] Engelstein, *Russian in Flames*, 319.
[8] Engelstein, *Russian in Flames*, 192-213. The Red Terror refers to the application of violence against class enemies of the revolution and political enemies of the Bolshevik party.

conflict in realizing this shift. Moreover, I aim to highlight the distinction between the revolutionary moment and revolution as an enduring political project. The former encapsulates the popular energies that produce the momentary violence resulting in the overthrow of the existing regime. The latter is the attempt to organize these popular energies into a discrete political aim. The Red Army served as the primary agent in this transition of revolutionary periods and thus situated the Civil War front and center in the consolidation of Bolshevik power.

In addition to Wade, Weiner provides a perspective that connects the subject of this paper more concretely to the experience of the Soviet Union in the middle of the twentieth century, particularly in the Second World War, as Weiner aims to situate the Soviet perspective of WWII into a broader narrative of eternal revolution. Weiner claims that the social transformation implemented through violent, arbitrary means in 1917-1921 was repeated throughout the course of 1941-1945, and likewise would impact the long peace which succeeded it. Weiner's work illustrates the connection between the political violence of the Russian Civil War and later instances of political violence in a more crystallized Soviet state. As a result, the Marxist-Leninist impulse to use political violence as a social scalpel and shape a new political community through arbitrary violence is not simply a particular occurrence resulting from 1917 but is critical to the history of Marxism-Leninism in the twentieth century as a whole.

Finally, another major work on the broader subject of the revolution is Fitzpatrick's *The Russian Revolution.* In this text, Fitzpatrick engages with major questions of characterizing the Russian Revolution in the context of modernization, class conflict, and political terror. In dealing with the third, she makes overtures towards an ideological antecedent to the political violence of 1917 as inherent in the Marxist-Leninist project. However, in contrast to Holquist, Fitzpatrick aims to emphasize class distinctions and party loyalties. She offers a very different view of the terror, which is closer to how Engelstein conceives of it, emphasizing its role in the radicalization of the civil war and the Manichean distinction made between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary.

I aim to make a contribution to this varied historiography through my analysis of the ideological antecedents of the terror and how these played out in the construction of the Red Army. Whereas other authors focus on pressures emanating from the continuum of violence found in the First World War, the Civil War, and the shaping of the Soviet state, I will illustrate how the implementation of terror through the Red Army was a product of pre-war ideological considerations and reflected long-standing debates among the revolutionary left. The leaders of 1917 had reflected on the prospect of civil war and

applied their ideological categorizations and concepts in such a way that is worthy of close analysis. In particular, the writings of Lenin and Trotsky prior to and during the Russian Civil War illustrate how a centralized army and the assimilation of arbitrary violence into this broad structure was the execution of a premeditated ideological conviction. I will contribute to the historiography by focusing on how a Marxist-Leninist understanding of revolutionary war prior to and during 1917 shaped the conflict of the Russian Civil War and the resulting Soviet state.

Marxism-Leninism and War: Theory and Practice

To understand the relationship between the Red Army and Marxism-Leninism, it is essential to establish Lenin's general view of war. Lenin's notion of war operated within a broader system of class analysis, as he asserted that war was inseparable from the class system that engendered it. Lenin stated in his work *War and Revolution,* "From the point of view of Marxism, that is, of modern scientific socialism, the main issue in any discussion by socialists on how to assess the war and what attitude to adopt towards it is this: what is the war being waged for, and what classes staged and directed it."[9] Lenin applied this framework of analysis to understanding the Great War of 1914. In Lenin's view, the parties of the Second International had made a grave error in supporting their respective national governments at the outbreak of the war.[10] This divide within the party culminated in the dissolution of the Second International, providing an opportunity for Lenin to postulate his own position on the war issue. Fundamentally, Lenin argued that socialism's only course was to capitalize on The Great War by transforming it into a class civil war designed to force a decisive battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: "It is our duty to help the masses become conscious of these [revolutionary] moods, deepen them and give them shape. This task finds correct expression in the slogan: convert the imperialist war into a civil war."[11] It was in this hypothetical civil war that Lenin placed his hopes for world revolution. Even before the outbreak of the civil war, Lenin understood the starting point of the revolution as violent civil strife, which would then be used to implement Bolshevik power. The eventual Russian Civil War proved to be a violent destruction of the bourgeois social class and implemented

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[9] Lenin, "War and Revolution." *Collected Works*, translated by Bernard Isaacs, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 401.

[10] Lenin, "Socialism and War." *Collected Works*, translated by Julius Katzer, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 310. The Second International was a broadly socialist organization which sought to organize left-wing political movements across national boundaries. The Second International dissolved as a result of tensions regarding how to address the First World War.

[11] Ibid., 313.

proletariat power through explicitly violent means.[12] The events that transpired in Russia from 1917-1921 realized Lenin's vision. The outbreak of civil war, however, left an open-ended question for socialism as to the methods used to fight it.

Engelstein describes the October Revolution of the Bolshevik party as, fundamentally, "a military operation."[13] Indeed, it was on behalf of the "Military Revolutionary Committee" that Trotsky proclaimed the death of the constituent assembly as a result of the uprising.[14] However, as military operations go, it was a rather bloodless and nonviolent one.[15] One of the decisive factors of the Bolsheviks' success was the neutrality of the Imperial army at large during the insurrection.[16] This allowed sympathetic garrison detachments in Petrograd and the revolutionary Red Guards to topple the Provisional Government. The military units that stormed the Winter Palace on October 25, 1917) looked very different from the Red Army which later replaced them.[17] The Red Guards were an amalgamation of *ad hoc* formations consisting of a range of social classes and political interests, although the Bolsheviks exhibited the majority of control over their movement and composition.[18] Despite their role as the decisive actors in the October rising, the Red Guards were disbanded just eight months after the events of October 25th, as the civil war began to crystallize into a conventional armed conflict. As Engelstein describes, "The Red Guards were abolished definitively… as part of the general move toward suppressing self-activated formations of all kinds and consolidating top-down control."[19] While former Red Guardsmen permeated into the Red Army, the revolutionary character which they embodied was quickly neutralized by the Bolsheviks. The Red Army which would replace them, while still "revolutionary" in some sense, would eventually reflect the transition from the revolutionary moment to an enduring political project. In other words, the Red Army became wrapped up in the attempt by the Bolsheviks to corral a general popular energy towards their own political aim: the centralization of Soviet power through the class leadership of the urban proletariat and the shaping of the peasantry into a revolutionary class. These aspects of the army, however, were not a foregone conclusion; they were forged amidst the

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[12] Lenin, "The Military Program of the Revolution." *Collected Works*, translated by M.S. Levin, vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 79.

[13] Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 183.

[14] Ibid., 184.

[15] Ibid., 185-190.

[16] Ibid., 193.

[17] November 7 in the New Style calendar.

[18] John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: a Military Political History, 1918-1941* (Independence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), 8-9, 19.

[19] Engelstein, *Russia in Flames,* 230.

tribulations of civil war and the changing relationship between war, politics, society, and the state.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks ascended to power in the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917. Almost immediately, counterrevolutionary forces, both domestic and international, worked toward their defeat.[20] Additionally, the war against the Central Powers had not yet formally ceased, and Germany continued to make inroads into Ukraine and Latvia, threatening the Bolshevik's hold on power.[21] Despite the rapidly deteriorating military situation, Lenin's first official policy regarding the vestiges of the Imperial armed forces prioritized disarmament. The initial Bolshevik program towards the army was to spread propaganda in order to ensure its internal dissolution.[22] This manifested itself in encouraging an increased democratization of the Imperial army and an opening of the soldier's political consciousness.[23] The Bolsheviks would advocate for elected command and soldier's autonomy within the Imperial army, and sought to gain political sympathy among the workers and peasants through agitation.[24] This strategy relates to Lenin's overall view of the Great War as providing an opportunity for socialism to overthrow the existing order and even dovetails with Friedrich Engels' conception of how a revolution should deal with a standing army.[25] As Engels noted, "…demoralization (from the bourgeois standpoint) must spread precisely in the ranks of the army; under the conditions of modern technology, the revolution must begin in the army."[26] Whereas Engels would understand the dissolution of a standing army as occurring naturally, Lenin and the Bolsheviks created an active program to push the army to the point of ineffectiveness.[27] By neutralizing the army through increased democratization, the Bolsheviks could solidify their seizure of power. However, in doing so, they left a power vacuum and an ethos of disorganization which complicated their attempts to build a Red Army.

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[20] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History 1918-1941*, 15.

[21] Engelstein, *Russia in Flames*, 237-239.

[22] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 7.

[23] Ibid.

[24] In particular, the Bolsheviks would emphasize their desire for peace which gave them a claim of uniquity in terms of the other political parties attempting to operate in the armed forces.

[25] Lars T. Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 136. Particularly the notion of "smashing" the existing apparatuses of the bourgeois state. Lih notes that the smashing which Lenin advocates for in *The State and Revolution* constitutes a greater democratization of existing apparatuses, ensuring they cannot be used to suppress the revolution.

[26] Engels to Lafurge, printed in Martin Berger, *Engels, Armies, and Revolution: the Revolutionary Tactics of Classical Marxism* (Hamden: Archon Book, 1977), 164.

[27] Ibid., 169.

Constructing an Ideological Army

The Red Army formed amidst this backdrop of chaotic civil war and external conflict. As a result, in its early moments, it imported this disorganization into its own character.[28] The attempt to form an army out of disorder created the first political controversy for the Red Army in July 1918: the battle over centralization and professionalization. Even the basic organizational structure of the Red Army was not uncontested and resulted from intense debate over the ideological basis for a revolutionary army. The drive for centralization was spearheaded by Trotsky, who would serve as the People's Commissar for War during the duration of the Russian Civil War. Trotsky's main military maxim was that only a centralized army could find victory in the long war that now faced the regime.[29] According to Trotsky, this policy was firmly ideological: "The Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class."[30] These principles, however, would see the democratization of the army, and the autonomy of local units, firmly swept away.[31] Essentially, Trotsky saw the army as a subordinate arm of the state, not an independent entity that could generate its own political power and force. However, Trotsky had to eventually acknowledge that this principle ran directly contrary to how Bolshevism approached the imperial army in its waning days, namely its advocating for democratization of the armed forces.[32] Trotsky defended his position along the lines of Lenin's conception of the State: "Power is the instrument by means of which a certain class secures its domination. Either this instrument serves the working class, or it serves against the working class."[33] The use of certain existing structures and practices was viewed as necessary to secure the power of the revolution. This simple formula would provide the basis for a professionalized Red Army.

Another dimension to the creation of the Red Army was the question of a militia. In general, Marxism was ideologically predisposed to favor a militia system over that of a standing, professionalized army, largely based on the experience of the Paris Commune of 1870.[34] The issue of a militia was inextricably linked with the question of class for

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[28] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 25-27.

[29] Trotsky, "Introduction," in *How the Revolution Armed: The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 1, 7. While Trotsky and Lenin would both end up writing extensively on military matters, they did not have extensive military experience themselves. That being said, what Trotsky and Lenin really focused on in their writings was the political aspect of war, which would become all the more important in the context of the civil war. In general, they did not intervene in exceptionally technical affairs for which they were unqualified.

[30] Ibid., 8.

[31] Trotsky, "Our Policy in Creating the Army," *How the Revolution Armed,* vol. 1, 243.

[32] Trotsky, "The Internal and External Tasks of Soviet Power," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 49.

[33] Ibid., 55.

[34] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 6.

