



# EAST BAY HISTORIA

VOLUME 10 ◆ 2026

# EAST BAY HISTORIA



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Dedicated to the thinkers and curious minds.

“Curiosity as restless questioning, as movement toward the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive. There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making.”

**Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed***

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# FOREWORD

Luana Beltramini Vilela, Editor-in-Chief

The tenth edition of *East Bay Historia* comes at a time when history is being questioned, restricted, and even erased in some places. Across schools and public spaces, certain stories are labeled controversial or dangerous simply because they challenge dominant narratives. In this context, writing, editing, and publishing this journal is more than an academic task; it is an act of resistance. Choosing to study, write, and share history is a way of saying that these stories matter and that they deserve to be told.

This edition reflects our continued commitment to making space for voices that have too often been ignored. The research featured here takes readers from California to the American South to China, showing that the struggle over memory and representation happens across regions and cultures. Together, these works remind us that history is not distant or abstract. It shapes the way we understand our communities and ourselves. The range of topics explored in this volume highlights the depth and importance of historical study. Articles examine African American culture, Native American representation, mental health, fashion, and feminism, among other subjects. Each author demonstrates how careful historical analysis helps us better understand systems of power, identity, and change. Their work shows that history lives not only in major events, but also in everyday experiences and cultural expression.

This edition also includes a special oral history section and a collection of book reviews, expanding the ways we engage

with the past. The oral histories preserve personal experiences that might otherwise be lost, while the reviews encourage thoughtful conversation about recent scholarship.

This journal would not have been possible without the dedication and care of many people. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our editorial board for their thoughtful work and commitment throughout the process, and to the authors whose research, passion, and trust made this edition possible. I am especially thankful to Dr. Anna Rose for her continued guidance and support. We are also grateful to Professor Josh Funk's Digital Illustration course at Chico State, whose creativity and collaboration contributed to bringing this edition to life. Together, these contributions strengthen our shared mission: to protect, question, and share history in meaningful ways. As you turn these pages, we invite you to read not only with curiosity, but with the understanding that engaging with history is itself a powerful act, and that the stories preserved here are part of a larger, ongoing conversation that needs your voice too. ♦



*Illustration by Alan Buell, Chico State*

## RESEARCH ESSAYS

# THE “CRAZIEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD”: THE ORIGINS OF MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT IN EARLY CALIFORNIA, 1850–1900

Margaret Balk

**Abstract:** This paper examines the early history of mental health treatment in California between 1850 and 1900, focusing on the Stockton Insane Asylum—the first institution of its kind west of the Mississippi—and the complex social, legal, and medical forces that shaped it. Using the case of Rev. W. F. B. Lynch—a prominent Alameda County educator, Presbyterian minister, and community leader, who was repeatedly institutionalized there—we explore how race, class, gender, and family structure served as protective factors against the damaging effects of the stigma of insanity. Rev. Lynch’s

experience is situated within the broader historiographical debate about whether asylums were inherently repressive or humanitarian institutions, while highlighting California's unique context: explosive population growth, broad commitment laws, and limited social safety nets. Ultimately, Rev. Lynch's case demonstrates the need to move beyond reductive victim-versus-beneficiary frameworks and instead examine the nuanced lived experiences of institutionalized individuals.

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When Rev. W. F. B. Lynch was apprehended in November 1882, he believed himself to be a train. “He utters all the sounds which emanate from an engine and train, and walks with a gliding movement, as if rolling along a track,” the *Oakland Tribune* wrote the next day, adding, “He is very noisy at times, but not violent.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this was a manifestation of Mr. Lynch's fears about being “railroaded” and taken to the state's first mental institution, the Stockton Insane Asylum, where he was committed at least three times over a twenty-year period.<sup>2</sup> However, in spite of his volatile mental illness, Lynch remained a respected member of his community, serving multiple terms as superintendent of schools in Alameda County, as well as on the local and State Board of Education for decades. He was also well-known as a talented elocutionist and was a favorite among the youth in the area, frequently officiating at their weddings.<sup>3</sup>



- 1 “The Third Time,” *Oakland Tribune*, November 13, 1882, California Digital Newspaper Collection.
- 2 Department of Mental Hygiene—Hospitals, “W. F. B. Lynch,” in *Stockton State Hospital Commitment Registers, Vol. 7–8, 1875–1886*, vol. 7–8, 34 vols. (Sacramento, CA, 1878), 325; Department of Mental Hygiene—Hospitals, “W. F. B. Lynch,” in *Stockton State Hospital Commitment Registers, Vol. 7–8, 1875–1886*, vol. 7–8, 34 vols. (Sacramento, CA, 1879), 391; Department of Mental Hygiene—Hospitals, “W. F. B. Lynch,” in *Stockton State Hospital Commitment Registers, Vol. 7–8, 1875–1886*, vol. 7–8, 34 vols. (Sacramento, CA, 1882), 693.
- 3 “Aged Pedagogue Called to Rest. W. F. B. Lynch Dies at the Residence of His Daughter,” *San Francisco Call*, August 27, 1901, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

This is not to say that he escaped the stigma that inevitably accompanied any “deviant” behavior. Correspondence by one of his neighbors, Lucy Ellen Shinn, describes a visit Mrs. Lynch received from ladies in town, during which they insulted her husband, told her that if she would just “pray as she ought and live as she ought, that God would not afflict her so,” and claimed that everyone in town said their son Harry was “just like his Father and that everyone thought he would be crazy some time.”<sup>4</sup> This was a common experience for many individuals sent away to an insane asylum, even for a brief period of time; a commitment often led to a downward spiral in social and economic mobility and stability due to the stigma attached to mental illness.<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Lynch’s case seems to have been something of an exception, as he maintained a certain elevated social status in his community despite his issues with his mental health. For example, in the fall of 1875, Mr. Lynch won a very close and contested election for Alameda County Superintendent of Education. The night the polls closed, while he presumably anxiously awaited the results, Mr. Lynch was found wandering the streets in the early hours of the morning, “talking quite incoherently.”<sup>6</sup> He was taken to the jail and placed “in the apartment usually assigned to female prisoners,” presumably because it offered him more comforts, as the line between insanity and criminality was a very blurry and contested one.<sup>7</sup> However, he remained agitated, and proceeded to tear down the gas fixtures in the room, forcing the officers to move him to a cell in the general population so that he would not suffocate. The next day, after being examined by a medical commission, he was sent away for treatment to somewhere in San Francisco.<sup>8</sup> This same series of events would occur again and again over the ensuing years, with periods of relative calm in his personal, professional, and spiritual life juxtaposed against “attacks of insanity” and

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4 Lucy Clark Shinn to Milicent Washburn Shinn, June 13, 1879, Internet Archive.

5 Angela Hawk, “Going ‘Mad’ in Gold Country: Migrant Populations and the Problem of Containment in Pacific Mining Boom Regions,” *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (2011): 95.

6 “Oakland Matters,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, March 18, 1876, San Francisco Chronicle Historical Archive.

7 Hawk, “Going ‘Mad’ in Gold Country,” 65, 85, 96.

8 “Oakland Matters.”

feverish activity, sometimes followed by several weeks to months in an insane asylum. However, during those calmer periods, he remained very active in his community: attending meetings of the Presbytery of San Jose, founding a college of science and industry, serving as superintendent of schools for Alameda County for many years, followed by several decades of work with the State and County Boards of Education.<sup>9</sup>

7  
 One's experience in the asylum was heavily dependent on several factors: patients who were living in poverty or of a lower class, an immigrant or minority, or unmarried or lacking social support tended to have the worst outcomes from the "treatment" they received in asylums.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, Mr. Lynch possessed many of the protective factors laid out by scholars on the subject: He was a white male from a similar cultural background as the asylum superintendents (i.e., educated, Protestant, and from the Northeast or Midwestern United States), and he was married, with a wife and several children to support him. Although many scholars have noted that it was most often family members who requested a patient be admitted to the asylum,<sup>11</sup> Mr. Lynch's role as the head of the household would have served as an additional "protective" factor: not only were families more reluctant to send their male relatives to mental hospitals for a variety of financial and social reasons, but doctors were often reluctant to place the permanent "taint" of insanity onto men.<sup>12</sup> Thus, families would put up with disruptive, undesirable behavior from their male relatives for longer periods of time out of economic necessity, due to legal hurdles, or to spare their reputation and ability to find employment.<sup>13</sup> This pattern bore

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9 "Aged Pedagogue Called to Rest. W. F. B. Lynch Dies at the Residence of His Daughter."

10 Gerald N. Grob, "Class, Ethnicity, and Race in American Mental Hospitals, 1830–75," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 28, no. 3 (1973): 229.

11 Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: Routledge, 2008), xxi–xxii.

