

# CLIO STAFF 2013

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# EDITORS

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Eugene Boyd is a student in the Master of Arts program at California State University, Sacramento. His interest is Modern European history with an emphasis on the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eugene earned his Bachelor of Arts from Sacramento State with a dual major of Journalism/ Political Science. He has written technical, political, academic and political articles throughout his career.

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Elizabeth Dukovich graduated magna cum laude from the University of California, Davis with a Bachelor of Arts in History, where she completed original research on Armenian Genocide denial. Elizabeth presented her research at the Third International Conference on Genocide held in November 2011. In Fall 2012, Elizabeth will graduate with a Master of Arts in History from California State University, Sacramento with a focus on Comparative Genocide. She hopes to continue exploring the commission and denial of genocide in future scholastic and professional endeavors.

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## **ELIZABETH DUKOVICH**

Elizabeth Dukovich graduated magna cum laude from the University of California, Davis with a Bachelor of Arts in History, where she completed original research on Armenian Genocide denial. Elizabeth presented her research at the Third International Conference on Genocide held in November 2011. In Fall 2012, Elizabeth will graduate with a Master of Arts in History from California State University, Sacramento with a focus on Comparative Genocide. She hopes to continue exploring the commission and denial of genocide in future scholastic and professional endeavors.

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## **LORRAINE DIAS HERBON**

Lorraine Dias Herbon is a graduate student in history at California State University, Sacramento. Her interests include California history, primarily the history of her hometown of Sacramento, although she is expanding her horizons with a desire to learn more about U.S. women's history and medieval history. Lorraine hopes to transfer to an out-of-state university to pursue a doctorate degree once she has completed her Master of Arts degree at Sacramento State.

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# WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTION

MARK ALBION



The American Revolution promised a freedom from tyranny and a new sense of liberty for the colonists. Yet gendered constructs were consistently used to justify separation from Britain and to maintain social hierarchies. For example, Britain, portrayed as an effeminate mother, disrupted America's rise to manhood. In conjunction with this idea, and inverting sexuality, rape by British soldiers of American women became colonial propaganda used to instill patriotism and to encourage men to protect "their property and their wives."<sup>1</sup> Rather than portraying these accounts as physically and emotionally charged assaults on women, tales of rape by British soldiers were considered political and personal attacks on manly honor.<sup>2</sup> Even the heroic actions of women during the Revolution in the political and military spheres did not seem to significantly alter gender hierarchies. While white middle- and upper-class women, unlike their working-class, Native American, and African American sisters, achieved some gains, new political, cultural and scientific

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1 Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 230-231.

2 Thomas A. Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 63-64.

forces posed challenges to women's civic rights.<sup>3</sup> This paper concentrates on historians' perspectives regarding the effects of the American Revolution on white women's political rights. While some historians note that the Revolution gave voice to women and allowed them to act in the political sphere, others contend that limitations on women's suffrage severely hampered women's political abilities and technically relegated women to the private sphere.

Mary Beth Norton, one of the major influences in modern American women's history, argues that the American Revolution allowed women legitimate access to the public sphere for the first time, giving them political recognition in a time of crisis. She cites how the Townshend Act of 1767 shaped their politic self-awareness as they responded to the boycott of tea advocated by newspaper essays and editors. While acquiescing to the demands of male colonial leaders, women signed agreements in the North and South ranging from avoiding British tea to total compliance with non-importation measures. Norton notes the Edenton Agreement signed by fifty-one North Carolinian ladies in 1774 as especially significant, for these females declared that they were compelled by the mandates of the provincial congress and were obligated to do whatever was necessary to support the cause of colonial society. She considers this a key point in American women's history, whereby females were beginning to transition from the private to the political arena.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Norton also acknowledges how men remained unaware of this shift, believing they could control and channel women's public actions.<sup>5</sup> John Adams' response to his wife over her concern for national legal protection against husbands' tyranny

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3 Pia Katarina Jakobsson, "Daughters of Liberty: Women and the American Revolution." In *Women's Rights: People and Perspectives*, ed. Crista DeLuzio (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010).

4 Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* (Boston: Harper Collins, 1980), 157-61.

5 Norton, 163-69.

demonstrated how he wished to continue subjugating women. Norton further argues that patriot men did not understand that ladies' altering their consumption due to boycotts and spinning cloth instead of buying it from the British were not simply minor changes in womanly tasks but rather political choices to serve the colonial cause. Men joked about spinning bees, but these Daughters of Liberty engaged in making homespun cloth (under the direction of ministers) were making public declarations, working diligently and abstaining from foreign luxury to extoll the patriot cause.

Women followed their soldier husbands by washing dirty uniforms, cooking meals, and tending to the wounded, but Norton indicates these women were often so poor that they depended on meager army wages and their spouses' support. Most women managed and protected the family's finances, business, and home, gradually earning respect from their departed husbands for their skills to the point that decision-making patterns changed substantially upon men's return. Loyalist women usually had no choice about their decision to flee and left their homes, belongings, and friends when danger was imminent, moving to safer lands under British control.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Norton illustrates how women, formerly meek about crossing gender lines, proudly protested financial and other grievances based upon their duties performed during the war.<sup>7</sup> Women's sense of the "possible egalitarian resonances of revolutionary ideology showed an awareness of implications that seem to have escaped the notice of American men."<sup>8</sup>

Barbara Clark Smith argues that female food rioters during the American Revolution acted in accordance with Revolutionary ideals and local standards of social and economic

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6 Norton, 212-13.

7 Norton, 225-26.

8 Norton, 227.

justice; denied formal political avenues, they nevertheless acted in a political manner.<sup>9</sup> As Norton discusses, women engaged in the marketplace, and forms of economic action against the British were advocated by patriot newspaper contributors and colonial elites. Yet Smith notes that even during the war, in areas where patriot colonial authorities retained power, women participated heavily in food riots against suspected price gougers and food hoarders. Particularly in the rural north, they pushed for fair deals based on community standards of morality and reciprocity. Traditionally violators in colonial America could be subjected to the scrutiny or punishment of religious or civic authorities.<sup>10</sup> Even in the thriving seaports, American society was still adjusting to commercialization, and the free market led to increased social inequality.<sup>11</sup>

Britain's revenue raising policies towards the colonies after the French and Indian War heightened a sense of economic exploitation. Therefore, women's boycotts and spinning bees represented not only patriotic fervor, but also a sense of the propriety of fair and equitable business dealings.<sup>12</sup> When war profiteers sought to publicly endorse the repeal of price regulation as early as 1777, women and men repeatedly paid the price they thought appropriate, not the price posted.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, Smith proposes that the sheer number and extent of women's food riots during this period was revolutionary, and women were not afraid to invoke the revolution if necessary. Kingston women proposed hindering their male relatives from serving in the military if they did not get tea, New York women persuaded continental soldiers to assist them on at least one occasion, and female food rioters

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9 Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 51, no.1 (January 1994), 3-5.

10 Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," 9-10.

11 Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," 10.

12 Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," 13-14.

13 Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," 24-25.



spoke of the Continental Congress to convince others of their righteousness.<sup>14</sup>

Smith offers two reasons for why women invoked the Revolution and cast themselves into the traditionally male political sphere through food riots. First, in 1765 the colonial elite called for the masses to assist them in boycotting as a measure of defiance against the exploitative British. Second, in answering the call, women brought in their own notions of “equity, neighborly dealing, and charity,” and retained these values long after the elites lost interest.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately for women, the food or price riot was no longer pliable after the war, “due to suppression of popular cultural forms; the increasing disassociation (however inaccurate for many) of women and production; the growing association of women with consumption and leisure; the growing articulation of social experience into realms either ‘public’ or ‘private.’”<sup>16</sup> According to Smith, the vote became the dominant form of political action after the war, suppressing all other mass political actions.<sup>17</sup>

Sara Evans states that white women worked within paradigms defined by colonial elites and Enlightenment philosophers to create a public role while subtly challenging conventional boundaries. She describes how the language of the Revolution was cast in gendered terms, as America the upright adolescent male struggled to achieve independence from Britain, the wicked mother.<sup>18</sup> Even John Adams contrasted republican martial manliness with the “Elegance, Luxury, and Effeminacy” of Europe.<sup>19</sup> With the tensions mounting between Britain and

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14 Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” 26-27.

15 Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” 29.

16 Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” 34.

17 Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” 34.

18 Sarah M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 47.

19 Evans, 47.

America in the 1760s, woman who acknowledged their effeminate timidity suddenly felt themselves drawn into the manly arena of politics. To enforce nonimportation and non-consumption of British goods, one colonial strategist advocated pulling women into the fray by urging them to adopt the boycott. Yet Evans reiterates Norton's evidence that women were often more than willing to participate, and also discusses how in 1780 Philadelphia women proposed to create a national women's organization to support the war effort. Their "Sentiments of an American Woman" attracted donations and promoted the creation of neighboring organizations in New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. However, General Washington denied them the agency to give the money directly to the soldiers, instead negotiating with them to make shirts.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, General Washington did not fully appreciate the women who followed his army, even though they provided invaluable services.<sup>21</sup>

After the Revolution, Evans argues that male elites who read Enlightenment philosophers combined older modes of thought with modern ideas to form the nature of American government. Liberty applied as a concept for some but not for all. Jean-Jacque Rousseau influenced American elites with his insistence that only "a male head of a household" could be a citizen involved in the public sphere, while women with their gentle qualities belonged at home in the private sphere.<sup>22</sup>

Evans insists that the notion of white propertied women as citizens presented a problem to white patriarchy. Therefore women were relegated to becoming republican mothers who would raise patriotic sons, with the benefit of training from female academies. The first Great Awakening had given women a public voice and Enlightenment writings promoted education as a prominent

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20 Evans, 50.

21 Evans, 51-52.

22 Evans, 55-56.

role in the shaping of the mind. Yet women such as Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray embraced a paradigm that advocated women's education. Evans argues that women influenced by the second Great Awakening combined civic duty and moral obligation in their institutions, associations, and clubs of the early nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, they challenged alcohol consumption, prostitution, slavery, and labor conditions in the public sphere, working collectively in a fashion which would eventually lead to demands for full political participation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Evans argues against women historians' traditional definitions of politics as applying only to male suffrage, negating "women's action...as a distinctive activity in its own right."<sup>25</sup>

Nancy Woloch disagrees with Evans that women managed to carve out a political voice through association even after the Revolution's end, and shares Smith's conviction that the early nineteenth century consigned women to a private, family sphere.<sup>26</sup> Woloch focuses on a "new, companionate ideal of marriage... based on sympathy, affection, self-esteem, friendship, and mutual obligation[,]” compared to an earlier harsh, patriarchal model.<sup>27</sup> Yet spinsterhood was considered less of a shunned circumstance, and some women in eastern areas used the newfound right to reject marriage offers to their advantage. Marriage was still the ideal, however, and many women of means attended institutions such as the Philadelphia Young Ladies Academy (1787) to fashion themselves as suitable republican wives and mothers.<sup>28</sup>

Many advocates of education had other ideas than simply marriage. Judith Murray, Priscilla Mason, and the Englishwoman

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23 Evans, 56-58, 64-66.

24 Evans, 74-75, 83-84, 92.

25 Evans, 5.

26 Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience: A Concise History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 35.

27 Woloch, 54.

28 Woloch, 57-58.

Mary Wollstonecraft felt that academies should help women in other ways besides their marriage prospects. Their ideas included equality, self-growth and confidence, economic independence, and even access to offices within Church and State.<sup>29</sup> Woloch notes that these notions did not come to full fruition in the early nineteenth century, but church-sponsored charity associations, ladies periodicals and literature, and women's work in the factories did expose women to changing circumstances. To Woloch, they signified portents of transitions to come, for the time was still not right.

Carol Berkin reiterates women's political participation in the Revolution, citing boycotts, spinning bees, laundering, nursing, cooking for the troops, even fighting as soldiers.<sup>30</sup> Yet she declares that "after the war, virtually no one suggested formalizing women's political participation, and women showed little interest in preserving the public platform that newspapers had provided."<sup>31</sup> She argues that most women were happy to go back to traditional roles as wives and mothers.<sup>32</sup>

Fortunately, the Revolution did offer some advantages to women. The Enlightenment and the actions of women during the Revolution dispelled the concept "that women were both morally and mentally inferior to men."<sup>33</sup> Berkin also argues that the resounding success of boarding schools and academies from northern to southern states disproved the concept that education would produce manly women uninterested in serving their families. Republican motherhood designed to instill civic virtue in patriotic sons became the norm. As a result, education for women

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29 Woloch, 61-62.

30 Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), xv-xvi.

31 Berkin, xvii.

32 Berkin, xvii.

33 Berkin, 151.

became a symbol of status, not deficiency.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, according to Berkin this form of republican education confined women to the private, family sphere. She notes that Abigail Adams was not asking her husband, John, to include voting rights for women when creating new laws for the nation. She asked for rights that would give wives legal power, such as “the right to own or buy land, to sue or be sued, or to claim as her property the clothes on her back.”<sup>35</sup> For John Adams and other political elites, an attack on political patriarchy was laughable. Adam’s argument that men must retain the title of master and act decently toward women, for in fact women were really in control, does not sit well with Berkin. In fact she states that in “Adam’s claim that mastery was a burden rather than a privilege, we can see an eerie echo of the antebellum slave owner’s claim of the burdens of his patriarchy.”<sup>36</sup>

The title of Rosemarie Zagarri’s book, *Revolutionary Backlash*, signifies her stance toward the Revolution’s contribution to women’s political rights. She claims that several factors influenced the changes that had occurred by the 1830s. “Whereas previously women had been excluded by custom and tradition, now their exclusion was legally required, scientifically mandated, and culturally determined.”<sup>37</sup> She notes how New Jersey experimented with female suffrage from 1797, but charges of voter fraud in Essex county in 1807 (observers supposedly saw males dressed as women voting several times) were used as an excuse by Democratic-Republicans and Federalists to disenfranchise both propertied women and free blacks. She considers this a “Faustian bargain,” for women had voted for Federalists, while

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34 Berkin, 152-53.

35 Berkin, 157-58.

36 Berkin, 158.

37 Rosemarie Zagarri. *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 180.

blacks had voted for Republicans.<sup>38</sup> Even without female suffrage, partisan politics between the Federalists and Republicans initially spurred women into the fray, with men encouraging women to attend, participate, and speak at political meetings and events. Significantly, Zagarri argues that the early nation's hatred of partisan politics, and the violent ruptures that partisan politics eventually caused within families, communities, and the nation as a whole, stimulated many men to insist that women withdraw from partisan activities and act as "peacemakers and mediators" between male factions.<sup>39</sup> The rise of the concept of a public sphere for men and a private sphere for women joined with this notion of female nonpartisanship to encourage women to reject politics and join reform and charitable associations. With women explicitly disassociating their efforts from politics, Zagarri insists that gender lines were drawn.<sup>40</sup> Yet partisanship again played a role in keeping the notion of women's suffrage abominable, for when Republicans tried to remove property restrictions for white and some free black males, Federalists taunted them by asking why not include women, all blacks, and children. Responding to this assault, Republicans agreed that only white men should be able to vote, and by 1830 they were largely successful in establishing this stipulation throughout the nation. Zagarri argues that by expanding the vote for white males, the nation had formally established gender and racial hierarchies.<sup>41</sup> New ideas coming from Europe stipulating the biological inferiority of both women and blacks contributed to this concept, and Enlightenment thinkers had also grouped blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

In conclusion, modern historians have debated the effects of the American Revolution on women's roles in the political

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38 Zagarri, 36.

39 Zagarri, 146.

40 Zagarri, 147.

41 Zagarri, 149-154.

arena. Norton, Smith, and Evans note the positive effects for women in their ability to engage publicly in boycotts, homespun cloth, fundraising operations, charitable associations, and reform organizations. They note the political voice women manifested during the Revolution, the education of republican mothers after the Revolution, and the organizational activities in which women participated in the early nineteenth century. Women publicly challenged prostitution, alcoholism, slavery, and labor injustice, and these acts were inherently political. Yet Woloch, Berkin, and Zagarri indicate that while women developed confidence by working through these associations, females were relegated to a private sphere with no opportunity for voting rights. While they may have had a voice in society, the expansion of white male suffrage damaged their political clout. In some way this debate is between those who argue politics involves only the right to vote and those who claim politics includes any type of influence over legislative, executive, and judicial action.





VERA BRITAIN:  
 A WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE DURING  
 THE GREAT WAR

LORRAINE DIAS HERBON



War is a man's job—or so it is said. Prior to the twentieth century, war tales retold the conflict from the male perspective with very little account given to women who, also, experienced the horrors and pains of war. Vera Britain, and women like her, who wrote of their war experiences, altered the all-male focus of war. Beginning with her first book, *Testament of Youth: The Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, Vera Britain provided historians, literary critics, and others with an invaluable window that looked into the female experience of the Great War. Historians, pacifists, and literary critics alike quote her extensively and use her work as a cornerstone to analyze and better understand the impact of World War I on an entire generation.

Vera Britain was born in December 1893 in Newcastle-under-Lyme, an industrial town in England famed for papermaking and textile mills. Her parents, Edith and Arthur Britain, were middle-class by the standards of the day, neither wealthy nor living in want. In 1895, the family moved to Macclesfield in Cheshire, where Vera's only sibling, her brother

Edward, was born. Through her formative years, Vera Brittain received the traditional female education favored by the middle-class in the Edwardian period. In 1913, Brittain made the decision to continue her education, testing for and being accepted into Somerville College at Oxford.

Vera Brittain's Oxford years should have been the happiest and most exciting of her life. Yet the assassination of an obscure Austrian archduke in July of 1914 served to alter her life's plan. Swept up in the excitement of the war, Brittain found herself agonizing over her inability to participate in the national effort in any meaningful way. As both her brother and her fiancée entered into the service and were dispatched to France, her desire to serve grew exponentially. In June 1915, she found a way to meet that desire. Joining the Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD) as a nurse, she served first at a hospital near Buxton where her family was living, then moved on to nurse wounded soldiers at a hospital in London. She would serve her nation's wounded soldiers as a nurse almost continuously until April of 1919, serving in Malta and in Etaples, France, as well as in England.<sup>1</sup>

During the war, Brittain soon realized a catastrophe had fallen upon her family and her entire generation. First, she saw first her fiancée, Roland Leighton die in the war, then two of her brother's friends died and finally her brother Edward died--all as a result of their military service. The impact of the Great War would serve to inform the rest of Brittain's life—as a writer, a feminist, and as a fierce advocate for pacifism.

Like others, Brittain began writing of her experiences around ten years after the war's end. In 1929, author Erich Maria Remarque published his *All Quiet on the Western Front* to resounding praise, and even more resounding sales. For the next several years, a “boom” of literature about the Great War

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1996), 97.

filled bookshops across Europe and the United States as more and more authors sought to describe the realities of experiences that had been, up until that point, too painful to chronicle.<sup>2</sup> As Remarque and others were publishing their works, Brittain began writing what would become *Testament of Youth*. Begun in 1929 and published in 1933, *Testament of Youth* is an autobiographical account of Brittain's experiences from her early childhood through her marriage and motherhood in the 1920's. Like Remarque, Brittain in *Testament of Youth* attempted to "describe the terrible effects of the Great War on the generation that came to adulthood during it."<sup>3</sup> Seeking to "rescue something that might be of value...from the smashing up" of her youth and that of her entire generation, Brittain's goal in writing *Testament of Youth* was to help not only herself to make sense of what had happened, but to help others as well.<sup>4</sup>

Brittain admits to some difficulties in telling her own story. Acknowledging that "it is almost impossible to see ourselves and our friends and lovers as we really were..." she writes that this difficulty in perspective delayed her telling of her story. Even knowing that there was a "boom in War literature" going on, she could not hurry the production of her memoir until she knew that she had done her best to portray both the events and her reactions to them in as honest a manner as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Even as a young girl, Brittain was aware of happenings on the world stage. She remembered the 1908 annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary, the 1911 Italian invasion of Tripoli, and the 1911 Morocco crisis.<sup>6</sup> While she did not truly

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2 Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 267-277.

3 Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, 280.

4 Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: The Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1933), 11.

5 Ibid., 13.

6 Ibid., 39.

understand the global implications of these events at the time, this early training would serve as the basis for her later interest in post-war international relations and the work of the League of Nations.

In her book, *Testament of Youth*, Brittain relates her life experiences; but the most moving are her descriptions of the war and her utter disillusionment brought about by the Great War. Reading selections from the diary she kept as a young girl, she notes that she has inserted some of these passages into *Testament of Youth* “to give some idea of the effect of the War, with its stark disillusionments, its miseries unmitigated by polite disguise.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout the book, Brittain uses words like “catastrophe” and “devastation” to describe what happened to her and her peers. She further notes that as early as 1915 she was “already beginning to suspect, as all my generation now knows, that neither side in wartime has a monopoly of butchers and traitors.”<sup>8</sup>

With the war’s end, Brittain recounts the numbness she and her fellow nurses received even as they were cheered while walking through London to Buckingham Palace. Feeling her “heart sinking in a sudden cold dismay,” she knew that the old world she had lived in as a girl was gone forever. Everything “that had hitherto made up my life had vanished.”<sup>9</sup> The peace under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles she describes as “nasty,” noting “the War had condemned me to live to the end of my days in a world without confidence or security, a world in which every dear personal relationship would be fearfully cherished....”<sup>10</sup> Vera Brittain became successful as an author and peace activist. The impact of the war, however, changed her forever. After her death in 1970, her remembrances of the Great War, captured in her writings, served many who used her experiences to better their

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7 Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: The Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, 45.

8 Ibid., 168.

9 Ibid., 463.

10 Ibid., 467, 469-470.

own understanding of World War I and the generation that lived through it.

Sandra M. Gilbert, poet and literary critic, was one of the first authors to use the work of Vera Brittain in her study of World War I. In her article “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,” Gilbert focuses on the literary works produced during and about the Great War, using these as a means of understanding gender roles during that pivotal period. As Gilbert points out, men and women had such severely divergent experiences of the War that it led to what Vera Brittain herself would call “a barrier of indescribable experience” between them.<sup>11</sup> While the experience of the war allowed women to break from the Edwardian social and economic constraints, as Brittain herself did through VAD nursing, this freedom was construed as emasculating to men, further deepening the divide between the sexes.<sup>12</sup> Nursing gave women a means of gaining a form of expertise, and thus, power at the expense of the men they nursed. For the men, they saw this acquisition of power to be a form of exploitation of their suffering.<sup>13</sup>

Gender studies was another issue citing Vera Brittain as a source of support. In 1984, Muriel Mellown published her article “One Woman’s Way to Peace: The Development of Vera Brittain’s Pacifism.” In this insightful essay, Mellown seeks to understand Vera Brittain through Brittain’s involvement with the peace movement. Noting that, by this time, Vera Brittain had been “almost forgotten” (despite the essay by Sandra Gilbert just the year before), Mellown finds Brittain’s life and work almost a “paradigm of female experience in the twentieth century.”<sup>14</sup> While

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11 Sandra M. Gilbert, “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War.” *Signs* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 425.

12 *Ibid.*, 429.

13 *Ibid.*, 435.

14 Muriel Mellown, “One Woman’s Way to Peace: The Development of Vera Brittain’s Pacifism,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 2 (Women and Peace 1985): 1.

finding that Brittain was a “radical feminist,” Mellown notes that this did not conflict with Brittain’s work for the peace movement; in fact, the synthesis of feminism and pacifism were both aspects “of the same struggle against tyranny and oppression.” Mellown pays particular interest to Brittain’s work with the League of Nations, although this allegiance suffered as the League in the 1930’s was “slowly wrecked by its determination to preserve the Versailles Treaty and by the disunity of the member nations.”<sup>15</sup>

Mellown’s legitimates Brittain’s life as both a feminist and a pacifist by her insistence on the significance of Brittain’s experience for women at they applied to women in 1984. For Mellown, Brittain has a “singular relevance for women today.”<sup>16</sup> With conservative political actors in power in both Great Britain and the United States in the 1980s, Mellown’s focus on Vera Brittain was as much about the political atmosphere of her own time as about the achievements of Brittain herself.

Muriel Mellown was not the only author to focus on Vera Brittain as a feminist. In 1996, Deborah Gorham published *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*. Gorham establishes Brittain’s importance as a memoirist of the Great War period, noting that her *Testament of Youth* was “an overnight success, selling more than 3,000 copies its first day out.” For Gorham, *Testament of Youth* is also a “manifesto in support of feminism,” and it is through this lens, more so than through the lens of Vera Brittain as a pacifist, that Gorham constructs her biography.<sup>17</sup>

Gorham utilizes a wide variety of sources, from Brittain’s published work, private diaries, her correspondence and other papers, and a vast array of secondary sources. Through these, she carefully analyzes not only what Brittain wrote about herself for publication, but also how that public persona often conflicted

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15 Muriel Mellown, “One Woman’s Way to Peace: The Development of Vera Brittain’s Pacifism,” 2.

16 Ibid., 1.

17 Deborah Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, 2.

with the private Brittain. Significantly, Gorham dismisses much of Brittain's romantic rhetoric about her wartime experience as being an after-the-fact enhancement of the true experience, said enhancement stemming from the devastating effects of the Great War and the deaths of Brittain's fiancée, brother, and close friends. Gorham writes that, on the eve of the War, Brittain was a "rebel" who rejected the "anti-intellectual provinciality of her family and defined herself as a feminist."<sup>18</sup> The fact that such a passionate retelling of love lost amidst the misery of war does not jibe with Gorham's view of Brittain as a solid intellectual and feminist and may be said to color Gorham's own reading of Brittain's thoughts and feelings.

In her conclusion, Gorham discloses a little more about why she chose to focus on Brittain as a symbol of feminism. During the 1980s and 1990s, feminism had moved into two camps—one which valued the equality of all people and one that believed in the "special nature" of women. Gorham herself belonged to the former category, and she believed that Vera Brittain embodied that very sense of equality that she herself espoused.<sup>19</sup> In the end, however, it is Brittain's integrity of character that Gorham most admires. As she puts it, "Brittain bequeathed her weaknesses as well as her strengths as evidence, and for this brave decision historians and a later generation of feminists should indeed be grateful."<sup>20</sup>

As Gorham put Vera Brittain into context as a feminist, editor Harold Bloom identified Brittain as an recorder for their time.-, He includes Brittain as one of the great women historians along with other notable female writers of the twentieth century such as Maya Angelou, Martha Gellhorn, and Lillian Hellman, in his two volume collection entitled *Women Memoirists*. While

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18 Deborah Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, 80.

19 Ibid., 263.

20 Ibid., 267.

he includes only one section of Brittain's own work, the foreword to the published version of *Vera Brittain: Wary Diary, 1913-1917*, Bloom relies on several authors, historians, and literary critics to provide an analysis of Brittain's importance as a witness to the events of the Great War. According to one essay on Brittain, Alan Bishop, an editor himself of letters from World War I, finds in Brittain a means of "adding to one's knowledge and understanding, not only of one of the great women of our time, but of the intricacies of human behavior under stress."<sup>21</sup> For her part, Maroula Joannou finds that Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* "belongs within the realm of 'dominant memory.'" She criticizes Brittain for producing a view of war 'from above' which does not question the idea of nation or the ideology of Englishness under which the war is conducted, rather than a view which properly reflects the discontents and ambivalent feelings about the war of those 'below.'<sup>22</sup>

Often, useful insights into history are found in not only what is written but in what isn't written. In Susan R. Grayzel's *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, the author presents a compelling picture of what it meant to be a woman during the Great War. She finds no use, however, in looking at the lives of Vera Brittain and the thousands like her who served as nurses in the Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD) through the course of the war. In fact, Grayzel mentions the VAD only once, in a footnote. With over 6,000 volunteers in place at the start of the war, and a tremendous influx of new recruits beginning in 1914, it is clear that the VAD provided an important vehicle for women seeking

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21 Alan Bishop in *Women Memoirists*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998), 16.

22 Maroula Joannou in *Women Memoirists*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998), 25.



to aid in the war effort.<sup>23</sup> As other historians have noted, including Britain's biographer Deborah Gorham, women's participation in the war effort, including through the VAD, was "significant both for the history of women and for the history of the war."<sup>24</sup> With this significance, it is curious that Grayzel neglected to mention this contribution by women.

In 2003, Richard Badenhause, like others before him, used Vera Britain to highlight the female experience of World War I. In his essay entitled "Mourning Through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Britain's *Testament of Youth*," published in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Badenhause goes a step further than earlier authors, using Britain to critique the work of Paul Fussel in his *The Great War and Modern Memory*. According to Badenhause, Fussel's focus on the male experience omitted the role of women in the war. Badenhause admits that while Fussel cited Britain's *Testament of Youth* twice in his work, he "does not assign Britain's work an authoritative status," instead using her narrative simply to validate what Fussel had written about the male experience.<sup>25</sup> Badenhause goes further to explore Britain's work in the light of what he denotes as her "dual roles" as active participant and passive observer.<sup>26</sup> Writing from the perspective of the "dual roles forced Britain to wrestle, much like the shell-shocked male soldiers, with the effects of trauma on her own psyche, while also engaging in a drawn-out process of mourning...."<sup>27</sup> It was only through the writing of her experiences, according to Badenhause, that Britain could "survive in the

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23 British Red Cross, "War time volunteers and personnel records," <http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/Museum-and-archives/Resources-for-researchers/Volunteers-and-personnel-records> (accessed May 10, 2012).

24 Deborah Gorham, *Vera Britain: A Feminist Life*, 98.

25 Richard Badenhause, "Mourning Through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Britain's *Testament of Youth*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 4 (Winter, 2003): 421.

26 Ibid., 422.

27 Ibid., 422-423.

present.”<sup>28</sup> Like so many others of the “lost generation” who suffered the shock and overwhelming loss of the Great War, Brittain took the steps necessary to cope with what she had experienced. During the war, she put herself into the participant role as a VAD nurse; after the war, she put herself into the same role as Remarque and other survivors by telling her story.

Today, Vera Brittain remains a useful source of information for scholars discussing the Great War experience. In 2011, historian Michael Neiberg published *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I*. Brittain plays several roles in helping Neiberg establish his theories on the reactions of everyday people to the political machinations that brought about the war. Noting that Brittain first found the outbreak of the war to be something quite distant from herself and her friends and family, he also uses her to portray the start of the war as “a ‘quite unexpected’ storm.”<sup>29</sup> Brittain’s descriptions of the lack of newspaper coverage of the war are utilized by Neiberg to identify the efforts of the government to maintain national morale by silencing the truth of the terrible losses experienced by the British during the first months of the war.<sup>30</sup> By Christmas of 1914, Neiberg also identifies Vera Brittain as being among those who realized that the war would not be the short affair as previously believed, but that it “would last a long time and not leave her family unscathed.”<sup>31</sup> For Neiberg, Brittain was the observer, the recorder of events in 1914 that allows him to more fully develop his ideas that the onset of war was unexpected and that disillusionment “with the war and the lofty rhetoric governments used to support it was well in place by the end of the war’s first year.”<sup>32</sup>

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28 Ibid., 424.

29 Michael S. Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 95, 123.

30 Ibid., 159.

31 Ibid., 227.

32 Ibid., 7.

What made these authors seek out Vera Britain as a source of information on the Great War and its generation? Because Britain was herself a multi-faceted, complex character, and because she showed no hesitancy in expressing the myriad aspects of her nature, authors find in her symbols of whatever truths they are seeking. Whether they see her as a feminist, a pacifist, a writer, or some combination of all three, Vera Britain provides the material that allows them to delve more deeply into World War I and its consequences for an entire generation of young people, men and women alike. For historians and writers of today, we may see in Vera Britain a model of an intellectual and emotional toughness that transcends even the most horrific of events and thus serves to remind us that we, too, may overcome our adversities.



THE SISTERS OF HISTORY:  
 FERNAND BRAUDEL, THE SOCIAL  
 SCIENCES, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
 THE ANNALES SCHOOL

TIM TADLOCK



George Burton Adams, President of the American Historical Association, announced in a speech on December 29, 1908 that the profession of history was under assault from a “hostile movement” comprised of no less than “five lines of attack” from fields “so closely ... related to us, ... that we are tempted to call them offshoots of history.”<sup>1</sup> Adams defines the five culprits as political science, geography, economics, sociology, and psychology.<sup>2</sup> Together with history, these disciplines form the foundation of the social sciences. While Adams professed the need to define history as a distinct and valuable discipline separate from the encroaching social sciences, historic thought was trending in a different direction in France. In 1903, French sociologist and economist François Simiand attacked the “idols of

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1 George Burton Adams, “History and the Philosophy of History,” *American Historical Review* 14 (January 1909): 224.

2 Adams, “History and the Philosophy of History,” 224-27.

the tribe of historians,” the three elements traditionally comprising historic study: the political idol, the individual idol, and the chronological idol. Simiand’s work was published in Henri Berr’s journal *Revue de Synthèse Historique*.<sup>3</sup> Berr’s journal sought “to reunite ... the diverse branches into which history obstinately subdivided itself.”<sup>4</sup> Historian Peter Burke terms this “the French Historical Revolution.” In his work by the same name, he outlines the evolution and development of the French school of thought that coalesced from Berr’s initial concept. This historiographic approach became the Annales School.