Bolshevism. A militia in itself was not viewed as a positive unless it represented the interests of a singular class. As Lenin stated, "On the question of a militia, we should say: We are not in favour of a bourgeois militia; we are in favour only of a proletarian militia."[35] This represents Lenin's view in 1916, before the Bolsheviks rose to power, and was meant to couple with the strategy of Soviet power championed by the Bolsheviks. The militia ideal envisioned a class army formed based on local units controlled by local Soviets.[36] While not necessarily a disorganized rabble, as is sometimes associated with the term "militia," it was meant to provide an alternative to the Imperial army similar to how the Soviets themselves provided a political alternative to the Imperial and Provisional governments.[37]

A proletarian militia was not necessarily one made up of only proletarians but rather a militia that served the proletarian class interests. However, the class composition of the army was important and directly related to the idea of promoting a new order. Trotsky echoed this sentiment during the very beginnings of the civil war: "An army that must be capable of fighting, that is able to ensure the defence of the country, cannot but conform, in its whole structure, in its whole composition, in its ideology, to the nature of these classes. This army cannot be anything other than a class army."[38] These statements show the theoretical ideal of a socialist army for Lenin and Trotsky. This conception of the armed forces envisions what is essentially a direct extension of the Bolshevik party and its concept of class struggle into military affairs. However, this would take a drastic turn as the Bolsheviks came to power, and reoriented themselves towards the creation of a professional army. As John Erickson states in his study on the development of Red Army structures from 1917-1941, "To keep power over the state it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to create their own well-organised army rather than make an *indiscriminate* appeal to workers, peasants and other brands of revolutionaries."[39] At the outset of the creation of the Red Army, the Bolsheviks clearly understood that an ideologically "perfect" army had little value amidst the realities of civil war. As the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party emphasized in March 1919, "When the class struggle has been transformed into open civil war… the slogan of a 'people's militia' loses all its meaning, in exactly the same way as the slogan of democratic parliamentarism, and so becomes a weapon for reaction."[40] Ideologically, Lenin and Trotsky were initially aligned

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[35] Lenin, "The Military Program of the Revolution," *Collected Works,* vol. 23, 85.
[36] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command,* 19-20.
[37] Ibid., 20.
[38] Trotsky, "The Red Army," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 134.
[39] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command,* 20.
[40] Trotsky, "Our Policy in Creating the Army," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 244.

with a militia system based on the proletariat class. In practice, however, this could not become a reality so long as the regime felt threatened by civil and external conflict. The project of an armed force formed on the principles of a militia had to be postponed in favor of a professionalized, conventional standing army.[41] While Trotsky later attempted to revive the class militia project, it was not realized during the duration of the civil war.[42]

The impracticality of the militia system did not preclude the Bolsheviks from creating a political and ideological component to the Red Army. The Bolsheviks sought to politicize the armed forces through the system of dual command while maintaining its practices and organization as consistent with "bourgeois military science."[43] This was achieved through the use of "military specialists" in forming the officer corps of the Red Army. Military specialists were ex-imperial officers and even generals who agreed to serve the Soviet regime and fight in the Red Army.[44] While ideologically this posed a problem for socialists, as this was a strong departure from the ideal of a class militia, Trotsky understood that there was simply no way around this problem for the Red Army if it desired to win the war: "For there could be no theoretical solution to the problem [the lack of military leaders], but only a practical one—selecting suitable commanders from among the former regular officers and NCOs."[45] This policy mirrored the significant continuity in administrative personnel in the Soviet state at large.[46] The Bolsheviks came to terms with the reality that the working class could not completely supply the necessary expertise to run certain state apparatuses. As Trotsky noted in the quote above, this aspect of the army was an entirely practical measure devoid of any ideological reasoning. Thus, the upper echelons of the army largely did not imprint a distinctly political influence on the army's structure and operations.[47]

The presence of military specialists was the subject of much controversy and prompted the addition of political commissars to army fronts, armies, divisions, and

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[41] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 27.

[42] Ibid., 48-49, 109, 118-119. One of the most common criticisms that Trotsky would face was that the concept of a class militia was a holdover from the Second International, and reflected the tendencies of opportunists that were unprepared to fight a revolutionary struggle.

[43] Willard C. Frank, *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev: 1915-1991* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992). This term was often used in contradistinction to how the Left opposition argued the army should be oriented, which will be discussed later in the paper.

[44] Trotsky, "A Necessary Explanation (About the Military Specialists)," *How the Revolution Armed: The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky*, translated by Brian Pearce, vol. 2 (London: New Park Publications, 1981), 171-172.

[45] Trotsky, "The Military Specialists and the Red Army," in *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 199.

[46] Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and Early Soviet Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 387.

[47] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command,* 34. That is not to say, of course, that there were not party members and ideologically motivated commanders who would rise to prominent positions in the army. It was the case, however, that military specialists made up a significant portion of the commanding positions in the Red Army. Erickson notes that the number of "red commanders" did not equal the military specialists even by the end of the war.

regiments.[48] The role of the political commissar was essentially to carry out political-agitational tasks, bolster the morale of their unit, create an ethos of ideological unity and purpose, and, importantly, ensure that the commander remained loyal to the Bolshevik cause.[49] Under this system of dual command, the military commander would have control of the operational aspect of the unit's actions, while the commissar oversaw the political and moral components.[50] Along with the political commissars, Trotsky introduced the idea of a communist "cell" to be formed within all army units down to the level of company, with the aim of creating a party presence within the Red Army: "… within each regiment and each company we must and can create a firm nucleus of Soviet people, of Communist revolutionaries. This nucleus, though small in numbers, will be the heart of the regiment and the company."[51] The aim of this program was to create a political backbone to the Red Army in order to imbue it with an ideological-revolutionary spirit. At the same time, however, this signified a much greater level of control being exhibited over the army by the Bolshevik party itself. This coincided with the Bolshevik institution of total war. On September 2, 1918, Trotsky stated before the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, "You will transform the country into an armed camp… you will centralise the military administration, placing all military authority in the hands of the Revolutionary War Council."[52] Just four days later, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic (*Revvoensoviet Respubliki*) was formed, which marked the end of military control by the Supreme Military Soviet.[53] Despite the admonitions of Soviet power, it had lost control of the military apparatus almost entirely and saw it placed directly in the hands of the Bolshevik party. As a result, the military was no longer an arm of Soviet power, but an arm of Bolshevik power. The

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[48] Ibid., 38. Army fronts in the Russian system are synonymous with army groups in western militaries.

[49] Trotsky, "Order no. 113," *How the Revolution Armed,* vol. 2, 310; John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 41-42. Erickson does note that at the outset of the Red Army's existence, not every political commissar was necessarily a Bolshevik (although most were). As the war went on however, and the opportunities for ideological clarification were presented to the Bolsheviks, this changed in their favor.

[50] Trotsky, "The Organisation of the Red Army," *How the Revolution Armed,* vol. 1, 166. Trotsky divides the system of command into the "purely technical" and the "moral-political."

[51] George F Nafziger, "Red Army Organization 1918-1921," The Nafziger Collection of Orders of Battle (The Nafziger Collection, 2021); Leon Trotsky, "The Socialist Fatherland in Danger," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 293. In the Red Army during the Russian Civil War, a company consisted of a military unit below the level of a regiment, containing anywhere between 100-300 men.

[52] Trotsky, "Before the Capture of Kazan: Speech at the Meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee on September 2, 1918," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 443.

[53] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command,* 26, 36. According to Erickson, the Bolshevik central committee would exhibit almost total control over the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, thus formally eliminating soviet control over army matters. The Supreme Military Soviet was not an explicitly Bolshevik institution, in contrast to the newly formed Revolutionary Military Council.

importance of political commissars and the creation of communist cells amidst Red Army units were merely a reflection of this fact.

The institution of political commissars and communist cells does not only represent an attempt by Trotsky, the Soviet Minister of War, and the Bolsheviks to gain political control over the army. Rather, it also provides an insight into these leaders' view of war itself and the moral component of military matters that dominated this view. In speaking on the relationship between commanders and commissars in 1919, Trotsky asserted, "If he [the commissar] does not interfere in military operations, it is only because he stands above the military leader."[54] In other words, Trotsky viewed the political role of the commissar, and the moral effect which it created amongst the troops, as entirely more significant to the army than the operational responsibilities of the military commander.[55] Lenin, who corresponded consistently with the Revolutionary Military Council throughout the course of the Civil War, exhibited a similar view when commenting on the defeats on the Southern front in 1919:

> The chief and principal means of rectifying them [the defeats on the southern front] is to intensify political work in the army and among the mobilised, to improve the work of the commissars in the army, to have more highly qualified commissars, to raise their level, to have them carry out in practice that which the Party Programme demands and which only too often is carried out far too inadequately, i.e., 'the concentration of *all-round* control over the commanders (of the army) in the hands of the working class.'[56]

Lenin and Trotsky's view of political commissars and their martial value corroborates an important conclusion regarding their military thought: the importance of the moral-political character of an army over that of its operational conduct. Trotsky went even further than Lenin in discussing this issue: "I declare… that this [the practice of local soviets retreating from occupied villages] cannot be allowed: that, if the Soviet army has lost a town, then it is, to a considerable degree, the fault of the local Soviet and the military commissar, and it is incumbent upon them to do their utmost to recover that town."[57] In short, Trotsky and Lenin understood that the system of war of the Red Army

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[54] Trotsky, "The Organisation of the Red Army," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 166.

[55] It should not be overlooked that this can also be seen as a reflection of the lack of military experience of both Lenin and Trotsky at the outset of the war. While Lenin was known to have read Clausewitz, and Trotsky would grow into his role as Commissar for war as the civil war progressed, they were always primarily political thinkers. Despite their relative inexperience with certain aspects of military issues, their continued concern with the army and military matters generally further emphasizes the intersection of war and politics exhibited by the Red Army.

[56] Vladimir Lenin, "All Out for the Fight Against Denikin!" *Collected Works*, translated by George Hanna, vol. 29 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 449. Lenin's italics.

[57] Trotsky, "The Socialist Fatherland in Danger," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 298.

was focused on forging an ideology-based morale within military regiments that would impact the army's prospects for victory. By creating specific political organs within the army and instituting party control over its actions and structure, the Bolsheviks hoped to construct an ideologically oriented army that delivered results on the battlefield aimed towards securing the power of the Bolshevik revolution.

Another critical aspect of the Red Army to be considered in the context of Marxist-Leninist ideology is the dimension of class and its relationship to the socialist armed forces. Lenin's concept of the industrial proletariat as class leaders of the peasantry would find further expression in the composition of the Red Army.[58] The theoretical concept of a class militia, as has been discussed, could not be realized in the situation of the civil war.[59] That being said, the class composition of the army itself was seen as critical to its martial and political success. In conjunction with this issue, Lenin stated, "Only those workers who have gone through the whole struggle, who can relate all their experiences and all they have suffered can influence the army and turn the peasants into the politically-conscious fighters that we need."[60] This conception of the role of the industrial workers within the army in relation to the peasantry directly ties in with how Lenin understood the nature of the socialist revolution at large.[61] The proletariat operated as political leaders and military examples, strengthening the resolve of the Red Army, and implementing the all-important aspect of the moral-political component of the armed forces. Lenin was not alone in this view of the army and the importance of the working class within it. The Latvian Bolshevik Ivar Smilga placed great emphasis on the class composition of the armed forces during the waning days of the civil war along with the question of a Soviet militia, arguing, "It was a principle of Bolshevik military organisation that the worker elements were distributed effectively, and the proposed scheme [a Soviet class militia] flatly contradicted this."[62] Smilga's views in this regard intersect with Lenin's political understanding of the role of the proletariat in the revolutionary army. While peasants would make up the bulk of the Red forces, the moral-political agency and weight of the army were clearly placed on the industrial

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[58] Lih, *Lenin*, 192.

[59] Trotsky, *Military Writings*, translated by George Breitman (New York: Merit Publishers, 1971), 28. Interestingly, however, Trotsky's attempts to revive the idea of the militia after the war were based partly on the idea that it would reconcile the class differences between the industrial working class and the rural peasantry.

[60] Lenin, "Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Red Army Deputies. April 3, 1919." *Collected Works*, vol. 29, 260.

[61] Lih, *Lenin*, 34-35.