12 Richard Wightman Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind: Insanity in California, 1870–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 10; Constance M. McGovern, "The Myths of Social Control and Custodial Oppression: Patterns of Psychiatric Medicine in Late Nineteenth-Century Institutions," *Journal of Social History* 20, no. 1 (1986): 8–12; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Rev. ed., *New Lines in Criminology* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002), xlvii; Eileen V. Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 19.

13 Grob, "Class, Ethnicity, and Race in American Mental Hospitals, 1830–75"; Hiroshi Maeda, "The Discovery of Mental Hospital Patients: A Historical Epidemiology of Institutionalization in the American North, 1880–1920," *Social Science History* 40, no. 3 (2016): 463–90; McGovern, "The Myths of Social Control and Custodial Oppression," 8.

out in Mr. Lynch's life: His odd, eccentric behavior was generally tolerated by his family and the community; it was not until he became more disruptive and violent that he was apprehended and sometimes committed.

To better understand patients'—like Mr. Lynch's—complex relationship with the asylum, I will first provide an overview of the central argument in the literature about mental institutions; then I will focus more on the historiography of California's mental institution system; and finally, I will consider possible future research directions.

### Insane Asylums: Humanitarian or Repressive?

The historiography of insane asylums grapples with a central question: What is the inherent, essential nature of these institutions, and what is their role in society? Scholars in one camp—frequently associated with historian David J. Rothman—argue that insane asylums are inherently repressive and that they inevitably devolve into neglectful custodialism. Conversely, the other camp—epitomized by Gerald N. Grob—argues that insane asylums are inherently humanitarian institutions. Here, patients could access treatment and basic care that they would not necessarily be able to find in their home communities—though the realization of these lofty goals was often fraught with challenges.

In his seminal work on the subject, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (1971), Rothman argues that the rise of insane asylums and other social regulatory institutions in early nineteenth-century America aimed at controlling and containing “inconvenient” or “bothersome” individuals. Rothman supports this assertion by highlighting the disproportionate representation of the lower classes, the poor, and the foreign-born in insane asylums.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, there emerged a clear pattern of escalating confinement and segregation of those deemed deviant, disruptive, or disturbing.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of these institutions of

14 Maeda, “The Discovery of Mental Hospital Patients,” 464, 484; Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, xxviii–xxx.

15 Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, xxix–xxx.

confinement was to impose a sense of order and routine upon their inmates, through dedication to steady labor and solitude, with the hope that they would then be reformed into productive members of society.<sup>16</sup>

9

Meanwhile, in his two-volume series on the subject—*Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (1972) and *Mental Illness and American Society, 1875–1940* (1983)—Grob presents a contrasting argument for the humanitarian nature of asylums and their creators. While acknowledging that asylums often fell far short of this ideal, Grob emphasizes the positive impact these institutions had on patients and their families.<sup>17</sup> To underscore the humane aspects of asylums, Grob points to the prevalence of elderly individuals in mental institutions by the early twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> He interprets asylums as akin to “old-age homes,” providing essential (if minimal) care and shelter to senile and disabled individuals, at a time when few alternatives existed.<sup>19</sup> Grob adopts an empathetic perspective towards the efforts of early psychiatrists and asylum superintendents, recognizing that “our predecessors...grappled—so often in partial and unsuccessful ways, as we still do ourselves—with their own distinct problems.”<sup>20</sup> Despite these shortcomings, in Grob’s view, asylums did benefit at least a certain subset of the patients who came through their doors.

Despite their divergent perspectives on the function of mental institutions in society, both camps agreed on one crucial point: the existing system of insane asylums had failed many of its patients.<sup>21</sup> Beginning in the 1950s and accelerating with the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, mental institutions underwent a gradual shutdown as part of the deinstitutionalization process. Patients were ostensibly meant to receive treatment in their home communities—though whether

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16 Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, xxx.

17 Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875*, xiv.

18 Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875*, xiv–xxiii; Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Illness and American Society, 1875–1940* (Princeton University Press, 1983), xi, 3–5; Maeda, “The Discovery of Mental Hospital Patients,” 464, 484.

19 Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875*, xiv–xxiii; Grob, *Mental Illness and American Society, 1875–1940*, xi, 3–5; Maeda, “The Discovery of Mental Hospital Patients,” 464, 484.

20 Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875*, xxiii.

21 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 2.

their home communities were ready or willing to receive them is another story entirely.<sup>22</sup>

### Historiography of California Mental Institutions: Therapeutic Custodialism?

California emerged on the mental health landscape a half-century after asylums first started appearing in the eastern United States, introducing an interesting nuance to this discussion. Literature exploring the early stages of California's mental health system reflects the familiar dichotomy between the humanitarian and repressive tendencies. This same tension can be seen in Mr. Lynch's story, underscoring the complexities inherent in the state's approach to mental health care.

Not long after becoming a state in 1850, California developed a notorious reputation for being home to the "craziest people in the world."<sup>23</sup> From the 1870s to the 1920s, California had the highest rate of insane asylum commitments in the United States.<sup>24</sup> According to the 1870 census, despite having only one mental institution, California had the second-highest proportion of insane residents in the country, with one in every 489 Californians being counted as insane.<sup>25</sup> By the 1880 census, California emerged as the clear "winner," with one in every 345 residents being insane—quite a feat for a state that had only been in existence for three decades.<sup>26</sup>

One important contributing factor to this dramatic statistic was California's exponential population growth during the mid-nineteenth century, due in large part to the discovery of gold in 1848 and the subsequent Gold Rush. Between 1850 and 1860 alone, the population surged by a staggering 310.3 percent.<sup>27</sup> At mid-century, California's population was only 92,597—by 1900, the population was more than sixteen times as large,

22 Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, xx.

23 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 18.

24 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 18.

25 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 18.

26 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 18.

27 William C. Hunt, "Population of California by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions," *Census Bulletin, Twelfth Census of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Census Bureau, October 24, 1900), 1.



As early as 1851, it became clear that *ad hoc* solutions at the local level were insufficient to address the needs of California's indigent sick, disabled, and mentally ill residents. Consequently, the California state legislature was compelled to pass resolutions to fund three public state hospitals: one in San Francisco, California's main population center; one in Sacramento, the state's legislative center; and one in Stockton, then only a small rural town, but one that was strategically connected to both San Francisco and Sacramento by waterways and later railroads.<sup>30</sup> Initially designed as primarily medical hospitals, these institutions soon allocated designated "insane" wards to accommodate patients with mental illnesses.<sup>31</sup> Within just a few years, however, accusations of financial mismanagement and inadequate housing for patients led to a restructuring in 1853. This led to the transformation of the state general hospital system into a county hospital system, as well as the designation of the Stockton institution as the state's first insane asylum.<sup>32</sup> Stockton was thought to be an ideal location for an insane asylum due to its rural location and distance from the disturbance of the cities.<sup>33</sup> Urban life was believed to exacerbate mental health issues, and the asylum would remove these disturbed (and sometimes disturbing) individuals from the rest of society, where their presence threatened social order due



30 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 24–26.

31 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 25; Stuart A. Brody, "Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years: 1849–1853," *Psychiatric Quarterly Supplement* 38, no. 2 (1964): 272.

32 Brody, "Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years," 267–68; Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 22–26.

33 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 31.

to their inability or unwillingness to participate in capitalistic production.<sup>34</sup> In late 1853, the Stockton Insane Asylum—later the Stockton State Hospital—began accepting patients from not only all parts of California, but also from other Western territories. It was the first mental institution west of the Mississippi River and would remain the only such institution in California until the Napa State Hospital began accepting patients in late 1875.<sup>35</sup> Before the end of the institution's first ten years, it had already become woefully overcrowded: in his annual report to the California legislature in 1858, the Resident Physician reported the asylum held 260 patients, exceeding the institution's maximum capacity of 250 patients.<sup>36</sup> Just a few years later, in 1861, the patient census had swelled to 434; and by 1869, the Resident Physician lamented in his annual report about having to make "between 300 and 400 beds ... on the floor every night" because of severe overcrowding.<sup>37</sup>

But why were so many people seemingly losing their minds when they migrated to California? Physicians and laypeople alike at the time had a number of theories as to the cause of this statistic: from the long ocean voyage to California, which exposed passengers to all manner of "morally damaging ideas and experiences"; to the prevalence of vice—drinking, gambling, violence—and absence of traditional social support networks on the Western frontier; to the imbalanced sex ratio leading to male celibacy and the related "conditions" of masturbation and spermatorrhea; to the overstimulating effect of California's climate on the nervous system.<sup>38</sup> It was also widely believed that urban environments led to higher rates of insanity, although this was more likely related to the probability of an insane individual encountering local authorities who could compel them to be confined to an institution of social control.<sup>39</sup>

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34 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 7, 31.

35 Michael T. Savino and Alden B. Mills, "The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry: 1852–1870," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 3, no. 4 (1967): 360; Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 25, 65.