Was the Annales but a brief ripple upon the pond of historiographic thought? Or was it something more profound? Perhaps the Annales will leave a lasting mark on history and provide valuable tools in its wake for use by future historians? Pursuit of the answer to the last question will employ the works of a few representative Annales historians; but the bulk of the following analysis focuses upon the works of Fernand Braudel, who, perhaps more than any other Annales historian, came to embody this historic approach. The analysis presents a discussion of the key characteristics of the Annales, including its strengths and inadequacies, through comparison with other historiographic approaches. Understanding the Annales in this context provides a broad toolbox for use by any historian looking to convey the broad structures within history.

While professors at the French university in Strasbourg, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, French historians in the first decades of the twentieth century, developed an approach to history that attempted to unify the social sciences rather than to establish boundaries between them. Each historian came from an interdisciplinary background and provided significant

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3 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 10-11.

4 Fernand Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences: The Long Term,” in *The Varieties of History*, ed. Fritz Stern, trans. Siân France (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 457.

contributions to Berr's journal.<sup>5</sup> According to Braudel, Bloch and Febvre, broke with the *Revue de Synthèse Historique* to create a new journal "that would be less philosophical, based on concrete new researches."<sup>6</sup> In 1928, they founded and became editors of the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (Journal of Economic and Social History). The new journal was modeled after the *Annales de géographie*, founded by French geographer and one of Lucien Febvre's influences, Paul Vidal de la Blache.

Since its founding, the French journal, *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, has evolved through time; changing names to demonstrate growth and evolution. The first name change to *Annales. Economies. Sociétés. Civilisations.* occurred in 1946 to better emphasize the interdisciplinary character of the Annales approach.<sup>7</sup> After the death of Lucien Febvre in 1956, French historian Fernand Braudel took the leadership role of the Annales during the early years of this period, retaining this position until 1968. The Annales focus turned to historical statistics. It leaned upon the strengths of sociology and economics to develop the language of statistics and models to explain recurring historical events. Braudel points to Karl Marx's origin of capitalism as an example of such a model, although it lacks the statistical foundation of an Annales approach.<sup>8</sup> After Braudel, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie became a leader within the Annales during the 1970s. During this period, the Annales shifted toward social history, tracing a path through the history of perspectives and attitudes. This is called *l'histoire des mentalités*. While the *mentalités* was first explored within the Annales in 1924 by Marc Bloch's *The King's Touch*, it rose to prominence within the school during

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5 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 11.

6 Fernand Braudel, "Personal Testimony," *Journal of Modern History* 44 (December 1972): 460.

7 Georg C. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 53.

8 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 422.

this later period. An example of *mentalités* from this period can be seen in Ladurie's *Montaillou*. In 1994, the name was changed to *Histoire, Sciences Sociales* to move away from the perceived bias against political history and look more favorably toward the study of industrial or post-industrial societies, incorporating aspects of poststructuralism.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the changes in name and its variations, the *Annales* retained common themes and purposes. The guiding principle of the *Annales* is the inclusion of the social sciences, seeking a dialogue between the different disciplines in order to develop a complete picture of civilization. In the *Annales*, the social sciences describe the material world to better understand culture rather than using the social sciences to define humanity as materialism did for Marx.<sup>10</sup> The *Annales* historians view history through the kaleidoscopic lens of the social sciences to better understand the present through a contextual understanding of the past, both distant and recent.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary historiography relied upon source evidence, which necessarily led to a focus upon short-term, event-centered history; or what François Simiand called, *l'histoire événementielle*.<sup>12</sup> According to Braudel, it is difficult to understand the "role played by the history of institutions, religions, and civilizations" without looking beyond the short-term.<sup>13</sup> Looking beyond the short-term period toward the features that underlie the long-term period allows one to identify the foundation or structure of history over the long-term, or the *longue durée*. Braudel believes "the long term is the one most suited to the development of observation and analysis common to all social sciences." This meant a break with recent historiography, which,

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9 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 61-62.

10 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 58-59.

11 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 419.

12 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 407.

13 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 408-9.



according to Braudel, recalls “the great mind of a Michelet, a Ranke, a Burkhardt, or a Fustel de Coulanges.”<sup>14</sup> The *mentalités* and the *longue durée* form two foundational characteristics of the Annales school.

Historians of the Annales school, or Annalistes, as they are known, function very much like an anthropologist, seeking to reconstruct the culture of a past region and age. While the goal of the Annales remained the same, the methodology employed to reach conclusions evolved over time as much as the school had itself. The early Annalistes of Braudel’s vintage might sift through vast collections of quantifiable data, tending toward economic or sociological data, such as tax records and demographic data, to reconstruct the society. The Annalistes of the *mentalités* era approach the information more like an anthropologist that seeks to reconstruct the culture from an understanding of daily interactions or attempts to uncover what was most important to the people, as in *Montaillou*. One thing all Annalistes have in common is the *longue durée*. Whether Braudel, Bloch, Febvre, or Ladurie, each looks for the common thread that changes little, attempting to identify the historic structure that transcends the shorter cycles of time.

### THE ELEMENTS OF THE ANNALES

The Annales is often termed a “school,” but is not viewed as such from those contributing to it.<sup>15</sup> Like many of the historiographic approaches to the study of history, the school contains many specific characteristics that distinguish it. Its scope and focus is nearly as broad as the school is inclusive. The Annales contains a wide array of different historical studies. On one end of the spectrum lies Ladurie’s microhistory, *Montaillou*. *Montaillou* explores the lives and relationships of the Cathars

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14 Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences,” 408-9.

15 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 52.

within the tiny village of Montaillou in southern France and its environs over the span of approximately a generation during the early-fourteenth century. On the other end of the spectrum lies Braudel's three-volume treatise, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Braudel's third volume, *Perspective of the World*, ranges across the globe exploring nascent capitalism wherever it occurs both within and beyond the European sphere of influence while paying nominal heed to the temporal boundaries established by the title. Given this rather wide range of spatial, temporal, and subject matter, it may be unclear what the works of the *Annales* have in common beyond the aforementioned *mentalités* and *longue durée*.

Human geography, or *Anthropogeographie*,<sup>16</sup> as German geographer Friedrich Ratzel termed it, is perhaps the most visible tool employed by *Annales* historians, particularly as it relates to the *longue durée*. The roots of this characteristic go back to the founding of the *Annales*. Co-founder Lucien Febvre was a pupil of geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache.<sup>17</sup> Vidal de la Blache was a human geographer who supported the idea that humans may alter their own environment within certain constraints. "Man," according to Vidal de la Blache, "henceforth master of distances, armed with all that science places at his disposal, will far exceed any influence that our remote ancestors could exert."<sup>18</sup> Vidal de la Blache's influence is seen clearly in Febvre's work *La terre et l'évolution humaine* which supported the ideas of Vidal de la Blache.<sup>19</sup> Bloch, too, was influenced by the teachings of Vidal de la Blache.<sup>20</sup> He recognized that "anthropogeography studies societies

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16 Friedrich Ratzel, "The Territorial Growth of States," in *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology*, ed. John Agnew, David Livingston, and Alisdair Rodgers (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 525.

17 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 13.

18 Paul Vidal de la Blache, "Meaning and Aim of Human Geography," in *Human Geography*, 191.

19 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 14.

20 Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1953), ix.

in their relations to their physical environments: relations which are obviously mutual, since man is constantly action upon things at the same time that they are action upon him.”<sup>21</sup>

Not all Annales historians were of the same geographic flock as Vidal de la Blache. Braudel took geography a different direction. Braudel states in the opening chapter of *The Mediterranean* that geography “is no longer an end in itself but a means to an end. It helps us rediscover the slow unfolding of structural realities, to see things in the perspective of the long term. Geography.... helps us to discover the almost imperceptible movement of history.”<sup>22</sup> Braudel identifies the concept of structure as “of the greatest importance,” defining it as the “organization, coherence, [and] a set of fairly stable relationships between social reality and the body of society,” and signifying the “reality which survives through long periods of time.”<sup>23</sup> For Braudel, geography is an element of the structure established in the study of the *longue durée*. Braudel states that “geographical observation of long-term movements guides us towards history’s slowest processes.”<sup>24</sup> This perspective of geography also echoes the writings of Friedrich Ratzel. Ratzel’s view of human geography differs from that of Vidal de la Blache in that he does not see the environment as malleable by humanity, except only slowly, over centuries or perhaps millennia. For Ratzel, the environment instead guides the choices and options for those that live in a specific region. For example, Ratzel states that “states bordering on steppes in their struggle with the inhabitants of the steppes must acquire so much of the same character as will enable them to avail themselves of the advantages the steppe affords.”<sup>25</sup> This theory is called geographic or environmental determinism. Ratzel recognizes geography as defining the development of human civilization, rather than being defined by them.

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21 Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, 124.

22 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, vol. 1, trans. Sián Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23.

23 Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences,” 411.

24 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 102.

25 Ratzel, “The Territorial Growth of States,” 535.

In *The Mediterranean*, Braudel constructs the Mediterranean basin as the central geographic feature defining the people. The sea is “the great divider, the obstacle that had to be overcome.”<sup>26</sup> Braudel’s later work, *The Perspective of the World*, straddles the line between these geographic perspectives. He migrated toward the center in his later years, stepping toward Vidal de la Blache while keeping the other foot firmly in Ratzel’s camp. It seems that in his later work, Braudel recognizes that humans define their environment more than he implies in *The Mediterranean*. “Geographic determinism,” he writes, “is not everything in the creation of territorial states, but it does play its part.”<sup>27</sup>

Geography is employed not only as a foundation for the *longue durée* or an explanation of the opportunities of a place but also to explain and define boundaries. Another common element among the *Annales* is the focus upon place, be it a small village, such as Montailou, or a region, as in Febvre’s thesis of his home region in France,<sup>28</sup> or in Braudel’s study of the nearly land-locked Mediterranean. In each of these cases, geography defines the boundaries of the study. Some works use comparative history to contrast two regions to better demonstrate specific characteristics. Marc Bloch uses geography in this way to compare England and France in *French Rural History*<sup>29</sup> and Braudel employs the same methodology to demonstrate similarities in the rise of capitalism in different cultural and geographic regions in *Perspective of the World*.

Geography is one of the most visible of the social sciences used within *Annales* histories, but it is far from alone. The *Annales* excels at exploring broad social constructs, such as economics,

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26 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 276.

27 Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*, vol. 3 of *Civilization and Capitalism, 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 288.

28 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 13-14.

29 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 23.

religion, and even day-to-day life. Marc Bloch's *The King's Touch* may appear as a political history, but it really explored the concept of the long-term, religious psychology and the psychology of belief.<sup>30</sup> Ladurie's *Montaillou* is an anthropological reconstruction of the day-to-day life of a specific religious group. Anthropological pursuits helped bridge the gap between the social scientists, history, and literature.<sup>31</sup> Among many, Braudel is best known for his dense economic works exploring the origins of capitalism. These are just a few examples of Annalistes employing the social sciences to create a picture of the civilization within their region of study. Braudel observed that "history could not transform itself except by incorporating all the sciences of man as auxiliaries to our profession, and by mastering their methods, results, and even points of view" leading to "the fruit of constant collaboration" between the social sciences.<sup>32</sup>

Another characteristic stressed by the Annales historians is "the relativity and multilayering of time."<sup>33</sup> According to Braudel, the historian sees time as "the beginning and the end of everything."<sup>34</sup> Braudel observes that historians see time as a single, fluid measure that can be infinitely divided into parts of varying sizes to suit the scale of the period of study.<sup>35</sup> He unravels this concept of time by recognizing that time moves in cycles and at different speeds in relation to different events. The *longue durée* is but one layer of time measured in centuries.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the *longue durée*, Braudel identifies an intermediate term, or *conjecture*, lasting "ten, twenty, or fifty years—in order to understand the

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30 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 17-19.

31 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 63.

32 Braudel, "Personal Testimony," 462-63.

33 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 51.

34 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 425.

35 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 424.

36 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 407.

background circumstances of events.”<sup>37</sup> Braudel demonstrates this within *The Mediterranean* by exploring the shift in the economic center of gravity from Venice to Genoa during the early sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The shortest cycle moves at the human scale or *l’histoire événementielle*. In this cycle, events, such as war and political cycles are found. The “retrogressive method” is another perspective of time employed by Bloch in *French Rural History*. This method looks at history backward, or from the present into the past, because “we know more about the later periods.”<sup>39</sup>

Together, the variety of perspectives through which the Annalistes view time allows for complete and robust spatial and temporal analysis, but it has not remained above reproach. Perhaps the most vocal critique of the Annales approach to time is the consequence impacting the individual within the multilayered perspective of time. According to the critique, individuals become “intelligible at the price of revealing their fundamental unimportance.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, even this critique suggests a value for the unique approach of viewing history as multiple layers of time.

By combining the differing levels, cycles, and relativity of time with the range of social science perspectives, the Annales builds complete pictures of its subject matter, or “total history.” Using the previous comparison, on one end of the spectrum is Ladurie, who states that “the study of Montaillou shows on a minute scale what took place in the structure of society as a whole. Montaillou is a drop in the ocean.”<sup>41</sup> On the other end, Braudel states his “attempt to encompass the history of the Mediterranean in its complex totality.”<sup>42</sup> The goal of a “total history” exists

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37 Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences,” 407.

38 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 387.

39 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 23-24.

40 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 34.

41 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Scholar Press (New York: George Brazillier, 2010), 276.

42 Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 20.

regardless of the geographic scope of the study. Patricia O'Brien, writing about Michel Foucault, states that "origins imply causes; beginnings imply differences."<sup>43</sup> Bloch would have struggled with her explanation. He provides a simplistic circular definition of origin as "a beginning which explains," thereby tying together origins with beginnings.<sup>44</sup> While O'Brien wrote of poststructuralist thought based upon the notions of Michel Foucault, it is apt in this case. Bloch warns against "the obsession with origins,"<sup>45</sup> calling it "the incarnation of that other satanic enemy of true history: the mania for making judgments."<sup>46</sup> The *Annales* is unconcerned with finding the anomalies in data that imply some difference or demonstrate an example of something that does not fit the generalized historical description of a culture; rather, the *Annales* historians are interested in discovering and erecting the generalized historical description of a culture itself.

### CRITIQUES OF THE ANNALES

Accepting the concept that the social sciences overlap each other, the concept of the *Annales*, as envisioned by Febvre and Bloch, is to blend the social sciences with history which acts as the facilitating discipline to create the dialogue between the social sciences. With this dialogue created, "total history" is developed rather than an "incomplete" history built upon one or two social science disciplines.<sup>47</sup> In this capacity, the *Annales* is a success. Two boundaries separate the *Annales* from other forms of historical inquiry. The first boundary are studies of narrow disciplinary focus or specialization. The *Annales* rejects this approach because of the inadequate consideration of additional perspectives, which

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43 Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 37.

44 Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 30.

45 Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 29.

46 Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 31.

47 Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 405.

are an integral part of the Annales approach. These perspectives set out against the isolated researcher, the social studies specialist, and the specialist historian.<sup>48</sup> The second boundary is a rejection of history that is not based upon sources, and often more specifically, the application of the social sciences. Some elements of historical inquiry lend themselves well to the Annales. However, as the Annales attempted to close one hole in the study of history, the approach seemingly opened new holes requiring critical examination. In painting the broad cultural history, the Annalistes often omit the common individual, who gets lost among the many people moving through time. From complaints of overgeneralization to inadequate consideration of events, the Annales is not beyond critique.

The Annales approach is very good at painting a picture based upon data. Annales historians increasingly incorporated and sought to be scientists, leading to a strong focus upon statistical data.<sup>49</sup> These statistical compilations portray the way in which society operated. Some historians tease information out of sources implied by the data, but many Annalistes, particularly those of Braudel's generation, rely heavily upon statistical sources. The limitation of this technique is the possibility of heavy bias or slanted opinion, such as that found in newspapers and diaries. These sources may fail to pass muster as adequate unless they are quantifiable and present a unified, generalized image of the culture of the time. As stated, the Annales is not concerned with outliers that do not support the broad portrayal of society.

The Annales school is often criticized on a variety of points. Fernand Braudel provided a target for those critical of the approaches or inadequacies of the school due to his visibility during the rise of the Annales. Braudel's seminal work, *The Mediterranean*, is criticized for its lack of focus. Even from within

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48 Braudel, "Personal Testimony," 462.

49 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 59-60.



the *Annales*, the book is critiqued for failing to include much discussion about “attitudes, values or mentalités collectives, leaving many details inaccurate, and inadequately considering the importance and interplay between Christianity and Islam.”<sup>50</sup> Braudel countered the impossibility of addressing all possible societies while recognizing the need to choose a focus, stating, “Like all historians and without meaning to, I have automatically been neglecting the lot of the great mass of mankind.”<sup>51</sup> Despite this counterargument, a “shift of interest took place” within the *Annales* towards the *mentalités* during the 1970s, partly as “a reaction against Braudel” and partly “against determinism of any kind.”<sup>52</sup> This counterargument coincides with the rise of Poststructuralist thought; a much larger shift occurring within history that questioned the very structures of history itself that was influenced by the writings of philosopher Michel Foucault.

Ladurie’s *Montaillou* is an example of a work from the *mentalités* period of the *Annales*. *Montaillou* is a microhistory where the focus is narrow in spatial, temporal, and subject matter. Its subject provides a sociological and anthropological understanding of the people and the village. The spatial context of the study of Montaillou is little more than Languedoc and Catalonia. Villager interaction with the outside is mentioned, but the political significance of the region or the reason for the focus upon the Cathars is an important context for a greater “total” understanding. Ladurie explains that the point of his study is to see into this time and culture by thoroughly examining one small corner of it.<sup>53</sup> He compares his study to protozoa visible beneath a microscope.<sup>54</sup> If the people of Montaillou are protozoa, then

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50 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 38-39.

51 Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*, 87.

52 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 67.

53 Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 356.

54 Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 276.

the rest of society contrasts as the broad expanse of the ocean. He implies that generalizations are made from such a study. He even goes so far as to cite examples of how such generalizations guided the broad histories in the works of Karl Marx and Adam Smith.<sup>55</sup> *Montaillou* suffers from many of the same failings that plague other microhistories. The danger of such an approach lies in context and generalization.

Making continent-wide generalizations from the study of a small village results in the magnification of social structure or economic life that differs or is altogether absent elsewhere. Microhistories that employ the *Annales* techniques, such as *Montaillou*, cast a light into narrow recesses of time and space that are often missed in sweeping national histories, but one must resist the temptation to overgeneralize the applicability of the circumstances within such a history. Microhistory has sustained several harsh criticisms, including such complaints that its “methods ... have reduced history to anecdotal antiquarianism,” that “they have romanticized past cultures,” and “they are incapable of dealing with the modern world and contemporary worlds marked by rapid change,” and “they are incapable of dealing with politics.”<sup>56</sup> Microhistory’s greatest weakness is also its greatest strength. It is difficult to understand the wider significance of a microhistorical study, but microhistories help to provide significance to the people and culture within broader historical works, such as those of the early *Annales*.

### THE LEGACY OF THE ANNALES

Most likely as a result of its interdisciplinary nature, the *Annales* has left a mark on many people, not all of whom have been historians. Some people affiliated themselves with the *Annales* while others used the tools of the *Annalistes* to expand upon their own work. Others reacted against the *Annales*. In this way, the *Annales* blended with other historical approaches.

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55 Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 353-54.

56 Iggers, *Historiography*, 113.

Examples include the economic linkage with cultural Marxism, Immanuel Wallerstein's blend with cultural Marxism, and Ladurie's use of microhistory. The *Annales* also contributed to the evolution of microhistory and poststructuralism.

Noted Marxist Eric Hobsbawm and his development of cultural Marxism in the United Kingdom paralleled the *Annales* under Fernand Braudel in France after World War II. Both were concerned with social history, defined by quantifiable scientific evidence and understanding of underlying social structures.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps it was inevitable they would intersect, given the nature of historic approaches to bleed into one another. Some of Hobsbawm's work "developed a dialogue with colleagues in France," including Braudel.<sup>58</sup> Braudel was amicable, disagreeing with the notion "that there is a no-man's land between economic history and social history."<sup>59</sup> Since much of the foundation of Marxism is built upon an economic explanation for social upheaval, it seems natural that some Marxists would turn to Braudel's works. Braudel's later work, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> Century*, mirrors the intentions of Marx to trace the development of capitalism. Unlike Marx, Braudel produces a "total history," moving through the levels of time from "deep patterns of economic life" to "the rise and fall of economies," and finally, to the "human-made events."<sup>60</sup>

Immanuel Wallerstein constructed the bridge between economic and social history with his development of the world-system concept. This approach is comprised of social and economic factors linked through interaction, often in what he calls a geoculture. Wallerstein embarked on his study of the development and life-cycle of the various world-systems. In turn,

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57 Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 39.

58 Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 30.

59 Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*, 45.

60 Eley, *A Crooked Line*, 38.

he developed a new perception of how the different world-systems are constructed and interact; a new perception that has come to be called “world-systems analysis.” In the essay, “The World System of Immanuel Wallerstein,” Charles Ragan and Daniel Chirot suggest that Wallerstein’s interest in developing world-systems analysis is to create an American system whose ideals would be a blend of the *Annales* and those of Karl Marx by both advocating that social scientists “examine seemingly isolated social phenomena as parts of a larger system” and to “prepare the intellectual ground for the coming of a world socialist system.”<sup>61</sup> Wallerstein confesses that the foundation for world-systems analysis is derived from Marx’s concept of the “Asiatic mode of production” and the *Annales* concept of “total history.”<sup>62</sup>

Wallerstein turned to Braudel and the *Annales* to fill in the missing gap that cultural Marxism contained. The *Annales* allowed Wallerstein to consider and develop a model to study the totality of the system.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, Wallerstein made an effort to define a *longue durée* for “the social system in which capitalism had grown as a single social system.”<sup>64</sup> In addition to the concept of the *longue durée*, Wallerstein also looks to Braudel’s economic model of the Mediterranean. Braudel regarded the Mediterranean as its own world economy and from Wallerstein’s perspective, perhaps the inspiration and first analysis of a world-system. Like Braudel, Wallerstein looks beyond national borders for unifying factors in the development of his model of the world-system, but Wallerstein takes a much broader approach by considering factors beyond political economy and geography. Wallerstein’s approach

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61 Charles Ragen and Daniel Chirot, “The World System of Immanuel Wallerstein: Sociology and Politics as History,” in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, ed. Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 307.

62 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-System Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

63 Ragen and Chirot, “The World System of Immanuel Wallerstein,” 287.

64 Ragen and Chirot, “The World System of Immanuel Wallerstein,” 285.

considers many more social and cultural factors, which is expected from a trained sociologist.

World-systems analysis is a macro-history: an explanation of the underlying factors driving the world forward over the *longue durée*. Wallerstein goes beyond the constraints of the *Annales* by seeking a thread that connects the patterns of the world-system. Rather than seeking purely economic motives for the rise and turn-over of subsequent world-systems, Wallerstein takes a sociological stance, examining the social values and goals of various oppressed groups, especially ethnic minorities, working-class men, and women. Like many *Annales* historians, Wallerstein does not much consider “great men;” however, unlike many *Annales* historians, most of his premise for world-systems analysis is based upon the significance of various events, most notably the French Revolution, the revolutions of 1848, and the world cultural shock of 1968.<sup>65</sup> It is this larger picture that concerns Wallerstein in world-systems analysis.

Other reactions to the *Annales* did not have such positive results. The shift away from Braudel’s broad historical structures is seen as the *Annales* reacting to itself. Instead of looking across the wide expanse of the open ocean of history, some of the later *Annalistes* dove beneath the surface of the data to focus upon “the role of values and mentalities in demographic behavior—in other words, by studying the history of family, the history of sexuality, and, as Febvre hoped, the history of love.”<sup>66</sup> As the awareness of the individual resurfaced with poststructuralism, so too did the awareness of the inadequacies of the *Annales* in dealing with issues such as race and gender. Some historians were unable to reconcile the people and events missing from the *Annales* and sought to rectify this by bringing the people out from the dark. These histories became the works of microhistory, and they did more

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65 Ragen and Chiro, “The World System of Immanuel Wallerstein,” 306.

66 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 69.

than present the life of the individual, but added that which is understood about the time and place surrounding the individual.<sup>67</sup> Here, microhistory finds its place within the larger context of the broad macrohistories. According to Iggers, “microhistory appears not as a negation of a history of broader social contexts but as a supplement to it.”<sup>68</sup> Microhistorians believed they were rediscovering culture and the individual and that it was entirely compatible with macrohistories, particularly cultural studies such as those of the *Annales*, because it explored a specific cultural element that may have been lost in the broad cultural generalizations.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The *Annales* dominated French historiography for much of the twentieth century. It provided a way to blend the newly developing social sciences with history, rather than stake a territorial claim for history and defend against encroachment, as George Adams implied in his speech. The *Annales* excels at providing a broad, multi-faceted view of a subject over a wide array of spatial and temporal boundaries. This methodology, successfully blended with cultural Marxism and with great potential as a counterpoint to microhistory, could present the “total history” it seeks to provide. It seems that microhistory and the *Annales* need one another for a complete view of history. Bloch alluded to this, observing that “great oaks from little acorns grow. But only if they meet favorable conditions of soil and climate, conditions which are entirely beyond the scope of embryology.”<sup>70</sup> Microhistory is an excellent choice for rediscovering the individual, which is often lost in the sweeping

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67 Iggers, *Historiography*, 104.

68 Iggers, *Historiography*, 117.

69 Iggers, *Historiography*, 114.

70 Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 32.

generalizations of the Annales. And while the Annales uses statistical evidence to find commonalities and similarities over time, perhaps the poststructuralists will illuminate the halls of those that defy the averages, those that are underconsidered, or even unconsidered in the grand narrative of history. The Annales, together with the other historiographic approaches, provide a piece of the developing historiographic theories of the last two hundred years. Together, they amount to a growing toolbox for the modern historian. Regardless of which school, method, or approach is pursued, the historical study of the past brings the present into better focus. “Is not the present after all in large measure the prisoner of a past that obstinately survives, and the past with its rules, its differences and its similarities, the indispensable key to any serious understanding of the present?”<sup>71</sup>





# FEMALE KATABASIS IN ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN CULTURES

KATIE CULLITON



A katabasis, or a descent into the underworld, is a key element in many heroic journey myths and tales of ancient Mediterranean cultures. From a narrative perspective, the hero has to descend into the underworld to gain valuable knowledge or information to help him succeed on his journey. Symbolically, the journey to the underworld represents a liminal experience for the hero; his journey spiritually separates him from other men and he returns wiser and more enlightened. Aeneas, Odysseus, Hercules and Orpheus exemplify the heroes who have taken this symbolic journey. However, female katabasis stories from ancient Mediterranean cultures function differently from their male counterparts. These female katabasis stories have themes of love, fertility and power, which psychologically and symbolically reflect ancient perceptions of women and the underworld, and have their origins in pre-historical concepts of a female earth. The first written female descent story, the Sumerian/Akkadian story of the katabasis of Inanna, became a template for future katabasis stories as well as provides clues to the culture's relationship with their gods. In contrast, myths of Isis show the fluidity of the underworld in ancient Egyptian culture. Similar to

the Mesopotamian stories, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, one initial descent becomes a yearly occurrence. Finally, the Roman female katabasis stories feature two non-deities, Psyche and the Sibyl, demonstrating the evolution of female katabasis stories in ancient Mediterranean cultures.

The Sumerians wrote, and the Akkadians later adopted, the first female katabasis story of the ancient Mediterranean. In the middle of the fourth millennium BCE, the Sumerians settled in Mesopotamia. The Akkadians conquered the Sumerian cities in the beginning of the second millennium BCE and a hybrid Sumerian/Akkadian culture developed. Even when the Babylonians conquered the region in 1750 BCE and began their Empire, the Sumerian culture, literature, and language persisted, continuing to be taught in schools.<sup>1</sup> This included the Sumerian gods, which two other cultures later appropriated. The pantheon contained four major deities based on the major components of the universe – sky, earth, air and water – all male except the earth goddess. Other important deities included the Moon God Nanna, his son, the Sun God Utu, and his daughter, Goddess of the Morning and Evening Star, Inanna.<sup>2</sup> Inanna played prominent roles in both Sumerian and Akkadian cultures.

A variety of cultures inhabited the Mesopotamian region in the second century BCE, and as Empires rose and fell, Inanna began to represent divergent ideas throughout the region. The powerful warlord, Sargon, politically elevated her to higher status, because in the Sumerian/Akkadian culture, the status of their deities reflected the fortunes of their earthly priests.<sup>3</sup> Sargon united the Mesopotamian region through war around 2000 BCE, but wanted to provide a new theological foundation for the

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1 Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 117-119.

2 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 123.

3 William W. Hallo and J.J.A. Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 6-7.

emerging Sumerian/Akkadian Empire. Therefore, he syncretized the Sumerian goddess Inanna with the Akkadian goddess Ishtar and proclaimed the new Empire as a “dynasty of Ishtar.”<sup>4</sup> This duality can be seen in other poems exalting Inanna; for example, *The Exaltation of Inanna* describes her as “lofty as Heaven... you are broad as the earth.”<sup>5</sup> Ishtar was characteristically seen as a love goddess.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the storehouse for grains, dates, and livestock serves as the oldest emblem of Inanna, but the star also symbolized her on vessels. In her syncretic form, Inanna functioned as the goddess of gentle rains, floods and terrible storms. She represented the morning and evening star, the liminal, in-between space of consciousness and energies, but also served as the goddess of war. The “dance of Inanna” poetically describes battle, and similarly, the “heart of battle” describes Inanna.<sup>7</sup> Even with her many powers and titles, the patriarchy still repressed Inanna. *The Huluppu-Tree* poem describes Inanna as “a woman who walked in fear of the word of the Sky God, An, who walked in fear of the word of the Air God, Enlil.”<sup>8</sup> In the *Descent of Inanna*, the powerful male gods all refer to her as their daughter, emblematic of their patriarchal attitude towards her.<sup>9</sup> Gilgamesh, a mortal, even rejects her advances. In *Gilgamesh*, he insults her, describing her as, “[you, a frost that congeals no] ice, a louvre-door [that] stay [not] breeze nor draught, a palace that massacres...warriors.”<sup>10</sup> Inanna embodies both love and violence. She is enraged at Gilgamesh’s rejection and tries to use the Bull

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4        Hallo and Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, 9-10.

5        Hallo and Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, 31.

6        Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 60-61.

7        Sylvia Brinton Perera, “The Descent of Inanna: Myth and Therapy,” in *Feminist Archetypal Theory: Interdisciplinary Re-visions of Jungian Thought*, ed. Estella Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupprecht (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 144-145.

8        Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 5.

9        Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 62

10      Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 49.

of Heaven to kill him, but Inanna is unsuccessful. Instead, an assembly of male gods punishes Gilgamesh with the death of his close friend, Enkidu, but for killing the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba, and not his insults to Inanna.<sup>11</sup> Even suppressed, Inanna continued to wield incredible power.

Inanna's sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, only appears in a few stories and myths, but plays a pivotal role in the *Descent of Inanna* and symbolizes the grim view of death found in the culture.<sup>12</sup> Her name translates to "Lady of the Great Place Below."<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the world, Ereshkigal was given the underworld as a dowry-gift.<sup>14</sup> She perpetually mourns the death of her son Ninazu; she lies prostrate, rending her hair and garments.<sup>15</sup> The myth of *Nergal and Ereshkigal* provides more insight into the personality and attributes of Ereshkigal. The gods wish to invite Ereshkigal to a feast but neither the sky gods nor Ereshkigal can enter into the realm of the other. While they communicate with her by messenger, the god Nergal offends the messenger and by proxy, Ereshkigal. Under pressure, Nergal goes down to the underworld to apologize, the travel restrictions not applying to him apparently, where he falls for the queen's charms and spend seven days in bed with her. Ereshkigal becomes bereft when he leaves and she sends her messenger to bring him back. In the end, Nergal returns "seiz[ing] her by her hair and pull[ing] her from her throne", and remains with Ereshkigal at her behest.<sup>16</sup> Figuratively married to the underworld as a child and sequestered away from the other gods, Ereshkigal is lonely. This, then, explains her high level of passion when Nergal arrives in her home.

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11 George, *Gilgamesh*, 50-55.

12 O.R. Gurney, "The Sultantepe Tablets (Continued): VII. The Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal," *Anatolian Studies* 10 (1960): 127.

13 Perera, "The Descent of Inanna," 149.

14 George, *Gilgamesh*, 181.

15 George, *Gilgamesh*, 176.

16 Gurney, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, 106.

Although Ereshkigal carries out the judgment of the great gods on those dwelling in her realm, she cannot do it when she becomes “sexually defiled.”<sup>17</sup> However, she can wield her power of keeping the dead away from living as she threatens to “send up the dead to eat the living...mak[ing] the dead more numerous than the living.”<sup>18</sup> This grim view of death extended into other Sumerian/Akkadian poems. In an early version of *Gilgamesh*, Enkidu gives a dour description of the afterlife. For instance, those who have more children will suffer from thirst less than those who have no children.<sup>19</sup> Based on this historical and cultural context of Inanna, Ereshkigal, and the Sumerian/Akkadian afterlife, the katabasis of Inanna can now be analyzed.