[62] Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 118.

working class, *à la* Lenin's heroic scenario, so much so that the careful distribution of the proletarian elements within the army became official Bolshevik policy.[63]

The significance behind Lenin and the Bolshevik's emphasis on the class component of the Red Army deserves a larger discussion than merely understanding it through the lens of Lenin's revolutionary "class leadership" ideal. It is indicative of the Bolshevik's larger view of the revolution and the civil war as revolving around the question of the peasantry. The class composition of the army was important because the nature of the war itself was fundamentally about achieving a transformation of the existing social order towards a socialist ideal.[64] The loyalty of the peasantry certainly had its military value in terms of providing manpower and securing an army's strategic rear, but the question of the peasantry was far bigger than this concept—it concerned the very root of what the Red Army was meant to be fighting for. In many ways, Lenin and the Bolsheviks conceived of the Civil War as a war for the support of the peasantry, as well as its transformation. Regarding the campaign in the Donbas region of southern Russia, Lenin said, "A turning-point has been reached on the Southern Front, and, what is more important, a turning-point in the temper of the peasants in the vicinity of the front has also been reached."[65] Lenin, in discussing one of the most crucial military fronts of the Russian Civil War, remarks that the reorientation of the peasantry to the Bolshevik caused the decisive victory on the southern front.[66] This sentiment clearly illustrates the relationship between the war and the peasant question. According to Lenin, the attitude of the peasantry in the vicinity of frontline areas was deemed essential to the military success of the Red Army and the political success of the Bolsheviks concomitantly:

> It should be remembered in connection with the work in the front zone which has only just been liberated that the main task there is to make not only the workers, but the peasants as well, put their faith in Soviet power, to explain to them *in practice* that Soviet power means the power of the workers and peasants, and at once to take the right course, the course adopted by the Party from the experience of twenty months of work.[67]

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[63] Ibid., 78; Lih, *Lenin*, 192; Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, 118.

[64] Vladimir Lenin, "Letter to the Workers and Peasants Apropos of the Victory Over Kolchak. August 24 1919," *Collected Works*, vol. 29, 558.

[65] Vladimir Lenin, "The Domestic and Foreign Situation of the Republic," *Collected Works*, vol. 29, 492.

[66] Mikhail Tukhachevsky et al., *The Russian Civil War, 1918-1921: An Operational-Strategic Sketch of the Red Army's Combat Operations*. Translated by Richard W. Harrison. (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2020), 190-195. Denikin's offensive in the spring and summer of 1919 would lead to him occupying large portions of Ukraine, and attempting an advance towards Moscow which was ultimately defeated.

[67] Vladimir Lenin, "All Out for the Fight Against Denikin!" *Collected Works*, vol. 29, 446. My emphasis.

The aim of the political sections and organization of the Red Army had a martial goal and a wider politico-strategic goal. The latter, exhibited above, was aimed toward achieving political victory in "front zones" adjacent to the ongoing military struggle. As the Red Army advanced, shattering the political grasp of the White forces in a given area, it was the role of the Red Army to implement Soviet power through the introduction of its political legitimacy via the violent actions of the Red forces, and its ideological legitimacy via the expressly political-ideological organizations which were attached to the Red Army for this purpose.[68] The army thus served as the transformative agent that brought about a new system of governance while simultaneously fighting the military struggle against the White forces. Therefore, while military matters were not discounted in building the Red Army, it is evident that ideological and political considerations had a significant impact on its founding. The *telos* of the Red Army was to serve this dual and interrelated military and political role. Trotsky exhibited this in July of 1918, saying, "Comrades, while war and the army are a continuation of politics, politics is, on its part, a reflection of the strength of the army."[69] Trotsky illustrated that the naturally political and ideological *telos* of the Red Army inverted Clausewitz's formula of war and politics.[70] War was beginning to no longer be "politics by other means," as the means used by the Red Army—violent implementation of a new political authority—became, very simply, politics in itself.

A discussion of the formation of the Red Army and the ideology behind it would be incomplete without an understanding of the views of the Left opposition on the Bolshevik military program.[71] The Bolshevik responses to the Left opposition at times provide a clearer picture of their attitude towards the military than their own positive actions and statements. The chief concern of the Left opposition, composed of Left

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[68]Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 132. Holquist cites the example of Antonov Ovseenko, one of the first Red Army commanders, implementing Soviet power by using the military as his instrument. A local soviet only was legitimate insofar as the Red Army recognized it as such. The most overt aspect of this concentration of power through military action will be illustrated later in conjunction with the Red Terror. The Bolshevik power system was implemented via the institution of violent political power and social transformation in which the army played a significant role.

[69] Trotsky, "The Creation of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 424. Significantly, this speech took place at the very beginning of the Red Army's existence, further illustrating the importance of the intersection of the military and political aspects of the army.

[70] Trotsky, "Military Doctrine or Pseudo-Military Doctrinairism," *The Military Writings of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 5, 1921-1923. Trotsky was no stranger to Clausewitz's writings, and cites him extensively in debates regarding military doctrine which occurred after the civil war and before the rise of Stalin. In particular, Trotsky uses Clausewitz to clarify his position on the connection between Marxist-Leninist ideology and the development of a specifically ideological military doctrine.

[71] The left opposition would provide a (surprisingly) wide-ranging military program which could be considered as a fairly coherent doctrine, fully saturated with ideological visions for an army which they viewed as a more accurate representation of the principles of socialism. They even anticipated future trends of maneuver warfare in some respects. Thus, only a small summary of it can be represented here.

Socialist Revolutionaries and Left Communists, was the "truly socialist" character of the Red Army and whether it lived up to the ideological vision of the socialist program.[72] In the view of the Left opposition, the construction of a professionally organized standing army was antithetical to the values of Marxism and the revolution.[73] In their view, the civil war should take on an explicit air of class warfare and be conducted by local guerilla detachments operating on a principle of partisan war.[74] The military program of the Left opposition, according to Trotsky, consisted of the following:

> The centralised army was declared to be the army of an imperialist state. The revolution must… give up for good… a centralised army. The revolution was entirely based upon mobility, the bold stroke, and manoeuvering. Its fighting force was the small, independent unit, made up of all types of arms, not linked with any base, relying on the sympathy of the population, moving freely into the enemy's rear, and so on.[75]

It is crucial to understand that what is grounding these views on warfare, and the army that would implement them, is an ideological view of the nature of revolution itself. The centralized nature of the army is depicted as contrary to the view of leftism in regard to the imperialist state. Furthermore, the idea of revolutionary combat is extrapolated to form the basis of a concept of maneuver warfare and partisan-based tactics. What the Left opposition envisioned was, in essence, an elevation of the Red Guards to the status of an army. It thus fundamentally broke with Bolshevism in the transition from the act of revolution to revolutionary power. The Left opposition did not share the tendencies of Bolshevism to adopt the mechanisms of the centralized state. This military program was not the product of a general staff seeking to modernize an armed force but the result of a fundamental worldview that sought to shape political realities by forming an ideologically oriented army. In turn, the Bolshevik response to this conception of the army also contained a distinctly ideological-political grounding.

The question of guerilla warfare was not foreign to Lenin, as it had become relevant during the revolution of 1905. Interestingly, Lenin did not provide a sharp rebuff in 1905 of "guerilla-ism," an element that would become rather common in Lenin and Trotsky's

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[72] Engelstein, *Russia in Flames,* 190-193, 203, 263. The Left Opposition was composed of a disparate alliance of figures on the revolutionary left who found themselves outside of the Bolshevik ideological mold, usually as a result over disagreements about the nature of state power. In particular, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries were the ideological descendants of the *Narodnik* movement, and emphasized the doctrine of agrarian socialism which was based on a revolutionary organization of the peasant class in the Russian countryside.

[73] Frank, *Soviet Military Doctrine from Lenin to Gorbachev*, 74.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Trotsky, "Introduction," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 10-11.

writings and speeches during the Civil War.[76] Lenin asserted that Marxism did not prescribe a doctrine for specific methods of armed violence in a revolutionary scenario, and, instead, these must be taken up in reference to the specific historical and political situation. As Lenin noted in a piece on guerilla warfare in 1905, "Marxism differs from all primitive forms of socialism by not binding the movement to any one particular form of struggle."[77] Lenin further stated that guerilla warfare in itself does not pose an issue but rather becomes potentially problematic when left outside party influence: "It is not guerrilla actions which disorganize the movement, but the weakness of a party which is incapable of taking such actions under its control."[78] Thus, Lenin, in regard to a doctrine of armed revolution, was principally concerned with the level of direction which the party itself could exhibit over a given action. This principle, which Lenin applied to military matters in 1905, can be used to understand Lenin's shift to an anti-guerilla stance during the Civil War. In the context of defeat on the southern front in the spring of 1919, Lenin placed much of the blame on the guerilla methods of local military detachments.[79] This negative view of guerilla warfare would be echoed by Trotsky at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party: "Counterposing the idea of guerilla units to that of an army organised and centralised in a planned way (as preached by the 'Left' SRs and their like) is a caricatural product of the political thought, or thoughtlessness of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia."[80]

Lenin and Bolshevism's shift away from guerilla methods of war can be partially explained by their general military ineffectiveness in a 'conventional war' that the Russian Civil War largely resembled.[81] What concerned the Bolsheviks about guerilla tendencies among certain sections of the army was not only their military implications for the Red Army but also their political implications for the Bolshevik state. Trotsky remarked on "guerilla-ism" in 1919: "The task [of overcoming 'guerilla-ism'] goes deeper… it consists in transforming the internal structure of the units and establishing a definite regime in them. Guerilla-ism is, by its very essence, hostile to centralised state authority."[82] The Bolshevik critique of guerilla-ism was principally based on its

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[76] Lenin, "Guerilla Warfare," *Collected Works*, translated by Clemens Dutt, vol. 11 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 212-215.

[77] Ibid., 213.

[78] Ibid., 219.

[79] Lenin, "The Present Situation and the Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power," *Collected Works*, vol. 29, 460. The guerilla units formed the right wing of the overall 'Red' forces opposing Denikin's advance into Ukraine and central Russia. It is also worth noting that many of these detachments were fighting under the banner of the anarchist Makhno, providing even greater ideological reasoning to place responsibility of the defeat on "guerilla-ism."

[80] Trotsky, "Our Policy in Creating the Army," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 246.

[81] There was certainly guerilla fighting at moments during the war. But it was largely fought between standing armies.

[82] Trotsky, "Lessons from the Ukraine," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 2, 261.

relationship to the authority of the state, and therefore the Bolshevik party. It was a political view of the armed forces that led Bolshevism to such a conclusion rather than merely a consideration of the pragmatism of a given military system.[83] This becomes particularly clear in light of the entrenched political units in the organization of the Red Army. The party could not create political organs, assign party commissars, and implement political agitation within guerilla units. As a result, political authority and centralized Soviet power (synonymous with Bolshevik power by this point) could not be implemented by guerilla units in the way the Red Army was designed to do. It was this characteristic of guerilla-ism that caused the sharp opposition towards its implementation on behalf of the Bolshevik party. Consequently, the question of the basic organization of the army itself was viewed through the lens of ideology rather than only in terms of specific, practical military considerations. "Guerilla-ism," put simply, could not align with the fundamental purpose of the Red Army: to act as the extension of centralized Soviet state power.

The Bolsheviks' rejection of guerilla methods, in many respects, arose out of its ideological legacy of Social Democracy, the intellectual predecessor to the Bolshevik party, and its opposition to the terrorist methods of Russian populism.[84] The way in which Trotsky and Lenin criticized guerilla warfare—in terms of its decentralization and ineffectiveness—was not limited to anxieties about party control over state apparatuses. Rather, the Social Democrats' rejection of individual terrorism provides an antecedent for this understanding. Social Democracy vehemently opposed the practice of individual terror attacks committed by populist radicals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[85] Trotsky stated in 1911 that "the disarray introduced into the ranks of the working masses themselves by a terrorist attempt is much deeper [than that which it inflicts on the bourgeoisie]. If it is enough to arm oneself with a pistol in order to achieve one's goal, why the efforts of the class struggle?"[86] The issue with terrorism was that it emphasized individual actors and cells over the unified proletarian body. It diminished the concept of a class struggle to individual acts of resistance. Guerilla warfare was seen

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[83] In fairness to the Bolsheviks, military critiques on the value of guerilla units were not absent from their polemics on "guerilla-ism." That being said, these were often levied against the forces of Makhno, who was essentially scapegoated for the defeat on the southern front in the spring and summer of 1919, likely as a result of his attempt to form an anarchist political project outside the Bolshevik's control. See Leon Trotsky, "About the Situation on the Southern Front," in *How the Revolution Armed* vol. 2, 301-305.

[84] Lih, *Lenin*, 23-33. The Social Democrats were the ideological forebears of the Bolshevik party, and they separated themselves from the *Narodnik* movement particularly on the question of how terrorism would function as a method of political change. Social democrats denounced the random acts of terror of the *Narodniks,* arguing that they lacked a coherent political aim.