36 "Insane Asylum Statistics," *Sacramento Daily Union*, August 5, 1858, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

37 Savino and Mills, "The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry," 365–66.

38 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 19–25; Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 23.

39 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 4–7.

More recent scholarships have generally settled on two factors: the lack of social support and California's (overly) broad commitment laws. Many of the early migrants to arrive in California during the Gold Rush were young men from diverse backgrounds and cultures, all seeking fortune but often failing to achieve it. In the event of a mental health episode in this unfamiliar land, individuals found themselves isolated from the traditional support structures that would care for them in their time of need—their family, their community, and the church.<sup>40</sup> Asylums were typically seen as last resort options by politicians, patients' families, and patients themselves, and families would care for their mentally ill relatives until it became too much of a stressor on the rest of the family.<sup>41</sup> However, in California, where migrants often lacked familial support networks, options were more limited. The alternatives—allowing these vulnerable individuals to continue to wander the streets or incarcerating them for vagrancy with common criminals—posed a number of issues. In the absence of alternative institutions, such as almshouses or poor farms, California asylums became the *de facto* social safety net for a wide array of individuals deemed odd, eccentric, immoral, or disruptive.

Perhaps more impactful were California's broad and vague commitment laws, which led to the state institutionalizing more individuals for a wider range of issues than did similar institutions in the eastern United States.<sup>42</sup> California passed its first law regarding the commitment of mentally ill or disabled individuals in 1853, which allowed a county judge, "upon the application of any person under oath and after the examination by two reputable physicians," to send someone to the insane asylum.<sup>43</sup> Until the 1897 passage of a new "Lunacy Law," commitment hearings were done in open court, sometimes even in

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40 Grob, *Mental Illness and American Society, 1875–1940*, 3; Abraham S. Luchins, "The Cult of Curability and the Doctrine of Perfectibility: Social Context of the Nineteenth-Century American Asylum Movement," *History of Psychiatry* 3, no. 10 (June 1992): 205–6; Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 24.

41 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 10; McGovern, "The Myths of Social Control and Custodial Oppression," 8, 15; Constance M. McGovern, "The Community, the Hospital, and the Working-Class Patient: The Multiple Uses of Asylum in Nineteenth-Century America," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 54, no. 1 (1987): 19–22; Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, xlvii.

42 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 23; Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 19–25.

43 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 30.

front of a jury of the accused's peers.<sup>44</sup> While the decision to institutionalize ultimately lay in the hands of the courts during the latter half of the nineteenth century, they were often more than happy to go along with the doctors' recommendations if it meant removing a troublesome individual from the community.<sup>45</sup> Officials boasted that California institutions never refused admission to "any person who has sought to enter her asylum."<sup>46</sup> Medical professionals may have also felt incentivized to embellish the size of California's insane population in order to secure much-needed state funding to construct more asylums.<sup>47</sup> This eagerness to create these custodial institutions may have been driven by California's need to prove itself: the young state wanted to increase its prestige and become a leader in progressive social reforms.<sup>48</sup> Some even claimed that California's high rate of institutionalization was the "sign of a superior civilization"—in caring for both residents and these "unfortunate strangers," California was "not only 'civilized, but, to the highest degree, humanized.'"<sup>49</sup>

However, by 1862, California asylum superintendents were already bemoaning their custodial role, writing that asylums had become "the receptacle for all forms of human wreckage," a "dumping ground for the off-scourings of creation."<sup>50</sup> They complained that courts frequently sent them individuals who were not best treated in an asylum environment—indigent patients suffering from old age, infirmity, substance use—contributing to overcrowding and limiting doctors' ability to treat their mentally disordered patients who showed the most promising signs of recovery and a return to usefulness.<sup>51</sup>

The first generation of asylum superintendents initially approached the treatment of insanity with enthusiasm and optimism, believing that it was only a matter of time before

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44 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 39.

45 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 38–47.

46 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 19.

47 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 22.

48 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 23.

49 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 25.

50 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 41, 45.

51 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 42.

major scientific discoveries made a cure possible.<sup>52</sup> However, as the nineteenth century wore on with asylums becoming increasingly crowded with a growing population of “incurable” chronic patients, this optimism waned.<sup>53</sup> The following generation of superintendents abandoned claims of curability, as the challenges posed by overcrowded institutions and heterogeneous patient populations made it impossible for physicians to develop the rapport necessary for treatment to be successful.<sup>54</sup> Simultaneously, medical opinions about the cause of mental illness shifted over the course of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, many physicians believed that mental illness was an “organic” disorder, acquired through inherited conditions and inadequate upbringing.<sup>55</sup> With the absence of effective treatments, custodialism became widely accepted as the only viable option.<sup>56</sup>

California’s entry into mental health care diverged significantly from its Eastern counterparts. Eastern asylums, some established since the late eighteenth century, had typically started as smaller cottage-style institutions able to provide individualized care to all their patients, before “declining” into custodialism as their patient population continued growing past what the institution could handle.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, from the beginning, California’s asylums were designed to be both treatment and detention facilities for the mentally disturbed.<sup>58</sup> Though Californian asylum superintendents attempted to follow the humanitarian moral treatment regimen employed in Eastern institutions, they were quickly overwhelmed by the number of patients and by their diverse backgrounds and presenting issues.<sup>59</sup> Moral treatment called for removing patients from

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52 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 14.

53 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 14.

54 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 14; Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 365.

55 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 14–15; Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 365–69.

56 Eric T. Carlson and Norman Dain, “The Meaning of Moral Insanity,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 36, no. 2 (1962): 138–39; Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 15–17, 28–29; Michael T. Savino and Stuart A. Brody, “Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals: 1852–1954,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 15, no. 5 (November 1966): 483; Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 365–69.

57 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 17.

58 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 17.

59 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 18.

their home environments that may have contributed to their poor mental health and placing them in a warm, familial atmosphere where they would participate in occupational therapy, religious exercises, games, and other amusements, all while receiving kind, compassionate treatment from staff.<sup>60</sup> While surprisingly progressive to our modern sensibilities, moral treatment was only effective if a number of criteria were met: patients and staff shared similar religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; caseloads remained small so that patients and staff could form the therapeutic relationships necessary for healing; patients received treatment shortly after the onset of their symptoms; the asylum had strong, charismatic leadership that instilled a sense of purpose in the staff; and the institution received adequate funding from the government and other sources.<sup>61</sup> Unlike Eastern states, where separate institutions had developed organically over decades to house the poor (almshouses and poor farms), the criminal (jails and prisons), as well as the insane (mental institutions), California had to scramble to figure out how to contain the various groups of “deviants,” thus making effective treatment challenging.<sup>62</sup>

Relatively little scholarship has been written about the development of the mental health care system in California; the bulk of literature about the insane asylum movement in America during the nineteenth century focuses on institutions along the Atlantic seaboard and in the Midwest.<sup>63</sup> Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when the deinstitutionalization movement was in full swing, scholars began investigating the legacy of California’s mental hospital system, some funded by the California Department of Mental Hygiene (CDMH).<sup>64</sup>

Most notably, historian Richard W. Fox’s 1978 book, *So Far*

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60 Joseph P. Morrissey and Howard H. Goldman, “Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill in the United States: Historical Developments and Reforms,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 484 (1986): 14–15.

61 Morrissey and Goldman, “Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill in the United States,” 15.

62 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 22, 37.

63 E.g., Ellen Dwyer, *Homes for the Mad: Life inside Two Nineteenth-Century Asylums* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Gerald N. Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History of Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830–1920* (University of North Carolina Press, 1966); etc.

64 Brody, “Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California’s Early Years”; Savino and Brody, “Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals”; Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry”; Warren F. Webb and Stuart A. Brody, “The California Gold Rush and the Mentally Ill,” *Southern California Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1968): 43–50.

*Disordered in Mind: Insanity in California, 1870–1930*, provides a thorough analysis of the evolution of the state’s commitment system, from the lens of the social, institutional, professional, and legal networks that determined who would be confined to a mental institution. After surveying the general developments in the state prior to the turn of the twentieth century, Fox focuses much of his analysis on the period between 1906 and 1929, examining a sample of about 1,200 court cases out of the over 12,000 individuals who were sent to insane asylums during that period, in order to better understand who was being committed, by whom, and for what reasons.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps most shocking were his findings about San Francisco’s conviction rate of individuals charged with insanity: Between 1873 and 1885, an average of 69 percent of those charged with insanity were committed to an asylum. Starting in 1886, though, something changed—that year, 79 percent of those examined for insanity were committed, and two years later, that figure was up to 86 percent. By 1889, 97 percent of those individuals formally accused of insanity were convicted of it.<sup>66</sup> Fox argues that because of the rapid expansion of California’s population, and because the state had to build its mental health care system from the ground up, the state’s asylums were doomed from the start to be custodial—not curative—institutions. He also found that as much as “two-thirds of all those committed were odd, peculiar, or simply immoral individuals who displayed no symptoms indicating serious disability, or violent or destructive tendencies.”<sup>67</sup> Fox attributes the exponentially increasing rates of individuals judged “insane” in nineteenth-century California to the spread of capitalism, the onset of industrialization, and the acceptance of the bourgeois value system.<sup>68</sup> Individuals who previously would have been cared for by their local communities were now seen as threats to the social order for their “willful” lack of productivity and failure to contribute labor to the capitalistic “marketplace.”<sup>69</sup>

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65 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 38.