The *Descent of Inanna* begins with Inanna’s preparations and instructions before her journey. The poem was pieced together from thirty tablets and fragments, a majority date back to 1750 BCE to Nippur.<sup>20</sup> Although the poem comprises several divided parts, the first part details her katabasis and has a correspondingly appropriate title, “From the Great Above to the Great Below.” The opening begins with Inanna “abandon[ing] heaven and earth to descend to the underworld.”<sup>21</sup> After a brief description of the geographical locations of her power, the poem describes Inanna as abandoning these places for her katabasis. Inanna prepares herself for the journey. She gathers the seven *me* and outfits herself in seven physical representations of her power, including a crown, royal robes and lapis beads.<sup>22</sup> The *me* are the “set of universal and immutable rules and limits.”<sup>23</sup> Other

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17 Gurney, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, 123.

18 Gurney, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, 123.

19 George, *Gilgamesh*, 176-189.

20 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 127.

21 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 52.

22 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 52-53.

23 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 123.

scholars define them as “divine attributes.”<sup>24</sup> These possessions demonstrate the importance of Inanna; literature like *Gilgamesh* reflects the incredible importance of the concepts of civilization and city-states to the Sumerians/Akkadians. Inanna advises her close servant, Ninshubur, to seek the help of the other gods if she does not return, and then, Inanna travels to the outer gate of the underworld.

The next part of the poem details Inanna’s journey through the underworld to her sister, Ereshkigal, and the consequences of this journey. At the gate, the gatekeeper questions Inanna about her intentions. Inanna replies she would like to visit her sister Ereshkigal to observe the funeral rites for Ereshkigal’s husband, the Bull of Heaven. Ereshkigal allows Inanna to enter, but strips Inanna of one of her vestments of power at each of the seven gates of the underworld. At each gate, she hears,

Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are  
perfect.  
They may not be questioned.<sup>25</sup>

This mirrors the process Nergal underwent when he made the journey to the underworld, though he retained his powers, unlike Inanna.<sup>26</sup> When Inanna enters the throne room of her sister, Ereshkigal, the judges of the underworld pass judgment against her and Ereshkigal strikes Inanna, turning her into a corpse, “a piece of rotting meat.”<sup>27</sup> Ereshkigal then hung Inanna on a hook in the throne room. Meanwhile, when Inanna does not return immediately, Ninshubur mourns Inanna and seeks the counsel of the gods as Inanna had commanded her. Enki, the god of wisdom,

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24      Hallo and Van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, 50.

25      Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 58.

26      Gurney, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, 127.

27      Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 60.

sends two creatures to Ereshkigal to offer her sympathy as she squirms in pain as if in childbirth. Touched by their empathy, Ereshkigal offers them a gift and they ask for the corpse of Inanna. Sprinkling water and food upon Inanna returns her to life. The rest of the poem describes the events after Inanna is freed from the underworld. Someone must take her place in the underworld and demons follow Inanna to make sure she follows this rule. When Inanna sees her husband, Dumuzi, does not mourn her absence, she is enraged and chooses him to take her place in the underworld. Through hiding and deception, Dumuzi tries to escape his fate with the help of his sister, but in the end, the underworld claims him. His sister is bereft. In compassion, Inanna allows Dumuzi's sister to take his place in the underworld half the year.

The first female katabasis story, *The Descent of Inanna*, provides a template for future female katabasis stories. The poem also raises several questions – what motivated Inanna to go down to the underworld? Why does Ereshkigal strike her dead immediately? Why does the poem end with the cyclical katabasis of Dumuzi and his sister? Psychoanalysis of the poem can provide some clues. Laurie Brand Gagné calls the poem a triumph of a hag-queen over a beautiful goddess.<sup>28</sup> She describes Ereshkigal and Inanna as two parts of one woman. Inanna's anger against patriarchy results in her decision to descend into the underworld. When a woman rages against her powerlessness, they have a tendency to turn that anger inward against themselves. Ereshkigal demonstrates this when she strikes Inanna dead immediately.<sup>29</sup> Ereshkigal only restores Inanna to life again when Ereshkigal “is able to relate to herself again because someone took the time to relate to her.”<sup>30</sup> However, in her analysis, Gagné believes some part

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28 Laurie Brand Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness: Women's Underworld Journeys, Ancient and Modern* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 23.

29 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 25.

30 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 27.

indiscretion of Dumuzi motivates Inanna to begin her journey, and surmises that an unwritten indiscretion occurred between the poem of their courtship and Inanna's descent.<sup>31</sup> However, the *Descent of Inanna* makes it clear Dumuzi's relative indifference to her disappearance is what incites Inanna's rage, especially compared to the grief shown by her sons and servant.

In later variants of the poem, Ishtar replaces Inanna, although all of Inanna's characteristics remain the same. Ishtar lists specific reasons for wanting to descend to the underworld, including her intent to raise the dead. This new reason explains why Ereshkigal would fear her approach and strike her dead immediately.<sup>32</sup> This later clarification does not detract from the original vague purpose of Inanna's descent.

Within the Sumerian/Akkadian culture, the physical representation of a god's statue was symbolic of the status of the god. Whatever befell the statue also happened to the god automatically. In the *Descent of Inanna*, Ninshubur lists precious metals in her lament of Inanna, which represent the statues of Inanna. Rituals required the physical representation of the god or goddess represented. Therefore, Inanna's descent can be seen as a ritual.<sup>33</sup> Rituals demonstrate change from one state to another.

Other goddesses, motivated by love and anger, also symbolize change. Many Sumerian/Akkadian myths contain examples of divine anger because the culture viewed natural and political disasters as retribution from the gods in anger.<sup>34</sup> Inanna offers an excuse for her journey, which is motivated by her love for her sister to help her sister mourn her husband. The love between Dumuzi and his sister also touches Inanna, and she allows them both to share Dumuzi's punishment. This is symbolically linked

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31 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 29.

32 Perera, "The Descent of Inanna," 167.

33 George, *Gilgamesh*, 112-113.

34 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 53.



to the theme of fertility. Before marrying Inanna, Dumuzi was a shepherd. Additionally, his sister's name means "rootstock of the grapevine."<sup>35</sup> Their cyclical descents into the underworld represent the two seasons of the Sumerian/Akkadian harvest cycle; grapes and figs are harvested in autumn while barley for beer is harvested in the spring.<sup>36</sup>

Primordial fertility rites share similarities with the ritual of sacrifice of Inanna and the fate of Dumuzi and his sister. As Eliade wrote "the myth of the birth of edible plants...always involves the spontaneous sacrifice of a divine being...the fundamental idea is that life can only be born of another life which is sacrificed."<sup>37</sup> These rituals are widespread and old; evidence of them has even been found in ancient Mexico.<sup>38</sup> Other ancient Mediterranean female katabasis stories demonstrate the themes of love, power and fertility.

The afterlife in ancient Egyptian myth presents a contrast to the harsh and cruel afterlife depicted in other ancient Mediterranean cultures. Egyptians considered the transformation of the soul upon death to exist in a dream-like state in "a domain of irrationality."<sup>39</sup> The *duat*, the underworld, formed one part of the geography of the afterlife. Unlike other ancient Mediterranean cultures, the gods and goddesses could move between the many realms of the world, such as the underworld and the celestial world.<sup>40</sup> For example, *The Book of the Dead* often depicts Isis and Nephthys standing behind the throne of Osiris although they also interacted with the rest of the world. Therefore, katabasis stories

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35 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 168.

36 Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 168.

37 Perera, "The Descent of Inanna," 169.

38 Perera, "The Descent of Inanna," 170.

39 Ogden Goelet, Jr., "A Commentary on the Corpus of Literature and Traditions Which Constitutes *The Book of Going Forth by Day*," in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, ed. Eva Von Dassow (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1998), 142.

40 Goelet, "A Commentary on the Corpus of Literature and Traditions Which Constitutes *The Book of Going Forth by Day*," 143.

do not appear amongst the Egyptian gods and goddesses. Isis though shares similar characteristics to Inanna, being “ignorant of nothing in heaven or on earth.”<sup>41</sup> However, the *Myth of Kingship* shares similar themes to the *Descent of Inanna*, including returning from the dead.

Pieced together from numerous *Pyramid Texts*, *The Myth of Kingship* includes the death of Osiris; however within the story, Isis shares many similarities with Inanna. Eldest son of the earth and the sky, Osiris is murdered by his brother, Seth, and his body parts are scattered across Egypt. Bereft, Isis and her sister Nephthys scour the land and piece back together the body enough for Isis to become pregnant. Other versions of the myth have her breathing life back into Osiris with her wings or transforming into a sparrow hawk to become impregnated. Osiris can now descend into the underworld, where he refuses to become involved in the issues of the living. Isis, though, is the true protagonist of this story, “the hieroglyphs of whose name contain the symbol of the throne.”<sup>42</sup> Motivated by love, Isis resurrects Osiris and using her magic, she offers “the basic hope of a continuity of existence for everyone” through her conception of Osiris’ son, Horus.<sup>43</sup> With obvious connections to fertility, her ability to turn into various animals symbolizes her connection with nature. Additionally, similar to Inanna, the patriarchy of the gods represses Isis, even with her great power and wisdom. When Isis spares Seth’s life, Horus cuts off her head in a rage and her headless body becomes a statue, though Re eventually restores her. Isis has the power to resurrect the dead and perform other powerful magic but cannot defend against the anger of her son. Both Inanna and Isis share themes of fertility, nature, and patriarchy. The theme of death connects both goddesses. However, the Egyptian concept of the

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41 George Hart, *Egyptian Myths* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990), 44.

42 George Hart, *Egyptian Myths*, 33.

43 George Hart, *Egyptian Myths*, 33.

underworld allows Isis easier travel between the realms, appearing behind Osiris in many depictions of the judgment of the dead. These themes continue into ancient Greece.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* mirrors many of the themes and symbolism in the *Descent of Inanna*. Composed at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, the poem begins with the abduction of Persephone.<sup>44</sup> Stolen away from a field of flowers while frolicking with other young women, Persephone is carried into the underworld kicking and screaming. Her father, Zeus, had given her away to his brother, Hades, in marriage without telling her mother, Demeter, the goddess of the harvest. Demeter wanders the earth for nine days before she finds out the cause of Persephone's disappearance. Stricken with grief, Demeter withdraws from the world of the gods and travels to Eleusis, where she becomes the nurse to a young baby boy. Demeter anoints the boy with ambrosia and hides him in the fire at night to turn him immortal, but the mother is angry when she sees what Demeter is doing. Angry herself, Demeter leaves and withdraws from the earth as well. The earth lies fallow and the gods, alarmed, try to appease Demeter. She refuses all their offers, only wishing to see her daughter again. Finally, Zeus sends for Persephone. However, because she has consumed part of a pomegranate, she must spend a third of the year in the underworld with Hades.<sup>45</sup> Sumerian/Akkadian myth similarly expresses the symbolism of consuming food in the underworld. Nergal received a warning not to eat or drink any food nor sleep with the goddess of death, though he did not resist the last item.<sup>46</sup> Once again, the power of anger provides the theme throughout this poem. In anger, Inanna condemns Dumuzi to the underworld just as Demeter's anger

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44 Lars Albinus, *The House of Hades: Studies in Ancient Greek Eschatology* (Oxford: Aarhus University Press, 2000), 159.

45 Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Homeric Hymns*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1-14.

46 Gurney, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, 115.

reunites her with Persephone. The kidnapping of Persephone does not automatically cause the crops to die in the field; the wrath of the mother causes these consequences.<sup>47</sup> This anger manifests as intimately personal. The love relationship exemplifies one noticeable difference between *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the earlier stories. In this myth, love exists between a mother and daughter compared with love between sisters (Inanna and Ereshkigal), and between brother and sister (Dumuzi and his sister, and Osiris and Isis).

This relationship leads to some additional psychoanalytic perspectives. Demeter and Persephone represent two aspects of the same goddess, demonstrating the continuity of being beyond the boundary of life.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, it represents the symbolic three phases of a woman's life. Persephone symbolizes the maiden, Demeter the mother, and Hekate the crone, who supports Demeter throughout the poem. At the end of the story, all three women unite.<sup>49</sup> Similarly this reflects the cyclical nature of life – the theme of death and regeneration. Persephone descends and returns to earth every year (yet she remains conveniently available anytime someone seeks her in the underworld); the importance of her role continues as “she separates the light and the dark.”<sup>50</sup> The revolving descent and return of Dumuzi and his sister echoes this as does Isis' regeneration of Osiris. In the end, this myth has similar themes of love, power, and regeneration found in the other female katabasis myths.

In contrast, the katabasis of Odysseus has an entirely different meaning and symbolism than *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the other female katabasis stories even though they originate from the same relative time period. Odysseus descends

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47 Albinus, *House of Hades*, 165-166.

48 Albinus, *House of Hades*, 177.

49 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 31.

50 Perera, *The Descent of Inanna*, 188.

into the underworld to gain important knowledge from the dead. This presents a test, and by passing this test, he confirms his status as a hero and gains important wisdom.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Odysseus does not intend to confront a deity in the underworld like the women, but instead, interact with the dead, which are memories of the living.<sup>52</sup> The nature of Inanna, Isis, and Persephone as goddesses differs from the divinely blessed mortal Odysseus; however, the symbolism and meaning differ based on their gender and not their divinity. The Romans have two female katabasis stories featuring mortal women with divine blessings.

These stories, beginning with *Cupid and Psyche*, share close similarities with the preceding female katabasis myths. Apuleius inserted the story of *Psyche and Cupid* into a longer story called the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*, written in the second century AD. Apuleius frames the narrative in history claiming they were based on old Grecian stories and written on Egyptian paper with a reed from the Nile.<sup>53</sup> An old Grecian woman tells the story of *Psyche and Cupid* within the story. People worshipped Psyche instead of Venus because of her incredible beauty. Incredibly jealous, Venus orders her son, Cupid, to punish her; instead, he falls in love with her. Taken to an isolated house with invisible servants, Psyche falls in love with an invisible husband with one strict rule – Psyche must never try to see him. However, eventually, Psyche's sisters convince her to look at her husband. When she does, she sees Cupid and in the process, pricks herself with his arrow. Angry at her discovery and wounded by oil lamp, Cupid flees back to his mother. Madly in love with Cupid, Psyche wanders the earth looking for him before encountering Venus, who decides to test Psyche's worthiness. First, Venus piles together a bunch of seeds and demands Psyche separate it by the end of the day. Aided by

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51 Albinus, *House of Hades*, 69.

52 Albinus, *House of Hades*, 73.

53 E.J. Kenney, "Introduction," in *Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche*, ed. E.J. Kenney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9.

ants, Psyche succeeds in her task to the anger of Venus. Next, Venus commands Psyche to get gold wool from some dangerous sheep. Again, with the help of a river spirit, she succeeds. Finally, Venus commands Psyche to go into the underworld and ask Persephone to place a day's worth of her beauty into a box. Yet again, a Tower helps Psyche by giving her specific instructions on how to complete her task. She arms herself with barley cakes soaked in wine and honey, and places two coins into her mouth to pay the ferryman Charon. She ignores the requests of a donkey, a dead swimmer, and a group of old women weavers. Throwing one of the barley cakes to Cerberus, she manages to safely make it to the throne room of Persephone. Persephone fills the box in private and returns it to Psyche, who then makes the return journey with the help of the other barley cake and coin. However, despite a warning not to look in the box, Psyche opens it once she has left the underworld and immediately falls into a deep and infernal sleep. In the end, Cupid saves Psyche, and Psyche obtains permission to marry Cupid in a proper ceremony.<sup>54</sup> Although the katabasis comprises one small part of the *Psyche and Cupid* story, the story contains similar elements to the other female katabasis myths.

The theme of love prevails throughout the whole story - love between Cupid and Psyche, and Cupid and Venus. Motivated by her love for Cupid, Psyche undertakes her journey. She is even willing to kill herself for his love, though ants, a river spirit, and a Tower convince her against it. Furthermore, the connections between love and the soul provide a meaningful metaphor in the story. The word *psyche* means "soul" in Greek and Cupid embodies love.<sup>55</sup> In the end, love saves Psyche, but "the helpless need of the seeker for salvation rather than...her deserts or convictions" calls

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54 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass or Metamorphoses*, trans. E.J. Kenney (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), 71-106.

55 Kenney, "Introduction," 16.

it down.<sup>56</sup> Psyche has a passive role in the story; things happen to her rather than her acting upon them. This exemplifies one main difference between her and the mortal men who make katabasis journeys. One of Psyche's key characteristics is "her utter helplessness when thrown on her own resources."<sup>57</sup> A hero does not have this characteristic.

Psyche also differs from Inanna and Demeter because Psyche remains unchanged by her journey while both Inanna and Demeter change forever. However, even though Psyche never matures within the story, she perhaps represents the maturity of the attitude towards death. "To remain oneself, in the face of the power of death, that is to remain open to life instead of closing off and shutting down in anger and despair, requires letting go of all that death can take from us."<sup>58</sup> Unlike Inanna and Demeter, Psyche does not find her power within her anger. She wields a more innate and personal power; it comes from her beauty, her simplicity, and her naivety. From the story of the *Descent of Inanna* to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to the story of *Psyche and Cupid*, these three myths can be seen to comprise one long story over 2,500 years of an angry woman learning to love, and her ability to transform her power from wild and angry and used to lash out to an controlled innate personal power.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, themes of fertility are interwoven throughout the story. Psyche is pregnant for most of the story, reveling in the "dignity of being called a mother."<sup>60</sup> She also "marveled that from a moment's pain there should come so fair an increase of her rich womb."<sup>61</sup> However, Venus threatens her pregnancy and successfully completing the tasks provides additional incentive for Psyche. In addition to

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56 Kenney, "Introduction," 14.

57 Kenney, "Introduction," 19.

58 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 52.

59 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 59-60.

60 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, 83.

61 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, 83.

the story of Psyche, Roman culture contains other examples of a mortal woman completing a katabasis.

The second Roman story occurs within the *Aeneid*, and shares many of the traits of *Psyche and Cupid*. Written around 19 BCE, the *Aeneid* has an episode where Aeneas travels to the underworld with Deiphobë, the Sibyl, as a guide. She shares with Psyche a common background as the daughter of a mortal man, which makes her mortal rather than a goddess. She also serves Apollo as a priestess. The descent of Aeneas and the Sibyl is a small episode in a much longer epic. She guides him along the path to the underworld so he may speak with his father one more time. She wields knowledge and wisdom as her power. Aeneas' men swiftly carry out her commands and Aeneas himself quickly does as she says. Like Psyche, she brings necessary objects, as required, with her to help complete the journey. While romance does not exist between her and Aeneas, she does love Apollo. When she begins to channel the god, her "wild heart grew large with passion."<sup>62</sup> Apollo fills her with his spirit as she gains his powers of divination. She becomes "taller to their eyes and sounding no longer like a mortal."<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the Sibyl witnesses the glorious recitation of the descendants of Aeneas including Caesar and Augustus, reflecting the continuation of life after death. Similar to Psyche, the Sibyl remains unchanged by her journey.

Therefore, a basic pattern for female katabasis stories from the Sumerian/Akkadian to the Roman culture can be identified; it involves "discovering a new life through the surrender to passion, losing that life through the loss of the other, and coming through loss."<sup>64</sup> In the *Descent of Inanna*, Inanna surrenders herself to her sister and returns to life, and she loses her husband, yet survives. The story of *Psyche and Cupid* has Psyche discovering

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62 Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), 161.

63 Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 161.

64 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 7.



married life, experiencing the loss of her husband, and surviving through love. Furthermore, love progresses over time from dark to pure.<sup>65</sup> While Inanna expresses angry and wild love, Demeter and Persephone show a maternal and protective love. In ancient Egypt, Isis demonstrates the “supreme example of a devoted mother.”<sup>66</sup> Psyche’s love manifests as simple and pure. Throughout these stories and myths, these themes of love, fertility and power have been woven together, representing ancient attitudes towards women and the afterlife.

Besides the similarity in female katabasis myths and stories, these ancient Mediterranean cultures shared another characteristic of the underworld – the fact it existed under the world. These cultures had their own names and descriptions for the underworld, such “the land of no return,” but each depiction clearly located them under the earth.<sup>67</sup> There existed a clear delineation between the living and the dead. The themes and motifs seen in these female katabasis stories, which differ greatly from the male versions, represent a connection between the underworld and the woman. These women do not interact with the dead, but with the physical representation of the underworld.

Myths and stories use symbols to communicate with their audience and manipulate the teller as they themselves view the cultural models. Within myth, traditional elements familiar to the audience occur within the cultural context. These elements usually appear as motifs, like people, places, and other cultural items, and action patterns, which “are familiar actions or sequences of actions that are recognizable from one story to another.”<sup>68</sup> Jung viewed descent stories as “retrieving values long repressed and of uniting

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65 Gagné, *The Uses of Darkness*, 7-8.

66 Hart, *Egyptian Myths*, 44

67 Gurney, *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, 109.

68 Radcliffe G. Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the ‘Orphic Gold Tablets’*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6-8.

above and below into a new pattern”.<sup>69</sup> Such symbolism must have originated in the pre-history of humanity when humans communicated through symbols before words.

Prior to the Neolithic period, humans gazed up at the sky and pondered the divinity of limitless sky. In the Neolithic period, humans invented agriculture, relying upon the earth for their sustenance, and they no longer relied upon hunting as their main source of food. Long before knowledge of photosynthesis and hardiness zones, planting would still hold mystical traces. The seeds would disappear into the earth and return as life-giving plants, and the cycle repeated every year. Human sexuality became tied to these rituals; “the harvest was seen as the fruit of a hierogamy, a sacred marriage; the soil was female; the seeds divine semen; and rain the sexual congress of heaven and earth”.<sup>70</sup> Ancient Israelite texts show the continuation of these rituals into the sixth century BCE, much to the consternation of the prophets Hosea and Ezekiel.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the invention of agriculture and the observations of the early humans gave the impression of personifying the earth as female, even symbolizing the earth as a womb from which life springs forth.<sup>72</sup> The female katabasis stories of cultures that developed from these Neolithic farmers reflect these same symbolic meanings. Each symbol connects to an aspect of the culture. Love relates to human sexuality; fertility to the planting; power to drought, flooding, and the lack of food; and anger to wild and irrational nature. The female katabasis stories connect to the early concept of a “mother earth.”

Some scholars argue the prominent female deities from these ancient religions, like Inanna, Isis and Demeter, represent archetypes of a Mother Goddess or Great Mother figure, which

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69 Perera, *The Descent of Inanna*, 143.

70 Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (New York: Canongate, 2006), 41-42.

71 Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 43.

72 Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 43.

the patriarchy suppressed at the beginning of civilization. Whether these scholars offer a correct analysis does not deny these female deities wielded their own power – this has been demonstrated above. These females had a different relationship with death than their male counterparts, both in myths and tales as well as life. Women create life much like the earth creates the food humans need for life. The dead transform when they return to the womb under the earth. They may be meat on hooks, thirsty bird-like creatures, souls, and memories of the living, but they transform. At a primal level, women also represent the liminal state between life and non-life, one that lasts nine months.

Overall, the underworld in ancient Mediterranean cultures symbolically connects to the pre-historical concept of the earth as mother, demonstrated by an analysis of the female katabasis myths and stories from these cultures. Similar themes of love, fertility and power appear throughout these stories and in the rituals and beliefs of the Neolithic human culture. These stories differ from their male counterparts and demonstrate how women had symbolism and meaning even within a patriarchal culture. While women may not have had institutional power, they wielded their own unique power. Through psychoanalysis, these stories reveal universal symbols and meanings; as Jung said, “the soul expresses itself in the universal language of symbols.”<sup>73</sup>



POPULAR DISCOURSE AND GENOCIDE  
 RECOGNITION:  
 THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN THE  
 AMERICAN PRESS DURING WWI

ELIZABETH DUKOVICH



INTRODUCTION

At nine years old, Kerop Bedoukian sensed disaster he could barely comprehend when the Ottoman government arrested his father, a prominent Armenian businessman, in 1915. Several days after the arrest, Bedoukian and his mother would join other displaced, scared Armenians on a sixty day march through the Syrian Desert. On the journey, Bedoukian watched a group of Turkish boys molest a young girl and then throw rocks at her when they finished. The Ottoman gendarmes supervising the march and ostensibly guarding the Armenians, did nothing. Even after the nameless girl drowned herself in the Euphrates River, no one stopped the boys from continuing to hurl stones at her dead body.<sup>1</sup> In adulthood Bedoukian came to understand that he witnessed and survived the Armenian Genocide, the systematic attempt to rid the collapsing

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1 Kerop Bedoukian, *Some of us Survived*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1978), 49-50.

Ottoman Empire of its Armenian population through deportation and massacre.

The brutality of the Armenian Genocide featured prominently in the American Press during its commission, from approximately 1915 to 1923. The widespread publication of atrocities reveals important information about political and cultural themes that resonated with a largely isolationist American public. The popular conversation about the Armenian Genocide focused on diplomatic pressure that emphasized humanitarian values rather than Wilsonian internationalist politics, the kinship between American and Armenian identity, and the role of gendered violence in communicating the unique horror of the massacres.

American historiography covering the Armenian genocide focuses largely on high politics and the diplomatic relationship between the United States and Turkey. A related body of literature examines the role of international politics and critiques Western countries for condoning and/or enabling the genocide when it suited their political advantages.<sup>2</sup> This article builds on that scholarship by exploring the tenor of the U.S. national conversation about the Armenian Genocide using articles, journals, and books on the subject published during World War I, culminating in coordinated opposition to relations with the newly formed Turkish republic in 1926. Historian Peter Balakian records that *The New York Times* published 145 articles on the Armenian killing and deportation in 1915 alone, highlighting the Armenian Genocide as America's first introduction to the horror of killing on such a massive scale.<sup>3</sup> A collection of American news

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2 For two examples of such literature, look for Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003) and Donald Bloxam, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003), 282, 286.

articles monitoring the events as they occurred, *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press: 1915-1922* contains copies of these articles that invite historical analysis about the way the larger American society received information about the Armenian Genocide. Of the 194 *New York Times* articles in Kloian's compilation, 70% appeared in the first four pages of the paper, 26% in the first two, and 10% on the front page. Kloian presents duplicates of the articles exactly as they appeared, instructing readers to perceive them as incontrovertible evidence of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>4</sup>

In the early twentieth century, *The New York Times* enjoyed increased readership under the leadership of Adolf S. Ochs, who rescued the struggling publication from the verge of bankruptcy by advertising a focus on more factual reporting contrasted with the sensationalism associated with William Randolph Hearst. In addition to reducing the price of the paper by two-thirds, Ochs also introduced different typeface, a new Sunday illustrated magazine, and a Saturday book review.<sup>5</sup> During World War I, its reputation as a balanced view of current events and the new changes resulted in increased circulation from 250,000 to 390,000, representing a relatively large reader base for the time.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, *The New York Times* stood at the center of America's relief effort for the Armenians as the most prolific source of information about the Armenians. News of the Armenians travelled so successfully that President Herbert Hoover reminisced that "Armenia was in the front of the American mind...known to the American schoolchild only a little less than England."<sup>7</sup>

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4 Richard Kloian (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press: 1915-1922*, (Berkeley: Anto Printing, 1988), ix-x.

5 Alex S. Jones and Susan E. Tiftt, "Adolph S. Ochs," in *Editor & Publisher* Volume 132, Number 44, October 30, 1999, 14-15.

6 Elmer Holmes Davis, *History of the New York Times, 1851-1921*, (New York: J.J. Little & Ives, 1921), 331.

7 Balakian, 282.

The themes of Armenian Genocide coverage suggest that the target audience likely consisted of middle to upper-class white men with sufficient funds to purchase newspapers and respond to fundraising pleas, sufficient knowledge to find international politics interesting, and personal interest in defending “helpless” women and children. Analyzing the content of influential *New York Times* articles helps historians understand the public relationship to the Armenian Genocide as it happened, revealing the aspects that made recognizing the atrocities and helping the Armenians so crucial to Americans during and immediately after World War I.

### THE GENOCIDE

A brief introduction to the genocide the articles depict provides necessary context for analyzing their content. The most widely accepted definition of genocide among scholars in the field is the one articulated in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948. According to that definition, genocide involves the commission of at least one of five different acts against a particular “national, ethnic, racial, or religious group: 1) killing members of the group; 2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; 3) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; 4) imposing measures to prevent births within the group; 5) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”<sup>8</sup> From 1915 to 1922, the Ottoman government deported and/or executed Armenian government officials, religious and political leaders, and average men, women, and children. By the end of World War I, approximately one million civilians perished as a result

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8 Richard G. Hovannisian (ed), *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1986), 44.



of starvation, abuse, and the brutal conditions of concentration camps along the forced march from Anatolia to the Syrian Desert.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer who originally coined the term “genocide” in 1943, referenced the Armenian case as a particular influence.<sup>10</sup>

With the Armenian Deportations, the Ottoman government committed all five of the crimes that legally constitute genocide. The Ottoman Minister of the Interior Talat Pasha organized and planned the deportations under the law known as the Provisional Act on the Evacuation of Suspect Persons, enacted on May 27, 1915.<sup>11</sup> The government deported the Armenian women and children from their homes on foot to the Syrian desert of DeirZor. Concentration camps along the route housed Armenians journeying from all over the empire, from Erzerum near the Russian Border to Zeitun, a town in what is now northwestern Turkey. The Ottoman government defended the deportations as a security measure against subversive Armenian nationalist groups; however, the indiscriminate nature of the deportations, the government sanctioned massacre of the civilian refugee population, and the deliberately brutal conditions the Armenians suffered resulted in one of the first genocides of the twentieth century.

Many of the women, children, and elderly walking the sixty day journey died of starvation and exhaustion. Ephraim K. Jernazian, an Armenian working as an Ottoman government translator in Urfa during the genocide, confirms the indiscriminate nature of the deportations. He recounts witnessing town leaders imprisoned, tortured, and murdered before

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9 Historians continue to debate the exact number of casualties; estimates range from one hundred thousand to as high as three million. One million represents the current scholastic consensus.

10 Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 210.

11 Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, *A Crime of Silence: The Armenian Genocide*, Preface by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, (London: Zed Books, 1985), 72.

deportations began in his town.<sup>12</sup> Henry Morgenthau, United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, likewise recognized the comprehensive slaughter intended in the deportations and recorded his observation in his memoirs: “when the...authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact.”<sup>13</sup> Some gendarmes would purposely extend their march by making the Armenians walk in circles so that they would grow weaker and thus more likely to die. Eyewitnesses describe murders of Armenians taking place frequently during deportations by Kurdish and Turkish brigands attacking the caravans of people, stealing their valuables, and raping women. A government branch known as the Special Organization even released gangs of violent prisoners and sent them after the traveling Armenians.<sup>14</sup> Due to the evidence of systematic, state-sanctioned brutality and murder, the majority of scholars argue that the Ottoman deportations and concurrent massacre of the Ottoman-Armenian population qualify as genocide.<sup>15</sup>

## DIPLOMACY AS HUMANITARIANISM: POLITICS IN GENOCIDE COVERAGE

Although the concept of “genocide” did not yet exist, the officials drawing attention to the Armenian plight emphasized the uniquely terrible nature of the crime to galvanize relief efforts. Americans reading *The New York Times* and popular journals

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12 Ephraim K. Jernazian, *Judgment Unto Truth: Witnessing the Armenian Genocide*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 64, 101.

13 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1919), 309.

14 Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History*, (New York: W.W. Norton Company, Inc., 2003), 38.

15 For an overview of Armenian Genocide scholarship, reference Richard Hovannisian's *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999).

learned about the genocide through articles describing the vivid, personal agony of Armenian victims accompanied by calls for American intervention. Revelations about the treatment of the Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman government, a German ally, occurred simultaneously with increasingly tense strains on American neutrality in World War I. After the Germans bombed the British ocean liner *Lusitania*, whose passengers included 128 American citizens, in 1915 and later the unarmed French channel steamer *Sussex* in 1916, President Wilson's rhetoric began to shift subtly from strict isolationism to one of America as an international force for morality and humane values. In 1915, Wilson stated that "any nation that does violence to the principle of just international understanding is doing violence to the ideals of the United States...."<sup>16</sup> In October 1916, Wilson declared that America would feel shame if it did not rally "in the interests of those who suffer, in the interests of those who are wronged... seeing to it that no man is put upon if we can prevent it, and that all men are confirmed in their home of a day of justice and liberty to come for them."<sup>17</sup> Despite Wilson's suggestion of an American responsibility to prevent injustice where possible, his emphasis on neutrality in the war led to his successful reelection in 1916.<sup>18</sup> The US entered the war in 1917 despite strenuous objections from isolationists and returned to an isolationist foreign policy after 1918. The press coverage of the Armenian genocide reflects the careful balance between asserting the importance of the United States as an international defender of morality while avoiding military entanglements. In 1915 and 1916, intervention meant fundraising assistance from the American public to aid Armenian deportation victims as well as diplomatic pressure on the Ottoman government, though calls for diplomatic pressure stay noticeably

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16 Jason C. Flanagan, *Imagining the Enemy: American Presidential War Rhetoric from Woodrow Wilson to Geroge W. Bush*, (Claremont: Regina Books, 2009), 10.

17 Flanagan, 20.

18 Flanagan, 19.

vague about what that might entail.