[85] Trotsky, "Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism (1911)," Marxists Internet Archive, updated November 2006.

[86] Ibid.

by the Bolsheviks as functioning similarly due to its decentralized nature. Trotsky later noted in 1919, "Each guerilla commander looked on his unit, which he later named a division, as a closed world."[87] Thus, the anxieties of party control over all elements of the army, which brought it into conflict with guerilla units, were not purely based on a simple desire for power. Rather, Social Democracy, a direct ideological forebear of Bolshevism, had understood that the need for a centralized struggle was a result of the nature of class struggle itself. Social Democracy's opposition to individual terrorism and Bolshevism's opposition to "guerilla-ism" reflect a similar emphasis on the importance of a singularly oriented and organized proletariat in the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The "Social Scalpel": Arbitrary Violence, Red Terror, and the Future of the Soviet Union

Trotsky, in his rejection of individual terrorism, did not reject terror as a whole. Terror, according to Trotsky, needed to be organized for some kind of definitive political end.[88] This principle was enacted by the Red Army in the "Red Terror." The role of the Red Army as the vehicle for Bolshevik legitimacy, as well as the instrument used to carry out social transformation, can be described as its defining characteristic. The Red Army did not just fight the war on the front but also the one that developed in the interior of the Soviet state. As Trotsky instructed the Red Army, "The nest of dishonorable traitors must be destroyed, ...No mercy for any *stanitsas* that offer resistance... within a few days you [the soldiers] must cleanse the Don country of the black stain of treason."[89] "Traitors" to Trotsky were not simply those taking up arms against the Bolshevik party but those areas, villages, and people which refused to readily submit to the centralized power of the party. Thus, the Red Army acted as the political tool with which the new Soviet society would be created. The Army essentially brought the state to conquered regions in the form of political institutions and institutionalized violence.[90] "Mass terror" against class enemies became the order of the day for the Bolshevik party. As Trotsky noted, "The Soviet power must safeguard its rear, placing the bourgeoisie under surveillance and practicing mass terror against it."[91] Trotsky could not be more explicit about a program of organized violence. While mass terror was by no means a Bolshevik innovation, what the Red Army brought to a region in its political violence was an

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[87] Trotsky, "The Military Situation," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 458.
[88] Ibid., "Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism."
[89] Trotsky, "Order No. 100," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 2, 273. The term "*stanitsa*" refers to local organizations of Cossacks which is essentially synonymous with a village or town.
[90] Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 130-132.
[91] Trotsky, "The Socialist Fatherland in Danger," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 301.

extension of Bolshevik state power itself.[92] Violence did not only serve a punitive and reconstructive function but was also a reflection of new political legitimacy and reality.[93]

As local regions were brought into the military and food struggle, this necessarily brought them under the state apparatus. As Holquist notes, "[Stalin] insisted… the best way they [members of the former Don Soviet Republic] could serve the cause was by transferring to the central apparatus, especially to the Red Army, or the central food-supply organs."[94] Under the pretext of war and food supply, the Red Army violently implemented Soviet state power. The centralization of the army under political control was designed for this end. The army itself, in its interior, was meant to reflect the ideal Bolshevik social order through its political uniformity and class composition. Simultaneously, it itself was the state and represented the state's authority. Violence conducted by the Red Army, in the name of food requisition or political uniformity, was not conducted as an isolated event but as an entire political system. Holquist claims that targeted violence was critical in articulating the new Soviet state model and allowing the Bolsheviks to extend their authority into the countryside.[95] The Red Army was instrumental because it simultaneously represented Soviet power and implemented Soviet power. The Army created and reflected the social ideals of Trotsky and Lenin in terms of proletarian class leadership and the subsumption of local authorities into the larger Soviet project, while carrying with it the authority of the centralized state. As Engelstein notes, the Red Army acted as a model of the new Soviet ideal, as well as its implementer.[96] The militarization of rear areas of the frontlines created the ideological-political system of "total revolution," designed to transition the nation away from the moment of insurrection and into the enduring political project of revolution.[97] The Red Army was ground zero for such a policy.

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[92] Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution,* 165; Engelstein, *Russia in Flames,* 270.

[93] Engelstein, *Russia in Flames,* 270.

[94] Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution,* 170-171. Stalin's actions outlined here are contemporaneous to the debates outlined in the rest of the paper. At this point, Stalin would serve in varying roles in the military, at points holding field command such as at the Battle of Tsaritsyn in 1919. Stalin essentially had control over military, food, and Cheka operations in and around Tsaritsyn from 1918-1919, and thus illustrates the role of the Red Army in shaping the countryside amidst the conflict.

[95] Ibid., 280.

[96] Engelstein, *Russia in Flames,* 629.

[97] Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation,* 390, 395. Kotsonis notes that the response to the crisis of food and Civil War represented a transformation of power structures, as the state was both the "method" and "solution" to said crisis. The Red Army mirrors this principle, acting as the new social ideal and its implementer concomitantly.

Conclusion

The Red Army faced critical questions regarding its character as a military body during its formation. The Army's system of command, structure, political nature, and social composition were all viewed through the lens of ideology. While the highest ideal of a socialist army, that of a unitary class militia, was not realized during the civil war, the Bolsheviks nevertheless inculcated a distinctly political nature to the Army. The use of military specialists in the higher echelons of the armed forces was simply a necessity that the Red Army could not avoid. Despite the protestations of the Left opposition, there was no distinctly "proletarian military doctrine" separate from precedential operational methods.[98] Interestingly, as demonstrated, this did not seem to pose a major issue for Lenin and Trotsky, whose view of war tended to look beyond operational considerations. Instead, they chose to emphasize the role of political ideology in creating a revolutionary morale that would lead the Red Army to victory. As a result, the role of the industrial proletariat in the army was emphasized through the framework of Lenin's "heroic scenario," which saw the proletariat as ideological leaders of the peasantry. This political aim was realized through the implementation of political commissars and communist cells, both of which also increased the presence of the Bolshevik party in the Red Army. The view of the war exhibited by the Bolsheviks emphasized the political role of the Army in bringing Soviet authority to the peasantry, with the army acting as living legitimacy of the Soviet system and therefore the Bolshevik party. The use of a professionalized army to attain this aim alienated the Left opposition, who desired an implementation of guerilla warfare based explicitly on an ethos of total class struggle. Lenin and Trotsky rejected this program in order to centralize political control and realize the overall aims of the revolution. The Bolsheviks drew on the position of Social Democracy in regard to the question of terror, seeing a centralized model as the only representation of a proper class struggle. Terror itself, however, was not rejected but assimilated into the Red Army and Bolshevik statecraft. While military considerations were never absent from any of these questions regarding the construction of the Red Army, they often took a subordinate position in relation to that of ideology. The Bolshevik view of war, class struggle, and state authority all found some expression in the formation of a wholly political armed forces.

Marxism-Leninism and war did not always have the smooth relationship that was envisioned by Lenin before the Civil War. The main tenets of Lenin's view at that time constituted an understanding of the occurrence of war through the analytical model of

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[98]Trotsky, "Introduction," *How the Revolution Armed*, vol. 1, 10-11.

Marxism, emphasizing the social forces at play behind the phenomenon of war. Lenin took this view and broke with the Second International (or, as he saw it, they would break with traditional Marxism), framing socialism's stance during the imperialist war as an attempt to transform the broader conflict into class civil war. War, in Lenin's view, was inseparable from social class and the state. Clausewitz's formula of war as politics by other means was thus taken to its extreme conclusions. The civil war solidified this fact, as the society and state itself, the whole new body politic, was formed through the fires of war and political violence. As a result, Lenin went beyond Clausewitz's understanding of war as politics by other means and viewed the terms war and politics as a nearly synonymous pair.

The aim of this paper was to convey how Marxism-Leninism related to the war question in a theoretical sense and illustrate how this was realized through the formation of the Red Army. Additionally, I sought to illustrate the importance of Lenin and Trotsky as ideological leaders of the Bolsheviks. Lenin and Trotsky's conception of war as a political tool influenced the use of violence by the Red Army to realize the social aims of Bolshevism. While this is evident in the political elements introduced into the Army, the way the Bolshevik state formed its Army was not necessarily an ideological tenet directly fashioning a specific outcome; that is, the Army did not have a one-way relationship with the state. Whereas the state wielded the Army to realize its political aims and extension of legitimacy, the violent practices used by the Army in its social transformation became incorporated into the Bolshevik state. In this sense, the Army acted as the material manifestation of Lenin's vision of transforming the war from an imperialist war to a class civil war. However, the class antagonism and socially transformative vision of Bolshevism carried these practices beyond the war itself, past what Lenin initially had in mind when remarking on the prospects of armed conflict.[99] The nature of revolution as an enduring political project allowed for the experience of the war to influence future Soviet statecraft.

Therefore, the military question facing Marxism-Leninism and the Bolshevik party at the outset of the October Revolution was much larger than tactical considerations of how the revolution would attain and maintain its power. Rather, what was at stake was the nature of revolutionary power itself, as the construction of the army influenced the centralization and political violence of Soviet statecraft. The Bolsheviks, while having to concede certain aspects of the Army to precedent, created a deeply political and ideological army that played as much of a role in the immediate rear of the front as it did on the front lines. The Army was Soviet power. It served to implement this power and

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[99] Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 288.

tie it together under the centralized state model of the Bolshevik party. In many ways, it essentially was the state in practice, as political violence and mass terror replaced conventional order (or lack of order) with a new authority implemented by the Red Army. Thus, not only was the Army formed ideologically, it itself influenced the state and society through the experience of the civil war. In this role, it can be said that it stood apart from the conventional armies of its time. As a result, the Red Army played a crucial role in the social transformation which occurred during the Civil War and the continuance of such practices after the war's end. The Red Army in the civil war period is thus representative of how, under Bolshevism, war was not merely politics by other means, but politics became war itself.

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"LIKE NAZI BUTCHERS": DISCOURSES ON BLACK GENOCIDE AND THE LIMITS OF CIVIL RIGHTS IN 20TH-CENTURY AMERICA

Janis Parker

Abstract

This paper examines discourses on Black genocide in America circulating in the 1950s-1970s. Specifically, I assess how genocidal fears informed discussions on sterilization and birth control in Black communities. Discourses centered Black women as the main targets of sterilization abuse and birth control fostered a belief that the U.S. government aimed to reduce the Black population via reproductive control. I trace how Black organizations and activists analogized their concerns about reproductive violence to eugenics, Nazism, and the Holocaust, and delve into how individuals and groups alike relied on these histories to emphasize the dangers of sterilization and contraception. Genocidal fears exacerbated partitions already alive in the Civil Rights Movement, as organizations employed various tactics, ideologies, and objectives. With these divisions in mind, I argue that genocidal fears, especially seen through a gendered lens, further exhibited intra-movement heterogeneity. That genocidal fears endured despite gains in civil rights complicates the traditional view that history naturally and linearly moves towards progress. Rather, discourses on Black genocide expose lingering limits to achieving full racial equality in America.

Introduction: Black genocide within international context

> "This is not a problem of Civil Rights-it is a problem of Black Survival. The concept of civil rights is pitifully insignificant when our very lives are at stake."
>
> —Floyd B. McKissick, 1967

Just three years after the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948, the Civil Rights Congress submitted a petition charging the United States government with genocide. William Patterson, the primary author of the petition and Communist Party USA member, argued that the U.S. committed genocide in the form of racial terror, as well as through the economic, political, and social subjugation of Black Americans. It declared that Black citizens "suffer from genocide as the result of the consistent, conscious, unified policies of every branch of government."[1]

The charges put forth in the petition are early examples of how different Black civil rights organizations and their leaders would come to draw heavily on comparisons to Nazism and genocidal actions to describe America's institutionalized racial discrimination and history of violence. Many equated racial violence, specifically sterilization abuse against Black women and debates surrounding birth control, to genocide. In the 1960's-1970's especially, Black activists condemned sterilization abuse, and some condemned the use of birth control, for its roots in eugenics. The early 20th-century eugenics movement produced transnational networks between eugenicists in the U.S. and Germany that strengthened in the 1920s and 1930s following the First World War and the rise of the Nazi Party. American and Nazi eugenicists established intellectual and political connections through eugenics policy. Support for eugenics continued in the U.S. even after the fall of the Nazi government in 1945, as eugenics adapted to continue in practice under the American welfare state. These connections heightened the genocidal fears many Black leaders and activists voiced against the U.S. government. Within predominantly Black organizations, rifts emerged between Black men—who were more likely to espouse fears concerning genocide—and Black women—whose bodies were primarily affected by sterilization and birth control.