66 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 48.

67 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 148.

68 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 12–13.

69 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 13.

While psychiatrists and reformers were optimistic about their ability to cure insanity in the early part of the nineteenth century, by the latter part of the century that enthusiasm had faded— asylums were overflowing with patients who did not respond to the primary treatment of the time (moral treatment), and as the populations of these institutions became more diverse, it became impossible for psychiatrists to effectively treat a large portion of that population.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, the discipline's views shifted, and insanity was seen as an organic problem, not a “functional” impairment, and thus custodial care was the only “treatment” possible for these individuals.<sup>71</sup> Psychiatrists enthusiastically promoted each new innovation in treatment—from moral treatment, to custodial asylums, to urban psychopathic wards for short-term treatment—and Fox cynically observes that “such professional enthusiasm appears to arise whenever a self-conscious group of professional reformers seeks to justify, and obtain public financing for, institutional innovations.”<sup>72</sup>

Stuart A. Brody published several articles<sup>73</sup> focused on the years between 1849 and 1853, tracing the earliest stages of California's response to the challenges posed by the care of the mentally ill.<sup>74</sup> The first official action taken to address the “problem” of the mentally ill took place in 1849, when San Francisco's town council arranged for the city's criminals—and its insane—to be held on board a stranded ship in San Francisco's harbor, the *Euphemia*.<sup>75</sup> This would be the state of affairs until two years later, in 1851, when the *Euphemia* had become landlocked by wharves and buildings.<sup>76</sup> By that time, it was clear that these quarters were inadequate for mentally ill patients, and that a more organized and official response was necessary, prompting legislative action to fund the construction

70 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 14.

71 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 14–15.

72 Fox, *So Far Disordered in Mind*, 15.

73 Brody, “Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years”; Savino and Brody, “Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals”; Webb and Brody, “The California Gold Rush and the Mentally Ill.”

74 Brody, “Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years.”

75 Brody, “Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years,” 263; Webb and Brody, “The California Gold Rush and the Mentally Ill,” 43–44.

76 Brody, “Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years,” 263; Webb and Brody, “The California Gold Rush and the Mentally Ill,” 43–44.

of three hospitals that would care for the state's physically and mentally ill.<sup>77</sup> Brody concludes that California's "care for the mentally ill made outstanding progress" during the first four years of the state's existence and asserts that Stockton Insane Asylum was designed to treat mental disorders and return patients to the community as rapidly as possible.<sup>78</sup>

Another researcher, Michael T. Savino, published several papers through the CDMH.<sup>79</sup> In 1966, Brody and Savino analyzed the death and discharge rates of patients from California state hospitals between 1852 and 1954. The authors were surprised to discover that discharge rates during the first twenty years of the institution's existence (1852 – 1870) were most comparable to modern figures,<sup>80</sup> with 23.5 percent of those admitted to state hospitals released after three months (compared to 33.8 percent in 1954).<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, between 1900 and 1910, only nine percent were released after three months, and only 27.7 percent after one year.<sup>82</sup> This trend, though surprising from a commonsensical point of view, mirrors the fluctuations between optimism and pessimism of the psychiatric profession that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>83</sup> Physicians in the 1850s and 1860s were generally optimistic about the curability of mental illnesses, especially if treated during the early stages.<sup>84</sup> However, starting around the time of the Civil War, it became clear that asylum superintendents could not achieve the same high recovery rates boasted by the first generation of superintendents. The accumulation of "chronic" or "incurable" patients fostered psychiatrists' growing pessimism about their ability to help certain classes of patients; in their annual reports, superintendents of the Stockton State Hospital described these patients as "inheriting an ancestral

77 Brody, "Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years," 263; Webb and Brody, "The California Gold Rush and the Mentally Ill," 43–44.

78 Brody, "Hospitalization of the Mentally Ill during California's Early Years," 272; Webb and Brody, "The California Gold Rush and the Mentally Ill," 49–50.

79 Savino and Brody, "Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals"; Savino and Mills, "The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry."

80 The final time period analyzed in this paper was the year 1954, as after this, psychotropic medications began to be widely used in mental hospitals.

81 Savino and Brody, "Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals," 476–77.

82 Savino and Brody, "Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals," 477.

83 Savino and Brody, "Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals," 480–84.

84 Savino and Brody, "Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals," 480–83.

trait or predisposition.”<sup>85</sup> This shift towards custodialism would lead to a dark chapter in California’s history, where eugenic sterilization of the mentally ill was touted as “progressive.”<sup>86</sup> The psychiatric profession would only begin to swing back towards optimism after World War II, at which time retention rates returned to what they had been during the more optimistic “moral treatment era” a century before.<sup>87</sup>

In a 1967 paper, Savino and Alden B. Mills further explored the treatment philosophy of Stockton State Hospital superintendents between the years 1852 and 1870, during which time moral treatment was most in vogue at the institution, by examining the annual reports of the first five superintendents as well as a report by the state’s first Commissioner in Lunacy.<sup>88</sup> The authors found that, although these superintendents in California tended to remain optimistic about their ability to cure patients with moral treatment longer than their Eastern institutional counterparts, this was only because the institution was young and its staff and attendants had not yet had time to become disillusioned and overwhelmed.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, this fledgling mental health system likely found it necessary to justify its usefulness to the state legislature by assuring officials that with enough funding it would be able to cure high rates of patients, returning them to their home communities, once again productive members of society.<sup>90</sup> However, by the 1870s, California superintendents had also come to share the same fatalistic pessimism of their Eastern counterparts, plagued by the same issues of overcrowding, understaffing, and a lack of funding, which all contributed to moral treatment’s lack of efficacy.<sup>91</sup> By the turn of the century, in their annual reports, superintendents were describing patients as “more than useless unfortunates” and a “stream of living death”—a sharp contrast to the hopeful assertion from just fifty years before that cases

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85 Savino and Brody, “Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals,” 483.

86 Savino and Brody, “Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals,” 483.

87 Savino and Brody, “Discharge and Death Rates in California State Hospitals,” 484.

88 Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 359.

89 Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 360.

90 Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 360.

91 Savino and Mills, “The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry,” 365.

of insanity or mental derangement were more curable in the early stages.<sup>92</sup>

More recent contributions to the literature include Angela Hawk's 2011 article tracing the trans-Pacific migrations of mentally ill individuals through the mining boom regions in California, British Columbia, and eastern Australia, as well as Eileen V. Wallis' 2023 monograph *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, which tracks the developments of the state's complex and imperfect "bureaucracy of disability."<sup>93</sup> In her article, Hawk asserts that social regulatory institutions, like asylums, often facilitated the peripatetic wanderings of the same "deviant" individuals they wanted to contain, through frequent discharges, readmissions, and transfers between institutions.<sup>94</sup> To rid themselves of the "burden" of mentally ill individuals, asylum superintendents often contributed to the instability and disorder in the lives of these patients.<sup>95</sup> Wallis's book surveys the development of California's mental health care system, from the scraps that remain that tell us about the indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican approach to the issue of the mentally disordered; to the exploding need for mental health care during the Gold Rush; to the construction of several other mental institutions across the state over the following half century.<sup>96</sup> The pressures of the Gold Rush pushed California to develop a system of asylums and hospitals twenty to thirty years earlier than the rest of the region.<sup>97</sup>

### Future Directions

Recent research into the history of insane asylums highlights the limitations of past statistical methods to fully capture the patient experience and underscores the untapped potential of large datasets combined with qualitative sources. A team of researchers published an article in 2017 focused on methodological considerations when dealing with a large,

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92 Savino and Mills, "The Rise and Fall of Moral Treatment in California Psychiatry," 368.

93 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 3–9.

94 Hawk, "Going 'Mad' in Gold Country," 95–96.

95 Hawk, "Going 'Mad' in Gold Country," 95–96.

96 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 1–11.