Viscount James Bryce, the British Ambassador to the United States from 1907-1913, appears in the news frequently as one of the most vocal proponents of American intervention. Americans already knew Bryce for his 1889 book *The American Commonwealth*, hailed as “the most important work on American culture by a non-American since Tocqueville.”<sup>19</sup> As a member of the House of Lords during World War I, Bryce often spoke against the Armenian Genocide and called on America to assist the victims. One article in *The New York Times* described Bryce’s account of the “heart-piercing” massacres that moved the House of Lords: “The House of Lords is a very unemotional assembly, but it was thrilled in every fibre at the story of the horrors compared to which even the atrocities of Abdul Hamid pale. As Lord Bryce truly said, there is not a case in history...where a crime so hideous and on so gigantic a scale has been recorded.”<sup>20</sup> Nine days later, *The New York Times* reported Bryce repeating his assertion during a proposal to condemn the atrocities, stating “The horrors of the massacre exceeded anything in the history of persecutions.”<sup>21</sup> A respected figure denouncing the Armenian Genocide in such colorful terms demonstrates the caliber of the discussion appearing in the American press. The description of the august and impersonal House of Lords shaken to its core by the horrors described reinforces the unique devastation of the Armenian Genocide. The repetition of this sentiment appearing just over one week later suggests the publishers anticipated interest from their readers.

Stories about the atrocities often included pleas for

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19 Balakian, 118.

20 “800,000 Armenians Counted Destroyed,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1915, 3 in Richard D. Kloian (ed), *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press, 1915-1922* (Berkeley: Anto Printing, 1988), 60.

21 “Bryce Says Only Germany Can Save Armenians,” *The New York Times*, October 16, 1915, 8 in Kloian, 77.

American intervention based on a moral obligation to those suffering. Henry Morgenthau and James Bryce campaigned heavily in the public, and the American Committee on Armenian Atrocities joined the public relations efforts, with spokespeople frequently appearing in *The New York Times*. On September 21, 1915, Bryce foreshadowed Wilson's rhetoric in his appeal for more American aid, asserting that "[t]he civilized world, especially America, ought to know what horrors are passing in Asiatic Turkey during the past few months, for if anything can stop the destroying hand of the Turkish government it will be an expression of the opinion of neutral nations, chiefly the judgment of humane America."<sup>22</sup> In his 1916 book, Bryce published a letter to the U.S. Consul at Tiflis in which the Rev. Robert S. Stapleton requested that Ambassador Morgenthau "intercede in the name of humanity against the wholesale slaughter..."<sup>23</sup> In addition to calls for diplomatic intervention, Morgenthau proposed raising a fund from one to five million dollars to "defray the expense of transporting thousands of Armenians to America to save them from slaughter at the hands of the Turks."<sup>24</sup> The calls for American involvement reflect the tension in American politics during 1915 and 1916, as those lobbying for intervention in the Armenian cause focus on diplomatic pressure as an effective tool to stop the massacres and fundraising to help transport the Armenians away from harm. Those lobbying for the Armenian cause echo Wilson's rhetoric of America as an international moral force, and likewise echo his caution - none of the appeals for aid published in *The New York Times* mention the idea of military intervention.

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22 "Bryce Asks US to Aid Armenia," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1915, 3 in Kloian, 34.

23 "Zrzeroum: Letter, Dated 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1916, from the Rev. Robert S. Stapleton to the Hon. F. Willoughby Smith, U.S. Consul at Tiflis; Communicated by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief" in James Bryce (ed.), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916: Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by Viscount Bryce*. Preface by Viscount Bryce. (London: Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, Limited, 1916), 589.

24 "Admires Morgenthau Plan," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1915, 31 in Kloian, 31.

**ARMENIANS AND AMERICANS: AN ETHICAL KINSHIP**

Articles in *The New York Times* and popular journals emphasized the United States' moral responsibility to the Armenians not only based on the increasing rhetoric of America as an international force, but also because of kinship between the Americans and Armenians. In the early twentieth century, the ideal American citizen had a strong Christian (Protestant) faith, an indefatigable work ethic, and a stable family life (also, implicitly, white skin). In his memoirs, Morgenthau discussed the nature of Americans with a suspicious Ottoman diplomat, explaining that Christian schools established in Ottoman territories represent "the fine altruistic spirit" of the American people and recounted rags-to-riches stories of the Vanderbilt and Rockefeller families as well as a story of a man who "arrived in New York, a penniless and ragged boy," and ended his life a millionaire.<sup>25</sup> While a more detailed discussion of the nuances of American citizenship and its permutations is beyond the scope of this article, the aforementioned themes recur in press articles emphasizing the similarities between American and Armenian people.

Even before the genocide began, the narrative of the dangerous and depraved Islamic Turk oppressing the innocent Christian appeared frequently in the American press. Americans' prejudices against Turkish people originated from having little access to information about Islam or the Ottoman Empire; as a new country, upper-class Americans familiar with the Ottoman Empire knew only that it was not a democracy and responded to tales of Islam's hostility to Christianity. Cotton Mather, the influential seventeenth century Puritan minister, used "Turk" as a negative reference, such as calling for family prayer time by admonishing good Christians to be at least as good as the Turks or insulting the British by comparing their barbarity

to that of the Turks.<sup>26</sup> Missionary publications had a history of depicting the Turk in essentialist terms, characterizing the entire race as incapable of self-governance, naturally violent, and unproductive.<sup>27</sup> By 1914, the stereotype had proliferated in American culture and infused the discussion about Christians and Turks in the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, *The New York Times* ran a series of columns warning about Christian massacres, depicting the danger innocent Christian populations faced at the hands of Ottoman Turks. On November 12, 1914, an article entitled “Report Christians in Peril in Turkey,” described “brigandage, murder, and atrocities” against Armenians but also warning that “all Christians and foreigners” face “great danger.”<sup>28</sup> The next month, two additional articles close to the beginning of the paper lamented atrocities against Christians, one describing Turkish people spitting on Armenian “corpses suspended in the street” and forcing “Christians to do the same,” and another article on the same page with the headline “Turks Hang Christians in the Street.”<sup>29</sup> The graphic descriptions of disrespect to the dead and appalling Turkish behavior continue unabated in subsequent articles and publications, painting a dichotomy between the Armenian and Turkish people designed to garner sympathy for the Armenian cause.

In the pre-war period, the American press learned much of its information about the Ottoman Empire from the American Christian missionaries stationed there, bolstering association between Christianity, Armenians, and Americans based on their reports. One *New York Times* article contained a statement

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26 Justin McCarthy, *The Turk in America: The Creation of an Enduring Prejudice*, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2010), 9-10.

27 McCarthy, 155-157.

28 “Report Christians in Peril in Turkey,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 1914, 3 in Kloian, 2.

29 “Turkish Women Revolt” and “Turks Hang Christians in the Street,” December 14, 1914, 2 3 in Kloian, 2.

from Rev. Dr. James L. Barton, foreign secretary of the Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, lamenting the fate of Christians in Turkey, including American missionaries: “Probably in all history, two hundred missionaries have never been called on to pass through more terrible experiences than have our missionaries in Turkey during the last nine or ten months and the end is not yet.”<sup>30</sup> Barton’s testimony adds a relatable dimension of American suffering for readers, depicting missionaries suffering with the pain of witnessing the seemingly unprecedented scale of atrocities and experiencing maltreatment themselves.

The testimony of American missionary Grace Higley Knapp illustrates the way accounts of the genocide lacked nuance and portrayed Christians as innocent victims of savage Muslims, emphasizing the flawless character of American Christians in her story. Knapp was stationed in the city of Van during brutal fighting between Armenian and Ottoman forces and published an account of her experience there, which Bryce included in *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916*. Knapp described anticipating the Turkish arrival, listening to artillery volleys while understanding that soon “hell would let loose in the crowded city and our crowded compound” in the form of “unspeakable atrocities perpetrated on the persons of those we loved,” expecting they would “probably suffer them in our own persons.”<sup>31</sup> Knapp’s testimony echoes that of Dr. Barton, implying a relationship between the Americans and Armenians, both political and social outsiders in the majority Islamic Ottoman Empire because of their Christianity. Later in her testimony, Knapp declared, “The effect on its followers of the religion of

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30 “Americans’ Death Laid to the Turks,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1915, 9 in Kloian, 107.

31 “The American Mission at Van: Narrative Printed Privately in the United States by Miss Grace Higley Knapp (1915)” in James Bryce (ed.), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916: Documents presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* by Viscount Bryce. Preface by Viscount Bryce. (London: Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, Limited, 1916), 39.



Islam was never more strongly contrasted with Christianity. While the Armenian refugees had been mutually helpful and self-sacrificing, these Moslems showed themselves absolutely selfish, callous and indifferent to each other's suffering." Likely unaware that it undermined her overall narrative, earlier in the same testimony she mentioned that remaining Armenians declined to help the American missionaries care for the Turkish elderly, women, and children left behind after the skirmish in Van.<sup>32</sup> As a Christian missionary, Knapp's predictable denunciation of Islam as a pernicious influence on its followers is hardly surprising; however, her rhetoric reflects that of mainstream articles published in the popular American press before and after her story entered the public. This suggests that Knapp may have absorbed the anti-Islamic rhetoric already present in American culture and filtered her experiences in the Ottoman Empire through that lens. As part of Bryce's book, her testimony both reflects and perpetuates American-Armenian kinship and anti-Islamic stereotypes.

A separate narrative of the events at Van included in Bryce's work reinforces the friendly relationship between Americans and Armenians from the Armenian perspective. Readers of the Armenian-American journal *Gotchnag* in New York encountered a serial description of the conflict in Van from an Armenian identified as Mr. Y.K. Roushdi, and Bryce's work introduced the account to readers of his 1916 publication. Roushdi states that "Even the American missionaries confessed that they could not conceive how a Government could display such meanness and treachery towards citizens who had been so faithful in their duties. It is important to mention that the sympathies of the American missionaries had been with the Armenians at all times."<sup>33</sup> To an American audience, the characterization of Armenians as

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32 Bryce, 41.

33 "Van: Narrative by Mr. Y.K. Rushdouni, Published serially in the Armenian Journal 'Gotchnag,' New York" in Bryce, 64.

faithful citizens contrasted with the “treacherous Turk” suggests parallels between the Armenians and the ideal of a hard working, dutiful American citizen. An article in *The Literary Digest* entitled “How Your Gift is Saving the Armenians” emphasizes the qualities of American international aid which correspond with the achievement ideas of the American Dream. The American Committee on Armenian Atrocities emphasized that its relief efforts would go to work programs rather than direct handouts, distributing labor assignments to Armenian men capable of working “with an eye to the future of the people,” and with exceptions “in the case of children and helpless women.”<sup>34</sup> These descriptions of Armenians using relief to work hard resemble the stories of industrious Americans building their success out of humble backgrounds that Morgenthau recounted to the Ottoman official.

Morgenthau returned to this theme of Armenians as hard-working, praiseworthy people in his pleas for fundraising aid. On September 14, 1915, *The New York Times* prominently featured Morgenthau’s plea for public aid to the Armenian cause. Morgenthau describes their plight and calls for coordinated political action: “Since May, 350,000 Armenians have been slaughtered or died of starvation. There are 550,000 Armenians who could be sent to America, and we need help to save them.” Morgenthau articulates a particularly American goal for the aid he requests, calling on “each of the Western States raise a fund to equip a ship to bring the number of settlers it wants. The Armenians are a moral, hard working [*sic.*] race, and would make good citizens to settle the less thickly populated parts of the Western States.”<sup>35</sup> Morgenthau characterizes Armenians as a

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34 “How Your Gift is Saving the Armenians,” *The Literary Digest*, March 9, 1918, New York: Frank & Wagnalls Company in Richard D. Kloian(ed), *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press, 1915-1922* (Berkeley: Antio Printing, 1988), 223.

35 “Would send here 550,000 Armenians,” *The New York Times*, September 14, 1915, 2 in Kloian, 30.

desirable race that connects well with American values; he repeats the description of their upstanding citizenship (interestingly ignoring the revolutionary groups that, however small, did actually exist in the Ottoman Empire). He also praises their work ethic as a particularly useful trait for further settling the American West. The descriptions of the Armenian people in the American press reflect the values of American hard work and ingenuity.

The financial successes of relief organizations and Morgenthau's political actions in response to a public outcry demonstrate the efficacy of the campaign linking Armenians to Americans. Along with other prominent American missionary leaders, Dr. Barton would go on to found the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ASCAR), which collected \$89,970,293.06 in relief, the equivalent of over \$3 billion dollars today.<sup>36</sup> The success of the fundraising efforts reveals that appeals to Christian sympathies for the Armenian people successfully elicited donations. On May 15, 1915, *The New York Times* reported Ambassador Morgenthau's efforts to intercede on behalf of the Armenians after "a flood of communications from various parts of the country urging that steps be taken to protect native Christians in Armenia and in regions under Turkish control."<sup>37</sup> Morgenthau specifically states the public pressure came from a desire to protect Christians, indicating that publications about the suffering Armenians resulted in enough public pressure to motivate diplomatic action. Such a public outcry corresponded with Morgenthau's own goals of diplomatic intervention as an outspoken advocate of America's political importance in relieving the suffering in the region.

## THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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36      McCarthy, 165.

37      "Morgenthau Pleas for Armenians," *The New York Times*, May 10, 1915, 9 in Kloian, 13.

In addition to the emphasis on Christian suffering, depictions of the atrocities in the American press often included a gendered component, representing innocent Christian women and children as helpless victims of depraved Muslim Turks. Mentions of atrocities typically always included “outrages” against women and children, often in graphic detail. Depictions of helpless women that required urgent American aid and assistance came during a time in the United States when gender roles were in flux. Between 1914 and 1917, American women entered public life in unprecedented numbers as volunteers for the Red Cross, as organizers for peace, as integral workers in the US preparation for World War I, and, critically, as supporters of women’s suffrage. Gendered language in preparedness propaganda during 1915 and 1916 split along class lines, with portrayals of military discipline as important for masculinity and patriotic women as mothers protecting the nation as they would their own children prevalent among the upper class and activists among Socialists and working-class using gender to emphasize the importance of peace.<sup>38</sup> Appealing to politically engaged, largely upper-class readers, accounts of the Armenian genocide appealed to the sympathies of American men by recasting women in traditional roles of mothers and vulnerable, delicate ladies in need of rescue.

Depictions of women suffering often included intentionally shocking detail to underscore their desolation and vulnerability. In Bryce’s 1916 compilation of atrocities committed against the Armenian people, Bryce reprinted an interview with an Armenian refugee identified as Mrs. Gazarian that first appeared in the *Pioneer Press* in Minnesota, which included the following testimony: “I saw Turks bury Armenian victims with the dogs, divide the women among them as wives and throw babies in

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38 Elizabeth McKillen, “Pacifist Brawn and Silk-Stocking Militarism: Labor, Gender, and Anti-War Politics, 1914-1918,” *Peace & Change* July 2008, Vol. 33 Issue 3: 393, 397-398.

the lake.”<sup>39</sup> Infant drowning recurs frequently in the published reports of atrocities in Turkey, either by Turkish cruelty or women at their wits’ end desiring to end the suffering of their children. For example, *The New York Times* ran an article entitled “Great Exodus of Christians,” chronicling Armenians attempting to flee Azerbaijan and the difficulties they faced. The article contains a description of “maddened women” throwing their own children into a river “or into pools in order to end their sufferings from cold and hunger.” It ends on a disheartening note, concluding “People died unheeded and unmourned. In fact, those who died seemed to be envied by the living.”<sup>40</sup> This article fuses appeals for Christian sympathy with gendered language to emphasize the great extent of their suffering.

Bryce often emphasized the suffering of women and children to illustrate the importance of his cause in his appeals for aid, echoing themes of Christian kinship as well as the importance of diplomacy. In his direct plea to Americans for assistance with stopping the atrocities, Bryce accuses the Turkish government of “extirpating Christianity by killing off Christians of the Armenian race” and emphasizes that “accounts from different sources agree that over the whole of...Asia Minor and Armenia the Christian populations are being deliberately exterminated, the men of military age being killed and the younger women seized for Turkish harems, compelled to become Mohammedans, and kept, with the children, in virtual slavery.”<sup>41</sup> The danger of sexual exploitation emphasized in these accounts foreshadows the wartime propaganda that insisted on the necessity of American men adopting military service to safeguard American womanhood.<sup>42</sup> Repetition also indicates the types of stories

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39 “Van: Interview with a Refugee, Mrs. Gazarian, published in the *Pioneer Press* of St. Paul, Minnesota, USA” in Bryce, 76.

40 “Great Exodus of Christians,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1915, 3 in Kloian 9.

41 “Bryce Asks US to Aid Armenia,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 1915, 3 in Kloian, 34.

42 McKillen, 411.

publishers believed resonated with the public, and their frequent repetition of similar stories suggests the success of this particular angle. Eight days after Bryce's call for Armenian aid, *The New York Times* features a story by Professor Samuel T. Dutton, Secretary of the Committee on Armenian Atrocities, relaying testimony from a refugee who escaped Turkey. She "told of the fate of the 100 [Armenian] girls who were attending a mission school in Turkey. These girls...were divided into groups, and those that were the best looking in the opinion of the Turkish officers were taken over by those officers. Those considered not quite so good-looking were given over to the soldiers, while those still less attractive were put up for sale to the highest bidders."<sup>43</sup> The crimes described against girls and women emphasize the cruelty of Turkish officials, whose barbarism often appears linked with their religion. The appeals for interference featured in *The New York Times* rely on images that correspond to traditional American visions of womanhood as passive and delicate, reaffirming traditional gender roles to male readers that may have found the developments of women entering the public sphere uncomfortable. In their use of gendered imagery to convey the seriousness of the genocide, published accounts emphasize both the Christian identity of the women in question and their helpless condition to convince Americans of the crucial need to aid the Armenians. Combined with other rhetoric extolling America's unique moral standing in the international community as a humanitarian rather than military actor, accounts of the genocide before World War I reflect broader political and social trends in the United States at the time.

### THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE

The public denunciations of Ottoman atrocities, the demonization of the Turkish race, and advocacy on behalf of

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43 "Armenian Women Put Up at Auction," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1915, 3 in Kloian, 47.

the Armenian people recurred in opposition literature to the American-Turkish Treaty of Lausanne. In 1923, the United States sent delegates to Lausanne, Switzerland to advise negotiations between the newly established Turkish republic and allied powers to formally end the fighting between them. Since the United States never declared war on the Ottoman Empire, the government did not participate directly in the main treaty negotiations. They did, however, begin separate negotiations with Turkey to re-establish diplomatic and economic ties that had been severed in 1917 when the United States declared war on Germany. Several years of debate about the resumption of warm diplomatic relations and economic cooperation followed, with supporters arguing that the secular, modernizing platform of Kemal Ataturk, the leader of the Turkish Republic, signaled an advantageous opportunity for cooperation and opponents revisiting language of Armenian victimization and American moral responsibility.<sup>44</sup>

The themes present in the opposition literature mirror those calling attention to the Armenian plight before World War I. The American Committee Opposed to the Lausanne Treaty, formed in 1923 by influential missionary groups and Armenian advocates, published a series of statements and opinions by prominent public figures all arguing against ratification, a significant number of which appealed to American's Christian solidarity with the Armenians as sufficient reason to reject closer relations with the newly formed Turkish state. The first section of the publication presents "Authoritative Opinions on the Lausanne Treaty and the Turks by 56 Americans," including Morgenthau who emphatically declares, "I am unalterably opposed to the Treaty."<sup>45</sup> Morgenthau's opinion comes shortly after that of Charles W. Eliot, who

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44 Robert L. Daniel, "The Armenian Question and American-Turkish Relations, 1914-1927," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, September 1959, Volume 46, Number 2: 267. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1891527> Accessed April 25, 2012.

45 Cardashian, Vahan. *The Lausanne Treaty, Turkey and Armenia*, (New York: American Committee Opposed to the Lausanne Treaty, 1926), 18.

emphasizes the importance of Christianity in the opposition: “How strange it is that nobody gives the real reason why we should have nothing to do with the Turks! The present Turks are the descendants and heirs of those Turks who for centuries have harassed and butchered the Christian population within their borders, and are themselves continuing the same practices to an even more revolting degree.”<sup>46</sup> Statements by church groups, pastors, and missionaries repeat Eliot’s reasoning. A vivid example come from Fred Perry Powers, a missionary born to missionary parents, who asked, “...are we going to grasp the bloody hand of the Turk, who is as unspeakable as he was in Gladstone’s day, and let bygones be bygones for the sake of what money we can make by trading with him?”<sup>47</sup> Just as Armenians appeared as unequivocally innocent victims in American publications, Turks appear as equally violent and deranged, with only rare mentions of kindness towards Armenians in a select few of the American publications addressing the genocide. The depictions of innocent Armenians and violent Turks imply the immutable nature of such characteristics, repeating earlier appeals to America’s international moral responsibilities based on kinship with the Armenians through their seemingly American attributes of loyalty, piety, and hard work as well as through their Christian identification.

The congressional rejection of the treaty in 1927 indicates the success of opposition campaigns, but the rejection did not impact American-Turkish relations in the long run. Significant economic interests, specifically involving the Chester Oil Company and its interest in access to Turkish resources, and political interest in moving forward from the conflicts of the war resulted in resumption of relations one month after the rejection of the treaty via an official exchange of notes. Objections came only from groups like The American Committee Opposed to the

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46 Cardashian, 17.

47 Cardashian, 99.



Laussane Treaty, and the Armenian question began to recede from public memory.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The popular conversation surrounding the Armenian genocide involved themes important to American politics and social identity. In 1915 and 1916, advocates for intervention and aid in the Armenian cause adopted President Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric of America's moral responsibility towards oppressed peoples without alienating an isolationist public wary of the "European war." Descriptions of the moral quality of Armenians linked them with prevalent notions of ideal American citizenship, notably ideas of devout Christianity, industry, and hard work. Publications about Armenian victimhood underscored their plight using gendered imagery that depicted Armenian women according to traditional ideas of masculine strength and feminine delicacy in a time of transitioning gender roles in the United States.

The reflection of the Armenian genocide through issues resonant with the American political and social landscape suggests an interesting starting point for future genocide recognition. The question of Armenian Genocide recognition recurs in American politics to this day, complicated by the U.S. reliance on strategic military and political alliances with Turkey to advance foreign policy objectives. As the Armenian Genocide fades from recent historical memory and approaches its centennial, the global significance of American and Turkish relations makes studying the popular influences on genocide recognition and denial a crucial part of breaking the relative silence.



AGENCY, EMPATHY, AND SOCIAL  
 JUSTICE: THE FEDERAL DANCE  
 THEATRE, TAMIRIS, AND  
 HOW LONG, BRETHREN?

CAREY GALBRAITH



INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression was a time of economic despair and artistic ingenuity. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal established jobs for the unemployed and unprecedented government sponsorship of the arts. One relief agency, the Federal Dance Theatre (FDT), has been largely excluded from histories of the New Deal, presumably due to ignorance, brevity, or the opinion that its short tenure indicates insignificance. The development of the FDT, the personal background and work of its primary choreographer, Tamiris (whose real name is Helen Becker), and the social message of her critical dance concert, *How Long, Brethren?* reveal the agency and empathy of the dancers and choreographer. Tamiris stands out as a pioneer of modern dance and social justice in an era of Jim Crow segregation and fear of communist subversion. A further examination of contemporary perceptions demonstrates the artistic, relevant, and subversive nature of the FDT, Tamiris, and *How Long, Brethren?*

## THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND DANCE: THE MAKING OF THE FEDERAL DANCE THEATRE

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt instituted a series of “alphabet agencies” to assist in economic relief. On May 6, 1935, Executive Order No. 7034 established the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which developed job opportunities for the unemployed.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to earlier relief efforts, the WPA provided those on relief with jobs in their particular profession.<sup>2</sup> The director of the WPA, Harry Hopkins, sympathized with artists and argued that in addition to mainstream professions, artists of varying types deserved government assistance.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, a number of arts projects were initiated in the spring of 1935, such as the Federal Writers’ Project, Federal Art Project, and Federal Music Project. The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) was developed later that year, with Hallie Flanagan sworn in as National Director on August 29, 1935. These four projects (and eventually the Historical Record Projects) were referred to as Federal Project Number One.<sup>4</sup>

Tamiris, a modern dance pioneer, and other dancers in New York were familiar with the economic plight of dancers and had been organizing to gain relief for some time. A month before the WPA was created, dance critic John Martin wrote in the *New York Times*, “There are hundreds of dancers out of work in New York. Unless they are given a means of keeping their technical training alive, they will shortly be permanently unemployable as dancers.”<sup>5</sup> In 1934, Tamiris and about thirty other dancers voted to establish a union whose goals included “jobs for dancers, dance teachers,

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1 Library of Congress, “The WPA Federal Theatre Project, 1935-1939,” <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/ftwpa.html> (accessed 2 February 2012).

2 Kim C. Friedman, “The Federal Dance Theatre in New York City: Legislative and Administrative Obstacles” (master’s thesis, American University, 1992), 2.

3 John O’Connor and Lorraine Brown, *Free, Adult, Uncensored: The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project* (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1978), 2.

4 Friedman, “The Federal Dance Theatre in New York City,” 9.

5 John Martin, “The Dance: On Relief,” *New York Times*, 14 April 1935: X9.

etc., ... a central theatre of dance where performing units are salaried to put on dance programs regularly, ... [and] immediate cash relief for needy cases.”<sup>6</sup> The newly-established union, the Dancers Union, proved fundamental in the fight for a distinct Federal Dance Project.

In January of 1936, plans for dance to be included within the New York City Federal Theatre Project were revealed, but the dancers refused to be “second-class citizens on this whole thing”; they wanted an independent Federal *Dance* Theatre.<sup>7</sup> Lili Mann Laub, a dancer with the FDT, said, “There were dancers living in attics . . . They were starving, too . . . this is why we had to have the [Dance] Project. We had to. We would all have been dead in the streets if we didn’t.”<sup>8</sup> This urgency led Tamiris and other dancers to lobby Hallie Flanagan for a distinct dance unit. Fanya Geltman, one of the most politically-involved of the FDT dancers, spoke of Tamiris’s skills as an organizer: “She really was a woman who had something to say, and she could speak like no one else.”<sup>9</sup> Along with these personal meetings, the Dancers Union sent a telegram to Flanagan on January 14, 1936, stating, “The needs of the dancers of New York are not adequately covered by the present setup under the municipal drama project. We therefore request the formation of an independent dance project with its own administrative staff and permanent theatre.”<sup>10</sup> Flanagan

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6 “Dancer’s Union,” *New Theatre*, January 1935: 29.

7 John Martin, “The Dance: WPA Project,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1936: X8; Fanya Geltman (Del Bourgo), interview with Karen Wickre, December 16, 1977, p. 1, Works Progress Administration Oral Histories Collection, Collection #C0153, SCA, GMU. (Hereafter noted as WPA OHC.)

8 Lili Mann Laub, interview with Karen Wickre, May 24, 1978, p. 26, WPA OHC.

9 Fanya Geltman (Del Bourgo), interview with Karen Wickre, December 16, 1977, p. 18, WPA OHC.

10 Western Union telegram, January 14, 1936, Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collection, cited in Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 80.

granted the request the next day.<sup>11</sup> In her 1940 memoir of the FTP, Flanagan referred to Tamiris's dancers as "her fiery cohorts" and recalled their endless union activities and picketing with a hint of disapprobation (probably because of the negative publicity this brought her).<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the dancers knew how to organize effectively and acted with agency in successfully institutionalizing and thus legitimizing dance as an art form worthy of government sponsorship.<sup>13</sup>

The FDT, sometimes referred to as the Dance Project, was a serious artistic endeavor as evidenced by the funding, hiring, and production plans. Granted \$150,000 for the first six months' expenses, the Dance Project planned to hire 185 dancers at \$23.86 per week.<sup>14</sup> The five choreographers hired (due to a loophole in funding, which allowed twenty-five percent of funding to go toward non-relief personnel on creative projects) in the New York unit were Gluck-Sandor, Doris Humphrey, Felicia Sorel, Tamiris, and Charles Weidman.<sup>15</sup> Hallie Flanagan appointed Don Oscar Becque as the director. The allotted funds were sufficient to produce eight productions, with "a theatre for performances, orchestras, musical ensembles and choruses where required." The dance concerts were to be new experiments, since Flanagan found it "more desirable to produce many good failures than one conventional success."<sup>16</sup> Flanagan's emphasis on experimentation provided the context for exploring "modern," relevant issues using cutting-edge choreography. Unfortunately, bureaucratic issues slowed the process of auditions and rehearsals just as they were starting.

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11 Kathleen Ann Lally, "A History of the Federal Dance Theatre of the Works Progress Administration, 1935-1939" (master's thesis, University of Oregon, 1980), 25.

12 Hallie Flanagan, *Arena* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), 76.

13 Friedman, "The Federal Dance Theatre in New York City," 24.

14 Friedman, "The Federal Dance Theatre in New York City," 36.

15 Graff, *Stepping Left*, 80.

16 John Martin, "The Dance: WPA Theatre," *New York Times*, 15 March 1936: X7.

“Bureaucratic red tape” diminished the optimism the dancers first maintained.<sup>17</sup> Legislation passed on March 5, 1936 froze hiring in the Arts Projects, leaving the FDT with the eighty-five dancers hired, rather than the promised 185.<sup>18</sup> The dancers and other choreographers soon became upset with Becque, the Dance Project’s director, because of his incessant push for a “common denominator of technique” and his re-auditioning of all dancers in August, 1936, which they viewed as a tactic to get rid of dancers who opposed him.<sup>19</sup> The dancers picketed, made petitions, and organized to remove Becque and hold onto funds, which Congress also decreased. Although Becque resigned in December of 1936, the funds were never returned and the FDT was subsumed under the FTP in October 1937.<sup>20</sup> The Dance Project continued to produce dance concerts until June 30, 1939, when the Special Committee on Un-American Activities closed the FTP due to accusations that it was a “veritable hotbed of communism”.<sup>21</sup> After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, conservatives in the United States became wary of individuals touting anything resembling socialist or communist ideas. Government sponsorship of programs not traditionally supported with federal funds, by their very nature, raised suspicions of socialism as well. In this context, it is noteworthy that the FDT came into existence at all; that it produced socially-relevant dance, occasionally in conflict with the mainstream views of the day, was quite revolutionary.

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17 Saida Gerrard, interview with Karen Wickre, February 21, 1978, p. 9, WPA OHC.

18 Lally, “A History of the Federal Dance Theatre of the Works Progress Administration, 1935-1939,” 25.

19 Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1972), 40; Graff, *Stepping Left*, 86.

20 Susan Manning, “Black Voices, White Bodies: The Performance of Race and Gender in ‘How Long Brethren,’” *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (March 1998): 25.

21 Kim C. Friedman, “The Federal Dance Theatre in New York City,” 110; Radio Address by Sen. J. Parnell Thomas, 12 September 1938, in Kim C. Friedman “The Federal Dance Theatre in New York City,” 98.

The FDT significantly impacted modern dance, social awareness, and the political behavior of dancers. Though not discussed here due to length, the FDT produced twenty-six dance concerts nation-wide exploring social and artistic issues, which received critical acclaim from the *New York Times*, other newspapers, and dance and theatre magazines.<sup>22</sup> The dancers were politically active and agitated for their rights, and many of the choreographers who worked for the FDT became central figures in the development of modern dance in America, including Charles Weidman, Doris Humphrey, Katherine Dunham, and Tamiris.

A review of the oral history transcripts of many New York City Dance Project dancers, an audition board member, and a publicist reveals a complicated set of perceptions of the FDT. For example, most viewed it as a legitimizing force for dance, a vehicle for educating the nation in dance, and a means of gaining solidarity, identity, and power as dancers and women. Conversely, they also viewed it as a frustrating system, filled with “bureaucratic red tape,” little flexibility, and an unclear purpose.

Dancers perceived the FDT as a vehicle for the recognition of dance as art and an upstanding profession. Anne Lief Barlin, a dancer with the Dance Project, stated that dance “was akin to prostitution” at that time, “at least [for] the Jewish European family.”<sup>23</sup> Other dancers echoed this sentiment. Nadia Chilkovsky, a member of the audition board, stated that dance was not a recognized art form and remembered her father saying, “Nice girls don’t dance.”<sup>24</sup> Sue Nadel, another dancer, jokingly said that, “dance was equivalent to basket weaving.”<sup>25</sup> Although the early twentieth century saw an increase in public activity for some

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22 Mary-lynn Son Hilton, “An Investigation of Modern Dance Works Sponsored Between 1936 and 1939 By the Works Project Administration Federal Theatre Dance Project,” (master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 1979), 60.

23 Anne Lief Barlin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 25, 1977, p. 10, WPA OHC.

24 Nadia Chilkovsky, interview with Karen Wickre, May 25, 1978, p. 12, WPA OHC.

25 Sue Remos Nadel, interview with Karen Wickre, October 23, 1977, p. 5, WPA OHC.



women, including “flappers,” who could dance in public for leisure, many women were still constrained by Victorian ideals extending from the nineteenth century that idealized women as private creatures who belonged in the home—not on stage for the “consumption” of an audience. Ostensibly, the framing of dance as government-sponsored work gave it legitimacy as a form of labor, and many of the women in the FDT chose to dance both as a form of artistic expression and a way to gain economic independence.