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[1] William L. Patterson, "We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of The United States Government Against the Negro People" (1951), Black Past, accessed October 22, 2022.

Scholars have explored the historical comparisons between Nazi Germany and the U.S. in terms of racial politics and white supremacist ideology. Legal scholar James Q. Whitman documents the influence that U.S. race law, particularly immigration laws, anti-miscegenation laws, and eugenics, had on Nazi Germany's own race regime.[2] Likewise, historian Egbert Klautke argues that the links between hardline eugenicists in the U.S. and Germany were significant.[3] The existence of these transatlantic connections opened the door for Black activists to analogize Nazi persecution and U.S. racial violence. Finally, other scholars deal more specifically with sterilization abuse and birth control measures as tools of white supremacy in Nazi Germany. Gisela Bock writes on the duality of racism and sexism in the Nazi sterilization campaign that intended to prohibit "undesirable" reproduction and promote "race hygiene," similar to U.S. eugenics law.[4] Rather than challenge the comparisons between Nazi Germany and Jim Crow America, I use this existing scholarship to contextualize U.S. racial tensions and fears about "Black genocide" in the 1950's-1970's.

Focusing on the U.S., scholars have written on the relationship between medical violence against Black women and fears of genocide surrounding sterilization and birth control measures. Scholars such as the medical ethicist Harriet Washington have traced the long history of eugenics and medical abuse of Black Americans in the early 20th century that contributed to mistrust towards any method of birth control or medical procedure.[5] Legal scholar Dorothy Roberts offers a historical account of anti-Black reproductive violence from chattel slavery to the modern welfare state, where violence has been perpetuated by various federally-sanctioned policies and unethical medical practices.[6] Further, historian Simone Caron analyzes the splits in Black organizations along gender lines between Black men and women regarding genocidal fears and birth control access.[7] This scholarship provides a useful framework to engage the issue of how Black women struggled for bodily autonomy amidst concerns about whether sterilization

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[2] James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[3] Egbert Klautke, "'The Germans Are Beating Us at Our Own Game': American Eugenics and the German Sterilization Law of 1933," *History of the Human Sciences* 29, no. 3 (Jul. 2016): 25–43.

[4] Gisela Bock, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State," *Signs* 8, no. 3 (1983): 400–421.

[5] Harriet A. Washington, "THE BLACK STORK: The Eugenic Control of African American Reproduction," in *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

[6] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

[7] Simone M. Caron, "Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960s: Genocide or Power Politics?" *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 3 (1998): 545–69.

and birth control intended to fulfill a genocidal plot, as some Black activists and organizations claimed.

My objective is to add another dimension to the preexisting scholarship that focuses more on the tension that resulted from genocidal fears between and within civil rights groups, and how this tension affected the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) writ large. Previous scholarship has explored various components of medical abuse and genocidal fears in the Black community, and among Black women specifically. However, few scholars have emphasized the greater effect this debate had on the Civil Rights Movement as activists dismantled Jim Crow structures. Ongoing sterilization abuse that continued into the 1960's-1970's clearly revealed that racial violence did not end with the new federal protections for Black citizens. Likewise, the birth control debate indicated that there was a precarious line between mistrust of the U.S. government and the desire for reproductive autonomy. How groups articulated fears regarding genocide at the time can help us to understand the long-lasting tensions between combating racialized medical abuse and maintaining reproductive agency. There is still widespread distrust in Black communities toward the federal government, especially in regard to medical practices and federally-funded contraception.[8] I hope that I can offer a new perspective on how genocidal fears, integral to these debates, further de-homogenized the Civil Rights Movement and exacerbated tensions towards racial progress in the U.S.

The primary sources for understanding these connections are diverse, ranging from organizational materials and reports to public health surveys and feminist manifestos. The petition *We Charge Genocide*, mentioned earlier, indicates that civil rights organizations already linked structural racism and violence against Black Americans to the evolving international language of genocide as early as 1951. Groups within the "mainstream" Civil Rights Movement—such as the NAACP—and those that formed the militant vanguard for civil rights and Black liberation—the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, and Communist-led organizations—also argued that America's racial policies had a genocidal agenda. Beyond the activist realm, researchers published surveys in public health that reported significant fears about a government-sanctioned "genocidal plot" within Black communities. Fear and mistrust directed at the U.S. government as related to sterilization and birth control were widely discussed in the Civil Rights Movement, both organizationally and academically. These sources provide a more robust analysis of how different groups understood the "genocide question" and how these understandings impacted the broader movement.

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[8] Caron, "Birth Control and the Black Community"; Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, 12-13, 16.

In this paper, I will first contextualize the extent that Black organizations and activists relied on historical analogies of Nazism and the Holocaust to frame the question of Black genocide in the 1960's-1970's. From there, I will focus on how these genocidal fears informed discussions of the sterilization abuse of Black women and debates surrounding birth control, especially as they related to gender discourse. The proverbial "Black community" included a diverse array of viewpoints and ideas about white supremacist oppression, and not everyone held genocidal fears or prioritized these fears in their advocacy. Even as some Black leaders and organizations drew on the U.S.-German comparisons based on histories of eugenics and sterilization, these leaders held various political affiliations that impacted their goals and what they prioritized. Sterilization and contraception were two major topics in the 1960's-1970's that heightened genocidal fears in the Black communities. Gender divides between Black men and women also impacted how organizations understood the genocide debate, and often created tension between reproductive autonomy and racial solidarity. These tensions not only affected the internal dynamics of specific organizations, but also affected the overall relations within the CRM as the movement splintered and developed into niche factions, like those organizations within the Black Power movement. Based on preliminary research and the grounding belief that the Civil Rights Movement was not homogenous, I argue that genocidal fears, especially when discussed in a gendered framework, contributed less to racial solidarity and more to intra-movement tension and heterogeneity. This heterogeneity, and the persistence of genocidal fears, complicates the traditional viewpoint that history naturally moves along a linear line toward progress.

A Collaborative Past: framing the history between the U.S. and Nazi Germany

A long history of eugenics ideology and practice connected the U.S. and Germany even before Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in 1933. While in practice for centuries, "eugenics" as a term did not emerge until Francis Galton, Charles Darwin's cousin, coined it in 1883. Galton, promoting what we now understand as social Darwinism, believed that the more "gifted and able" white upper classes should have more children, while the "unfit"—those considered racially inferior or from lower socioeconomic status—should not.[9] Eugenics in practice encompassed both "positive" measures, to incentivize "healthy" families to reproduce, and "negative" policies that

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[9] Philip R. Reilly, "Eugenics and Involuntary Sterilization: 1907–2015," *Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics* 16, no.1 (2015): 352.

manipulated or forcefully discouraged "unhealthy" reproduction. The professionalization of eugenics became a global phenomenon in the late 19th century, but the ideological appeal and academic reach heightened in the 1920's-1930's, especially among American and German eugenicists. Historian Egbert Klautke delves into the "transatlantic network" that grew in the interwar period between the U.S. and Germany. According to Klautke, America's "intellectual and material [support] helped to re-establish the German position within the international movement for eugenics that had been lost during and after the First World War."[10] Thus, both academic exchange and American philanthropy allowed German eugenicists to reassume leadership and credibility. One particular eugenics initiative buttressed this transnational dialogue between the U.S. and Germany: sterilization.

Beyond the academy, the U.S. had already established a leading role in eugenics policy, demonstrated by the multiple states that adopted sterilization laws—as early as 1907—to control reproduction.[11] Sterilization procedures "involved surgery to tie the Fallopian tubes so that a woman could not become pregnant or vasectomy for males."[12] Hardline American eugenicists and their German admirers favored "negative" measures like forced sterilization against certain demographics: the mentally ill, disabled, lower classes, and/or nonwhites. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of state sterilization laws in *Buck v. Bell* (1927). The case centered around the forced sterilization of Carrie Buck, a white, mentally disabled woman in a Virginian mental institution. As a result, by 1930 almost thirty states had enacted sterilization laws, largely targeting mentally disabled women.[13] German eugenicists, especially those affiliated with the Nazi Party, took note of American laws as they helped to institute their own legal apparatus based on racial and reproductive control.[14]

What legal scholar James Q. Whitman refers to as "the American model" was discernible after the Nazi Party adopted a sterilization policy in 1933. Beyond American sterilization laws, Nazi leaders—Hitler, Roland Freisler, Heinrich Himmler, etc.—both commended and critiqued U.S. immigration laws, anti-miscegenation policies, and various notions about racial purity bound up in Jim Crow.[15] Sterilization law reflected the fear and anxiety that surrounded eugenics ideology and policy, especially for eugenicists

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[10] Klautke, "American Eugenics and the German Sterilization Law of 1933," 27.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (The Random House Publishing Group, 2002): 233.
[13] Reilly, "Eugenics and Involuntary Sterilization: 1907–2015," 356-357.
[14] James Q. Whitman, "Protecting Nazi Blood and Nazi Honor," in *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).
[15] Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, 12-13, 135.

who feared that low birth rates would ensure "race suicide" for white races. Hitler's cabinet passed the "Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring" on July 14, 1933. This law specifically encouraged sterilization–involuntary, if necessary–for people with mental or physical disabilities.[16] The law developed out of decades of anxiety about "racial degeneration," declining birth rates for white German women, and the desire to control women's reproduction.[17] As historian Gisela Bock argues, controlling women's reproductive ability was crucial to eugenics policy. The duality of racism and sexism in the Nazi sterilization campaign intended simultaneously to prohibit "undesirable" reproduction and promote "race hygiene," similar to U.S. eugenics law.[18] German law after 1933 expanded to enact a range of both "positive" and "negative" eugenics measures against more demographics, predominantly Jews, but also Afro-Germans and Romani groups. The 1933 sterilization law proved pivotal to Nazi Germany's development of a "racial state" built on white supremacy and legal exclusion.[19]

Notably, the U.S. journal on eugenics, *Eugenical News*, partially "claimed credit for the German law, assuring its readers that the text of the statute read 'almost like the 'American model sterilization law'" authored by Harry Laughlin in 1922.[20] Director of the Eugenics Record Office from 1910-1939, Laughlin drafted the "Eugenical Sterilization Law" to provide a blueprint for "sterilization legislation" that targeted "potential parents carrying degenerate hereditary qualities."[21] Laughlin typified the transatlantic link between hardline American and Nazi eugenicists, receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Heidelberg in 1936, an honor he described as "evidence of a common understanding of German and American scientists of...those fundamental biological and social principles which determine the racial endowments and the racial health… of future generations."[22] Clearly, American and German-Nazi eugenicists held mutual admiration for each other, and the similarities in eugenics law and policy, as well as the concomitant intellectual discourses, reflected this network of exchange.

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[16] Bock, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State," 408.

[17] Ibid., 405-406.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Eve Rosenhaft, "Blacks and Gypsies in Nazi Germany: The Limits of the 'Racial State,'" *History Workshop Journal*, no. 72 (2011): 163-165.

[20] Klautke, "American Eugenics and the German Sterilization Law of 1933," 32; Harry Laughlin, "Model Eugenical Sterilization Law," in *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic laboratory of the Municipal court of Chicago, 1922), 445, provided by Cornell University Library, on *InternetArchive*.

[21] Laughlin, "Model Eugenical Sterilization Law," 446.