97 Wallis, *California and the Politics of Disability, 1850–1970*, 13, 323.

collaboratively-created database—in this case, of information extracted from the patient case records of four asylums in Australia and New Zealand between 1864 and 1910.<sup>98</sup> The authors touch upon issues of ethics and access to patient records and private health information; record linkage between institutions and with vital records; the development and selection of data analysis categories; comparisons across different institutions; as well as the constraints and opportunities this kind of large dataset provides. Through careful examination of institutional records and relevant secondary sources, the authors use a mixed methods approach, blending qualitative and quantitative data to better grasp the nuances of institutionalized patients' lives. The authors argue that psychiatric patient records hold much potential to increase our understanding of the history of the mentally ill and mental institutions. Similarly, in an article from 2016, Hiroshi Maeda employs statistical techniques and large digitized population databases (the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series [IPUMS]) that were unavailable to earlier researchers.<sup>99</sup> Maeda focuses his analyses on the demographic traits that most epitomize both Rothman's archetypal insane asylum patient (lower-class immigrants) and Grob's stereotypical patient (the elderly). With multivariate analyses, Maeda is able to examine multiple demographic variables simultaneously, providing a more nuanced picture of mental hospital patients than was possible with earlier techniques (i.e., comparison of univariate population frequency tables). Maeda concludes that earlier simplistic and reductionist interpretations that sought to characterize all patients as either victims or beneficiaries of the asylum are no longer adequate; in reality, patients were both.

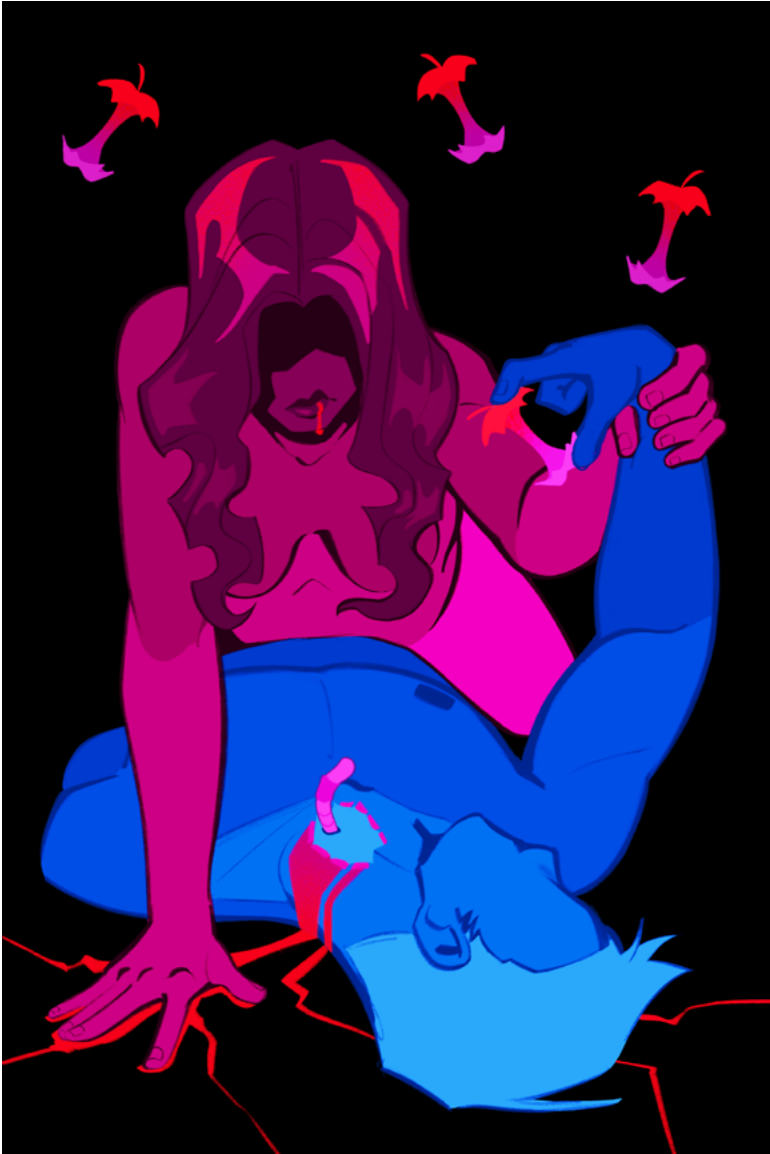
### Conclusion

Reverend W. F. B. Lynch's experiences with the Stockton Insane Asylum illustrate the paradox of nineteenth-century mental health care in California: institutions founded

98 Angela McCarthy et al., "Lives in the Asylum Record, 1864 to 1910: Utilising Large Data Collection for Histories of Psychiatry and Mental Health," *Medical History* 61, no. 3 (July 2017): 358–79.

99 Maeda, "The Discovery of Mental Hospital Patients," 463–67.

on humanitarian ideals quickly devolved into instruments of social control. Mr. Lynch's relative privilege protected him from some of the worst consequences of confinement, while others without such protective factors were often forced into an increasingly custodial system shaped by overcrowding, limited resources, and social prejudice. Asylum superintendents' rapid descent from optimism about their ability to cure patients to disillusionment and even nihilism reflected a broader struggle in the emerging field of mental health care to balance compassionate treatment with the institutional and societal pressures to maintain order. Ultimately, these institutions reveal a society trying—and often failing—to define what it means to be sane, productive, and worthy of belonging, reminding us that the boundaries between care and control remain a central challenge for mental health systems today. ♦



*Illustration by Evan Henderson, Chico State*

# SACRED DEFIANCE: THE FEMINIST RECLAMATION OF LILITH

Kelcee Stokes

Abstract: Once vilified as a demon in Mesopotamian folklore and Jewish tradition, Lilith has been reimagined in modern feminist, queer, and spiritual discourses as a symbol of resistance. This essay traces her evolution from the rebellious first woman of Eden to a radical, queer-inclusive icon of autonomy and defiance. Through feminist theology, spirituality, literature, queer theory, and monster theory, Lilith's origin reveals how religious and cultural traditions have historically demonized women and other marginalized groups who resisted patriarchal control, subjugation, and forced heteronormativity. Her reclamation underscores the political and spiritual power of reinterpretation, demonstrating how reclaiming silenced figures can disrupt entrenched systems of oppression, provide empowering alternatives to patriarchal narratives, and open space for more inclusive understandings of identity, autonomy, and resistance.

Long before Eve ever bit into the apple, there was Lilith. According to religious folklore, she was the true first woman. Formed by God from the same earth as Adam, she was his equal from the moment of her creation. So when Adam demanded her submission and insisted on his superiority, Lilith refused; she fled Eden and crossed the Red Sea, never to return.

For this act of defiance, Lilith was canonically villainized. No longer was she remembered as the first woman, but recast as the mother of demons, a vile creature who hunted men and infants by the cover of night.<sup>1</sup> Her life became a cautionary tale about what happens to women who disobey the orders of men. Yet in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Lilith was reclaimed by feminist scholars in theology, literature, and queer theory who believed that her reputation stemmed from her refusal to conform to patriarchal expectations of obedience, passivity, and heterosexuality. By reinterpreting Lilith through feminist theology, spirituality, literature, queer theory, and monster theory, feminists have embraced her as a radical symbol of autonomy. Rather than rejecting her monstrosity, they reclaim it, turning Lilith into an inclusive icon of rage, identity, and the power to defy systems that marginalize nonconforming bodies and desires.<sup>2</sup>

Lilith's earliest appearances in Sumerian and Babylonian myth describe her as a *lilitu*—a storm demon or vampiric spirit who preys on infants and pregnant women. These associations migrated into Jewish religious tradition, most notably in the Talmud and the medieval satirical text *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* (9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> C.E.). In this text, it is made clear that Lilith's relationship with Adam was contentious from the start. Upon meeting, Adam insisted she lie beneath him during intercourse because he believed himself superior. Lilith argued their equity, but when he continued to demand dominance, Lilith uttered the Ineffable Name of God and fled. Rather than submit, she gave up to Eden. Her story was embedded in Jewish mystical and folkloric traditions, evolving until she became a demoness who was a danger to newborns and a seductress of sleeping men. As Mariana Ruah-Midbar Shapiro explains, Lilith's association with rebellion, sexual autonomy, and nocturnal danger made her the perfect scapegoat for patriarchal fears about women who refuse submission.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "The Lilith Question," *Lilith Magazine*, September 2, 1976.

2 Simon Clay, "Lilith, a Monster Feminist Icon: Four Genealogies of a Divine Jewish Demon," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 5–6.

3 Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, "The Temptation of Legitimacy: Lilith's Adoption and Adaption in Contemporary Feminist Spirituality," *Modern Judaism* 39, no. 2 (2019): 126–128.