The pedagogical aspect of inexpensive dance performances was perceived as a fundamental benefit of the Dance Project. Samuel Chavkin, a publicist with the FDT remembered the exhilaration of audiences who had little exposure to live performances: “suddenly these people would be sitting in a place like the Nora Bayes Theatre...and watching a dance performance such as that by Tamiris...and virtually shouted their heads off in appreciation and applauding.”<sup>26</sup> Lili Mann Laub said, “We had—people who were exposed to theatre more than they ever would have been and more than they are now.”<sup>27</sup> The dancers perceived the opportunity to educate the populous in an emerging art form as critical and significant. Mura Dehn found in the FDT an educational tool “that showed that culture can be brought to the masses and to the places where it never reached them before... and that people want and need it.”<sup>28</sup> On the importance of creating and sharing such art forms as a national product, Nadia Chilkovsky said, “I think a country, a culture, is remembered long after senators change...by its cultural product, cultural output.”<sup>29</sup> Paula Bass Perlowin echoed this sentiment, saying that, “This is what remains of the world...the art that a nation produced is

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26 Samuel Chavkin, interview with Karen Wickre, May 22, 1978, p. 2, WPA OHC.

27 Lili Mann Laub, interview with Karen Wickre, May 24, 1978, p. 27, WPA OHC.

28 Mura Dehn, interview with Karen Wickre, April 20, 1978, p. 21, WPA OHC.

29 Nadia Chilkovsky, interview with Karen Wickre, May 25, 1978, p. 22, WPA OHC.

what lives on.”<sup>30</sup> Clearly, these people perceived art education and the support of new art made possible through the FDT as instrumental to a nation’s future.

The FDT provided women with an outlet for meaningful work, and in the process, they furthered their organizational skills to fight for their rights as workers and as women, and for the rights of those facing social injustice, such as African Americans. Fanya Geltman, at the time of her interview in 1977, spoke of how she would still refer to fellow dancers who were getting publicity for their work as “‘my dancers,’ because we were all of the same era.”<sup>31</sup> Many in the Dance Project viewed it as a family. Sue Remos Nadel saw the FDT as a place where more than just dance occurred; it also facilitated political awakening: “We were in a way, the women were, you know, feminists. We were tearing down old traditions, we were asserting ourselves in all kinds of ways as artists and as human beings. So it was . . . we were involved not only in dance but in other things, the political, and organizational things.”<sup>32</sup> Being a part of the FDT brought a sense of solidarity and personal growth on many levels.

In contrast to the positive aspects of the FDT, the dancers, audition board member, and publicist alike found several bureaucratic challenges within the FDT; indeed, Samuel Chavkin said “insecurity” was the only guarantee in the FDT.<sup>33</sup> Anne Lief Barlin perceived the FDT as a siphon on her creativity, since she did not feel like an individual performing, but rather like a body for the choreographers “to work through.”<sup>34</sup> Nadia Chilkovsky ended up resigning from the audition board out of frustration with the guidelines, which were either too open or too narrow.

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30 Paula Bass Perlowin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 23, 1977, p. 64, WPA OHC.

31 Fanya Geltman (Del Bourgo), interview with Karen Wickre, December 16, 1977, p. 11, WPA OHC.

32 Sue Remos Nadel, interview with Karen Wickre, October 23, 1977, p. 10, WPA OHC.

33 Samuel Chavkin, interview with Karen Wickre, May 22, 1978, p. 4, WPA OHC.

34 Anne Lief Barlin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 25, 1977, p. 5, WPA OHC.

Since she believed the program was meant for relief, Chilkovsky did not like having to turn people away. When the other audition board members felt differently, Chilkovsky said, “My humanism couldn’t take it, so I resigned.”<sup>35</sup> Mura Dehn found the conditions to be considered for relief outrageous: “You couldn’t have parents. You couldn’t have a place where you lived. You had to be in some kind of limbo.” Dehn also felt out of the loop as a jazz dancer in a primarily modern dance world, waiting for ages before getting placed with a choreographer.<sup>36</sup> Saida Gerrard referred to the “bureaucratic red tape” of the system and discussed how morale would go down when dance concerts were over-rehearsed, which happened fairly often.<sup>37</sup> The FDT was perceived as a disorganized bureaucratic system that inhibited progress while simultaneously creating opportunities. The dancers within the FDT acted with agency in overcoming and manipulating these challenges.

Although the Hearings of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities reviewing the FTP are not representative of the whole of Congress (there were Senators asking for a permanent national theatre at the time), these hearings framed the dissolution of the FTP and are therefore a critical glimpse into how it was perceived. The primary witness before the Dies Committee (led by Chairman Martin Dies) was Hazel Huffman. Formerly-employed by the WPA mail division, Huffman was fired after she was discovered reading FTP mail without permission.<sup>38</sup> At the outset of the testimony, Congressman J. Parnell Thomas stated that “the purpose of this testimony is to show the communistic activities in the Federal Theatre Project in New York City.”<sup>39</sup> There was no

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35 Nadia Chilkovsky, interview with Karen Wickre, May 25, 1978, p. 11, 13, WPA OHC.

36 Mura Dehn, interview with Karen Wickre, April 20, 1978, p. 5, 11, WPA OHC.

37 Saida Gerrard, interview with Karen Wickre, February 21, 1978, p. 9, WPA OHC.

38 Elizabeth Cooper, “Tamiris and the Federal Dance Theatre 1936-1939,” 41.

39 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States: Hearings before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities*, 75th Cong., 3rd sess., 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 21 August 1938, 775.

question of showing “if” communist activities were happening—it was a foregone conclusion, and one that would conveniently shut the program down. Huffman proceeded to discuss personal conversations she had with various members of the FTP and provided evidence of “communist activities” through labor union documents that were distributed at rehearsals.<sup>40</sup> She described Flanagan as a Communist sympathizer because of her travels to Russia in the 1920s, and called *How Long, Brethren?* “communistic propaganda.”<sup>41</sup> Huffman stated that Gellert’s *Negro Songs of Protest* had been printed in *New Masses* (a left-oriented publication) back in 1931, and should therefore be considered communist.<sup>42</sup> Despite Flanagan’s many attempts to correct the widespread misinformation about the FTP, she was ignored, and the Dies Committee Report of January 3, 1939 stated that “a rather large number of the employees on the Federal Theatre Project are either members of the Communist Party or are sympathetic with the Communist Party.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, an act of Congress closed the FTP on June 30, 1939. The members of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities perceived (perhaps “framed” is a more accurate term) the FTP and *How Long, Brethren?* as communist and subversive.

On discussing the demise of the FDT, the dancers said they were not surprised by the turn of events; they were aware of the socially-provocative nature of their dances, as well as the poor receipt of their activism in the midst of an insecure political and economic environment. “We saw the handwriting on the wall,” said Saida Gerrard, “it was guilt by association.”<sup>44</sup> They knew the

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40 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 776-777.

41 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 777.

42 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Special Committee on Un-American Activities, 784-785.

43 Hallie Flanagan, *Arena*, 335-347.

44 Saida Gerrard, interview with Karen Wickre, February 21, 1978, p. 19-20, WPA OHC.

Dies Committee Hearings were happening, though none of the dancers were singled out to testify, and some, like Fanya Geltman, recalled being on the FBI watch list during the McCarthy Era.<sup>45</sup> Paula Bass Perlowin and Sue Nadel discussed how some people simply did not want support for the arts (Sue called these people “boondogglers”), and others marked people as communist “as soon as they see somebody on a picket line or putting up a battle for something.”<sup>46</sup> Karen Wickre, who conducted the oral histories of the FDT dancers, recalled that in 1977, she still came across people who were reluctant to admit being a part of the FTP for these reasons.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps this legacy of communist subversion resulted in the FDT’s exclusion from histories of the New Deal.

### TAMIRIS: DANCER, CHOREOGRAPHER, ORGANIZER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Tamiris, a modern dancer and choreographer, is credited as the leading force behind the creation of the FDT, and in many ways, her work embodies its goal of providing socially relevant, artistic works for the public.<sup>48</sup> Tamiris choreographed four works during her tenure in the New York City unit of the FDT, including *Salut au Monde*, *How Long, Brethren? Trojan Incident*, and *Adelante*. In order to understand her choice of topics, aesthetic style, and philosophy, it is necessary to review her background and personal growth as a dancer and choreographer.

Helen Becker’s personal background is likely linked to the political radicalism in her dance. Becker was born in New York

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45 Fanya Geltman (Del Bourgo), interview with Karen Wickre, December 16, 1977, p. 7, WPA OHC.

46 Sue Remos Nadel and Paula Bass Perlowin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 23, 1977, p. 61, WPA OHC.

47 Sue Remos Nadel and Paula Bass Perlowin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 23, 1977, p. 67, WPA OHC.

48 Elizabeth Cooper, “Tamiris and the Federal Dance Theatre 1936-1939: Socially Relevant Dance Amidst the Policies and Politics of the New Deal Era,” *Dance Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 24.

City on April 23, 1902 to Russian Jewish immigrants.<sup>49</sup> Her father worked in a garment sweatshop, and her mother died when she was three. Becker grew up in the Lower East Side of New York City, which was considered the Jewish ghetto, in the midst of poverty.<sup>50</sup> Considering that African Americans were often segregated via discriminatory housing, hiring, and education practices (which often contributed to high levels of poverty), Becker likely empathized with this population at an early age. Becker received her first dance training from Irene Lewisohn at the Henry Street Settlement House, beginning at age eight.<sup>51</sup> After graduating from high school at age fifteen, Becker auditioned at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet.<sup>52</sup> Though she was clad in “gymnasium-like practice clothes” and “barefooted,” she went through with the audition and was accepted on scholarship.<sup>53</sup> Becker quickly rose to the *corps de ballet*, demonstrating her technical capability and speed of learning, and danced with the Metropolitan Opera for four seasons. She performed as a guest soloist with the Bracale Opera Company on tour through South America for a season as well.<sup>54</sup> While in South America, an admirer sent her a bouquet of flowers and a poem, whose last line read, “Thou art Tamiris, the ruthless queen, who vanquishes all obstacles!”<sup>55</sup> After completing a final season at the Metropolitan Opera upon her return from South America, Becker left the restrictiveness of ballet and sought a freer movement style. She worked with Michel Fokine and then a Duncan dancer (Isadora Duncan, with her free movement and bare feet, is often

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49 Pauline Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” *Dance Chronicle* 17, no. 3 (1994): 327.

50 Julia L. Foulkes, “Angels “Rewolt!”: Jewish Women in Modern Dance in the 1930s,” *American Jewish History* 88, no. 2 (June 2000): 242; Graff, *Stepping Left*, 77.

51 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 133.

52 Amter, “Tamiris: the One Exception,” 29.

53 Walter Terry, *The Dance in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1956), 120.

54 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 134.

55 Amter, “Tamiris: the One Exception,” 31.

considered the progenitor of modern dance in America), but still found the movement constraining, so she worked in nightclubs and performed with the *Music Box Revue* in order to gain income. At this time, Becker adopted her namesake, Tamiris, from the poem discussed earlier—presumably because she was fiercely confident in herself, but also because adopting “exotic” names was a common practice of performers at that time.<sup>56</sup> After earning enough money to survive for a year and a half, Tamiris quit her job working for the *Music Box Revue*, found a dance space, and devoted that time to discovering her own movement style.<sup>57</sup>

On October 9, 1927, Tamiris, sponsored by Daniel Mayer, Inc., presented her first modern solo program, *Dance Moods*. Accompanied by Martha Graham’s musical director, Louis Horst, Tamiris performed what she felt were legitimately American themes and styles. This concert included creative innovations, such as *The Queen Walks in the Garden*, the second silent dance in America, and *Subconscious*, which she performed in the nude. At this time, dance was connected to music rhythmically, stylistically, and often thematically, so an exploration of movement free of music broke significant barriers. Tamiris’s dance in the nude also revealed interest in Freudian theories, which were revolutionizing psychological and sexual mores. Though there is little information regarding *Subconscious*, the fact that Tamiris titled her dance this demonstrates her awareness of contemporary scholarly developments.

Tamiris’s second solo concert, performed on January 29, 1928, was comprised of two sections: *American Moods* and *Moods Diverse*. In this concert, Tamiris performed *Nobody Knows the Trouble I See* and *Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho*, works that would be central to her repertoire and were the beginning of her

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56 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 134.

57 Amter, “Tamiris: the One Exception,” 33-34.

close association with black spirituals.<sup>58</sup> In her program, Tamiris laid out her “Manifest” on dance: “Art is international, but the artist is a product of a nationality and his principal duty to himself is to express the spirit of his race.... There are no general rules. Each original work of art creates its own code. The aim of dance is not to narrate... by means of mimic tricks and other established choreographic forms. Dancing is simply movement with a personal conception of rhythm.”<sup>59</sup> It is evident that Tamiris equated the idea of “race” with nationality; she had no qualms about performing to black spirituals with themes related to the African American experience, because she believed that African Americans were part of the American nationality and history, which Tamiris also became a part of after her parents immigrated to the United States. These statements also reflect Tamiris’s philosophy of personal expression, rather than reliance on or codification of a particular technique, as opposed to the other modern dance pioneers, like Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman, who are each associated with a clear method of dance and choreography. Perhaps Tamiris’s legacy was harder to trace and record in the annals of dance history because there was little in her works that was quantifiable or distinctive.<sup>60</sup> In the fall of 1929, the Mozarteum Society invited Tamiris to tour Europe and perform at the Salzburg Festival. After becoming an “instantaneous success” in Europe, she returned to America and performed to rave reviews.<sup>61</sup>

Acknowledged as a concert dancer of merit, Tamiris engaged in two artistic ventures upon her return: she developed the idea of a cooperative dance program to defray production costs

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58 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 134-135.

59 Joanna Gewertz Harris, “From Tenement to Theater: Jewish Women as Dance Pioneers: Helen Becker (Tamiris), Anna Sokolow, Sophie Maslow,” *Judaism* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 262.

60 Schlundt, *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955*, 75-76.

61 Olga Maynard, *American Modern Dancers: The Pioneers* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 160.



and sought dancers to build her own dance company—both of these activities place Tamiris at the forefront of the modern dance movement and demonstrate her agency. The Dance Repertory Theatre was the brainchild of Tamiris, and she succeeded in attracting Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey for two seasons, and Agnes De Mille for the second. Tamiris's organization and collaboration with these pioneers of modern dance situates her as a choreographer of merit and similar ability. Tamiris choreographed solos for herself and group works for her company, the School of the American Dance, which they performed for the Dance Repertory Theatre. Although the concerts were successful enough to pay production expenses, the other choreographers bailed from any future seasons. Apparently, "Disputes within the group over the distribution of box office proceeds, management, and production arrangements, as well as rivalries and factionalism, brought an end to this collective."<sup>62</sup> Ostensibly, the individualistic approach of modern choreographers in the 1930s did not lend itself to cooperative efforts.

Tamiris continued to put on concerts with her dance group (which by 1934 went by the name, "Tamiris and Her Group") throughout the early 1930s, expanding her repertoire to include the *Walt Whitman Suite*, *Cycles of Unrest*, *Harvest*, and *Momentum* among others. These works exhibited Tamiris's growing concern for social issues, such as opposing war and the economic depression.<sup>63</sup> These dances were important thematic precursors to her work with the FDT.

As mentioned earlier, Tamiris was the key organizer of the FDT. Additionally, she was the only choreographer who gave up her own company and studio to immerse herself in the work of the Dance Project.<sup>64</sup> Producing four original works for the

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62 Cooper, "Tamiris and the Federal Dance Theatre 1936-1939," 25.

63 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 140-141.

64 Schlundt, *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955*, 39.

FDT, Tamiris was also the project's most prolific choreographer, and she identified this as the "happiest period of her career."<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the moment would pass, as the Special Committee on Un-American Activities found the FTP communist and shut it down in the summer of 1939. When the FTP closed, Tamiris was both poor and "considered 'red.'"<sup>66</sup> In a performance on July 29, 1939 (shortly after the FDT dissolved), Tamiris chose to go by the title, "The American Dancer Helen Tamiris." Perhaps Tamiris did this to emphasize her Americanness, rather than the exotic appeal she was going for earlier in life, in the context of growing fear over foreign powers steeped in Communism and Nazism.<sup>67</sup>

When the FTP dissolved, Tamiris had to start over from scratch, since she gave up her own company to devote herself to the work of the Dance Project.<sup>68</sup> Tamiris's work in this period reflects both a distancing from social issues (perhaps in response to the conservatism of the World War II era) and the growing optimism of the period. Tamiris engaged in a new venture: musical theatre. John Roy, the Radio City Rainbow Room director, saw Tamiris's *Liberty Song*, performed in her basement studio, and was so taken with it that he brought it to the Rainbow Room for six weeks in 1941. From there, Tamiris's career as a Broadway choreographer took off.<sup>69</sup> Tamiris is most famous for her choreography in *Touch and Go* (for which she won the Antionette Perry Award for Best Choreography), a revival of *Showboat*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Inside USA*, *Plain and Fancy*, and *Up in Central Park*. Tamiris reportedly changed the image of the Broadway dancer from someone pretty to look at to someone with serious dance skills.<sup>70</sup>

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65 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 147.

66 Gewertz Harris, "From Tenement to Theater: Jewish Women as Dance Pioneers," 263.

67 Cooper, "Tamiris and the Federal Dance Theatre 1936-1939," 43.

68 Amter, "Tamiris: the One Exception," 67, 80-82.

69 Lloyd, *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance*, 147-149.

70 Amter, "Tamiris: the One Exception," 84.

Tamiris's final contributions to the dance world involved a return to concert dance and social issues. In 1960, Tamiris and her husband at the time, Daniel Nagrin, formed the Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company. Tamiris no longer danced, but she choreographed for the company, including the works *Memoir*, which is an exploration of "her Jewish roots," and *Women's Song*, "about women's societal roles and the havoc of the Holocaust."<sup>71</sup> On August 4, 1966, Helen Tamiris died of cancer at the Jewish Memorial Hospital at age sixty-four. The title of Tamiris's obituary in the *New York Times* on August 5, 1966 was "Helen Tamiris, Dancer, Is Dead: Choreographer Put a Stress on Social Responsibility."<sup>72</sup> Along with this legacy of social responsibility, Tamiris bequeathed a third of her estate to further the cause of American modern dance, leaving a monetary legacy, which was used to open the Tamiris Foundation.<sup>73</sup>

A review of the oral history transcripts of dancers from the Dance Project reveals a common perception that Tamiris was a great speaker, organizer, and performer. Anne Lief Barlin even credited her with "keeping the WPA Dance Project alive."<sup>74</sup> Samuel Chavkin perceived Tamiris as a "prima donna," but claimed that this was "forgiveable" since she was such a talented person.<sup>75</sup> Lili Mann Laub provided an excellent description, calling her "a vigorous, very lusty, earthy, pantheistic personality and her work was like that. It was full of verve and a kind of a personal joy of movement. . . . she wasn't afraid to take up a cause."

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71 John Martin, *John Martin's Book of the Dance* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1963), 162; Rebecca L. Rausch, "Personal Information for Helen Tamiris," *Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, March 20, 2009, Jewish Women's Archive, <http://jwa.org/archive/jsp/perInfo.jsp?personID=594> (accessed 23 February 2012).

72 "Helen Tamiris, Dancer, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 5 August 1966: 24.

73 Liz Sonneborn, *A to Z of American Women in the Performing Arts* (New York: Facts on File, Inc.: 2002), 210.

74 Anne Lief Barlin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 25, 1977, p. 9, 11, WPA OHC; Nadia Chilkovsky, interview with Karen Wickre, May 25, 1978, p. 16-17, WPA OHC.

75 Samuel Chavkin, interview with Karen Wickre, May 22, 1978, p. 7, WPA OHC.

And she did it well . . . with a great deal of zest.”<sup>76</sup> Sue Nadel called Tamiris “articulate and sophisticated and brilliant.”<sup>77</sup> The conglomerate of these comments reveals a perception of Tamiris as a strong leader, speaker, and dancer.

Tamiris appears in *America Dancing: The Background and Personalities of the Modern Dance*, by John Martin, the *New York Times* dance critic of the day. This book, published in 1936, essentially codified modern dance. Martin devoted a chapter to “The Independents” of modern dance, whom he defined as dancers who have made significant contributions to “the distinctively American dance as a fine art.” Tamiris is one of eight choreographers whom Martin categorized as independents, and he placed her in the beginning of the chapter to emphasize her prominence. Although the FDT had not been established at this time, it is significant that Martin chose to place Tamiris in this section, rather than in a separate chapter, as he did for Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman. Since Martin is considered the originator of the term, “modern dance” and developed much of the established opinion on choreography, this placement of Tamiris may be definitive.<sup>78</sup> Later dance historians may have simply copied this categorization without considering the groundbreaking work Tamiris did in the FDT as worthy of giving Tamiris a distinct chapter. Despite this placement, Martin found in Tamiris “a talent to reckon with.” He described Tamiris as “striking” and said that she had “a rare and innate gift for beautiful movement.”<sup>79</sup> Martin suggested “Negro dance” was an orientation befitting Tamiris, and indeed, this would be realized in *How Long, Brethren?* From this early writing in 1936, it is clear that dance critic, John Martin, perceived Tamiris as important to

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76 Lili Mann Laub, interview with Karen Wickre, May 24, 1978, p. 24, WPA OHC.

77 Sue Remos Nadel, interview with Karen Wickre, October 23, 1977, p. 33, WPA OHC.

78 Foulkes, “Angels “Rewolt!,” 251.

79 Martin, *America Dancing: The Background and Personalities of the Modern Dance*, 244.

the modern dance movement, energetic and passionate, but not on par with Graham, Humphrey, and Weidman.

### *HOW LONG, BRETHREN?: BODIES AND VOICES*

Perhaps the work for which Tamiris is most well-known is *How Long, Brethren?* The archival evidence, popular publications, and secondary sources discussing *How Long, Brethren?* far exceed that of many of Tamiris's other works; therefore *How Long, Brethren?* stands as the most emblematic of Tamiris's choreographic career and as the best option for unearthing her philosophical and aesthetic approach, as well as underscoring her social justice. The world premiere of *How Long, Brethren?* was May 6, 1937. Presented first in the Nora Bayes Theater along with Charles Weidman's *Candide* through July 4th, and then revisited later that year, from December through January of 1938 at the Forty-ninth Street Theatre, *How Long, Brethren?* ran for a total of forty-three performances to a total audience of 24,235 people.<sup>80</sup> According to dancer Pauline Tish, the performances "always received a standing ovation that continued long after the curtain fell." Additionally, *Dance Magazine* honored *How Long, Brethren?* with its first ever Dance Magazine Award for modern group choreography on June 10, 1937.<sup>81</sup> The receipt of such widespread acclaim by audiences and the elite dance community alike demonstrates that Tamiris created a relevant, artistic, and resonating work.

*How Long, Brethren?* was performed by twenty dancers accompanied by the twenty-member Federal Theatre Negro Chorus and a small orchestra. The cast of dancers were all female and white (many were also Jewish), and their work with the Negro Chorus marked one of the few instances of racial integration in the FTP. Hallie Flanagan exalted *How Long, Brethren?* as "hold[ing] to the democratic principle of racial equality"—both

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80 Tish, "Remembering Helen Tamiris," 352.

81 Tish, "Remembering Helen Tamiris," 344, 352.

in subject matter and in the bringing together of the dancers with the Federal Theatre Negro Chorus.<sup>82</sup> Tamiris selected seven of Lawrence Gellert's transcribed "Negro Songs of Protest," which he collected from African Americans in the South. Genevieve Pitot, Tamiris's long-time accompanist, arranged the songs, and Tamiris ordered them to produce her desired effect.<sup>83</sup> The seven songs Tamiris chose included the following, in performance order: "Pickin' Off de Cotton" (performed by the ensemble), "Upon de Mountain" (performed by Tamiris and the ensemble), "Railroad" (performed by the ensemble), "Scottsboro" (performed by the ensemble), "Sistern an' Brethren" (performed by the ensemble), "Let's Go to de Buryin'" (performed by Tamiris and the ensemble) and "How Long, Brethren?" (performed by Tamiris and the ensemble).<sup>84</sup> These songs spoke of "poverty, starvation, injustice, and death" and called for action opposing racism.<sup>85</sup> Samuel Chavkin, a publicist for the FTP, said "there were very few things that actually stirred me as much really and seeing the audience being so stirred, people actually crying when they saw *How Long, Brethren?* because the music was so stirring. The orchestration was extraordinary. . . . I must have watched it a dozen times, never tired of it."<sup>86</sup> Dance can be a powerful medium for providing awareness, and Tamiris and her dancers chose to highlight the social injustice of racism in America, which leads one to believe that they felt a measure of empathy with the African Americans.

Tamiris's choreography powerfully expressed the brutality of racial suffering. John Martin commented on the challenge of surpassing such moving music with dance, saying, "under such circumstances, choreography becomes almost superfluous," yet

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82 Flanagan, *Arena*, 199.

83 Manning, "Black Voices, White Bodies," 26, 28.

84 Schlundt, *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955*, 54.

85 Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955*, 46.

86 Samuel Chavkin, interview with Karen Wickre, May 22, 1978, p. 22, WPA OHC.

he believed Tamiris succeeded, at least in a few of the songs, most notably “Upon de Mountain” and “Let’s Go to de Buryin’.”<sup>87</sup>

The second dance of the series, “Upon de Mountain,” is centered around a mother, Tamiris, and her three children. Tish said the three children were “cry[ing] for food,” and “Tamiris’s arms reached out to protect the children as they moved from side to side.”<sup>88</sup> Opposite this grouping, another group of dancers was in a formation across the back of the stage. Each “stepped out of the line, raising an arm as if demanding food.”<sup>89</sup> In the midst of the Great

Depression, images of hunger were fairly common and would have crossed racial boundaries. In this piece, Tamiris sought recognition of the humanity of African Americans and their economic plight, which was often considerably worse than others, due to job discrimination.

The dance accompanied by the song, “Scottsboro,” protested the famous Scottsboro case, in which seven African American boys accused of raping a white woman were hung. Martin felt this was a weak section, due to “the excitement of the group manifest[ed] . . . largely by personal emotionalizing.”<sup>90</sup> One can imagine the disturbing nature of this scene, where the seven dancers—some on boxes and others on the floor—had a black covering over their faces and were clearly representing the process of being hung: “their jerky torso movements indicating a modicum of life left in them.”<sup>91</sup> Although Martin may have found “Scottsboro” lacking from an aesthetic approach, Tamiris made a strong statement about the injustice of executing the African American boys wrongly accused of rape. Tamiris’s inclusion of

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87 John Martin, “Dances are Given by WPA Theatre,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1937: 29.

88 Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” 347.

89 Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” 347.

90 John Martin, “The Dance: WPA Theatre: Tamiris and Weidman Stage Productions at the Bayes,” *New York Times*, 16 May 1937: 171.

91 Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” 347.

“Scottsboro” underscores her sense of a social mission in the midst of Jim Crow segregation.

The peak of *How Long, Brethren?* was Tamiris’s performance in “Let’s Go to de Buryin.” Pauline Tish recalled that Tamiris, with characteristic energy and power, “chewed up the space in full-bodied movement phrases, not dancing to the music so much as embodying it ... Tamiris’s chugs and struts moved as quickly as if on air, while digging into the ground at the same time. She seemed to say, ‘Here I am. Come and join me wherever I go.’”<sup>92</sup> Although the lyrics of this song are not revolutionary, Tamiris’s movement quality urged spectators to use their energy and power in response to the pain, suffering, and injustice they witnessed in earlier songs.

*How Long, Brethren?* concluded with its title song. According to Susan Manning, Tamiris began the number on stage alone. She reached out with her arms and lunged, but never moved far from her original position.<sup>93</sup> Pauline Tish recalled that Tamiris was the leader, and as small, tight groups of four entered the stage, the dancers kept their gaze focused on her.<sup>94</sup> Eventually, the dancers joined together into one line, facing Tamiris to their right. With their hands clenched tightly, they exited “marching into a red dawn.”<sup>95</sup> Tish recalled that “this piece in its simplicity was a call for direct action.”<sup>96</sup> The social context of the time made the red lighting an obvious signal for international socialism and change through group action.<sup>97</sup> As mentioned earlier, *How Long, Brethren?* received standing ovations each night and was highly acclaimed. The articles John Martin wrote for the *New York Times* on the FDT, Tamiris, and *How Long, Brethren?* show a changed

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92 Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” 349.

93 Manning, “Black Voices, White Bodies,” 33.

94 Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” 350.

95 Manning, “Black Voices, White Bodies,” 33.

96 Tish, “Remembering Helen Tamiris,” 350.

97 Manning, “Black Voices, White Bodies,” 31, 33.



perception of Tamiris. For example, Martin wrote that *How Long, Brethren?* may be her “best group work to date,” and found the overall structure “eloquent.”<sup>98</sup> *How Long, Brethren?* exhibited Tamiris’s aesthetic approach, sense of social justice, and boldness in the midst of segregation.

Although *How Long, Brethren?* was not discussed much in the oral history transcripts, the available testimony indicates that dancers and publicists perceived it as a politically moving and emotionally powerful piece. Anne Lief Barlin touched on *How Long, Brethren?* saying that she did not recall it being controversial with audiences. Barlin had “mixed feelings” about the performance, because, as she said, “It was something borrowed” from another group’s tradition.<sup>99</sup> Saida Gerrard, on the other hand, said that while it was not “agitprop . . . It really made you have a real empathy for the tragedy [of racial injustice].”<sup>100</sup> Several of the dancers and the publicist commented on the audience’s ecstatic reactions to *How Long, Brethren?*<sup>101</sup> Chavkin clearly perceived the power of the Negro Choir, because he thought there were sixty to seventy voices, when in reality, there were only twenty.<sup>102</sup> Overall, the choreography and performance of *How Long, Brethren?* appear to have produced a stirring effect.

## CONCLUSION

Though not widely recognized, the Federal Dance Theatre, Tamiris, and *How Long, Brethren?* made significant contributions to American art, culture, and society. The dancers and Tamiris

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98 John Martin, “The Dance: WPA Theatre: Tamiris and Weidman Stage Productions at the Bayes,” *New York Times*, 16 May 1937: 171; John Martin, “Tamiris is Soloist in Ballet Revival,” *New York Times*, 22 December 1937: 32.

99 Anne Lief Barlin, interview with Karen Wickre, October 25, 1977, p. 12-13, WPA OHC.

100 Saida Gerrard, interview with Karen Wickre, February 21, 1978, p. 16, WPA OHC.

101 Samuel Chavkin, interview with Karen Wickre, May 22, 1978, p. 8, 22, 23, WPA OHC; Saida Gerrard, interview with Karen Wickre, February 21, 1978, p. 10, WPA OHC; Fanya Geltman (Del Bourgo), interview with Karen Wickre, December 16, 1977, p. 19, WPA OHC.

102 Samuel Chavkin, interview with Karen Wickre, May 22, 1978, p. 8, WPA OHC.

exhibited agency and political organization in the making of the Federal Dance Theatre, which then helped legitimize modern dance as an art form in America, provided a venue for artistic endeavors by modern dance pioneers like Tamiris, and educated some of the nation on cultural and social issues. Though it was perceived as subversive by the Congressmen on the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, the FDT was also viewed as an important medium for jobs and national art, and became a sort of family for many dancers. Tracing Tamiris's life demonstrates how her personal experiences as a poor, Jewish woman caused her to empathize with others similarly situated. Tamiris rose above her personal challenges to become a key mover in the modern dance movement and the fight for social and racial justice. Tamiris was perceived as a strong leader, great speaker, and beautiful dancer by her contemporaries. It is likely that her philosophy of personal interpretation of movement (rather than codification of technique) resulted in her general absence from dance history. *How Long, Brethren?* was a masterpiece of modern dance and was widely acclaimed as a socially relevant, artistic, and emotionally powerful piece. Tamiris and her dancers exhibited empathy and boldness in their call for racial justice in an era of Jim Crow segregation and fear of communist subversion; they deserve recognition for this transcendence.



Tamiris in *Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho*, from *Negro Spirituals*. Photograph from Helen Tamiris Collection, Lillian D. Dance Division, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

**Figure 1:** A powerful photograph of Tamiris in *Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho* from her *Negro Spirituals*, 1928. Reprinted from Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 14.

**Figure 2:** A focused photograph of Tamiris in *Crucifixion* from her *Negro Spirituals*, 1931.

Reprinted from Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 13.





FEMALES UNDER FIRE:  
 WORKING IN DANGER DURING  
 WORLD WAR II

MEGAN RANDOLPH



In many cultures all over the world, women are ascribed a subservient and subordinate role in patriarchal societies, and thus have had substantial restrictions placed on their choices and opportunities. This is true for women in the American culture as well. Throughout United States history women have been expected to adhere to strict behavior guidelines in most aspects of their lives including politics, marriage, children, business, society, and work. Over time, as brave and daring women have begun to challenge these prescribed gender roles, American society has slowly become more accepting of women's independence.

Many events occurred throughout the twentieth century that began to change the way that both men and women viewed sexual differences and women's capabilities. After American women won the right to vote, the women's movement progressed slowly for several decades culminating in the massive women's rights movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Many significant events occurred during this fifty-year period that had both positive and negative effects for the rights of women. There were both political and social occurrences that advanced the fight for female equality. One such event that propelled women to actively cross

gender lines was World War II and the various ways in which women actively and physically participated in this war. Women during World War II crossed gender lines by entering both the industrial workforce and dangerous military situations that were usually dominated by men. In doing so, they significantly contributed to the war effort and also challenged existing gender theologies.