[22] Harry Laughlin to Carl Schneider, August 11, 1936, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Virginia, Eugenics, and Buck v. Bell* (Historical Collections at the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library: University of Virginia, 2007), original image courtesy of Special Collections, Pickler Memorial Library, at Truman State University, http://exhibits.hsl.virginia.edu/eugenics/exhibit4-6/. See also: Dorothy E. Roberts, "The Dark Side of Birth Control," in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

The Second World War, the postwar Nuremberg Trials, and the United Nation's Genocide Convention did not erase the historic connections between American and German eugenicists. "Negative" eugenics, measures intended to forcibly restrict reproduction, became associated with infamous Nazi war crimes, but eugenics in practice did not disappear. Rather, laws and policies adjusted to enable eugenics to persist without being overtly tied to its unsavory history. Using this history, however, some of the dominant Black leaders and activists in the U.S. relied on analogies comparing Nazism and the Holocaust to America's Jim Crow order to frame the question of Black genocide and American racism. As early as 1947, W.E.B. Du Bois, a cofounder of the NAACP, appealed to the U.N. for redress on behalf of Black Americans. He argued that America denied Black Americans the full rights of citizenship and sociopolitical equality due to the "color caste system" and urged not only the U.N. but the world to act on behalf of Black humanity.[23] At the time of Du Bois's statement, the U.N. had not yet adopted the Genocide Convention and therefore there was no internationally accepted legal framework to acknowledge genocide. By 1949, with his trip to Poland, Du Bois reconceptualized the "race problem" and the color line "in relation to other histories of racism and violence," like that within the Warsaw Ghetto.[24] In "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," which he wrote post-visit in 1952, Du Bois analogized American racism and the reminiscence of antisemitic violence displayed in Warsaw. While he acknowledged the limits of comparison between the two, Du Bois underscored that racist violence and ideology existed through time and through space.[25] Regardless, the U.S. and Nazi Germany were linked in Du Bois's thinking at the time.

The U.N. received another petition on behalf of Black Americans in 1951, one even more damning than Du Bois's condemnation of America's racist and violent history. William Patterson, a member of the Communist Party USA and leader in the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), authored a petition entitled *We Charge Genocide*.[26] In it, Patterson argued that the U.S. had violated the U.N.'s Genocide Convention predominantly in the form of racial terror against Black Americans, coupled with economic, political, and social subjugation. The petition repeatedly emphasized how the U.S. violated Article II (a) of the Genocide Convention, or "killing members of the group," and Patterson made multiple comparisons to Nazi leaders and the "unrebuked Nazi genocide against the

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[23] W.E.B. Du Bois, "An Appeal to the World: A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress" (1947), Black Past, accessed October 16, 2022.

[24] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 117.

[25] Ibid., 125.

[26] Patterson, "We Charge Genocide."

Jewish people."[27] Patterson and the CRC were heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as in the labor movement representing the interracial working classes. Thus, *We Charge Genocide* represented an argument for both racial and economic justice in America.

While the petition claimed to represent, figuratively, all Black Americans suffering under America's racist violence and manifold oppression, not all Black Americans agreed with the genocide claims. Columnist Alfred Lewis, publishing in the Black-run newspaper *Plaindealer*, argued that the appeal, "like other political actions by the Communists…[was] merely an attempt to help Russia."[28] Lewis criticized Patterson and the CRC for purporting so-called Communist propaganda and "embarrassing the United States" on the international stage after the nation's role as an Allied Power.[29] While only one column, the *Plaindealer* represented a multitude of other Black news outlets locally and nationally that reported disdainfully against the Communist Party. Published in 1952 amid the Second Red Scare and America's pronounced racial tensions, it is possible that Lewis needed to stress his anti-Communist allegiance and disavow the genocide claim to avoid suspicion about national loyalties. Regardless, communism and its supporters remained taboo at the time and throughout the remaining Cold War period. An organization's political affiliations and ideologies mattered, especially when many would be deemed Communist, "subversive," or risks to national security—even Du Bois himself—if they delved too deep into global racial politics and criticized the establishment.[30]

Leaders who represented the Black Power movement frequently evoked comparisons to Nazism and the Holocaust to frame anti-Black violence. As the Civil Rights Movement expanded, the Black Power movement burgeoned in response in the late 1960's. At its core, Black Power critiqued the CRM for appealing to the mainstream and prioritizing integration rather than radical racial liberation. In a similar vein to the Communist-led organizations such as the CRC, Black Power groups employed highly-charged language to analogize the U.S. and Nazi Germany. In a speech presented to a National Conference on Black Power, Floyd McKissick, then the national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), explicitly framed racial violence as genocide.[31] He condemned the U.S.

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Alfred B. Lewis, "The Facts About Genocide," *Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas) 54, no. 7, Feb. 15, 1952: 3, in *Readex: African American Newspapers.*

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, 118.

[31] Speech "Genocide U.S.A.: A Blueprint for Black Survival," by Floyd B. McKissick, for the National Conference on Black Power, 1967, Series 3.1.2. CORE Administrative Materials, #4930, folder 6997, Floyd B. McKissick Papers,

government for sanctioning genocide against Black Americans just as Nazi Germany committed genocide against Jewish people—via ghettoization, economic inequities, incarceration, and other forms of structural violence.[32] Not only that, but McKissick argued that Black genocide in the U.S. would be easier to achieve than that in Germany, stating that, "in America, the special badge [the Star of David] does not need to be sewn on a man's jacket. He is always Black."[33] Similarly, unlike the spatialized ghettoization of the Jews, "the ghetto follows the Black Man wherever he goes."[34] McKissick argued that Black people needed to be more aware of the need for self-preservation—a key tenet of Black Power—and that they needed to enact a blueprint for Black survival.[35] For McKissick, the fear of Black extermination was potent and ubiquitous in Black people's lived experiences in America. His language reflects the sense of urgency many felt and the mistrust directed at the U.S. government's active complicity in genocidal policies.

Although a deeper evaluation of Black antisemitism in the 1950's and 1960's onward is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief assessment of this ideology offers another example of the heterogeneity within the fight for Black civil rights and liberation. Black antisemitism and Jewish racism diminished the existing alliance between the two groups on issues of civil rights. Many scholars who focus on Black-Jewish relations in the U.S. have noted that the Civil Rights Movement became an often contentious battleground for the two groups, depending on the issues and activism at hand. Some Black activists believed that Jews benefited from the white power structure despite their status as a religious and ethnic minority.[36] Further, others have connected Black antisemitism to the rise and militancy of the Black Power movement. They highlight Louis Farrakhan, a minister within the Nation of Islam whose tenure with the organization began in 1955 and whose position gave him ample freedom to promote anti-Semitic messages and racial separatism.[37] On the opposite side, civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, and the Jewish-led Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith coalesced against both anti-Black racism and antisemitism.

Black antisemitism calls into question the durability of historical analogies that many Black leaders and organizations used to compare anti-Black racism to Nazism and the

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1940s-1980s, at The James E. Shepard Memorial Library at North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina.

[32] Ibid., 4-5.

[33] Ibid., 8.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 9.

[36] Cheryl Greenberg, "Liberal NIMBY: American Jews and Civil Rights," *Journal of Urban History* 38 no. 3 (2012): 452–466.

[37] Stephen J. Whitfield, "An anatomy of Black anti-semitism," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 43, no. 4 (1994): 341.

Holocaust. An ironic sense of oppression emerged at the heart of Black antisemitism, because for many, in the words of Rabbi Alan Miller: "The black man is, in truth, the American Jew."[38] According to civil rights activist and writer Julius Lester, in the 1960's, "The issue [was] not black anti-Semitism. The issue [was] what it has always been: racism. And the physical oppression of black people by a racist system."[39] While some—Black and Jewish alike—believed that Black people's condition in the U.S. could be equated to the genocide Jewish people experienced under the Third Reich, Black anti-Semitic rhetoric indicates that ultimately there existed a dispute about whose oppression was worse. This is not to say that all, or even a majority of, Black activists or organizations spewed anti-Semitic messages to advance civil rights and Black liberation. The mere presence of Black antisemitism and Black-Jewish tensions in the 1960's reveals a more complicated, heterogenous narrative about racial violence and genocide. Although Black antisemitism blurred the lines between racial/group solidarity and antagonism, fears of genocide deepened within Black communities, and leaders continued to rely on historical comparisons to underscore systemic violence. The shared connections in eugenics history between the U.S. and Germany provided an accessible, albeit contested, framework to discuss "Black genocide." As the next two sections will show, many Black activists and organizations analogized eugenics, Nazism, and genocide to describe sterilization abuse against Black women and debates surrounding birth control measures in Black communities.

Sterilization Abuse and Black Condemnation

The early 20th century eugenics movement imparted a legacy that remained salient after the Second World War, especially as it concerned sterilization abuse. During the previous mainstream eugenics movement, during which nearly 30 states passed sterilization laws, eugenicists emphasized heredity and so-called "healthy" and "beneficial" reproduction.[40] Hardline eugenicists like Harry Laughlin, who controlled the Eugenics Record Office and spearheaded compulsory sterilization laws, did not shy from linking their beliefs about biology and heredity to race and class.[41] However, overtly "negative" eugenics practices lost popularity following WWII, after the international community condemned Nazi Germany's horrific practices. From the 1950's to the 1970's,

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[38] James Baldwin and Nat Hentoff, *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism* (New York: R. W. Baron, 1969): x.

[39] Julius Lester, "A Response," in *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism*, ed. James Baldwin and Nat Hentoff (New York: R. W. Baron, 1969): 237.

[40] Reilly, "Eugenics and Involuntary Sterilization: 1907–2015," 356-357.

[41] Ibid., 352.

eugenics policy shifted away from overt arguments about individual and collective "defects" or "degeneracy" to questions of family size and welfare.[42] Many politicians, as was the case in Mississippi, claimed to be concerned about welfare rolls and financial strain on the government, and pushed for sterilization measures to limit the number of people on welfare.[43] In practice, many physicians who performed sterilizations and/or operated family planning programs did so with this political agenda in mind. For example, the Health Research Group conducted a 1973 study, accompanied by interviews from Dr. Bernard Rosenfeld, finding that a "majority of physicians were white, Euro-American males who believed that they were helping society by limiting the number of births in low-income, minority families."[44]

Black civil rights activists and organizations condemned the long history of sterilization abuse that continued to actively affect Black communities, and many directly analogized the sterilization abuse in the U.S. to that of Nazi Germany. In 1962, the Communist-affiliated Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) condemned Virginia's "voluntary" sterilization law, claiming it primarily targeted poor, Black women on welfare.[45] In an unpublished memo, the SNYC focused on a rural clinic in Warrenton, Virginia, where physicians were performing supposedly "consensual" sterilizations. However, editor James E. Jackson noted that many women who went to this clinic were also listed on Virginia's relief rolls and welfare policies, arguing that physicians at the clinic lobbied for the sterilization bill and gained the support of legislators who were "alarmed at the state's rising welfare bills."[46] Jackson vehemently opposed the law, equating its practitioners to "Nazi Butchers:"

> In Warrenton, Va., just 45 miles from Washington, headquarters of the Voice of America and capital of the 'Free World,' physicians of the moral stripe and social-political mentality of Hitler's 'Butchers of Buchenwald' are each week committing such crimes against humanity as the Nazi beasts, Streicher and Eichmann, were hung for./...Yes, this too is the United States of America in 1962.[47]

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[42] Jacqueline Agtuca, "Past and Current United States Policies of Forced Sterilization," National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, *Restoration Magazine* (2020).

[43] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, *Genocide in Mississippi*, John O'Neal Papers, Box 14, Folder 14, Amistad Research Center, 1964: 4.

[44] Jane Lawrence, "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women," *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (Summer, 2000): 410.

[45] James Jackson, *Series XIV: Writings, Unpublished: Women Sterilized In Virginia,* 1962, MS, Southern Negro Youth Congress and the Communist Party: Papers of James and Esther Cooper Jackson, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University, *Archives Unbound.*

[46] James Jackson, *Series XIV: Writings,* 3.

[47] Ibid., 2.