Religious traditions have long employed myths, doctrines, and moral codes to define acceptable behavior—especially in terms of gender and sexuality—and to suppress those who fall outside these norms. Figures like Lilith were not just marginalized; they were transformed into cautionary symbols meant to instill fear and enforce conformity. As Aviva Cantor Zuckoff argues, Lilith’s demonization in Jewish folklore reflects deep-rooted anxieties about women who assert independence or sexual agency.<sup>4</sup> By portraying her as a threat to children, men, and divine order, religious texts constructed a narrative that discouraged rebellion and framed non-conforming behavior as dangerous or unnatural. These mechanisms of silencing are not limited to myth. They extend to interpretations of sacred law, gendered expectations in ritual practices, and the exclusion of women, queer, and gender nonconforming individuals from positions of spiritual authority. Feminist theologian Diana Carvalho, writing from a “Transformationist” Jewish feminist perspective,<sup>5</sup> points out that the dominant patriarchal reading of texts often erases female voices entirely or casts them in roles of submission and sin.<sup>6</sup> Reclaiming figures like Lilith disrupts these patterns by insisting that rebellion can be sacred and that religious narratives are not static truths but living stories open to reinterpretation.

As Lilith’s myth evolved across centuries of religious tradition, her image became a cultural battleground. Feminist theologians in the 1970s and beyond challenged this portrayal by reframing Lilith as a symbol of resistance. Carvalho argues that Lilith represents a woman who “reclaims her own body and voice” by rejecting Adam’s authority and the divine order that supported it.<sup>7</sup> Carvalho’s work reflects the ethos of Third Wave feminism, which emerged in the 1990s in response to the perceived limitations of Second Wave feminism, especially regarding issues of intersectionality and diverse sexual identities. Importantly, the

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4 Cantor Zuckoff, “The Lilith Question.”

5 A Jewish feminist identity centered around rejecting the patriarchal bases of Judaism in favor of gender inclusive language, participation, and rights.

6 Diana Carvalho, “Woman Has Two Faces: Re-Examining Eve and Lilith in Jewish Feminist Thought,” (M.A. Thesis, University of Denver, 2009), 14–16.

7 Carvalho, “Woman Has Two Faces,” 11.

rise of evangelical Christianity and the Christian right during this period reinforced rigid gender roles and traditional sexual norms, making feminist reinterpretations of figures like Lilith all the more urgent and subversive. Through feminist *midrash*,<sup>8</sup> writers like Aviva Cantor Zuckoff turned Lilith's flight from Eden into the first act of spiritual rebellion. As Zuckoff writes, Lilith "recognizes tyranny for what it is, and immediately resists it."<sup>9</sup> A newer generation of Lilith scholarship builds on this reinterpretation from the 1970s by contrasting Lilith's assertiveness with Eve's compliance. According to Kendra LeVine, Lilith is a powerful female role model because she values her independence above all else, even when it costs her safety, community, and divine favor.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Eve, who accepts her subordinate role, Lilith chooses exile over subjugation, becoming a counter-narrative to traditional femininity. In a world where women are still punished for speaking up, Lilith's refusal to be silent is both radical and relatable. Feminists use her story to challenge not only religious texts but the broader cultural narratives that have historically silenced women.

Outside the bounds of Jewish theology, Lilith was also embraced by feminist spiritual movements. Becoming a goddess figure in Neopagan and New Age circles starting in the 1970s, she was invoked in rituals as a force of sacred feminine rage, sexuality, and nocturnal power. In her study of feminist theology, Ruah-Midbar Shapiro noted that, within these circles, Lilith was no longer a demon to be feared but an empowering force of feminine energy and sacred rebellion representing female sexuality, nocturnal power, and unrestrained desire.<sup>11</sup> This reclamation highlights the broader trend within feminist spirituality: turning figures once used to shame women into sacred emblems of power. The invocation of Lilith as a divine feminine presence challenges the very foundations of patriarchal religion and asserts a space for female-centered

8 A method of Jewish interpretive storytelling that seeks to explain and expand upon biblical texts in order to connect them with contemporary issues.

9 Cantor Zuckoff, "The Lilith Question."

10 Kendra LeVine, "Reclaiming Lilith as a Strong Female Role Model," (Senior Thesis, Linfield College, 2020), 5–6.

11 Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, "The Temptation of Legitimacy," 126–128.

spirituality. The intersection of feminist spirituality and the sexual revolution<sup>12</sup> allowed Lilith's multiplicity to resonate with a wide range of feminist identities, all seeking empowering symbols that transcended rigid traditional gender narratives.

More recent scholarship pushes this reclamation further by introducing the idea of "monster feminism," a framework that embraces figures traditionally labeled as monstrous. Drawing on cinema studies scholar Barbara Creed's theory of the "monstrous-feminine,"<sup>13</sup> Simon Clay argues that Lilith's association with danger, sexuality, and rage is not a flaw to be corrected, but a strength to be celebrated.<sup>14</sup> In this view, Lilith is a monstrous utopian: a queer and trans-inclusive figure who embodies rage, gender fluidity, and radical freedom. The genealogies of Lilith include her as Eve's lesbian lover, a queer guardian of children, and a trans divine presence, all of which defy conventional gender roles and heteronormative expectations. This queering of Lilith reflects a broader feminist shift toward intersectionality. By reclaiming Lilith not in spite of her contradictions, but because of them, feminists affirm that resistance can take many forms: sacred, sexual, spiritual, monstrous, and poetic. Enid Dame's poem "Lilith" captures this complexity. Dame imagines Lilith after Eden, taking art classes in New Jersey, crying in the bathroom, and remembering the man and god she "couldn't live with."<sup>15</sup> This Lilith is both humorous and heartbreaking—an exile who chose freedom over comfort and carries the cost of that choice. Dame's vision of Lilith is not mythic in the traditional sense but achingly human.

Despite this resurgence, some scholars remain critical. Diana Carvalho and Simon Clay both acknowledge the tensions within feminist scholarship surrounding historical faithfulness and religious tradition. Carvalho notes that while feminist theologians aim to reconstruct religious narratives to empower women, this

12 A social movement during the 1960s and 1970s that challenged traditional norms around sexuality, reproductive rights, contraception, and gender roles. It emphasized personal freedom, sexual expression, and the rejection of rigid moral codes, particularly those rooted in conservative or religious traditions.

13 The concept of the monstrous-feminine explores how women in horror films are often portrayed as monstrous, reflecting patriarchal fears and anxieties. It is rooted in Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, which examines the horror genre's representation of femininity as abject and threatening.

14 Clay, "Lilith, a Monster Feminist Icon," 10–14.

15 Enid Dame, "Lilith."

process often requires a delicate negotiation between honoring Jewish tradition and radically transforming it. She argues that such tension is “inevitable in any project that seeks to reimagine the sacred from a feminist perspective,” as it risks being dismissed by traditionalists while still falling short of fully liberating all women.<sup>16</sup> Clay contends that concerns over whether Lilith’s image has been overly sanitized or excessively romanticized are actually productive. Lilith’s myth has always been shaped by the needs and fears of the societies that invoked her; therefore, her evolution is not a distortion, but a continuation of myth-making itself.<sup>17</sup> Together, they highlight that feminist reinterpretations of Lilith are not just acts of recovery, but also acts of creative disruption, challenging the boundaries of both tradition and feminist thought itself.

The transformation of Lilith from demon to feminist icon demonstrates the radical potential of reinterpretation. Feminist theologians, artists, and spiritual leaders have reclaimed her as a figure of defiance, an alternative to Eve, a goddess of autonomy, and a voice for the silenced. In doing so, they have not only challenged centuries of patriarchal myth-making but also modeled how other marginalized narratives might be reimagined. By elevating Lilith, feminists do more than rescue her from the identity imposed upon her; they expose the mechanisms through which religious tradition has historically suppressed non-conforming individuals. Articulating a new framework of empowerment for all feminists, including cisgender women, transgender women, and non-binary people. Her journey from outcast to icon reveals how reinterpretation functions as a political and spiritual act, one capable of confronting exclusion and affirming transformation. Whether she’s seen as a rebellious ancestor, a queer goddess, or a feminist monster, Lilith reminds us that defiance can be sacred—and that the voices of the demonized often have the most to teach us. ♦

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16 Carvalho, “Woman Has Two Faces,” 33.

17 Clay, “Lilith, a Monster Feminist Icon,” 30–32.



*Illustration by Tiffany Abrams, Chico State*

# STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE & REDRESS: FREEDWOMEN'S APPEALS TO PATERNAL AUTHORITY IN THE POST EMANCIPATION SOUTH

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**Stephanie Jones**

**Abstract:** This essay examines the strategic legal engagements of Southern freedwomen with the Freedmen's Bureau between 1866 and 1869. Far from passive recipients of paternalistic aid, Black women navigated this federal institution with rhetorical precision by mobilizing language rooted in labor contracts, maternal care, and Christian virtue to assert claims to wages, custody, and bodily protection. Drawing on affidavits, petitions, and labor contracts, this study argues that freedwomen deliberately framed themselves as morally upright workers and guardians of domestic order to compel recognition within a legal system structured to constrain their agency. These performances of deference were tactical, not submissive, and tools to negotiate limited redress within the Bureau's racialized and

patriarchal framework. By centering freedwomen's appeals as acts of civic self-definition, this essay contributes a nuanced perspective to Reconstruction historiography, revealing freedom as a negotiated process shaped by gendered constraints, legal improvisation, and Black women's persistent demand for recognition as rights-bearing citizens.