World War II presented opportunities for women to step out of accepted gender roles both on the home front and overseas as they entered a variety of occupations formerly unattainable to them. For instance women experienced significant changes as they became accepted into the industrial workforce, and received equal pay for replacing the men who had left for the war as the symbolic Rosie the Riveter. This acceptance of women was not however, due to a realization that men and women were abruptly considered equal, but rather it was due to the American economy and the need for a labor force to continue to manufacture products during the war. With the Depression only a few years in the past, the fear of a stagnant economy frightened the government as well as most Americans.

Although the women who worked as 'Rosie's' during this era significantly contributed to the war effort on the home front, some women further crossed established gender boundaries and placed themselves in dangerous military situations. Women's active and dangerous involvement in World War II as combat nurses, Army air force pilots, and secret agents will be the focus of this research. These women actively participated in occupations that were outside of those that they had normally been assigned, and they left their wartime experience with a newfound sense of their capabilities.

## NURSES

Combat nurses who served in the military were exposed to life threatening situations during World War II. Female nurses

were a valued necessity during any battle situation in order to care for the injured soldiers. An increased recruitment for thousands of nurses to join the ranks of the military and serve their country occurred early during the Second World War. These nurses became part of both the Army and the Navy and traveled throughout the world to care for injured soldiers.

Nurses were given the rank of an officer in the military. A chief nurse ranked as a First Lieutenant, assistant superintendent carried the rank of Captain, and a superintendent was a Major.<sup>1</sup> Due to this military rank, nurses received substantial pay and benefits as well as status, something that was uncommon for women in this era. Military nursing also offered women the opportunity to travel abroad. During this era women often lived under the guardianship of a male and did not often live independently, so to travel without a male escort, and earn their own substantial income was not a concept that many women had ever envisioned for themselves. Both the monetary compensation and the promise of seeing the world, in addition to helping with the war effort were very appealing for the thousands of women who enlisted.

In 1940, before the United States was officially involved in the war, only about 1,600 women enlisted in both the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. These numbers were inadequate to the amount of nurses required for the upcoming military conflicts. As the United States became increasingly involved in the war effort, recruitment intensified and this number grew to over 40,000 active military nurses in just three years.<sup>2</sup> This recruitment came from many places including advertisements in the media, schools, government programs and the Red Cross. For example, "The national Nursing Council for War Service, in cooperation with women's magazines, tried to locate and retain the 100,000 women

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1 Collett D Wadge, *Women in Uniform* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., LTD, 1946), 353.

2 Ibid, 352.

who had graduated from nursing school...<sup>3</sup> Quotas for nurses continued to be insufficient throughout the war and nurses were in high demand.<sup>4</sup> Many programs were developed to encourage women to join this campaign. Congress unanimously passed a 1943 bill providing federal aid for young women graduating high school to enter nursing programs.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Congress allotted \$5 million in Public Health Service grants to nursing schools throughout 1941-42.<sup>6</sup>

These new recruits were generally middle class, unmarried, with differing levels of education and varying ages. Many nurses were required to be a registered nurse with a college degree or a certificate from an accredited nursing school and also needed work experience to enter the field and receive a rank of officer.<sup>7</sup> However due to shortages many young women received training as aids to assist the nurses with more menial tasks and basic first aid. The aide training included a minimum eighty-hour training course developed and provided by the American Red Cross.

While a majority of the women came from Caucasian ancestry, the Army Nurse Corp did accept African Americans and other ethnic minorities. Approximately 500 black nurses were serving at the end of the war.<sup>8</sup> It is important to mention, however, that the era of World War II was also the time of Jim Crow laws, racial segregation and racist ideologies. The military was segregated during the war and for these reasons African American nurses were often segregated to care for African American sol-

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3 Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 16.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, 17.

6 Ibid.

7 Judy Barrett Litoff, and David C Smith, *We're in this War, Too: World War II Letters From American Women in Uniform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

8 Ibid, 65.



diers and prisoners of war.<sup>9</sup> In a series of letters, African American nurses expressed their interest and excitement at the possibility of joining the nursing campaign to Judge William H Hastie in hopes of being admitted. They received that opportunity.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of these racial divisions, all nurses had to travel closely behind the soldiers in order to provide adequate health care. This not only placed nurses within proximity to battles and bombings, but it also meant that they were constantly setting up and taking down makeshift hospitals that needed to accommodate up to 500 soldiers.<sup>11</sup> This was physically demanding and the women needed to be at their strongest. Fortunately they had been adequately prepared for this process during a physical training program. During this training the women went on twenty mile hikes while fully equipped with their gear that could weigh up to thirty-four pounds. Their training also included the rigors of a 75-yard obstacle course complete with barbed wire and trenches that they had to complete while being fired upon by bullets and dynamite explosions.<sup>12</sup>

Once recruitment and training was complete the women were often sent overseas to be near the front lines. Regardless of the fact that women were stationed at hospitals, this circumstance did not keep them safe from the dangers of the war. In September 1944 nurse Reba Z. Little became wounded when her air- evacuation plane crashed. She was captured by the Germans and held prisoner for five months.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a large group of nurses escaped an attack on Bataan to the island of Corregidor. Here the women hid underground, but were eventually captured by the Japanese. Sixty-six nurses were taken to a Manila prison camp

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9 Ibid., 65.

10 Ibid., 68-69.

11 Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 7.

12 Ibid., 7.

13 Francine D'Amico and Laurie Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage: Women and the U.S. Military* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 19.

where they remained until the war ended three years later.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the nurses who served in World War II documented their experiences to share with others. Lieutenant Juanita Redmond was an American nurse stationed in Bataan during World War II who experienced the horrors of the front lines. On March 30, 1940 the hospital where she worked endured a series of severe bombing attacks.<sup>15</sup> Fear and chaos were immediate and she states, "In my ward several of the men became hysterical; I would have joined them if I could."<sup>16</sup> Redmond explains her own peril after a bomb struck nearby, "I heard myself gasping. My eyes were being gouged out of my sockets; my whole body was swollen and torn apart by the violent pressure. This is the end, I thought."<sup>17</sup> Redmond did not sustain any major injuries and was safely evacuated.<sup>18</sup> Redmond's story is not infrequent. Letters and memoirs show that nurses experienced similar attacks and danger during their wartime work.<sup>19</sup>

A young Army Corps Nurse, June Waundrey, wrote dozens of letters home to her family from her posts in various parts of North Africa, Tunisia, Munich, and Sicily. She explained the horrors of the war and the fatigue that she endured regularly. She summed up her days by writing, "Working like slaves. Too tired to write and its always too dark to see when I get off duty. We were so close to the lines we could see our artillery fire and also that of the Germans."<sup>20</sup> Although Waundrey began her letter with a

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14 Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 5. Several groups of nurses were taken prisoner throughout the war; despite adequate research a total number of POW's was not located.

15 *100 Best True Stories of World War II* (New York: WM. H. Wise & Co., Inc., 1945), 51.

16 *Ibid.*, 51.

17 *Ibid.*, 51.

18 *Ibid.*, 54.

19 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We're in this War, Too*. See June Waundrey, Marjorie LaPalme, Gysella Simon, Ruth Hess, etc.

20 *Ibid.*, 127.

melancholy tone, the letter turned to more cheerful subjects. She also explained, "I'm well and as happy as one could be in this set up...there are many dedicated people here giving their all."<sup>21</sup> Many other women expressed similar sentiments in their letters home. Second Lieutenant Mary Mixsell wrote home, "I wouldn't trade my present job here with anyone else on earth and I hope they don't send me home until the war is over for good."<sup>22</sup> This assessment shows that although the war was emotionally and physically difficult, these women believed in what they were doing and knew they were capable.

201 female nurses in the Army Nurse Corps were killed during World War II.<sup>23</sup> Many who survived were honored for their bravery. Lieutenant Mary Anne Sullivan was awarded the Legion of Merit for successfully implementing the evacuation of her hospital without care for herself.<sup>24</sup> Two hundred Army nurses landed at Anzio in January 1944 with the invasion force. Four received the Silver Star - one posthumously - for evacuating patients ...six nurses died."<sup>25</sup> Additionally, according to James R. Power's study of wartime decorations, approximately 980 nurses were celebrated with a medal or award of some type for their services, bravery, and those who had been deemed as significantly contributing to the war.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, as ranked officers, after the war nurses received veteran's pay and a G.I. Bill for college. As a result of their bravery and success during World War II the Army and Navy Nursing Corps became a permanent part of the military.<sup>27</sup>

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21 Ibid., 127.

22 Ibid., 181.

23 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We're in this War, Too*, 170.

24 Collett D Wadge, *Women in Uniform* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., LTD, 1946), 353.

25 D'Amico and Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage*, 19.

26 James R. Power, *Brave Women and their Wartime Decorations* (New York: Vantage Press, 1959), 64-67.

27 D'Amico and Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage*, 20.

Another significant change for the women who served as nurses was the newfound independence and a sense of their capabilities. Journalist Eileen Hurst wrote an article about the World War II experience of Katherine Tierney Leahy. She claims that, Leahy “believes that her military experience broadened her life, gave her the opportunity to travel and to meet many interesting people. “Erna Mass, also a nurse claimed, “ In my wildest dreams I never thought I’d be seeing as much of the world as I am... Wouldn’t have missed this experience for the world... I’m growing up and much more tolerant and understanding than I used to be.”<sup>28</sup> At a time when women did not often live independently, earn decent pay, or travel alone, serving in the war provided women with these opportunities and an increased sense of confidence.<sup>29</sup>

### SECRET AGENTS

One of the very dynamic ways in which women crossed gender lines during World War II was as secret agents conducting espionage. The United States had utilized female spies informally since the Civil War, so the concept and implementation of them during World War II was not completely new to American warfare. There are however several aspects to female espionage during World War II that differed from that of previous wars. One of these differences was the formal organization of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II. This organization directed the intelligence activities for the United States during World War II. Between 1942 and 1945 the OSS utilized secret agents to perform espionage activities, which included investigations, sabotage, transmission of messages, interrogations and other secret missions.

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28 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We’re in this War, Too*, 226-7.

29 Eileen Hurst, “Voices of Connecticut Veterans: Katherine Teirney Leahy and a Nurses Efforts in World War II,”

*Connecticut History* 45 no. 2 (Fall 2006): 269.

Women were slowly introduced into this type of work but their success soon became apparent. The OSS had particularly good success with female agents in Germany, some of them being their best recruits. It was soon apparent that females had many advantages over their male colleague's.<sup>30</sup> Several reasons why using female agent was beneficial to the OSS include less paperwork, less suspicion, and the notion that women were often underestimated during this era. When addressing the advantages of using female secret agents, political author Joseph E. Persico claims in his book *Piercing the Reich* that, "A woman did not have to explain why she was not in military service. She did not need a sheaf of passes that a working male or soldier had to carry. That a woman might be involved in secret military intelligence simply seemed less likely on the face of it."<sup>31</sup> This statement supports the gender norms of the era in which women were often underestimated both intellectually and physically, and therefore were not suspected to be secret agents. For this reason and the fact that women were not required to carry the identification documents that men in Europe were required, they were easier to position and pass through secured areas and situations undetected. In the beginning of this process there was no clear recruitment policy, a friend or acquaintance involved with the OSS recognized that a women had particular skills and traits that would deem them a candidate for espionage often brought women into the OSS.

The women who entered the war as secret agents were very often white, middle or upper class women. Due to the need to speak a foreign language and a keen intelligence, they were often highly educated and therefore from families that had the resources for a good education. Agent Jane Foster Zlatovski spoke five lan-

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30 Patrick K. O'Donnel, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of World War II's*

OSS (New York: Free Press, 2004), 251.

31 Joseph E. Persico, *Piercing the Reich* (New York: The Viking Press, 1979), 261.

guages in addition to English, which included French, German, Dutch, Malay and some Spanish.<sup>32</sup> American spy Virginia Hall was born in Baltimore attended Radcliffe and Barnard Colleges and then later studied at Strasbourg, Toulouse and Grenoble universities in Europe to perfect her French.<sup>33</sup> Hall was from a wealthy family whose grandfather had made a fortune in the shipping business.<sup>34</sup> Another allied, agent Christine Granville was born a Polish countess whose father was an aristocrat was also highly educated.<sup>35</sup> Many of these women did not need to work, but chose to work for the OSS out of either the desire to partake in dangerous activity, or out of a sense of patriotic duty. "To serve behind enemy lines required courage and commitment... the quality that unites women who became agents was a steely determination to play an active role in inflicting real damage on the enemy."<sup>36</sup> It is evident that the women who chose to participate in this facet of the war did not make that choice based on monetary motivations, but on a desire to assist the war effort in an active and involved way.

In addition to being upper middle class, these secret agents were usually of European ethnic backgrounds. Due to the high level of education required, and the need look European and blend into European society, African American women were not involved in the OSS as secret agents. Women of color did not receive the same opportunities for education and advancement in the 1940s and therefore, for reasons of race and class, not considered acceptable candidates for secret agents.

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32 Maureen Mahoney, *Women in Espionage: A Biographical Dictionary* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 1993), 237.

33 Marcus Binney, *The Women Who Lived For Danger* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 112.

34 Ibid., 112.

35 Ronald Seth, *Encyclopedia of Espionage* (Great Britain: New English Library, 1972), 278-279.

36 Binney, *The Women Who Lived For Danger*, 2.

The last characteristic prevalent among female secret agents was youth. The women were generally in their early and mid twenties.<sup>37</sup> Their youth complimented the necessity that agents be physically fit. The women trained in parachute jumping, sabotage, handling weapons, raid tactics, silent killing, self-defense, security and so forth.<sup>38</sup> Agents were often dropped behind enemy lines and placed in perilous situations, therefore, these types of training were vital to their survival. In addition, due to the need for travel documents and frequent train raids by the Germans, agents usually walked or rode their bikes to travel.<sup>39</sup> A keen mind and physical stamina assisted a young female agent in being successful.

The OSS and its agents played an instrumental role in World War II for its contributions of espionage and obtaining or passing on important secret information. Secret agents were often placed in enemy territories to participate in various types of sabotage and surveillance. In addition to espionage, spies were also responsible for secretly getting supplies to allied supporters and troops and running rescue missions. "To underground movements in 16 countries OSS dropped 27,000 tons of weapons and supplies and thousands of agents. Other agents rescued more than 5000 American airmen. OSS casualties totaled about 100..."<sup>40</sup> The OSS and the men and women involved played a pivotal role in assisting in the war effort on many levels.

There are remarkable stories from the women who worked for the OSS and they have documented their experiences. Secret agent Betty Lussier who was raised on a farm in Maryland documented her experiences in an autobiography *Intrepid Women*. Lussier expresses her experiences in her own words, "There was a lot of action in Paris. We found ourselves racing down streets

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37 Ibid., 3.

38 Ibid., 15.

39 Binney, *The Women Who Lived For Danger*, 35.

40 *Secrets and Spies: Behind-the-Scenes Stories of World War II* (New York: The Readers Digest Association, 1964), 568- 569.

and we frequently passed truckloads of German troops in vehicles going in all directions.”<sup>41</sup> Lussier also discusses her experiences as an interrogator when enemy spies were intercepted and captured. She claims, “The first moments of capturing an active enemy spy are extremely delicate...the spy must be isolated immediately from family and friends. This isolation erodes his self-confidence, and sets him to wondering what has happened to them and what information they might be divulging.”<sup>42</sup> Lussier’s experiences serve as an example of the type of work and contributions provided by the female agents of the OSS.

Josefina (Joey) Guererro who became a spy for the Filipino underground in Manila in 1941, passed important information to the Americans and completed several dangerous missions. In one such mission in 1945 she traveled 40 miles on foot to pass a map of a Japanese military site to the allied forces. When crossing the border, “The first day a Japanese officer halted her, approached as if to search her. The map taped between her shoulder blades seemed to burn.”<sup>43</sup> If captured Joey’s fate would have probably been torture or immediate execution; however she was successful in her mission and provided valuable assistance to the Allied forces.

For female secret agents, beauty and charm could be a substantial asset in the field. Many female secret agents found it necessary to compromise their ethics and morals and use their sexuality in order to achieve the desired results of their mission. Paddy O’Sullivan used her sexual desirability and flirting to her advantage as a secret agent. A fellow agent claimed, “Red-headed Paddy O’Sullivan chatted up a German Officer for half an hour and

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41 Patrick K. O’Donnel, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of World War II’s*

OSS (New York: Free Press, 2004), 204.

42 Betty Lussier, *Intrepid Woman: Betty Lussier’s Secret War, 1942-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 191.

43 *Secrets and Spies*, 185.



ended up making a date with him to distract him from looking in her suitcase.”<sup>44</sup> Another agent described spy Christina Granville, “The almost mesmeric attraction she had was a blend of vivacity, flirtatiousness, charm and sheer personality. She could switch that personality on and off like a searchlight...”<sup>45</sup> These women often took advantage of the sexual desire of male officers by seducing high-ranking military officials in order to extricate themselves from a dangerous situation or to gain access to secret information.

One woman who used her sexuality for information was Amy Elizabeth Thorpe Brousse, code named Cynthia. Brousse had sexual liaisons with three separate men in order to gain secure information. Her most important seduction was of an Italian admiral/naval attaché of the Italian Embassy. The admiral was so taken with Brousse that she easily manipulated him and he handed over Italian naval codes.<sup>46</sup> “Of her willingness to grant sexual favors for information she remarked, ‘After all, wars are not won by respectable means!’” The third man she attempted to seduce was sympathetic to the United States and joined her to help her gain French Vichy naval codes.<sup>47</sup> They later married and lived out their lives together after the war. Sometimes espionage situations necessitated sexual seductions and flirtations in order to complete an assigned mission. In an era of sexual conservatism and a strict double standard for men and women with regards to sexuality, female agents like Brousse, who embraced their sexuality during this era felt empowered by their ability to control how they used it.

Although many women endured safe and successful careers as spies, others faced capture and punishment. American Mildred Fish-Harnack became involved in espionage activities with her German born husband. They joined a group called The

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44 Binney, *The Women Who Lived For Danger*, 6.

45 Ibid., 49.

46 Mahoney, *Women in Espionage*, 29.

47 Ibid.

Red Orchestra, Soviet intelligence agents conducting espionage in Germany.<sup>48</sup> Members of their group were arrested and executed for treason to Germany. Among their number were Fish-Harnack and one other woman. The two women had originally avoided execution and received prison sentences because of their sex, however Hitler himself overturned their sentence and demanded their execution since they were just as dangerous to his regime as the men.<sup>49</sup> Mildred Fish-Harnack died on February 16, 1943. She was the only American woman during World War II executed for treason during her attempts to aid American forces.<sup>50</sup>

Female spies during World War II crossed gender lines and placed themselves in dangerous and unknown situations in order to help their country. Some female secret agents were recognized and honored for their efforts during World War II while others secretly returned to live ordinary and quiet lives, and many continued to serve as secret agents during the Cold War. Jane McCarthy was awarded the American Medal of Freedom for her efforts as a spy during the German occupation of Paris.<sup>51</sup> Virginia Hall was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, which after the Medal of Honor was the Army's highest military decoration, the first woman to receive this honor. Although many other secret agents received the Distinguished Service Medal, there is very little documented information due to the secret and confidential nature of their work.<sup>52</sup> It is significant that the work these women performed was seen as important, and they were respected and honored by their country.

The women who were secret agents for the OSS are excel-

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48 Ronald Seth, *Encyclopedia of Espionage* (Great Britain: New English Library, 1972), 512.

49 Ibid., 518.

50 George Duncan's Women of the Third Reich, <http://members.iinet.net.au/~gduncan/women.html> (accessed March 18, 2012).

51 Power, *Brave Women and their Wartime Decorations*, 29.

52 Ibid., 62-63.

lent examples of women who crossed gender boundaries and chose to live outside of normal female expectations. For example, when Betty Lussier reported for training, four male agents had already arrived and looked at her expectantly. They assumed that even though she was there for the same training as they were, that she would take care of their secretarial needs. She later recounted that she promptly informed them, "I did not type, I did not make tea, and the only pencils I sharpened were my own."<sup>53</sup> Thus, Lussier rejected the gender stereotype assigned to her and joined the other men in her work for the war.

### AVIATORS

Another way that women crossed gender barriers was in the field of aviation. In the early decades of the twentieth century women such as Amelia Earhart, who took her first flying lesson in 1921, led the way for females in aviation. As the century progressed, increasing numbers of women were following her example and attaining their pilot's license. When the United States joined World War II in 1941, the concept that these women could use their flight experience and serve as pilots began to evolve. The demand came in 1942 when more and more male military pilots were being sent overseas to fight in overseas. At the beginning of the war many male pilots were needed to fight in combat while some remained in the United States in order to transport the newly built aircrafts from factories to their final destinations where they would be put to use. This method was effective until higher than expected casualties overseas required more men to leave these ferrying and transportation posts for active combat.

The Army Air Force decided as an experiment to try and use women pilots in this previously male-only occupation. Under the direction of Jacqueline Cochran, and General Henry H. Arnold, a division of female pilots known as the Women's Air Force

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53 Lussier, *Intrepid Woman*, 171.

Service Pilots (WASP's) was established in 1942. The military received an overwhelming amount of interested candidates whom already needed to have already procured a pilot's license<sup>54</sup>. Newspapers began to run ads and the response was tremendous. Over 25,000 women applied for the WASP's. From this number 1,830 were selected for instruction and 1,074 completed their training.<sup>55</sup> It is evident from this response that women were hoping for an opportunity to fly planes, and were ready to take on a role in the military that had been previously reserved for men only.<sup>56</sup>

The women selected as WASPs came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. They were not required to have specific high school or college credentials. The prerequisite of a pilot's license required a considerable amount of money. Some of the women did come from middle class families with the means to pay for flying lessons. Others came from lesser means, belonging to working class families such as Maggie Yee who always had to work to help her family.<sup>57</sup> The women were generally in their twenties, however later in the war the age minimum was lowered to eighteen. The majority of the women were Caucasian however the WASPs accepted a few women of color including Native American women and Asian Americans such as Maggie Gee.<sup>58</sup> Although some women of color were chosen as WASPS, African American women were completely excluded from the WASP program. As discussed earlier, America in the 1940s was segregated, and racist concepts excluded African American women from consideration as pilots.

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54 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We're in this War, Too*, 7.

55 Mark C Bonn (director), "Wings of Silver: The Vi Cowden Story." 2010. [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006R0AGLA/ref=cm\\_cr\\_asin\\_lnk](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006R0AGLA/ref=cm_cr_asin_lnk).

56 Jean Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), ix.

57 D'Amico and Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage*, 200-202.

58 Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1995), 257.

As with race, an apparent gender double standard existed for the women who entered this new program with regards to the amount of training required as compared to men. There was a substantially more stringent training requirement for female pilots versus what was required for male pilots. The education requirement for males was three years of high school, whereas women needed to be a high school graduate. In addition male pilots only needed to complete 200 total hours of flight time, in contrast to female pilots who had to complete more than twice that amount for a total of 500 hours. This information provides evidence of a stark double standard with regards to the military and concepts of gender.<sup>59</sup> Women in the era were considered less capable and less qualified, and therefore the military regarded women as needing more training. During the 1940s doubts regarding the abilities and intellect of women circulated widely, and therefore more stringent training was often deemed necessary for some occupations.

The women selected to be a WASP experienced a rigorous training program. This training included in-flight instruction, learning instruments, navigation, maintenance and physical training. Marion Stegeman wrote dozens of letters home highlighting this experience. On April 2, 1943 she described her training experience, "Everyday we have the same routine: mess inspection, ground school, drill or calisthenics, mess, flight line, mess, then study until 10 at night. So there's not much to add from day to day except to tell you again what a wonderful training I'm getting."<sup>60</sup> Madge Rutherford also wrote home about her passion for being a WASP, "Let me sing again the praises of the situation. Honestly, I truly love it here."<sup>61</sup> Similar sentiments echoed in the

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59 Deborah G. Douglas, *American Women and Flight Since 1940* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 81.

60 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We're in this War, Too*, 114.

61 *Ibid.*, 55.

letters and words of fellow WASPs Yvonne Pateman, Cornelia Fort, Margaret Gee and Vi Cowden. These women were working hard, but also enjoying a new experience and doing something that they loved.

Despite the adequate training, female military pilots still experienced resistance and sexism from men who did not want them involved in this male dominated sector. Societal norms of this era often relegated that women remain in the home, or at least to work in gender appropriate occupations. When women ventured out to male dominated occupations, men felt threatened by the new competition for jobs, or that a mere woman may do the job better than them. In 1943 a select group of Cochran's finest recruits were taken to Camp Davis, NC on a special mission to serve as target towers for live artillery training. When rumors of the women's arrival spread throughout the 50,000 men stationed there, not all were welcoming. For example, "...a group of enlisted men went to the tow-target squadron commanding officer, Major L.L. Stevenson, and requested transfers. 'I'm not going to serve any powder puff pilots,' grumbled one mechanic." Stevenson calmed the men and told them to give the women a chance and if they were still unsatisfied he would grant their transfer request.<sup>62</sup> Despite this kind of discrimination the women persevered and continued to challenge gender notions and the boundaries with which they were faced.

Although most WASP's survived their historic wartime experience, there were some fatalities. Thirty-eight women died in the line of duty while serving as a WASP. One such woman was Mabel Rawlinson who was killed after her plane tipped some trees and crashed. Marion Hanrahan was flying behind her and witnessed the entire episode. Sally VanWagenen Keil wrote of

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62 Sally VanWagenen Keil, *Those Wonderful Women in their Flying Machines: The Unknown Heroines of World War II* (New York: Rawson Wade Publishers Inc., 1979), 195.

Hanrahan's experience saying, "Marion helplessly moving forward, was by this time flying almost directly over the wreckage, eerily ablaze in the dark. Above the roar of her engine, she heard Mabel screaming."<sup>63</sup> This sacrifice was significant in that if these women had not taken on these tasks and placed themselves in danger, fewer male pilots would have been able to go overseas and fight in combat. In addition, the assistance of female pilots in helping to train the officers who would be fighting in combat situations aided in providing thoroughly qualified pilots for the war.

Marion Stegeman also wrote home about her passion for flying and the danger that she experienced. The passion she felt for flying is apparent in every letter she wrote home. In one she states, "Oh, God, how I love it! Honestly, Mother, you haven't *lived* until you get way *up* there – all alone – just you and that big, beautiful plane humming under your control."<sup>64</sup> Another WASP, Mary Ellen explains her love flying especially at night stating, "It was just a wonderful experience. We both remembered it as one of the highlights of our lives because it was so beautiful."<sup>65</sup> Vi Cowden also repeatedly expressed her love of flying and relished in the contentment of it.<sup>66</sup> These sentiments are repeated in letters and autobiographies of many WASPs and it is clear that women like Stegeman, Ellen and Cowden were comfortable in the planes and enjoyed in their jobs.

Cornelia Fort was in the air giving a flying lesson when she saw the attack on Pearl Harbor in Oahu Hawaii on December 7, 1941. Later recruited to be a military pilot, Fort assumed she would be flying overseas. She wrote home a letter saying goodbye to her family and telling of the impending danger that she may encounter in case of her death. Fort stated, "In writing this letter,

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63 Ibid., 203.

64 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We're in this War, Too*, 115.

65 Jean Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 89.

66 Bonn, "Wings of Silver.

which if delivered will be my last, ... the ocean voyage I will be making shortly has elements of danger and if I lose my life before seeing you again, dearest, I wanted to say aloha and send you my love forever and forever.”<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, during WASP training in 1943, the wing Cornelia’s plane was clipped in midair in by another training plane and she crashed. Fort was the first female pilot in the history of the United States to die in service.<sup>68</sup>

Violet (Vi) Cowden was twenty-six years old when she applied to join the war effort as a pilot. Cowden took part in a documentary film *Wings of Silver: The Vi Cowden Story* released in 2010, in which she orally chronicles her experience as a pilot and then a WASP from first time she took a lesson. At the time of the film Cowden was ninety-two years old and reminisces on her war-time experiences. Cowden discusses the significance that women’s roles as pilots had on those around her. She stated that at the time the women were just doing their jobs, it was not until later that she realized how much they encouraged others.

The WASP’s were disbanded rather abruptly as the war began to come to an end in 1944 due to an increasing number of available male pilots.<sup>69</sup> A newspaper article that ran in the *Williamsburg Shopper* announced the termination of the WASP’s. “Wednesday...1,000 women air force pilots (WASP) step from army planes for the last time.”<sup>70</sup> They had accomplished much in their short stint as a military division and had a significant impact on the outcome of the war. The WASP’s flew more than seventy-five million miles during the war.<sup>71</sup> The casualty ratio between

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67 Lisa Grundwald and Stephen Alder, eds. *Womens Letters: America from the Revolutionary War to the Present* (New York: The Dial Press, 2005), 549.

68 Ibid., 549.

69 Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II* ix.

70 Editorial, *The Williamsburg Shopper*. “1000 WASPS End Flying Service on Wednesday.” December 21, 1944, 19.

71 Bonn (director), “Wings of Silver.



the WASPs and the men who held the same job is equivalent.<sup>72</sup> This statistic demonstrates that the women were equals to men in their ability to fly planes and to handle the rigors of this occupation.

General Arnold who supervised Cochran and her WASP division had this to say on their disbandment, "We will no longer look upon a women's flying organization as experimental. We will know that they can handle our fastest fighters, our heaviest bombers; we will know that they are capable of ferrying, target towing, flying training, test flying, and the countless other activities which you have proved you can do."<sup>73</sup> This recognition from a high-ranking military official validated the efforts and the success of the eighteen hundred WASPS who risked their lives for their country. The women also received some favorable acknowledgment from the public and the media.

*The Williamsburg Shopper* called the WASPs a "Colorful chapter without precedent in the nation's military history."<sup>74</sup> Additionally through the letters written home from the women it is apparent that most of their families supported their actions and they communicated regularly with each other.

Other than the verbal recognition from General Arnold and other minimal acknowledgment, WASPs did not receive the many benefits or awards that were provided to the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. Sadly, the women who gave their lives in the WASP program for the service of their country were sent home and buried without any military honors or escort, no GI benefits, or in-

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72 Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World WarII*, 1. Exact documentation of male transport pilot deaths could not be located. Dependence on secondary source for information.

73 *Ibid.*, 4.

74 *The Williamsburg Shopper*. "1000 WASPS End Flying Service on Wednesday." 19.

surance, and without any commendations for their families.<sup>75</sup> This lack of recognition by their nation's leaders and military officials was difficult for the women who served and for the families who lost their women in this program.

When the WASP program disbanded, they went home, and keeping with the accepted gender norms of the 1940s, they were expected to return to more gender acceptable occupations. This often meant teaching jobs, office and clerical work, and domestic occupations. General Arnold who had supervised the program since its inception, fought to gain the veterans status for WASPs and after his death his son continued the campaign. Finally, thirty-three years later on March 8, 1979, "The U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that the service of the WASP had been determined 'active military service' for the purposes of all laws administered by the Veterans Administration."<sup>76</sup> The Wasps were now formally acknowledged as official personnel of the United States military and received all applicable benefits. The timing of this recognition falls on the heels of the women's movement of the 1970s. An era when women's equality became an important concept and women, such as the WASPs were recognized.

Although this recognition came decades after it was due, it is still significant that these women were eventually recognized for their valued service and sacrifice during World War II. Letters and memoirs written by women in the military relate to their friends and families that they were fundamentally changed by their experiences. They crossed established and acknowledged gender boundaries and entered a world new to women. As a result WASP Maggie Gee exclaimed, "I returned to Berkeley, California, with a lot more self confidence...My Horizon had broadened..."<sup>77</sup> The most significant recognition that these women received was from

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75 Hascall Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II*, 1.

76 Ibid.

77 Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 257.

themselves.

The women who worked as secret agents for the OSS, traveled abroad as military nurses, and flew airplane bombers, crossed gender boundaries, challenged perceived gender notions and took on the challenges that a war delivers. In the evidence presented, it is clear that the women involved, proved themselves capable of the jobs that they undertook and the challenges they encountered. Thus they debunked gender stereotypes that had before deemed women less capable than men.

The personal accomplishments that brave women achieved during World War II, and how those achievements altered their sense of themselves must not be forgotten. It was often women's conceptions of themselves that changed the most throughout these wartime experiences. Women overwhelmingly stated that their experiences in these occupations during the war opened their eyes to a new sense of who they were, and what they could accomplish. Nurse Faye Anderson was also significantly impacted by her experiences, "...I'll never cease to be amazed at the things we have done over here...but I guess you know by now that I love this sort of work and it has been a priceless experience..."<sup>78</sup> These experiences enabled women to become more independent and confident. Gaining the knowledge and experience that women could and should do something outside of the stereotypical gender norms changed the ideas that women had about themselves. Whether they returned home to marry and have children, go to college, or pursue another avenue, something innate in these women changed and gave them a newfound sense of self and identity as women. This is possibly the most important idea that comes of women's wartime experience, her ability to successfully do what had been denied to her before.

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78 Barrett Litoff, and Smith, *We're in this War, Too*, 259.