Jackson also referenced other critics of the sterilization law, particularly those in religious positions, such as Reverend Patrick A. O'Boyle, the Archbishop of Washington, and Rabbi Jay Kaufman, who denounced Virginia's law as treating the poor, and especially working-class Black women, as second-class citizens.[48] According to Jackson, sterilization laws purposefully targeted working-class Black mothers.[49] Designed to prevent Black women's reproduction, the law perpetuated a form of genocide against Black communities.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Community (SNCC) was another prominent Black-led civil rights organization that explicitly used the term "genocide" to describe sterilization abuse.[50] In a 1964 pamphlet entitled *Genocide in Mississippi*, SNCC condemned Mississippi's House of Representatives for voting in favor of HB 180, a sterilization bill that would perpetuate genocide against Black Mississippians under the guise of limiting the number of people dependent on welfare. SNCC activists opened the pamphlet with the U.N. definition of genocide and underscored Article II (d), which makes "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group" an act of genocide.[51] HB 180, similar to Virginia's "voluntary" sterilization bill, would have directly targeted poor Black women on federal and state welfare relief. While the SNCC authors did not make explicit analogies to Nazi Germany or Hitler, they believed sterilization abuse and compulsory sterilization laws were a "program of genocide against the Negroes of [Mississippi]."[52] The U.N. Genocide Convention provided SNCC, and others, with a new language framework to explain systemic abuses against Black people in America. "Genocide" encompassed these systemic abuses, including sterilization practices that revoked Black women's reproductive agency.

There is ample evidence to support the claims that HB 180 advanced a form of genocide against Black people, despite the claims of Mississippi legislators who weakly defended the bill on the basis of welfare policy.[53] Prior to HB 180, Mississippi was already one of several states—most of which were Southern states—that practiced forced sterilization against Black and other minority women. One notable instance of this abuse was the case of Fannie Lou Hamer, a Black civil rights leader from the Mississippi Delta, who underwent what became known as a "Mississippi appendectomy." Hamer, and many other Black women, went into hospitals and clinics for various medical

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[48] Ibid., 5-7.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, *Genocide in Mississippi*, John O'Neal Papers, Box 14, Folder 14, Amistad Research Center, 1964.

[51] Ibid., 2.

[52] Ibid., 3.

[53] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, *Genocide in Mississippi*, 3-4.

procedures, expecting routine treatment, but instead their physicians performed hysterectomies without their consent or knowledge, taking advantage of their social status as poor Black people.[54] As legal scholar Shyrissa Dobbins-Harris explains, sterilization often "occurred at the hands of doctors who were paid by the government to provide them with medical care" or for "learning purposes" at teaching hospitals throughout the South. "Mississippi appendectomies" were so common at the time that Hamer "remarked that 60 percent of Black women in Sunflower County [Mississippi] had been sterilized after childbirth."[55] SNCC activists, as well as most civil rights and women's rights activists, were acutely aware of these procedures and the rampant sterilization abuse of Black women.

Frances Beal was one such activist who condemned the rampant sterilization abuse happening in "maternity clinics" like that in Warrenton, Virginia. Beal, who was a member of SNCC before she formed an independent organization for Black women, likened sterilization to a genocidal plot against Black Americans.[56] Similar to James Jackson, she equated sterilization abuse to "Nazi-like procedures," stating that despite "sterilization experiments carried on in concentration camps some twenty-five years…no one seems to get upset by the repetition of these same racist tactics today in the United States of America."[57] Similar to other Black activists in the SNYC and SNCC, Beal believed sterilization laws and abuses specifically targeted poor Black women on welfare because they had fewer avenues to protest reproductive violence. Further, Beal explicitly denounced the role of the U.S. government, which she considered complicit in, if not actively responsible for, sanctioning genocide via sterilization. The federal government often monetarily sponsored these "maternity clinics" and teaching hospitals that proliferated nationwide, predominantly in rural areas, along with the physicians performing the operations.

The coerced sterilization of the Relf sisters in 1973 incited further outrage and condemnation on a national stage. The Montgomery Community Action Agency, located in Alabama, sterilized Minnie Lee Relf, 14, and Mary Alice Relf, 12, under the guise that the girls received contraceptive shots.[58] The case incited outrage not only in

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[54] Harriet A. Washington, "THE BLACK STORK: The Eugenic Control of African American Reproduction," in *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006): 190-191.

[55] Shyrissa Dobbins-Harris, "The Myth of Abortion as Black Genocide: Reclaiming Our Reproductive Choice," *National Black Law Journal* 26 (2017), 111.

[56] Frances Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1970): 114-115.

[57] Ibid., 115.

[58] Dobbins-Harris, "The Myth of Abortion as Black Genocide: Reclaiming Our Reproductive Choice," 93.

Alabama and the greater South, but nationwide. James Cameron, publisher of the Black-owned *Milwaukee Star* and later founder of America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, specifically accused the federal government of sponsoring what he called a "genocide program."[59] Cameron directed his anger toward the federal government because the Montgomery clinic received funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.[60] Lawyers for the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), who represented the Relf sisters in a class action lawsuit, "discovered that 100,000 to 150,000 women had been sterilized using federal funds and that half of these women were black."[61] The same year as the Relf case, the *Chicago Metro News* reported that a thirteen-year-old Black girl from Illinois had been sterilized at a Texas hospital.[62] In response, the reporter directly asked whether "Illinois tax dollars [were] going to continue supporting national Black genocide?"[63] Genocidal fears regarding forced sterilization practices reverberated nationwide as many felt that the federal government, via federally-funded physicians and clinics, intended to incrementally limit the Black population. Overall, many Black activists agreed that sterilization constituted an extreme form of racial and sexual violence tantamount to genocide, and if nothing else, that there was sufficient evidence of genocidal intent.

The Question of Birth Control: Is it genocide?

The long history of sterilization abuse in the U.S. intensified the debates surrounding birth control and contraception. Many Black leaders and activists in the 1960's and 1970's expressed concerns about birth control within Black communities, and these concerns were rooted, like sterilization, in eugenics history. Specifically, the modern birth control movement, spearheaded by Margaret Sanger, coincided with the early 20th-century eugenics movement. In 1921, Sanger founded the American Birth Control League, what would ultimately become the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.[64] According to legal scholar Dorothy Roberts, "eugenics [at that time] gave the birth control movement a national mission and the authority of a reputable science."[65] With the support of

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[59] James Cameron, "Cameron's Eye," *Milwaukee Star* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) 13, no. 48, August 2, 1973: 4, in *Readex: African American Newspapers*.
[60] Dobbins-Harris, "The Myth of Abortion as Black Genocide: Reclaiming Our Reproductive Choice," 111.
[61] Washington, "THE BLACK STORK: The Eugenic Control of African American Reproduction," 203-204; Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 93.
[62] "14 Black Legislators To Hold Genocide Hearings," *Chicago Metro News* (Chicago, Illinois) 8, no. 34, July 21, 1973: 1, 4, in *Readex: African American Newspapers*.
[63] Ibid., 4.
[64] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 56-59.
[65] Ibid., 72.

eugenicists like Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin, birth control became seen as a public health measure to curb "reckless breeding."[66] While this method of birth control targeted a range of individuals–generally anyone deemed "socially unfit"–racism factored heavily into the message. Interestingly, despite the early coalition between eugenicists and birth control advocates, only white women could access birth control clinics in the 1930's South due to Jim Crow segregation.[67] As Roberts argues, Black leaders and activists came into conflict with one another over birth control as early as the 1930's. By the 1960's and 1970's, birth control remained fiercely debated as to whether birth control perpetuated a form of genocide.

Following the Second World War, "population control," the proposal that humans should intentionally limit population growth by reducing the birth rate, factored into why many leading Black individuals distrusted birth control measures in the 1960's and 1970's. In 1968, Paul R. Ehrlich published *The Population Bomb*, in which he outlined his belief that a global overpopulation crisis, coupled with depleting environmental resources, would lead to a catastrophic increase in the world death rate come the 1970's-1980's.[68] The text incited a global fear of overpopulation in the 1970's and bolstered efforts to promote birth control and regulate family planning, often with violent and discriminatory effects.[69] While Ehrlich mainly outlined the problem of overpopulation, he briefly acknowledged the fears that population control targeted minorities as "a form of genocide, the militants call it."[70] He claimed that "the only way that the genocide accusation [could] be defused" was for white, affluent individuals to practice population control first.[71] However, "population control" as an idea and practice in the postwar period seemed all too reminiscent of earlier "negative" eugenics measures, fueling preexisting concerns about the possible ulterior motives of birth control within Black communities.

Historian Robert Weisbord assesses how various Black civil rights or revolutionary organizations viewed the use of birth control, or family planning, in Black communities.[72] Weisbord situates these various groups in the long history of white oppression and abuse of Black bodily autonomy, and he emphasizes medical

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 75-77.

[68] Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968).

[69] For more information regarding how the population control movement of the 1970s-1980s affected women's reproductive rights internationally, see Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control and Contraceptive Choice* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1987).

[70] Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb,* 173.

[71] Ibid., 174.

[72] Robert G. Weisbord, "Birth Control and the Black American: A Matter of Genocide?" *Demography* 10, no. 4 (1973): 571–90.

experimentation as well as the history of forced sterilization. Writing in 1973, Weisbord reviews how some groups, predominantly Black nationalists, Black Panthers, and the Nation of Islam (NOI), vehemently opposed birth control and considered it akin to "race suicide" or genocide. These groups adhered to the "strength in numbers argument," the belief that Black communities needed to increase reproduction to avoid being gradually exterminated.[73] Many of these groups' members saw birth control as an extension of white supremacist control "in the guise of pills and coils."[74]

On the other hand, other Black civil rights organizations and leaders regarded birth control in a more moderate light. Key leaders within the NAACP had supported birth control access for Black women since the 1920's and 1930's. W.E.B. Du Bois endorsed birth control measures as early as 1922, writing for the NAACP's main magazine, the *Crisis*.[75] Further, Walter White—the executive director of the NAACP from 1929-1955—served as an advisor to the Birth Control Federation of America through the organization's Division of Negro Service, in an effort to advocate for Black issues.[76] Even Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. received the Margaret Sanger Award in Human Rights in 1966 for his concern with family planning.[77] However, Weisbord notes that even within organizations like the NAACP, or among Black leaders who swung more moderately (as opposed to Black nationalists), some individuals believed birth control amounted to a genocidal plot. Weisbord cites, for instance, Dr. Charles Greenlee, a Black physician based in Pittsburgh and affiliated with the local NAACP chapter. Greenlee opposed birth control measures due to his belief that family planning clinics specifically targeted poor Black women, a claim reminiscent of the outrage against coercive sterilization.[78] The *Pittsburgh Press* published Greenlee's opposition in 1968, years before the Relf sisters' forced sterilizations occurred; however, Greenlee and his supporters already at that point criticized "programs sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity (O.E.O.), which allegedly concentrated family planning clinics in black neighborhoods."[79] Greenlee thus further indicates that Black leaders criticized the federal funds that supported birth control clinics.

Social and political activists were not the only ones concerned about sterilization and birth control being linked to genocide. William Darity and Castellano Turner, professors of public health and psychology, respectively, released two surveys in the 1970's

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[73] Weisbord, "Birth Control and the Black American: A Matter of Genocide?" 579-580.

[74] Ibid., 580, quoting Brenda Hyson in *The Black Panther*, 1970.

[75] Ibid., 574.

[76] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 77.

[77] Weisbord, "Birth Control and the Black American: A Matter of Genocide?," 585-586.

[78] Ibid., 584.

[79] Ibid.

measuring genocidal fears within Black communities related to family planning (birth control).[80] In the first study, released in 1972, they observed a significant relationship between fears of genocide and federally-funded family planning methods. The study found that a majority of the population sampled in Hartford, Connecticut felt that "birth control clinics in black neighborhoods should be controlled and operated by blacks" as opposed to other racial groups.[81] Polling responses suggested that Black communities were wary of outside intervention in Black reproductive health measures. Further, Darity and Turner cited both moderate and more militant Black leaders who opposed family planning measures to show the pervasive mistrust and fears related to birth control in the late 1960's and early 1970's. For example, at a 1966 workshop, some individuals within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) argued that family planning intended to reduce the overall Black population.[82] The researchers also cited *Muhammad Speaks*, the official newspaper of the Nation of Islam, as "vehemently opposed to the use of birth control methods by black Americans."[83] Religion certainly informed how some activists understood family planning, and genocidal fears and a general wariness of white-run programs crossed religious lines.