**I**n the spring of 1866, Betty Carrion, a freedwoman in South Carolina, appeared before the Freedmen's Bureau to file a complaint against her employer, James Dutart. Carrion testified that Dutart had beaten her with an ironing board after she exercised her right to receive visitors, a right explicitly outlined in her employment agreement.<sup>1</sup> Carrion recalled, "He told me, any one of my family or acquaintances could come and see me late or early."<sup>2</sup> She also cited his failure to pay the wages she had been promised, alongside support for her two children.<sup>3</sup> Carrion's complaint did not simply contest an act of violence; it demanded recognition of her contractual rights and her dignity as a working mother within a system under Reconstruction that continued to deny Black women full personhood.

Carrion's case exemplifies the deliberate strategies Black women deployed in the Reconstruction South to engage the Freedmen's Bureau, an institution steeped in white paternalism and moral authority. Established in 1865 to oversee the transition from slavery to freedom, the Bureau served as both a relief agency and a legal arbiter of labor disputes, domestic claims, and familial separations. Staffed largely by white northern men, its agents enforced an ethos of Christian morality, domestic discipline, and patriarchal family structures.<sup>4</sup> In many locales, these agents upheld not only the Bureau's paternalistic mandates but also collaborated with white southern elites seeking to reinstate systems of racial control that closely resembled slavery, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies and white

1 "Carrion v. Dutart, South Carolina Freedwoman and Her Employer," *Freedmen and Southern Society Project*, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Carrion-Dutart.html>.

2 Carrion v. Dutart.

3 Carrion v. Dutart.

4 Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (Fordham University Press, 2010), 85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13wzz3s>.

dominance under the veneer of legal order.<sup>5</sup>

Paternalism—the ideological linchpin of slavery—did not disappear with emancipation. As historian Eugene Genovese argues, freedpeople inherited a “hegemonic exchange,” in which performances of deference could still be leveraged to extract limited concessions from white authorities.<sup>6</sup> Freedwomen’s appeals to the Bureau reflected this continuity. Black women approached these institutions as skilled negotiators, adept at mobilizing the Bureau’s own moral scripts of virtue, discipline, and maternal care to secure redress and protection.<sup>7</sup> In this calculated exchange, deference was not submission, but a deliberate performance that enabled them to navigate the Bureau’s expectations and, in many cases, extract more favorable outcomes. These freedwomen entered this environment acutely aware of its constraints and possibilities, shaping their appeals within the Bureau’s paternalistic ethos to assert their rights.

Scholars such as Mary Farmer-Kaiser and Leigh-Anne Francis have traced how Black women navigated the Bureau’s racialized logic, at times adopting “performances of deference” or what Francis describes as “feigned ignorance” to secure redress.<sup>8</sup> Other historians, including Catherine Clinton and Hannah Rosen, have framed these women primarily as victims of sexual violence and domestic exploitation whose bodies remained contested sites of post-emancipation domination.<sup>9</sup> More recent interventions by historians Karen Cook Bell and Hannah Hicks have reframed freedwomen as “freedom-makers,” focusing on their use of courts, federal agencies,

5 Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

6 Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (Vintage Books, 1976), 5.

7 Karen Cook Bell, *Claiming Freedom: Race, Kinship, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (University of South Carolina Press, 2018), ii; Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (Fordham University Press, 2010), 85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13wzz3s>.

8 Leigh-Anne Francis, “Playing the ‘Lady Sambo’: Poor Black Women’s Legal Strategies in the Post-Civil War South’s Civil Courts,” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 19, no. 2 (2020): 252, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/774532>; Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 85.

9 Catherine Clinton, “Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality and Violence During Reconstruction,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (1992): 313–315; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 9–12.

and kinship networks to “assert rights and autonomy.”<sup>10</sup> Each of these approaches has illuminated key dimensions of freedwomen’s post-emancipation activism—whether through performances of legal deference, responses to sexual violence, or broader freedom-making approaches. In contrast, this essay offers a closer examination of the language and claims freedwomen employed in their petitions and testimonies. Rather than treating these appeals as generic legal engagements, this research foregrounds how Black women used deliberate references to labor, virtue, and maternal care as rhetorical tools to define and claim freedom within the Bureau’s racialized and patriarchal structures. By analyzing these petitions, not only as legal documents but also as strategic texts of self-definition, this study reveals how freedwomen asserted themselves as civic actors in a system designed to constrain their agency.

Building on this approach, this research contributes to existing scholarship by examining how, between 1866 and 1869, freedwomen navigated the Freedmen’s Bureau—a federal institution that styled itself as a neutral arbiter of justice but, in practice, operated as a tightly policed arena of white paternalism and constraint. By strategically leveraging the Bureau’s moral and legal frameworks—mobilizing labor contracts, Christian respectability, and maternal authority—freedwomen asserted claims to wages, custody, and bodily protection, positioning themselves as tactical legal actors who demanded recognition as workers, mothers, and rights-bearing citizens. At the same time, their appeals expose the paradox of freedom after emancipation: that performances of deference and respectability were both tactical tools of agency and conditions of constraint within the Bureau’s paternalistic order.

Conditioned by the patriarchal framework entrenched during slavery, these women did not confront the Bureau’s authority head-on; instead, they carefully maneuvered within its moral and bureaucratic expectations to make themselves visible within its rigid order. Far from signaling submission, these

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10 Hannah Katherine Hicks, *Troubling Justice: Women and the Criminal Courts in the American South, 1865–1900* (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2022), 3–5.; Karen Cook Bell, ed., *Southern Black Women and Their Struggle for Freedom During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), ii–iii.

calculated performances became deliberate tools of legal agency and civic negotiation. In reframing their appeals in this way, freedwomen challenged accounts that portray emancipation as a singular legal rupture. Instead, their actions reveal freedom as a contested, incremental process, shaped by freedwomen's purposeful engagements with patriarchal and racialized legal structures. They understood the stakes: to gain protection, they had to present themselves as conforming to the Bureau's standards of virtue and propriety.

While adhering to these expectations, employment contracts offered freedwomen a rare, formalized instrument to assert claims of respectability and civic participation. These agreements symbolized more than economic transactions; they became frameworks through which Black women positioned themselves as reliable workers and lawful citizens, demanding protections traditionally reserved for white wage earners.<sup>11</sup> For Carrion, citing the explicit terms of her contract—her wages, housing, and right to family visitation—became the foundation of her claim to justice.<sup>12</sup> Her invocation of the contract underscored both breached economic expectations and violated domestic authority within her workspace.

Across the South, formerly enslaved women like Catherine Moore, who were labeled “first class” employees, negotiated wages of \$12 per month without male oversight—presenting themselves within the Bureau's gaze as industrious and deserving of protection.<sup>13</sup> In Mississippi, freedwomen entered seasonal contracts specifying food rations, rest days, and housing.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Augusta, Georgia, Clark Anderson & Co. entered into a contract with multiple freedwomen, specifying wages, housing, and daily rations—further demonstrating how

11 Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Stephanie McCurry, *Women's War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 2019), 3–4.

12 Carrion v. Dutart.

13 Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869, “Labor Contract between Clark Anderson & Co. and Freedwomen,” Augusta, Georgia, March 13, 1866, National Archives Publication M798, Roll 36, “Unbound Miscellaneous Papers,” accessed May 2, 2025, <https://freedmensbureau.com/georgia/contracts/georgiacontract.htm>.

14 Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Mississippi, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869, “Labor Contracts of Freedmen,” National Museum of African American History and Culture, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/freedmens-bureau/record/fbs-1662423774659-1662426483508-1>.

freedwomen collectively used contractual agreements to assert their rights as wage laborers in the absence of male intermediaries.<sup>15</sup> These records reflect a nuanced legal literacy: women who had previously been denied contract rights under slavery now wielded these documents not simply as economic instruments but as evidence of their status as responsible workers entitled to state recognition. A contract from North Carolina between J. A. Pitman and freedwoman Winney Winston, similarly documented a detailed arrangement for wages and rations, reinforcing freedwomen's intentional use of contract law to frame themselves as lawful and deserving within the Bureau's paternalistic gaze.<sup>16</sup>

Freedwomen's contracts and complaints invoked mutual obligation, civility, and domestic responsibility—transforming labor into a moral claim on recognition. As author Amy Dru Stanley argues, the shift from bondage to contract was “not a leap into freedom but a negotiation through new constraints.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, not all such petitions found sympathetic ears. In Pike County, Alabama, freedwoman Eliza challenged local white authorities over labor exploitation and abuse, only to encounter Bureau agents more inclined to protect white employers than intervene on behalf of Black women.<sup>18</sup> Rather than reject these structures, freedwomen navigated them tactically. This process also extended into disputes over family authority, where Black women presented themselves as protectors of domestic virtue and lawful guardians within their households, seamlessly transitioning their contractual claims into demands for custody rights and domestic autonomy.