# IN PURSUIT OF THE PUBLIC: POPULIST PERSPECTIVES IN NEW DEAL ART

JANET RANKIN



A group of Cheyenne in full tribal regalia entered a post office in Watonga, Oklahoma to protest the mural, *Roman Nose Canyon* (1941), by Edith Mahier. Chief Red Bird, the head of the Cheyenne tribe, reported to the local newspaper that “Watonga’s highfalutin \$580 mural stinks.”<sup>1</sup> The principle objections were the featured Cheyenne, Chief Roman Nose, resembled a Navajo and his baby looked more porcine than human. In a similar story, the citizens of Topeka, Kansas were in an uproar over the depictions of livestock by the famous artist, John Steuart Curry, in his Capitol murals *Kansas Pastoral* (1942). The local citizenry informed the artist that his bull was out of proportion and that “pigs’ tails do not curl while eating.”<sup>2</sup> These stories illustrate how local communities engaged with the art created for libraries, post offices, city halls, and federal buildings during the 1930s and early 1940s.

Up until this time, art in America had been sequestered in museums and art galleries by high culture. Franklin Delano

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1 Jane Clapp, *Art Censorship: A Chronology of Proscribed and Prescribed Art* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972), 270.

2 Clapp, 271.

Roosevelt's (FDR) New Deal created art designed to meet the American public where it lived. With the government as patron, citizens felt they had a right to offer opinions about what was displayed in their community. Under FDR's administration, the U.S. government employed thousands of artists to produce more than one hundred thousand pieces of art between 1933 and 1943 for communities nationwide as both artists and the public enjoyed the freedom to create and experience art in a new way. These art programs effectively incorporated the populist ideals of the New Deal administration and fostered a unique climate of creativity and collaboration among artists, project administrators, and the public.

The New Deal was more a collection of ideas than a mandate. The term "new deal" first appeared in FDR's acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention in the summer of 1932 where he promised "a new deal for the American people" if elected.<sup>3</sup> In his "every man" speech on the campaign trail, FDR espoused the rights Americans could reasonably expect from a government that had more than enough for all its citizens. He argued, "Our government formal and informal, political and economic, owes to every one an avenue to possess himself of a portion of that plenty sufficient for his needs, through his own work."<sup>4</sup> Reminiscent of the concepts of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence, these ideas about rights to life and work formed the backbone of all of the New Deal relief programs. Populism represented the needs and desires of "ordinary people" and not institutions.<sup>5</sup> Even though the United States Government was itself an institution, populist

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3 Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago," July 2, 1932, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75174> (accessed May 1, 2012).

4 Howard Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 50.

5 Politico, "Arena Digest: What is 'populism' These Days?" <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31963.html> (accessed May 1, 2012).

ideas permeated FDR's New Deal administration and the work programs that brought relief to millions of unemployed during the Depression.

The Great Depression necessitated relief programs because citizens endured the deprivation not only of food and meaningful work but also a belief that things would get better for the country. Margery Hoffman Smith, an artist and supervisor of the Oregon Works Progress Administration (WPA) project at Timberline Lodge, recalled the urgency for relief when she noted, "there was a woodcarver, when we took him on, was living in a piano box and eating cold beans, beans soaked in cold water."<sup>6</sup> When FDR took office in 1933, he offered average citizens something that had been lacking since the collapse of the stock market in 1929 – hope. At his inauguration, FDR informed the country he was waging a war on the economic emergency; in his first one hundred days as president, he initiated the passage of fifteen pieces of legislation to alleviate the banking crisis, stabilize farm prices, and provide relief to the unemployed.<sup>7</sup> During the first ten years of his presidency, FDR reduced the unemployment rate by fifteen percent and spent over ten billion dollars to put over eight million people to work.<sup>8</sup> When FDR appointed Harry Hopkins, a friend and former social worker, to the position of administrator of the New Deal relief programs, Hopkins realized he and his staff had to make tough decisions: what was an appropriate amount of relief (so there was still an incentive to find a job), and what expenses should be covered (i.e. rent, medical bills, etc.). Hopkins began to

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6 Margery Hoffman Smith, interview by Harlan Phillips, April 10, 1964, transcript, Oral History, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA), <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-margery-hoffman-smith-11781> (accessed March 20, 2012).

7 Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1933, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14473> (accessed May 1, 2012).

8 U.S. Government, *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935-1943* (1947 repr., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), III.

differentiate between direct relief (the dole) and work programs, equally concerned with the state-of-mind of the unemployed as with filling their bellies. All relief distributed funds based upon a formula of family size and location to those who met eligibility requirements. Direct relief programs provided funds to unemployed workers in exchange for continual social worker scrutiny of relief status. The New Deal work programs asked the unemployed to work in exchange for compensation and designed various programs to offer skill preservation and worker training as part of projects that benefitted local communities. Glen Wessels, a Northern California Federal Art Project (FAP) supervisor, stated, "As far as I know, the artists gave the public much more in value than they received in relief pay."<sup>9</sup> Hopkins' concern for the morale of the country and moral character of the individual were some of the reasons why he was so responsive to the pleas of artists and art advocates to include art in his relief programs.

Four independent art projects formed under the New Deal administration. The first art project was the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) conceived to prevent the starvation of artists over the winter of 1933.<sup>10</sup> The following year, the U.S. Treasury Department established two art programs. The Section of Painting and Sculpture (Section) created art for new federal buildings and the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) created art for previously built federal buildings by hiring relief artists.<sup>11</sup> The largest program, the Federal Art Project (FAP) under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), produced the most art and employed the most artists on relief. Holger Cahill designed the FAP to give all artists the opportunity to maintain artistic skills, work with peers

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9 Glen Wessels, *California Federal Art Project Papers, 1935 – 1964*, Art Forum questionnaire, 1965, AAA, microfilm, NDA1.

10 Harry Hopkins, *Spending to Save* (New York: Norton, 1936), 116.

11 Francis V. O'Connor, *Federal Support for the Visual Arts: The New Deal and Now* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1969), 25.



and mentors, and try new techniques in artistic expression.<sup>12</sup> Each project will influence the others and how America came in contact with art.

Since taxpayers funded the New Deal projects, the art projects focused on producing art the public could enjoy, not simply employing artists. There were two main interpretations of public art. One favored public art as any art that is accessible, either because it is physically available to the public or because the public is able to understand and appreciate the art; the other stressed that the art must be created with the specific populace and location in mind in order to be classified as public art.<sup>13</sup> Emphasizing the latter point, philosopher Hilde Hein contends, “The sheer presence of art out-of-doors or in a bus terminal or in a hotel reception area does not make that art public – no more than placing a tiger in a barnyard would make it a domesticated animal.”<sup>14</sup> Discussions on public art extended beyond location and purpose to include elitist and populist perspectives. Art Historian Margaret Wyszomirski characterizes the elitist viewpoint as one in which “public policy on the arts should stress artistic quality as a criterion of support and that quality is most consistently found in, or associated with, the established cultural institutions”.<sup>15</sup> She outlines the populist position as one that embraces the “widest possible availability of the arts” that was less traditional and with a “more pluralistic notion of artistic merit and consciously seeks to create a policy of cultural diversity”.<sup>16</sup> New Deal art projects contained all of these notions about public art although they were displayed in different ways depending upon the project and

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12 O'Connor, *Federal Support*, 28.

13 Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), viii.

14 Hilde Hein, “What is Public Art? Time, Place, and Meaning,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 4.

15 Margaret J. Wyszomirski, “Controversies in Arts Policymaking,” *Public Policy and the Arts*, Kevin V. Mulcahy and C. Richard Swaim, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 13.

16 Wyszomirski, 13.

administrator.

There were many reasons for incorporating art into the relief projects. The “City Beautiful” movement had been popular since the 1890s and was largely responsible for the urban beautification (art, parks, and architecture) of cities such as New York, Chicago, and Washington, D. C. This movement espoused public or civic art would create a moral and civic virtue among the burgeoning populations of America’s cities. Charles Mulford Robinson, one of the first urban planners, argued, “Civic Art properly stands for more than beauty in the city. It represents a moral, intellectual, and administrative progress as surely as it does the purely physical.”<sup>17</sup> The impact of this idea could be seen in the *Federal Art Project Manual* which referenced the “social value” of art on the public.<sup>18</sup> Philosopher John Dewey’s ideas about art influenced many of the art administrators of the New Deal projects, especially Cahill.<sup>19</sup> According to Dewey, by having art relegated to museums, it had become isolated and formed “a separation of art from the objects and scenes of ordinary experience”.<sup>20</sup> Dewey emphasized “art denotes a process of doing or making” as much as an “esthetic experience” and he believed art was to be an experience for both the artist creating the work and the person viewing it.<sup>21</sup> Cahill adopted Dewey’s experiential ideas in the FAP divisions of exhibitions and art teaching.<sup>22</sup>

Most secondary scholarship credits a letter, written by the artist George Biddle to his friend the president, for art being

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17 Charles Mulford Robinson, *Modern Civic Art or, the City Made Beautiful*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (1903; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1970), 17.

18 Holger Cahill, *Federal Art Project Manual* (New York: Works Progress Administration, 1935), 3-5.

19 George J. Mavigliano, “The Federal Art Project: Holger Cahill’s Program of Action,” *Art Education*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (May, 1984), 26-30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3192762> (accessed April 30, 2012).

20 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1934), 6.

21 Dewey, 47.

22 Cahill, *FAP Manual*, 18.

included in New Deal programs. Biddle had been inspired by a mural project in the late 1920s in Mexico City that paid artists a small government salary to decorate public buildings. When the New Deal programs were initiated, Biddle encouraged FDR to try such a project because American artists were eager to engage in a similar program and “they would be contributing to and expressing in living monuments the social ideals that you are struggling to achieve”.<sup>23</sup> These ideas about public art and government patronage coalesced into what became the art relief projects of the New Deal.

The longevity and sheer volume of help delivered by the WPA made it by far the most notable of the work projects. Officials estimated nearly one quarter of all families in the United States depended upon the WPA for financial support in its eight years of operation (1935-1943).<sup>24</sup> FDR demonstrated the adaptability he brought to his administration in his assertion that “the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it; if it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”<sup>25</sup> This flexible attitude was the core of FDR’s New Deal and it gave his administrators the latitude to experiment with programs to get the economy moving. Officials designed the original relief programs implemented during his first hundred days as temporary programs containing time limits of six months to two years. After a program proved successful, legislators renewed it (such as the Emergency Relief Acts of 1933, 1935, and 1937), or it morphed into another agency (the PWAP served as the model for the Section and the FAP). Whatever the program, whatever its brevity or longevity,

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23 O’Connor, *Federal Support*, 18.

24 *WPA Final Report*, III.

25 Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Oglethorpe University Commencement Address,” Address delivered at the Oglethorpe University graduation held at the Fox Theater, Atlanta, GA, May 22, 1932, <http://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/faculty-research/new-deal/roosevelt-speeches/fr052232.htm> (accessed March 13, 2012).

each represented real relief for real people in one way or another.

The strength of the Roosevelt Administration laid not only in its versatility but also the swiftness with which it was prepared to act. Hopkins authorized the PWAP immediately after taking charge of the Civil Works Administration (CWA) in November 1933 and justified the project by exclaiming, "Hell! Artists have got to eat just like other people."<sup>26</sup> The artist Edward Laning argued artists were a natural choice because of the speed with which they could begin work since "they didn't require a capital outlay. They already had paints and brushes of a sort, and they carried the plans for the next painting in their heads."<sup>27</sup> Edward Bruce, a professional artist, became the director and he enthusiastically embraced government patronage of the arts. Convening the first PWAP meeting December 8, 1933, Bruce developed a plan to provide work for unemployed artists. Four short days later, sixteen regional committees were in place, and, in less than ten days, Bruce reported "eighty-six artists received their first checks".<sup>28</sup> As a winter stopgap, the PWAP originally scheduled projects only until mid-February; however, with many projects incomplete, the CWA extended the program until June. The alacrity with which the PWAP formed also carried over throughout the entirety of the project. In less than six months, it employed almost four thousand artists and produced over fifteen thousand pieces of art and craft.<sup>29</sup> The speed and scope of this program would never be duplicated in any other art relief project.

Relief status depended on a person's need and employability as determined by a state or local welfare agency. Once certified, registered artists interviewed with the FAP and completed a

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26 Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins, an Intimate History* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1950), 57.

27 Francis V. O'Connor, ed., *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1972), 91.

28 Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton: University Press, 1973), 12.

29 McKinzie, 27.

questionnaire regarding education, art training, and experience in various media to determine skill classification. A local art project could not be undertaken without appropriately skilled artists certified and available to work.<sup>30</sup> This elaborate qualification system resulted from earlier employment relief programs that did not screen artists. Researcher Richard McKinzie noted, with the PWAP, nearly “three-fourths of Southern California applicants were not bona fide artists” (professional artists) but art students, tradesmen who painted on the side, and “little old ladies who painted little scenes from nature”.<sup>31</sup> Many considered themselves artists; administrators, however, recognized far fewer as artists. In a 1930 U.S. census, 57,265 citizens self-identified as a professional artist, sculptor, or teacher of art, but in 1935, only 2,900 artists qualified for relief.<sup>32</sup> Clearly from the statistics, more regarded themselves as artists than possessed skills as identified by administrators; equally true, talented artists in need of work remained unemployed.

A discussion of the New Deal art projects would not be complete without a review of the Section (and to a lesser degree the TRAP) for several reasons. All of the art programs relied upon funding from the federal government which made each essentially part of the New Deal. The Section preceded and operated simultaneously with the FAP, which led the public to think of them as one even though each maintained separate projects with divergent objectives. The challenges Bruce faced in managing the PWAP led him to insist the Section be based upon the criteria of “quality” and not employment or relief. Bruce stressed Section art must meet standards of quality, but he never articulated his standards other than to categorize artists into “good, medium, and

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30 Cahill, *FAP Manual*, 3-7.

31 McKinzie, 13.

32 O'Connor, *Federal Support*, 192; 196.

bums”.<sup>33</sup> He limited subject matter to what he called the “America Scene” and rejected “anything experimental, unconventional, or possibly titillating”.<sup>34</sup> Section art reflected everyday America rather than the heroic or mythological scenes that had dominated art of the nineteenth century. Bruce outlined a list of appropriate subjects for post office art that included postal topics, transportation, or local life or history in a newsletter to artists.<sup>35</sup> McKinzie argues, “Bruce had to make artists feel free [to create] and, at the same time, extract from them a quantity and quality of production that representatives of the people and watchdogs of the purse could appreciate.”<sup>36</sup> Bruce’s elitist criterion for projects and restrictive content contrasted with his affirmations that artists could exercise creative freedom.<sup>37</sup> Average citizens most likely encountered Section art in one of the eleven hundred post offices built during this time, but access alone did not make it populist art or a populist program.

To dispel notions of favoritism or bias, Bruce designed an elaborate system of competitions to choose artists; in this way, art commissions in Washington, D. C. and juries in the communities where the art was to be installed approved all art proposals. Section objectives stated local talent should be considered for every art project, and, in an effort to employ local artists, most competitions limited submissions by region. A Section *Bulletin* announcement for a competition for the Santa Barbara, California post office stated the region included “any state west of the Mississippi”.<sup>38</sup> Rather than choosing truly local artists, Bruce’s

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33 McKinzie, 17.

34 O’Connor, *Federal Support*, 20.

35 Cahill, *Bulletin*, No.2, April 1935, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/TDAP-Bulletin-No-2--183681> (accessed April 30, 2012).

36 McKinzie, 21.

37 Edward Bruce, “The Implications of the Public Works of Art Project,” *Magazine of American Art* (March 1934), 113.

38 Cahill, *Bulletin*, no. 9, March-May 1936, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/TDAP-Bulletin-No-9--183688> (accessed April 16, 2012).

definition of “local” expanded in proportion to his narrowing definition of “quality.” San Francisco-based artists on the faculty of the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA) created all of the Section and TRAP works in Sacramento area post offices, which emphasized the Section’s elitist penchant for institutional art. Even as Bruce articulated the new “democratic patronage of art” these projects facilitated from the public, he continued to exhibit elitist forces on the arts.<sup>39</sup> The bureaucratic and selective nature of the Section resulted in the employment of nine hundred artists completing fourteen hundred commissions over the span of nine years.



Figure 1. Marion Gilmore, *Band Concert* (1941), egg tempera on gesso, USPS, Corning, Iowa.

The production of “quality art” did not leave the art of the Section free from debate. The art commissions chose pieces based upon artistic quality whereas most local juries judged content and accuracy of subject matter.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the controversies with tribe identification and pigs’ tails previously referenced, locals voiced complaints about changing the types of crops planted, removing a non-existent footbridge, and covering bare feet; in Paris, Arkansas, postal officials decried rural scenery “because it failed to show the progress the community had made”.<sup>41</sup> Not all

39 Bruce, 115.

40 Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art: The Government Art Projects of the 1930s with Examples from New York City & State* (New York: Gallery Association of NY State, 1977), 14.

41 Park, 16-17.

comments about the art projects were negative. Of Peter Hurd's mural *Old Pioneers* (1938) in Big Spring, Texas, Justice Harlan Stone described, "How important is it that the humble people of this country should be impressed with the fact that the artist finds beauty and dignity in their life."<sup>42</sup> The taxpayer T. B. Turner stated his appreciation for the mural of Marion Gilmore's *Band Concert* (1941) in Corning, Iowa, that "so artistically and yet so truthfully depicts the happy community 'way of life' in the finest little town in the most livable section of the most prosperous state of the most democratic country in the whole topsy-turvy world."<sup>43</sup> The Section manifested populist ideals in this one aspect, the exchange of dialogue between the community receiving the art and the artist or administrator. Citizens, as patrons of the art, felt free to express opinions about the kind of art they wanted in their communities even as the Section stifled artistic expression.

The Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), the smallest of all of the art programs, created art for previously built federal buildings or small, rural post offices so as to not compete with the Section.<sup>44</sup> The director Olin Dows shared Bruce's standards for "quality" which resulted in a program that limited the recipients of relief and the overall impact of the art program. After the explosion of art produced by the PWAP in four months, the TRAP employed just over four hundred artists and produced only eighty-nine murals, sixty-five sculptures, and ten thousand easel paintings in four years. Local TRAP projects by San Francisco artists include "The Letter," a wood relief by Zygmund Sazevich (1937) at the downtown Roseville, California post office, and "Farm Life," two tempera panels by George Harris (1937) at the Woodland, California post office.

Compared to the Treasury art programs, the FAP

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42 Park, 11.

43 Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 103.

44 O'Connor, *Federal Support*, 25.



aligned itself most closely with the populist ideals of the New Deal. The FAP allowed artists of all skill levels the most access to employment and gave the public accessibility to art in a multifaceted program. The art programs of FDR's administration offered thousands of artists the opportunity to work continuously, to experiment with applications, and to work collectively for the first time in American history.<sup>45</sup> The San Francisco sculptor Beniamino Bufano argued, "WPA/FAP has laid the foundation of a renaissance of art in America. It is the open sesame to a freer art and more democratic use of the creations of the artist's hand and brain. It has freed American art."<sup>46</sup> New Deal administrators touted the art programs as exemplifying democracy in action because of the numbers of relief artists employed and the numbers of citizens enjoying art freely.<sup>47</sup> Whether federal patronage of art really made it democratic for artists or the public could not be proved; however, the *perception* of democracy by the artists, administrators, and the public permeated the projects at the time and continues to influence scholarly evaluations of the art projects today.

The FAP was prolific. Cahill subdivided the FAP into eight divisions including mural and easel painting, sculpture, applied arts, and craft arts. From 1935-1943, the government spent close to seventy million dollars employing approximately 10,000 artists to produce over 2,500 murals, more than 18,000 pieces of sculpture, 108,000 easel works, and over 11,000 print originals.<sup>48</sup> Employment with the FAP ranged from a few weeks to eight years (for a lucky few) to produce works that continue to grace schools,

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45 O'Connor, *Federal Support*, 28.

46 Francis V. O'Connor, ed. *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 109.

47 Cahill, *Art in Democracy speech*, undated, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/-emph-render-italic-Art-in-Democracy-emph--183959> (accessed May 6, 2012).

48 *WPA Final Report*, 122; 133.

libraries, hospitals, and federal buildings today.<sup>49</sup> Many art works have been lost, many more endure, and others have been carefully restored to their original beauty.



Figure 2. Lucile Lloyd, *California's Name* (1939), oil on canvas, California State Capitol Building, Sacramento, California.

One FAP project with a storied past was Lucile Lloyd's beautiful triptych *California's Name* (1937) originally installed in the State Building in Los Angeles only to be forgotten in storage after an earthquake. Conservators restored and re-installed it in the California State Capitol Building in 1992 at the request of State Senators.<sup>50</sup>

All WPA employees received one of the following skill classifications: professional and technical, skilled, intermediate, and unskilled. The artists of the FAP first had to meet relief requirements; then, talent and experience factored into specific work assignments. Local administrators matched workers with projects and provided for job training. The WPA guidelines allowed for the hiring of non-relief workers with specific talents or supervisory skills who could train workers on relief.<sup>51</sup> Over the years, this ratio of relief/non-relief fluctuated between ninety/ten

49 WPA Final Report, 41.

50 California State Senate Rules Committee, *California's Name: Three WPA-Sponsored Murals by Lucile Lloyd* (January 1992), 1-2.

51 Cahill, *FAP Manual*, 3-5.

and seventy-five/twenty five depending upon the economy and the whims of Congress.<sup>52</sup>

Contrary to the other art programs which paid for materials and commissioned artists for a specific project, the FAP required the recipient of permanent art (murals and sculpture) to pay for materials while the FAP paid artists a salary. The FAP paid a weekly wage based upon (but always lower than) local prevailing wages depending upon residence and population size which could range in the professional and technical class from \$23.25 for artists in California's larger cities to \$9.75 for artists in small towns in southern states such as Mississippi.<sup>53</sup> For this remuneration, the artist was expected to work ninety-six hours per month on a particular project, sculptural piece, or, in the case of easel artists, to paint a fixed number of paintings.<sup>54</sup> Most artists did not find the FAP work week requirements a hindrance or impediment to artistic creativity. The San Francisco sculptor Sargent Johnson stated, "I think it [was] a pretty wonderful job for the time, considering we had to get these things out quick. We couldn't putt around for long. They gave you a design and you had to have the whole thing up in so many days, you know, or months."<sup>55</sup> This system kept an artist working as long she/he qualified for relief.

The FAP murals represented populist ideals by being publicly accessible (in all its meanings) and requiring artist collaboration. The art of fresco (painting on wet plaster) gained prominence in America on a large scale with this push for public murals. Several American artists learned the art of fresco in Mexico or from working with Diego Rivera in New York or San

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52 Hopkins, 167.

53 Arthur W. MacMahon, John D. Millett, and Gladys Ogden, *The Administration of Federal Work Relief* (Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1941), 150.

54 Cahill, *FAP Manual*, 22.

55 Sargent Johnson, interview by Mary McChesney, July 31, 1964, transcript, Oral History, AAA, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-sargent-johnson-11474> (accessed March 15, 2012).

Francisco and taught the technique to others.<sup>56</sup> The FAP artists worked cooperatively in the creation of art, and skilled artists trained novice artists in a variety of artistic techniques. New York artist Ruth Gikow argued it was not art school but the “early years of the WPA [that] really, really made an artist out of me.”<sup>57</sup> Murals earned the reputation of being populist because the permanent public display meant they belonged to a “people’s audience”.<sup>58</sup> This audience could include passersby in hospitals, schools, or subways where artists worked together to invent painted tile techniques that would “resist the dampness, vibration, and modern cleaning methods” so the art could survive.<sup>59</sup> Muralist Philip Evergood believed the years of the FAP had done more for advancing mural painting and bringing a “closer understanding between the American artist and his public” through art than at any other time.<sup>60</sup>

Mosaic murals were endemic to California; mosaic artists in both Los Angeles and San Francisco experimented with a variety of tile mediums to produce a specific color palette or lower material costs. Bay Area artists used marble left over from the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition; Southern California artist and administrator Stanton MacDonald-Wright invented a vivid colored cement tile he called “petrachrome” to create mosaics that would otherwise have been cost prohibitive given budget limitations.<sup>61</sup> Of the mosaics produced, Mary Morsell noted “all that was needed was a degree of freedom from

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56 Holger Cahill, “Mural America,” *Architectural Record* 82, No. 3 (1937): 63.

57 Ruth Gikow, interview by Harlan Phillips, 1964, transcript, Oral History, AAA, <http://aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ruth-gikow-12598> (accessed March 1, 2012).

58 O’Connor, *Millions*, 48.

59 O’Connor, *Millions*, 49.

60 O’Connor, *Millions*, 49.

61 Stanton MacDonald Wright, interview by Betty Hoag, Oral History, 1964, AAA, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-stanton-macdonaldwright-11673> (accessed May 2, 2012).

purely commercial requirements. This the government provided.”<sup>62</sup> The project expenditure restraints imposed by the relief programs actually facilitated the invigoration of old techniques (fresco and mosaic) and the innovative use of new or recycled materials.

Ingenuity expanded beyond mural projects as collectives of artists developed new inks, paints, and improved techniques in silk screening in the applied arts division that printed hundreds of thousands of posters for WPA projects.<sup>63</sup> The print artist Anthony Velonis asserted “the WPA/FAP was the logical place for all this to be initiated and developed. For nowhere else is there such a crosscurrent of varied technical experience and such an opportunity to practice, mixed with a bold, imaginative, and creative spirit.”<sup>64</sup> In this way, the art programs benefitted both the artist and the advancement of art techniques in America. Prints fit the populist agenda by being reproducible (not original or valuable) and engaging in the promotional subject matter of performances, parks, and good hygiene, both qualities which brought art to the masses.<sup>65</sup> Artists on relief in the print division congregated in workshops which cultivated an environment of experimentation and free expression.

Many artists saw the art projects as something more than the mere production of art. In remembering the unique opportunity presented by the art projects, Robert Cronbach, a New York sculptor, reflected “for the creative artist the WPA/FAP marked perhaps the first time in American history when a great number of artists was [*sic*] employed continuously to produce art. It was an unequaled opportunity for a serious artist to work as steadily and intensely as possible to advance the quality of his

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62 Mary Morsell, “California Mosaicists,” *Magazine of Art* 30, no. 10 (1937), 623.

63 McKinzie, 132.

64 O’Connor, *Millions*, 156.

65 Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38.

art.”<sup>66</sup> For many FAP artists, working on the project gave them a sense of worth and collective participation in something larger than themselves. Muralist Geoffrey Norman noted, “Artists were given walls to decorate not in imposing banks or state capitols, but in schools, hospitals, libraries, prisons, in every part of the country.”<sup>67</sup> He enthusiastically painted for the government and in turn the people, many of whom had little previous contact with art. During these projects, artists focused on communicating with their audience (be it a federal courthouse or country post office) more than communicating ideas with their art, and the notion of “art for art’s sake” that had dominated the art world in the 1920s evaporated in favor of a dialogue between artists and citizens.<sup>68</sup> This change was the result of the artist as government worker or “citizen-artist” and the government as patron of the arts or a “citizen-public” for art.<sup>69</sup>



Figure 3. Lucienne Bloch, *Childhood* (1935), fresco, Women’s House of Detention, New York, New York. No color photographs of this mural exist as it was destroyed when the building was demolished in 1974.

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66 O’Connor, *Memoirs*, 140.

67 O’Connor, *Millions*, 52.

68 Alan Howard Levy, *Government and the Arts: Debates over Federal Support of the Arts in America from George Washington to Jessie Helms* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 60.

69 Harris, 38.

The art programs allowed an artist to fulfill her/his creative potential as well as allowed the public to be enriched by viewing it. Lucienne Bloch described her experience of working on a mural at the Women's House of Detention in New York by stating that when viewing the facility she felt there was "a crying need for bright and bold curves to offset this drabness and austerity".<sup>70</sup> She also sensed the inmates saw art as "high-brow", and she needed to make her mural relevant and intimate. To accomplish this, she painted a scene of a city park with children of all colors playing as mothers watched and gossiped. The female inmates developed a strong connection to the mural and even "named" and "adopted" some of the children in the painting. This project which required the artist to paint on site where she could meet and talk with the inmates touched Bloch deeply, and she confided, "Such a response clearly reveals to what degree a mural can, aside from its artistic value, act as a healthy tonic on the lives of all of us."<sup>71</sup> In this way, the art provided relief to the artist in the form of work and skill development as well as relief to the viewer from daily concerns.

Public art exhibitions and art centers of the FAP most closely followed the populist ideas of making art available to everyone. The Northern California FAP selected the Berkeley Public Library as a "testing ground" to begin a Print Lending Library lending lithographs to library card holders; this was an effort to afford more citizens the opportunity to enjoy and experience art on a personal level. In the first few weeks, over 200 people viewed 317 prints and librarians "checked-out" ninety-five pieces to patrons. A bulletin subtitled "An Experiment in Democratizing Art" noted several uses of the art included teachers displaying the art in classrooms to students who had never before seen a work of art, impoverished newlyweds decorating an otherwise bare apartment, and a visitor taking a new print to

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70 O'Connor, *Millions*, 76.

71 O'Connor, *Millions*, 77.

a hospitalized friend each week in place of flowers. Despite the success of the lending program and interest in similar programs by other state directors, officials disbanded it a little more than a year later to release the hundreds of prints in the program to art centers requesting circulating exhibitions.<sup>72</sup>

Art Centers throughout the country were not only places where local artists could find work; they were places where citizens of all ages could come in contact with art in their local community. Art teaching and circulating exhibitions were included in the FAP to “provide the public with the opportunities to participate in the experience of art” along with providing employment for local unemployed artists and art teachers.<sup>73</sup> Communities provided the space and utilities for a center and the FAP paid the salaries of faculty and staff as well as providing travelling art exhibitions. Administrators estimated between twelve and fifteen million people of all ages took art classes, listened to an art lecture, or saw an art exhibit in one of the eighty-four art centers across the country by 1940.<sup>74</sup> With most of the projects (other than post offices) created in large cities, art centers gave small communities an opportunity to experience art from Jacksonville, Florida to Spokane, Washington. Cultural historian Jonathan Harris argues as “democratic” as the FAP art center strived to be, the establishment of “so-called Negro Art Centers” in Harlem, Chicago, and in the South “appears never to have challenged the segregation of black and white communities in the United States”.<sup>75</sup> Democracy in art was absent in the presence of Jim Crow. Art centers relied upon the community for support and therefore reflected community values and prejudices. Forty

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72 California Federal Art Project Papers, 1935 – 1964, *FAP Bulletin* (undated) and FAP letter, December 7, 1937, AAA, microfilm, NDA1.

73 Sacramento Art Center Records, 1937-1941, *Art Circular No. 1*, Oct. 8, 1937, AAA, microfilm, NDA14.

74 Sacramento Art Center Records, *Art Circular, No. 1*.

75 Harris, 46.



thousand people walked through the doors of the Sacramento Art Center to participate in its various art experiences between June 1938 and December 1939.<sup>76</sup> Local artists or teachers found employment only at the Sacramento Art Center as all other art projects in and around Sacramento were created by San Francisco artists.<sup>77</sup> A local newspaper account featured photographs of residents engaged in a variety of artistic pursuits and reported that “many find their talents have been lying dormant for years”.<sup>78</sup> Art administrators believed these centers “represented a ‘corrective’ force intended to redistribute ‘cultural resources’ and to energize” what were seen as vast deserts of culture and creativity.<sup>79</sup>

The undertaking to employ thousands of artists, create government-sponsored art, and engage the public with art was a radical idea that worked. Artists appreciated the collaborative experience of working, learning, and creating together; at the same time, citizens enjoyed art in local communities as viewers and participants in art experiences. The claim this was a Renaissance in American art was no exaggeration as it was a true revival for art, artists, and the spirits of the public. FDR had hoped to be remembered for this art, according to a comment heard by Henry Morgenthau Jr., U.S. Secretary of the Treasury: “one hundred years from now my administration will be known for its art, not its relief.”<sup>80</sup> At the dedication of the National Gallery of Art in 1941, he argued for the merits of the art created under his administration. FDR stated Americans had seen paintings *by* Americans “some of it good, some of it not so good, but all of it native, human, eager, and alive - all of it painted by their own

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76 Sacramento Art Center Records, *Newsletter*, April 15, 1940, AAA.

77 Sacramento Art Center Records, *Newsletter*.

78 Ronald Scofield, “Painting or Play Acting, Dress Designing or Modern Dancing – They All Find Encouragement and Guidance at the Sacramento Art Center,” *Sacramento Bee*, December 16, 1939, 19.

79 Harris, 48.

80 Lenore Clark, *Forbes Watson: Independent Revolutionary* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 148.

kind in their own country, and painted about things that they know and look at often and have touched and loved.”<sup>81</sup> Art did not simply subsist during the Depression. The economic forces actually brought artists together in collaborative efforts of work, art, and process. Despite the schism between elitist and populist forces during the New Deal, creativity prevailed through new techniques in art as well as the community’s appreciation of art.

The hope these programs would change the public’s relationship with art forever never truly materialized, but it neither withered nor reverted back to pre-Depression exclusivity. The art produced during FDR’s administration has endured and gained a newly found respect by historians, artists, and the populace who work to preserve it. The General Services Administration has a WPA art recovery program for lost easel art as well as safeguards in place to protect the art in government buildings. Public art is not perfect. Despite Edith Mahier’s best efforts to study and paint a true representation of a local hero, native tribesmen did not see themselves in her work. The creation of public sculptures and murals has continued but never to the extent of the New Deal years. For the most part, easel art has quietly crept back to the domain of galleries and museums. The public still complains about public art whether it is the tail of a pig or a giant red rabbit at the Sacramento International Airport. The consideration of the public into public art offers rewards for both the artist and the citizen. As accessible as public art is, the art itself is less important than the citizen’s freedom to voice concern, frustration, or delight in the project. In this way, the populist roots planted during the New Deal of ordinary people participating in public art continue to flourish today.