In the second study, published a year later, when controlling for age, sex, and region, Darity and Turner found that younger Black men from northern cities were more likely to link birth control to genocide.[84] The study sampled almost two thousand Black Americans living in either Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, or Charlotte, North Carolina. Researchers found that, out of the total sampled, over half agreed that Black survival depended on increasing the birth rate, and almost 40% perceived birth control as a "genocidal plot" to reduce the Black population.[85] Darity and Turner also referenced how state sterilization laws, many of which were compulsory, and sterilization abuse against both Black women and men exemplified "the pervasiveness of white racism in the United States."[86] Both the sterilization abuse and white-run family planning clinics elicited mistrust and varying degrees of fear throughout Black communities. Notably, the study found that Black men—specifically from northern cities home to more militant groups—as opposed to Black women, were more likely to directly link birth control to

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[80] William A. Darity and Castellano B. Turner, "Family Planning, Race Consciousness, and the Fear of Race Genocide," *American Journal of Public Health* 62, no. 11 (1972): 1454-1459, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.62.11.1454 ; Darity and Turner, "Fears of Genocide Among Black Americans as Related to Age, Race, and Gender," *American Journal of Public Health* 63, no. 12 (1973): 1029-1034.

[81] Ibid; Darity and Turner, "Family Planning, Race Consciousness, and the Fear of Race Genocide," 1458.

[82] Ibid, 1455.

[83] Ibid, 1456.

[84] Ibid; Darity and Turner, "Fears of Genocide Among Black Americans as Related to Age, Race, and Gender," 1029.

[85] Ibid; Darity and Turner, "Fears of Genocide Among Black Americans as Related to Age, Race, and Gender," 1030.

[86] Ibid, 1029.

genocide. Black women were less likely to consider birth control an overt genocidal plot because they desired reproductive agency, as the ones directly affected by birth control and pregnancy.[87] Taken together, both studies determined that communities wanted more Black-led control over family planning programs as opposed to outside white interference.

The ongoing conversation about birth control in the 1960's and 1970's posed questions not only about race but also about gender. Darity and Turner's second survey indicated that genocidal fears produced fissures based along gender lines, especially with regard to region and age. As many scholars have already argued, birth control sparked intense debates about how Black women could maintain their reproductive agency when it conflicted with certain groups' ideas of racial justice. Historian Simone Caron emphasizes that although birth control debates and concerns about black extermination existed in prior decades, "by the 1960s, however, fears of genocide heightened as publicly-funded clinics appeared in areas dominated by 'poor and prolific black families.'"[88] Focusing on Pittsburgh, Caron places the 1960's birth control debate alongside the fears some Black leaders held of genocide and government control over Black sexuality. She traces the polarization that occurred between Black Power advocates, predominately male, who linked federally-funded contraceptive access to genocide, and many Black women who desired birth control to manage their own reproductive autonomy.[89]

While neither Black men nor Black women universally denounced or supported birth control, the rhetoric grounding the debate perpetuated patriarchal ideas about gender roles and reproduction that intended for Black women to remain subservient. Scholar Dobbins-Harris argues that these ideas reflected misogynoir, the deeply ingrained sexist and racist prejudice directed specifically at Black women. Although she deals with abortion, her argument extends to birth control and Black women's basic reproductive agency, as she argues that genocide theorists "sexualize racism by centering Black women and their wombs as the site of genocide."[90] The Black Panthers and the NOI, characterized as more "militant," as well as leaders like Jesse Jackson who were a part of the "mainstream" Civil Rights Movement, "encouraged women to breed for the Black liberation movements and the race."[91] This mindset adhered to the "strength in

[87] Darity and Turner, "Fears of Genocide Among Black Americans as Related to Age, Race, and Gender," 1030.
[88] Simone M. Caron, "Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960s: Genocide or Power Politics?" *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 3 (1998): 545–69.
[89] Ibid, 545.
[90] Dobbins-Harris, "The Myth of Abortion as Black Genocide: Reclaiming Our Reproductive Choice," 91.
[91] Ibid, 120.

numbers" argument mentioned in Weisbord's assessment. According to this perspective, Black women should refrain from using birth control to increase the Black birth rate and prevent an impending Black genocide nationwide.

Many influential Black women advocated for increased birth control access in opposition to their aforementioned male counterparts, and in doing so, rejected patriarchal norms. To further contextualize birth control's enduring controversial history, as early as 1941 the National Council of Negro Women established a committee on family planning and requested other Black organizations do the same.[92] At the time, this move indicated a shift away from the predominately white-led organizations like Planned Parenthood, as the NCNW believed that Black communities should exert more control over their own family planning measures than previously allowed.[93] This attitude persisted into the 1960's and 1970's, as women within the Black liberation movement ideologically split from their Black "brothers" over access to birth control.

Genocidal fears complicated many Black women's positions on birth control, especially those involved in the Black Power movement of the 1960's and 1970's. Although by no means universal, many men within Black Power factions—namely Black nationalists, the NOI, and the Black Panthers— "expected [women] to be supportive and understanding of their men in personal relationships and political life and were best suited for the bearing and care of children."[94] Some Black women in the movement ascribed to this line of thinking as well, believing that their value to the movement relied on their ability to reproduce for the "black revolution."[95] Brenda Hyson, for example, writing for *The Black Panther* in 1970 believed that both abortion and birth control amounted to genocide against Black people, and thus denounced family planning measures within the Black community.[96] Scholar Winifred Breines details multiple stories from Black women in the Black Power movement who recounted that "birth control was actively discouraged as a form of black genocide inflicted by the white power structure."[97] For some, race loyalty trumped reproductive agency, and many feared the possibility of genocide despite the blatant misogynistic rhetoric that reinforced anti-birth control arguments.

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[92] Dobbins-Harris, "The Myth of Abortion as Black Genocide: Reclaiming Our Reproductive Choice," 120; Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 99.

[93] Ibid; Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 100.

[94] Winifred Breines, "Hope and Anger: Black Women and Black Power," in *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 57.

[95] Ibid, 77.

[96] Diane Schulder and Florynce Kennedy, "Black Genocide," in *Abortion Rap* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971): 154.

[97] Breines, "Hope and Anger: Black Women and Black Power," 77.

In contrast, many prominent Black women activists denounced this masculinist rhetoric that hinged on the "strength in numbers" argument. Florynce Kennedy, a lawyer, civil rights activist, and radical feminist—who represented the Black Power activist Assata Shakur and multiple Black Panthers on trial throughout the 1960's—criticized those who claimed that birth control and abortion amounted to genocide. She criticized people, particularly Black men, who argued that birth control was a genocidal plot, pointing out that their rhetoric simultaneously reflected a desire to control Black women's reproduction.[98] Although Kennedy gave credence to their fears, she also supported Black women's freedom to make their own choices about birth control. Frances Beal, who also denounced sterilization abuse, believed that federally-funded "'birth control' [was] in fact nothing but a method of outright surgical genocide."[99] Despite this view, Beal, like Kennedy, supported Black women's bodily autonomy and condemned the patriarchal rhetoric surrounding birth control discourses in the late 1960's.[100] Occasionally, women's activism and pushback against their "brothers" proved fruitful—under Elaine Brown, the Black Panther Party's only female chairman, "the BPP became outspoken birth control and abortion advocates, but continued to object to any government enforced family planning methods."[101] Therefore, an organization's stance on birth control could fluctuate depending on national trends and shifting ideas about women's reproductive rights.

Conclusion: The durability of genocide

Sterilization abuse and debates surrounding family planning did not magically end after the 1970's. Just as eugenics laws and policies endured past the early 20th century eugenics movement and adapted after the Second World War, medical abuse and reproductive violence continued well beyond the 1960's and 1970's. At the turn of the 21st century, Dorothy Roberts headlined a forum on "Black Women and the Pill" as a tribute to the 40th anniversary of the birth control pill.[102] In her address, she briefly traces the history of sterilization abuse in the U.S. and the debate about whether birth control amounted to a genocidal plot, and then proceeds to criticize the continuing abuses Black women suffer in terms of reproductive violence. Further, many institutions continue to forcibly sterilize Black and other minority women. The *Immigration and Human Rights*

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[98] Diane Schulder and Florynce Kennedy, "Black Genocide," in *Abortion Rap* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971): 161.
[99] Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," 109-122.
[100] Ibid, 116.
[101] Ibid; Dobbins-Harris, 100; Elaine Brown served as chairman of the Black Panther Party from 1974-1977.
[102] Dorothy Roberts, "Forum: Black Women and the Pill," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 32, no. 2 (2000).

Law Review published an article in 2021 detailing how Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) allegedly performed a "high number of hysterectomies performed on ICE detainees," who consisted of lower-income immigrant women vulnerable to border violence.[103] As the author notes, forced sterilizations and medical abuses are not history, but continue due to "a lack of oversight…[that] creates an environment with minimal accountability caring for a vulnerable population."[104] In the case of sterilization and birth control abuse, the victims remain the same—positionally and monetarily vulnerable women of color.

The period between the 1950's and the 1970's was crucial to civil rights, as activists secured greater federal protections against institutional racism—the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968—and largely succeeded in combating the legal race order. However, Black activists and predominantly Black-run organizations remained wary of the racial violence embedded in America's socio-political institutions. For many, American racism evoked comparisons to Nazi Germany and Hitler's genocidal crusade against Jewish people, rooted in white supremacist ideologies. Examining how various Black leaders and factions expressed genocidal fears, especially alongside reproductive violence, shows that the movement for civil rights held deep ideological and gendered fissures that prohibited the narrative of racial harmony that many still believe to be true. Even as the concomitant movements for civil rights and Black liberation maintained mutual concern about anti-Black violence, different priorities and degrees of militancy contributed to the overall heterogeneity among sub-groups. Coercive sterilization practices and birth control measures, and the genocidal fears regarding the two, further evidenced intra-movement conflict and gender divisions within organizations.

As Floyd McKissick, former national director of CORE, explained to a conference on Black Power, "Genocide is not a simple matter."[105] McKissick emphasized "that questions must be raised–the same questions which were raised by the events in Nazi Germany. This time, answers must be found."[106] However, what answers could be found if racist ideology and violence merely adapted to the times? What answers could be found unless the U.S. government endeavored to take Black genocide seriously, rather than pretend that select civil rights legislation rectified centuries of abuse? More research is necessary to provide answers, if answers are attainable. Histories of genocide are complex and go

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[103] Emily Medosch, "Not Just ICE: Forced Sterilization in the United States," *Immigration and Human Rights Law Review: The Blog* (2021), accessed November 02, 2022.

[104] Ibid.

[105] McKissick,"Genocide U.S.A.: A Blueprint for Black Survival," 5.

[106] Ibid, 7.

beyond mass murder, as shown through the debates surrounding sterilization abuse and birth control.

The fact that genocidal fears regarding anti-Black racism, especially medical violence, persisted despite civil rights advances and federal protections undermines one of the traditional narratives of progress associated with American democracy. Genocidal fears indicate that racial "progress" existed on a tenuous foundation in the era known for civil rights and Black liberation. While the decades from the 1950's to the 1970's witnessed important milestones for racial integration and race relations in the U.S., there remains a legacy of mistrust toward the government and medical establishment for sanctioning violence.[107] As mentioned previously, coercive sterilization practices continue to target economically vulnerable minority women, and birth control remains controversial. This history is unfinished and, arguably, unresolvable. Does a narrative of progress have a place for all the people sterilized without their consent, or for those who wanted birth control but feared ulterior motives? In an ideal narrative, one that privileges progress, the arc of the moral universe will eventually bend toward justice.[108] The language and historical analogies that Black leaders and organizations relied upon to frame racial violence, sterilization abuse, and birth control provide insight into how genocidal fears proliferated despite progressive accomplishments. While this interpretation does not discount the painstakingly won victories of the Civil Rights Movement or the Black Power movement, it does highlight the limitations that arise when one views historical moments in a vacuum, rather than in a continuous state of fluctuation. Further research on the discourses surrounding Black genocide in the U.S. could provide insight into how to leverage claims for reparations and restitution. This opens doors about the range of historical injustices that warrant redress, and what form(s) this redress may take depending on the severity of injustice. Narratives that center Black genocide, paranoia, and mistrust will help us to analyze similar acts of racial and reproductive violence, offer us a familiar framework to analogize this history as the violence persists, and bolster persistent calls for redress and justice.

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[107] Ibid; Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, 12-13, 16.

[108] See the full quote by Martin Luther King Jr.: "We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice," said at the National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

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