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81 Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address at the Dedication of the National Gallery of Art.,” March 17, 1941, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16091>.

SACRAMENTO'S CENTRAL CITY:  
 ITS GRIDIRON PLAN AND  
 PUBLIC SQUARES IN PERSPECTIVE

MICHAEL KREMER



Public spaces have provided cities and their residents with access to recreational spaces and landscapes not readily found in early cities. The city of Sacramento, throughout its history, has been an excellent example of how parks and public spaces play a significant role in the success and growth of American cities. To understand the significance of Sacramento's Central City public squares, one must understand the founding of Sacramento and its gridiron plan. Then, one can follow the history of public squares, both individually and as a whole. The gridiron planning design was an essential tool in establishing several Californian cities. This is also true for the city of Sacramento. The gridiron plan, drawn up in 1848-49, established the boundaries of early Sacramento and created a plan for land sales and the city's growth. The grid is prominent to the city of Sacramento because it designated the city's early public parks and squares. The designers of Sacramento saw the potential for a thriving urban center and they used the gridiron plan, with the inclusion of public squares, to define the boundaries and possible characteristics of a future city. As Sacramento's Central

City prospered, so too did each public square situated throughout the city. Each public square provided neighborhoods with access to recreational and open spaces in an urban environment.

### SELLING LAND MEANS CREATING A CITY (AND ELIMINATING DEBT)

The creation of Sacramento a city does not follow the same pattern as other Western or Californian cities in the nineteenth century. The physical establishment of Sacramento, using a gridiron plan, was created out of debt situation. Sacramento's Central City located where the American River meets the Sacramento River was a fraction of nearly forty-eight thousand acres of land bought by Swiss immigrant and entrepreneur, John Sutter, Sr. Sutter obtained the land in a grant from Mexican governor Juan Alvarado in 1839, along with Fort Ross from the Russians in Northern California, which launched Sutter, Sr. into a deep financial crisis he would never recover from.<sup>1</sup> Sutter worked to construct and establish a trading post and fort near where he landed his ship at Sutter's Landing, east of the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers.<sup>2</sup> He built Sutter's Fort, and established a town site, called New Helvetia, in 1839. Sutter gained a prominent reputation in the surrounding valley through several business ventures, including funding various mining and agricultural projects, obtaining funds from various business associates, as well as his continuous, and often controversial, labor relations with the local Nisenan Maidu and Miwok tribes.<sup>3</sup>

Within the first few years Sutter became a successful tradesman and entrepreneur in California and Sutter's Fort became

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1 Iris H.W. Engstrand, "John Sutter: A Biographical Examination," in Kenneth N. Owens, editor, *John Sutter and a Wider West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 80-81.

2 John William Repts, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 195.

3 A continued, more in-depth examination of Sutter's relationship with the Native Americans and their labor can be found in Albert L. Hurtado's "John A. Sutter and the Indian Business, in Kenneth N. Owens, editor, *John Sutter and a Wider West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 51-75.

a prominent stopping point for travelers arriving either from the San Francisco Bay en route to the Sierra Nevada or vice versa. Yet within a short time, Sutter quickly accumulated a massive amount of debt due to his spending habits and unsuccessful business endeavors. Some of Sutter's increased spending and debt included running Sutter's Fort as a trading post for miners and travelers, purchasing Fort Ross (along the Northern California coast) from the Russian government, and establishing two small townships, Sutterville and New Helvetia. By 1848, Sutter's debt totaled roughly \$80,000, owing money to his business partners and associates, and most notably to the Russian-American Company. Sutter was forced to put up his holdings at New Helvetia as collateral to settle portions of his debt. Certain factors, aside from his looming debt, created more problems for Sutter. Sutter became increasingly weary and depressed, leading to excessive drinking; he also began taking credit instead of cash from miners purchasing supplies. In the winter of 1848-49, he hastily retreated to his cabin near Coloma in the nearby Sierra Nevada mountain range. As Sutter experienced his debt woes, James Marshall, a miner who worked for Sutter, discovered gold on Sutter's Coloma property. Marshall inadvertently set off a firestorm of migrants and miners into the region, sparking the California Gold Rush.

John Sutter remained in hiding throughout the early months of 1849, most notably staying at his properties of Coloma and Hock Farm near the Feather River in Northern California. By this time, Sutter, Sr. had accrued more debt under his name, mainly from bad business negotiations, being "swindled out of his land" and money, miners "squatting" on his land and not paying rent, and paying for items he could not afford.<sup>4</sup> As Sutter, Sr. continued to build debt in his name, he eventually "transferred some of his holdings to his son, John Augustus Sutter, Jr.," in order to relieve himself of the debt

burden.<sup>5</sup> By doing so, however, Sutter, Sr. had made matters worse for himself and his family.

By spring of 1849, Sutter's oldest child, John "Augustus" Sutter, Jr., arrived from the Helvetia area of Switzerland to Northern California. At the age of twenty-one, Augustus arrived in search of his father who had abandoned his wife and children, leaving them with massive debt over a decade before.<sup>6</sup> Augustus believed that his father had accrued substantial wealth from his business ventures and land holdings, a possible reason for including his son's name in his financial interests. When Augustus entered Sutter's Fort, however, he found something very different than what he expected.

Augustus found New Helvetia and Sutter's Fort mismanaged and in disrepair from use by squatters and miners. The fort and New Helveita was in chaos because Sutter Sr.'s primary labor force, the local Nisenan Maidu and Miwok people, had followed other miners in search of fortune during the Gold Rush. Sutter, Sr. had attempted to profit from the Gold Rush but failed to do so due in part to his debt woes, theft of crops by miners and passersby headed to the mountains, loss of labor to the mines, and little involvement by Sutter at the mines.<sup>7</sup> Sutter, Sr. heard of Augustus' arrival and made his way to the fort, where both were reacquainted, and discussed options on how to settle Sutter, Sr.'s debt. By the fall of 1849, father and son came to the agreement that Sutter, Sr. would sign away his rights to ownership of his land and other assets to Augustus. Afterwards, Sutter, Sr. left the fort and land holdings to his son, and returned to his property on Hock Farm, away from many of the people in his life, believing that he had "been cheated out of...all that was Sacramento [sic]."<sup>8</sup>

Once he had control over the land and Sutter's Fort, Augustus

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5 Engstrand, 84.

6 Engstrand, 78; 85.

7 Allan R. Ottley, editor, *The Sutter Family and the Origins of Gold-Rush Sacramento, originally written by John Augustus Sutter, Jr.* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 10.

8 Engstrand, 85.

Sutter began to update the fort and clear the surrounding land. He received help from businessmen, miners, and traders with whom he became acquainted during his stay at the fort. Some of these men were business partners of his father's or new arrivals to the region who were looking to get their hands on land deals and other business opportunities. Individuals and companies who worked with Augustus Sutter, Jr. included Peter H. Burnett, Morton Matthew McCarver, John Bidwell, Lansford Hastings, and the Hensley, Reading & Company.<sup>9</sup> Augustus and other businessmen developed partnerships to increase the value and sell small portions of his father's land. More had to be done, however, to pay off his father's debt, including selling the land at better prices.

Within a few weeks after Augustus started selling off titles to land parcels, a man by the name of Sam Brannan, who would become one of the most influential businessmen in early California history, worked his way into becoming one of Augustus' most significant business partners in the sale of titles. Brannan, a Mormon settler, had started out in California as a store keeper near Sutter's Fort. He gained notoriety in 1848 when he discovered, from miners and John Sutter, Sr., that John Marshall may have found gold at Coloma. Quick to judgment and without confirmation of the gold discovery, Brannan made his way to San Francisco. He is recorded to have shouted throughout the streets that gold had been found in the Sierra Nevada.<sup>10</sup> Brannan then bought as much mining supplies as he could afford, and made his way to his store in New Helvetia. He soon advertised that he had the necessary mining supplies settlers needed for gold mining. Brannan became financially wealthy, enough to dabble in various business ventures with John Sutter and other entrepreneurs. He soon became an influential business figure in the Sacramento Valley and San Francisco. He continued

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9 Ottley, 14-19.

10 Kenneth N. Owens, *Gold Rush Saints: California Mormons and the Great Gold Rush for Riches* (Spokane, WA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2004), 119-121.

to develop personal and business ties with mining companies including mines near Coloma and Mormon Island.<sup>11</sup> He eventually participated in buying and selling commercial property; a venture that would involve him with the plotting and selling of land parcels in Sacramento.

Brannan became a business partner of Augustus Sutter's, and suggested platting<sup>12</sup> a large section of land between Sutter's Fort and the Sacramento River. Brannan was interested in platting the land to sell parcels at a large profit.<sup>13</sup> Brannan's choice of platting location was ingenious because, although he had been in the area for a short time, he saw the business potential that connected Sutter's Fort with the wharf at the Embarcadero along the Sacramento River. Brannan had other motives in suggesting the plat, mainly that it would influence more commercial enterprises to develop away from Sutterville, a few miles south of the river. Brannan looked to increase the importance of Sacramento as a commercial hub in the region because of the better situated location and investments he had already made. Sutterville, in Brannan's mind, was a problem and rival to Sacramento, if it were allowed to continue to grow. The location of Sacramento's plat would, and did, intentionally create more business ties for Brannan and his associates, and removed the competition of Sutterville from the Embarcadero and eventually, Sacramento.<sup>14</sup>

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11 Owens, 121-123.

12 Plats, or platting, are checkerboard-like plans which feature straight-aligned streets, meeting at right-angles, and forming several square or rectangular blocks. Each block was then subjected to division into smaller parcels for the distribution of land for future built projects. These gridiron or checkerboard plans were laid across several types of landscapes across America, most being placed over flat or hilly terrains or next to navigable waterways. Gridiron plans provide cities and towns simplicity in city planning, with opportunities to greatly expand beyond their initial boundaries for future urbanization purposes if needed.

13 Hallam, 29.

14 Hallam, 29-30.



## A GRID LEADS TO A CITY

Augustus saw the potential in platting of the land and also saw a better, quicker way to settle the remaining debt of his father with the Russian-American Company. He believed that there was potential in selling this platted land to make enough profit to close the debt. Augustus agreed to plat the land located between Sutter's Fort, the American River, and the Embarcadero along the Sacramento River. Augustus was not interested in the ownership of or reselling of the land, as much as he wanted to plat the land and pay off his father's, now his, debt. The next step was to hire a surveyor; not an easy thing to find in California in the late 1840s. Fortunately, one individual was present in California who could assist Augustus. In late 1848, Captain William H. Warner, a professional engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers and a veteran of the Mexican-American War, journeyed with other surveyors into the Sierra Nevada to report on the gold discovery.<sup>15</sup> While making their way to the mountains, Warner and his colleagues, like miners and traders before them, stopped at New Helvetia to stock up and rest before they continued their traveling.

At Sutter's Fort, Warner met Brannan and Sutter, Jr., who learned about Warner's work as a surveyor and asked him to draw up plans for a gridiron system on the desired location. Warner accepted the job, after taking a leave of absence from his party that continued to gold country. Warner was assisted in platting the terrain by fellow members of his party, Lieutenants William Tecumseh Sherman, of later U.S. military fame, particularly Sherman's March from Atlanta to Virginia, decimating those areas during the Civil War, and Edward O.C. Ord, who a year later, drew up the gridiron plan for Los Angeles, to be draftsmen associates.<sup>16</sup> The three surveyors established residence near the American River, and from December 1848 to January 1849, they created a gridiron

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15      Hallam, 31-32.

16      Hallam, 32.

plan/plat for a potential town site.<sup>17</sup> Their plan would allow Sutter, Jr. to quickly sell off his land holdings.

The gridiron plan, which became the city of Sacramento, followed a simple design. The grid is like other quickly built cities of the American West, and utilized the terrain of the American and Sacramento Rivers as cornerstone of the grid/map.<sup>18</sup> The simplicity of the grid included several streets, eighty feet wide, which met at right angles and formed square parcels. In the grid/plat, Warner labeled every street and natural features for easy reference. Streets that ran in a north-south direction were listed numerically, starting with Second Street close to the Sacramento River and increasing eastward. Front Street was listed as the principal street that ran along the Sacramento River and was already partially constructed by the Embarcadero. Streets that ran west-east were listed alphabetically, increasing southward from the curve of the mouth of the American River. A few streets were listed alphabetically northward, such as North B Street, toward the banks of the American River. One exception to the eighty foot wide streets was M Street, now Capitol Avenue, which was designed and laid out as 100 feet wide. Twenty-foot alleys were also included in the grid to alleviate future congestion issues.<sup>19</sup> Warner's grid design featured Sutter's Fort as a prominent structure in the potential city, along with the influence of the Embarcadero, the Sacramento and American Rivers, and other natural features including China Slough.

In completion of the gridiron design, over 500 square lots were drawn over the land Sutter, Jr. set aside to sell. Once Warner had shown his grid plan for the land, Sutter, Jr. approved the design and managed the sale of lots to prospective buyers. In January 1849, only a short time after the creation of the gridiron plan and Sutter, Jr.'s deed of transfer of land titles, the auctioning off parcels

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17 Ottley, 17.

18 Joseph Armstrong Baird, Jr., *Architectural Legacy of Sacramento: a Study of Nineteenth Century Style* (Sacramento, CA: *Sacramento Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3, September 1960), 193.

19 Reps, *Cities of the American West*, 209.

in Sacramento began.<sup>20</sup> In the beginning, most lots or parcels sold quickly alongside the Embarcadero and areas surrounding the fort. The sales of lots near the Embarcadero, interested business people and new residents as the core business of the town; although the grid plan did not highlight a central business sector for the new city.<sup>21</sup>

In the sales process, Sutter, Jr. and his associates began to assess the potential of the land to become a city. While writing up the city deed in 1849, Sutter included the reservation of ten square lots, measuring approximately two and a half acres, as public squares. Elsewhere in the deed, he reserved other streets and locations for the public, and organized the sale of lots to be handled by a civic government. With the city deed, Sutter, Jr. established a new community, Sacramento, out of the land his father had owned in debt. The deed allowed Sutter, Jr. to transfer the ownership of most of the land titles, except Sutter's Fort and surrounding lots and streets, to the new city of Sacramento as well as individual buyers. This effectively relieved Sutter, Jr. of his father's debt burden. Businessmen and entrepreneurs had the opportunity to buy, sell, and speculate on the sale of land and plots.<sup>22</sup> This also included Sam Brannan, who bought several plots of land after they were platted. Although Augustus was virtually able to eliminate his father's debt, there was not much profit left over on the land sales for Augustus. John Augustus Sutter, Jr. eventually left Sacramento and moved his family to Hock Farm, and then, in poor health and of little wealth, moved to Acapulco, Mexico, where he lived for his remaining years, dying in 1897.<sup>23</sup>

By the summer of 1849, however, much of the grid plan and its parcels had been bought by various purchasers, usually

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20 Ottley, 21; 27.

21 John William Reps, *The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning in the American West Before 1890* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 61.

22 Reps, *Cities of the American West*, 209.

23 Ottley, 73-74.

speculators, businesses, and residents. Sutter, Jr. saw an increase in profit for himself and the city in the management of the land. On average, in June of 1849, lots had sold for three thousand dollars compared to two hundred and fifty dollars a few months earlier. Brannan, Sutter, Jr., and other speculators became influential in the sale of lots in Sacramento and became controllers of the city over the sale of lots and land.<sup>24</sup> Order was a necessity in the recording of sales of the many lots and parcels in Sacramento. Therefore, according to Sutter Jr.'s City Deed, much of the sale of the town's lots and parcels were to be managed by a civic government.<sup>25</sup>

Within a year, a local government was established and Sacramento quickly grew into a successful city. Many of the lots sold in the first year included some form of a structure used by human activity or inhabitation. One consequence of the grid, and the increased growth of the city, was the natural and human disasters that plagued the area in the following decades. Floods, fires, and land speculations would affect the city's growth and the grid in the latter nineteenth century. This included shifting the drainage of the American River at the river's mouth, building levees along the Sacramento River, and eliminating use of the grid for most of the area north of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. The saving grace of Sacramento in the nineteenth century was the location of the State Capitol, and the significant location of the city. Over the next one hundred plus years, Sacramento continued to prosper, commercially and in population, despite the disasters that befell the city in the 1850s and 1860s, including several floods from the Sacramento and American Rivers and city-wide fires.

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24 John Frederick Morse, *The [First] History of Sacramento City*, originally written in 1853 (Sacramento, CA: Sacramento Book Collectors Club, 1945), 25.

25 Otlely, *The Sutter Family and the Origins of Gold-Rush Sacramento*, 20-21.

## THE CENTRAL CITY AND ITS PUBLIC SQUARES

The gridiron, in what would become the Central City sector of Sacramento, has influenced the landscape and image of Sacramento, including the evolution of public squares set aside by John Augustus Sutter, Jr. in 1849. The public squares in the Central City are unique to the early planning efforts of Sacramento. They are the earliest attempts of forming parks in the city. Sutter, Jr. reserved public squares in the grid plan and City Deed in 1849. The public squares were placed in almost equal distances apart from one another. This was so that residents in developed neighborhoods had access to parks or squares within close distances from their property or place of work.<sup>26</sup> Although some public squares have similar elements and facilities, no two public squares are alike in design and what is available at each site. The entire public squares share a common history as sites recognized and set aside as parks and public-use sites for the city and its residents.<sup>27</sup>

Sacramento's history with parks and other public spaces is as old as the city itself. Ten square lots were set aside in 1849, by John Augustus Sutter, Jr. in the city deed he wrote to establish the city of Sacramento and transfer ownership of land parcels he and his father had owned. These ten square lots, according to Sutter, Jr., were authorized for "the public use of the inhabitation of said City to be applied to such public purposes as the future incorporated authorities of said City from time to time declare and determine," including parks and green spaces.<sup>28</sup> By doing so, Sutter, Jr. had created the first parks in Sacramento. These parks, as a whole, would become influence the development of Sacramento's Central City neighborhoods and the psyche of its residents.

The use of parks in Sacramento, much like other urban centers, gave residents easy access to natural landscapes and green

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26 Reys, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 61-62.

27 John A. Patterson, *The Development of Public Recreation in the City of Sacramento* (M.A. Thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 1957), 3.

28 Patterson, 3.

spaces; especially important for residents who did not own property with lawns or yards. Parks and public spaces provided residents with relief from their daily lives and the stresses of the city; whether it was poor air quality, noise from traffic, or to give residents a space to engage in recreational activities. The location of parks and public spaces often coincided with the location of residential neighborhoods, where individuals and families would have easy access to open spaces. Selecting sites of parks and public spaces often followed the gridiron plan of their respected city, as was the case of Sacramento in its early years, which in turn determined the use of surrounding land for residential, civic, and commercial interests.<sup>29</sup>

The public squares in the Central City used by Sacramentans today highlight the interests of their respective neighborhoods and residents. Out of the nine existent squares, two squares provide civic and public interests, Cesar Chavez Park and Sacramento Memorial Auditorium, three squares provide tree-filled and relaxation qualities of parks, Fremont, Marshall, and Winn parks, three were built for the recreational opportunities to their neighborhoods, Grant, Roosevelt, and Stanford parks, and one square strictly provides young Sacramentans with a neighborhood playground, Muir Park. These public squares provide their respective neighborhoods access to green spaces and gathering places. All have done so for over one hundred years.

The following list includes all ten square lots, bounded by their respective streets according to the 1849 city deed, and includes their current and historical names:

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29 Gunther Paul, Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34.

| <u>Square Lot</u>  | <u>Historical/<br/>Current Name</u>       |
|--|---|
| 9 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , I and J Streets.....  | Plaza<br>Park/Cesar E. Chavez Plaza       |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , P and Q Streets.....  | (Franklin D.)<br>Roosevelt Park/Playfield |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> , 16 <sup>th</sup> , P and Q Streets..... | (John C.) Fremont Park                    |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> , P and Q Streets..... | (Alfred M.)<br>Winn Park                  |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> , I and J Streets..... | (James W.)<br>Marshall Park               |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> , 28 <sup>th</sup> , B and C Streets..... | (Leland) Stanford<br>Park/Playfield       |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> , 22 <sup>nd</sup> , B and C Streets..... | (Ulysses S.) Grant<br>Park/Playfield      |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> , 16 <sup>th</sup> , B and C Streets..... | (John C.) Muir<br>Playground              |
| 15 <sup>th</sup> , 16 <sup>th</sup> , I and J Streets..... | Sacramento<br>Memorial Auditorium         |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , B and C Streets.....  | Alkali Flat<br>Playfield (lost)           |

The nine remaining public squares are situated and are part of the neighborhood that surrounds it. For over one hundred and fifty years, these parks sometimes referred to as Sutter Park Grants, have evolved. The squares are important to the history of Sacramento's park system, and are as important as the inclusion of larger parks such as Capitol, Southside, William Land, and McKinley parks, that developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Capitol Park, constructed in the 1860s, provides a large natural landscape as a backdrop to the California Capitol Building, while also serving as a large urban park where both the public and government employees escape from their busy

lives and is also the site of civic and public events. Other large parks in Sacramento, including Southside, William Land, and McKinley parks, provide neighborhood residents open land which residents use for recreational, private, and event plans. These parks also include a public zoo at William Land Park and a public library and recreational center at McKinley Park. In all, the public squares in Sacramento's Central City continued the park movement that included public spaces, some even larger than the square parks, in the city of Sacramento as it grew into an urban center.

These public squares began a movement to increase public parks and spaces in Sacramento and gave examples of what future parks in the city could become. No matter the changes that have occurred in each public square all of the sites are as old as the city itself, and each remaining square or park has retained its purpose as a site for public use. Many of the public squares have gone through several changes since the 1850s. Public schools once existed on the sites of Marshall Park and the Memorial Auditorium, before they were demolished, as new schools were constructed elsewhere for the growing student population. The Memorial Auditorium continues as a public-use building; serving as a facility for public school graduation ceremonies, concerts, and performances. Marshall Park is not only home to a park and playground facility, but also contains a senior citizen center built in 1961. Finally, parks like Grant, Roosevelt, and Stanford contain recreation fields where residents can play sports in their centralized neighborhoods. Much more can be said for the other public squares and parks in the Central City. Although each may be different, the squares have retained their purpose as sites of public-use for the people of Sacramento.

Out of the ten public squares set aside in the City Deed of 1849, twelve according to the original 1849 gridiron plan for



Sacramento, nine public squares exist today.<sup>30</sup> In following the criteria of the urban park movement in United States history, three types of parks are evident in describing the designs and history of these public squares. The three types of parks include plazas or civic-oriented, reform parks, or recreational and play fields, and the neighborhood park. For example, Chavez Park has maintained its description as a plaza or civic-oriented park for a few key reasons: it is situated near Sacramento's civic and downtown business neighborhood, including City Hall, the federal Post Office, Public Library, and a few state government agencies and public events are hosted on the plaza's grounds, including farmer's markets, concerts, and public demonstrations. The Memorial Auditorium also qualifies as a civic public square. Fremont, Marshall, and Winn Parks qualify as neighborhood parks because they provide picturesque, tree-filled, and green grounds for public relaxation; where residents gather to enjoy quiet, tranquil moments in a bustling city, and use the sites for public events and meetings. Roosevelt, Grant, and Stanford Parks and Muir Playground are categorized as reform parks because they house recreational and playing fields. The first three each have designated space for baseball diamond fields, along with basketball courts, soccer field space, or playgrounds. Muir Park is, as mentioned before, a space reserved for playground equipment and activities for young children.

The public squares are influential spaces to their respective neighborhoods. They provide residents and citizens an opportunity to commune with both an urban and country environment in centralized locations. As neighborhood parks, these squares also provide local residents with a place to gather and discuss events, become involved in business and recreational activities, and get to know the people and places around them. Today, six of the

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30 "Reprint of the 1849 "Plan of Sacramento City, State of California." Map/plans can be found at the Sacramento Room archival center, Sacramento Public Library.

public squares are located within historic districts according to the Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources: Grant Park, Cesar Chavez Park/Plaza, Fremont Park, Marshall Park, the Memorial Auditorium, and Winn Park.<sup>31</sup> These six public squares provide a park to their respective historic districts and the development of their neighborhoods. The presence of all nine public squares is influential to the development and history of the Central City and its many neighborhoods. These influences include green spaces, sites for public gatherings, local events, markets, and concerts, fields for youth and adult sports, and open areas to alleviate the congestion of the city. The open, public spaces are ideal because they are situated in Sacramento's urban center and cut out of the imposing gridiron plan of the city.

## CONCLUSION

Sacramento's Central City grid plan and public squares are significant features in the history of the city. The grid and the public squares are tied to the establishment of Sacramento, and have been continuously influenced by the changes of the city throughout its history. The existent public squares continue to serve the purpose that John Augustus Sutter, Jr. assigned for them. Each public square has served the visitors and residents of Sacramento for generations, providing an escape to parks and open spaces. Each park or public square has its own history and contribution to its respective neighborhood and the city. Its history involved; sites of public schools, the Capitol building, business opportunities, civic and neighborhood pride, architectural and landscape creativity, and relaxation and recreation activities. As a whole, the public squares were the first attempt to provide Sacramento with parks and public spaces as part of the planning for a growing city. These spaces influenced the development and use of other parks in Sacramento,

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31 City of Sacramento. *Sacramento Register of Historic and Cultural Resources* (Sacramento, CA: Department of Community Development, December 2011), 122, 150, 152, 154, 156, 178.

parcs large and small for purposes of neighborhood recreation, zoos, senior centers, wildlife habitats, and libraries. It is the history of these public squares, along with their individual and collective histories, that started the movement to include parks and public spaces in urban planning efforts in Sacramento.

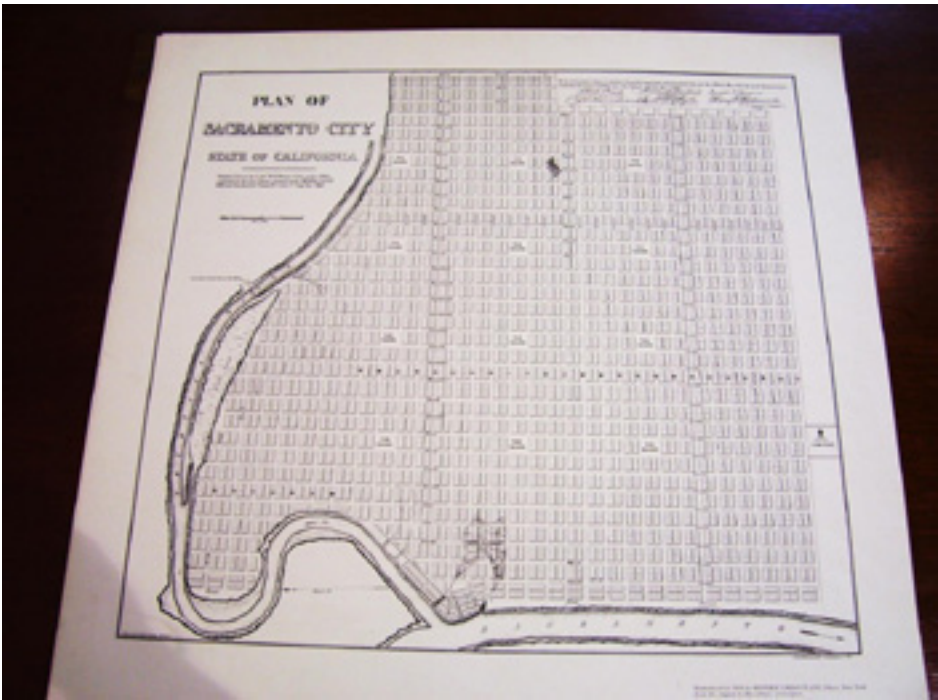


Figure 1: “Photograph copy of the Reprint of the 1849 “Plan of Sacramento City, State of California.”

The plan identifies twelve city blocks as ‘public squares,’ equally spaced out in the grid. Ten public squares visible in the plan were named by John Sutter, Jr. in the City Deed of 1849 as sites for future public uses.

*Photo taken by Michael Kremer, April 24, 2011. Copyright approval by staff at the Sacramento Room archival center, Sacramento Public Library.*



WEBSITE REVIEW:  
 AMERICA'S BLACK HOLOCAUST  
 MUSEUM

<http://www.abhmuseum.org>

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Public service is one of the main duties of the museum. Building on this notion, America's Black Holocaust Museum (ABHM) serves as an important instrument in informing and educating the public on an often neglected portion of America's history. Focused on the long history of injustices brought against African-Americans in the United States, the museum aims to present what it has termed "America's Black Holocaust," beginning with the capture and enslavement of Africans through the lynchings of the twentieth century. ABHM was forced to close its doors in 2008; however, it was reborn four years later as a virtual museum existing exclusively on the internet. Although it lacks a physical location, this newfound form has not hindered the museum's message, but rather it has allowed the museum to serve the public in a greater way by making use of the vast capabilities of the internet. By embracing a topic often avoided by mainstream America, the user-friendly website for America's Black Holocaust Museum serves as an educational tool for the masses.

Dr. James Cameron, the only known survivor of a

lynching, founded ABHM in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1984. He developed the museum as both a place of remembrance for the African-Americans who have lost their lives as a result of the “Black Holocaust” and as a way of spreading knowledge about the injustices brought against African-Americans throughout the history of the United States. After operating out of a storefront for four years, the museum acquired a freestanding building in 1988 and continued to grow and gain recognition. According to the website, the museum had an annual attendance of 25,000 visitors, but after the death of its founder in 2006 and the hardships endured during the economic downturn of the mid-2000s, the museum was forced to close in 2008. However, in February 2012, ABHM took a new form; it became a virtual museum. ABHM currently has a board of directors, expert advisors, media developers, and a single staff member, some of who are professors at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Volunteers helped to restore life to ABHM by creating the website and uploading a plethora of information about the museum and its founders along with a series of exhibits on the history of slavery and black life in the United States.

After accessing the user-friendly website, the visitor is immediately presented with the museum’s mission statement and an introductory video. The statement reads, “To educate the public about the ongoing injustices endured by people of African heritage in America” with its goal being to “provide guests with opportunities to rethink their assumptions about race and racism.” This statement immediately makes it clear this site intends to be educational and thought-provoking. Alongside the mission statement is an introductory video. After clicking the “play” button, the head griot (a West African word for “story teller” or “oral historian”) begins to explain the website’s history, layout, and general purpose. The man explains how to navigate the site and, by talking *to* the visitor rather than *at* them, gives visitors a welcoming sense they are entering a different new space. The

layout of the page is simple and user-friendly. Along the top of the page, there are five tabs the visitor has the option of clicking on: About ABHM, Galleries, Resources, Contribute, and Breaking News. Clicking on a tab presents other options.

The "Galleries" tab has the main contents of this virtual museum with several different options. The visitor has a choice of seven different galleries to enter ranging from "African People Before Captivity" to "NOW- Free at Last?" After choosing a gallery, guests arrive at a new page with more information on the topic and, in most cases, a YouTube-hosted video created by ABHM to provide the visitor a more interactive and entertaining experience. Following the text, a number of exhibit links tie in with each gallery topic. The links open new exhibits which each display a number of photographs and are accompanied by an in-depth discussion of the subject and extensive historical context for the artifacts and photographs.

ABHM is, without a doubt, still a work in progress. Many of the pages have broken links or proclaim "Some Exhibits to Come." Additionally, the museum lacks other interactive material. Guests can choose where they would like to go within the virtual museum, but there is not much to hold the visitors attention; the website is mostly text and small, low-resolution photographs. Without the museum-produced videos explaining the virtual museum qualities of the page, this site could easily be mistaken for an average teaching tool or historical website. It can be difficult to see how this website can be called a museum especially since it lacks a physical structure.

Although the museum lacks large, photographed collections, its main focus is education on a very sensitive subject. While most museums try to avoid controversial and touchy subjects, ABHM embraces and focuses directly on one. The website mimics the visitor actually entering a physical space and interacting with real docents, videos, and textual supplements encouraging guests to think critically about what the African-

American experience has been like. Sparking feelings in the same vein as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum through presenting first-hand stories and materials, ABHM can at times make guests feel uncomfortable while at the same time educating them on a great injustice.

Following new museum theory, ABHM fosters participation within the virtual museum. They open up each page to comments, highlighting this aspect in the introductory video on the main page, and give each visitor the opportunity to share their story about the founder or their own personal stories about a lynching victim. Not all interactive functions work at this time, but the idea is outstanding and hopefully will expand over the years. By asking for public participation, they allow the visitor to feel connected to the exhibits, and they make the visitor a part of the exhibit.

Despite being online for less than a year, ABHM has created an educational, exciting, and easy to use virtual museum though not without some flaws. By bringing up issues often ignored and forgotten, ABHM intends to reshape the way the general public views black history. The museum intends to make information not always easily accessible available to people all around the world at all hours of the day. To improve the reception and enjoyment of the public, the website would benefit from additional interactive features. Reggie Jackson, the head griot of the museum, states clearly while welcoming the visitor to the website, "This page is your doorway into American events - sights and sounds that are rarely found in our history books but are fundamental to our understanding of ourselves as a nation."