Southern freedwomen framed themselves as guardians of domestic order when asserting claims over their children, using this approach as an instrument of legal standing. The Bureau's

15 “Testimonies of Two North Carolina Freedwomen Against Former Owner,” After Slavery Exhibit, Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, accessed May 2, 2025, [https://dhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/after\\_slavery\\_educator/unit\\_one\\_documents/document\\_six](https://dhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/after_slavery_educator/unit_one_documents/document_six).

16 Testimonies of Two NC Freedwomen.

17 Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 18.

18 Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Alabama, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1870, “Case between Jas. T. Bean and E. A. Raborn about Freedwoman Eliza,” Union Church, Pike County, Alabama, February 25, 1867, National Archives Publication M809, Roll 23, “Miscellaneous Papers,” accessed May 2, 2025, <https://freedmensbureau.com/alabama/unionchurch.htm>.

emphasis on patriarchal family structures and Christian morality created both opportunities and limitations for Black women asserting maternal authority. They crafted their custody petitions to appeal to the Bureau's priorities, presenting themselves as morally fit mothers whose authority deserved recognition.

In 1866, a freedwoman named Mary Lacey presented an affidavit that exemplifies this intentional approach. She declared, "I did not agree to give away my child...I want her back and am willing to take care of her."<sup>19</sup> Lacey's insistence on consent and care was a calculated assertion of legal maternal authority. Like many formerly enslaved women, Lacey's child had been placed in an apprenticeship without her consent—a common practice white employers used to circumvent labor laws and maintain control over Black children.<sup>20</sup> Apprenticeship, in this context, referred to a legal arrangement that purported to train Black children in skilled labor but, in practice, often bound them to former enslavers in conditions that closely resembled slavery.

Similarly, when freedwoman Loucy Jane Boyd contested her daughter's removal from her custody by her white employer, her petition to reclaim her child emphasized consent and maternal rights: "I was not present when he took her from me...I never agreed to it."<sup>21</sup> Boyd's child had been seized by her employer while she was away, under circumstances that echoed Lacey's plight.<sup>22</sup> Another case from North Carolina recorded a freedwoman's appeal for her children's return after they had been apprenticed without her knowledge, highlighting the widespread deployment of these appeals across the South.<sup>23</sup> Records of similar claims can also be found in personal correspondence, such as a letter from a Kentucky freedwoman, Aima Shipp, that revealed her ongoing struggle to care for her grandchildren while fulfilling labor duties, emphasizing moral

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19 "Affidavit of Mary Lacey, District of Columbia Freedwoman, and James Lacy," Freedmen and Southern Society Project, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Lacey.html>.

20 Affidavit of Mary Lacey.

21 "Freedwoman Loucy Jane Boyd v. L. W. Willis," Freedmen and Southern Society Project, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Boyd.html>.

22 Affidavit of Mary Lacey.

23 Proceedings of a Freedwoman in North Carolina Regarding Custody of Her Children," Freedmen and Southern Society Project, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/LL65pg.htm>.

responsibility as part of her public persona.<sup>24</sup> The intentional framing of these appeals and claims required the Bureau to reconcile its moral authority with its professed commitment to family stability. Yet not all freedwomen's petitions received sympathetic hearings. Bureau agents sometimes dismissed the claims of women they labeled "disorderly" or "improper," especially when a petitioner's tone or persistence appeared to violate expectations of feminine restraint. These denials reveal the narrow limits of strategic performance—success depended as much on conforming to moral codes as on the justice of one's claim.

Across the South, freedwomen like Julia Hill petitioned for the return of children taken under abusive indentures, carefully highlighting neglect and cruelty to reinforce their own maternal competency and moral fitness.<sup>25</sup> These appeals reflected a broader project of legal engagement where claims to labor and custody overlapped, reinforcing Black women's assertions of civic participation and domestic respectability within Reconstruction's fragile legal order. Moreover, these petitions for custody were inseparable from broader demands for bodily integrity and protection. Freedwomen's legal negotiations consistently blurred the lines between labor exploitation, familial separation, and physical violence—forcing the Bureau to engage with the entangled post-emancipation realities of Black women navigating freedom's contested terrain.

Building upon these intertwined claims, freedwomen also turned to the Bureau to assert their right to bodily protection. While the Bureau theoretically extended jurisdiction over violent disputes, Black women faced profound challenges seeking redress for physical and sexual violence within a legal culture steeped in racialized assumptions about Black women's hypersexuality and disorderliness.<sup>26</sup> This climate was reinforced by broader cultural narratives, such as those found in Lydia Maria Child's *The Freedmen's Book*, which emphasized Christian

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24 "Georgia Freedwoman to Daughter in Tennessee: Aima Ship Letters," Freedmen and Southern Society Project, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Ship.html>.

25 "Julia Hill Petition," Freedmen and Southern Society Project, Legal Files of 1865, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/LL65pg.htm>.

26 Clinton, *Bloody Terrain*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 313–316.

morality, domestic virtue, and industriousness as the cornerstones of freedpeople's advancement—values that shaped both Bureau agents' expectations and freedwomen's discursive practices.<sup>27</sup>

Harriet Hill's 1866 petition exemplifies how freedwomen deployed this method. Alongside demands for wages and child custody, she detailed the violent treatment she endured from her employer, framing herself as a dutiful worker and nurturing mother subjected to abusive overreach.<sup>28</sup> The persistence of similar violations is echoed in testimonies like that of a Georgia freedwoman, Harriet Hill, whose postwar recollections described being "struck for talking back" by a former enslaver, underscoring the enduring threat of violence that Black women faced when asserting autonomy.<sup>29</sup> Hill's calculated method mirrored what nineteenth century author Fanny Tipton asserted was a freedwoman's right to present herself as a wronged laborer and morally upright woman, when their physical violation demanded redress.<sup>30</sup> In South Carolina, similar petitions were filed for back pay while detailing the physical mistreatment, further exemplifying how Black women combined wage claims with demands for bodily protection, forcing the Bureau to confront its complicity in tolerating violence alongside economic exploitation.<sup>31</sup> In all of these cases, freedwomen compelled the Bureau to confront not only labor exploitation but the intertwined nature of racialized sexual coercion and economic oppression—forcing agents to reconcile their stated mission of order and protection with the violence Black women endured.

Testimonies from two North Carolina freedwomen further illustrate the layered nature of these appeals. One woman declared, "He struck me over the head with a stick...I didn't think he had the right."<sup>32</sup> At first glance, this statement might be

27 Lydia Maria Child, *The Freedmen's Book* (Ticknor and Fields, 1866), v–xii, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044024572562>.

28 Harriet Hill Petition.

29 Image 21, "Slave Narrative Project, Georgia, Part 2," *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narratives*, Library of Congress, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.042/?sp=21>.

30 "Fanny Tipton v. Richard Sanford," *Freedmen and Southern Society Project*, March 24, 1866, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/Sanford%20case.html>.

31 "South Carolina Freedwoman Petitions for Back Pay," *Freedmen and Southern Society Project*, Legal Files 1866–67, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://www.freedmen.umd.edu/LL66-67pg.html>.

32 Testimonies of Two N.C. Freedwomen.

read as a straightforward account of physical abuse—another example of the pervasive violence Black women faced in the post-emancipation South. However, embedded within this assertion is something more calculated: the freedwoman was not simply recounting an act of violence; she was invoking the language of rights, placing legal and moral responsibility on her accuser for violating the norms the Bureau purported to uphold. By framing her statement as a rejection of overreach rather than disorderly defiance, she positioned herself within the Bureau’s logic as a respectable, disciplined woman entitled to bodily protection. Such appeals reframed bodily autonomy as integral to freedwomen’s broader assertions as laborers, mothers, and moral guardians within Reconstruction’s fragile legal order.

While such testimonies remain essential in documenting the persistent vulnerabilities Black women faced, they can also risk obscuring the deliberate rhetorical strategies these women employed to reposition themselves within the legal system. As Leigh-Anne Francis argues, “performances of submissiveness and servility” were at times tactically deployed by Black women seeking to align themselves with white judges’ expectations.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the cases examined here reveal that freedwomen’s appeals more often transcended such scripts. They did not merely present themselves as passive victims or feign helplessness; rather, they crafted narratives that emphasized respectability and required protection, pressing Bureau agents to reconcile their professed commitments to order with freedwomen’s demands for redress.

Across these overlapping domains of labor, custody, and bodily integrity, freedwomen’s appeals to the Freedmen’s Bureau reveal a cohesive, if constrained, strategy of legal engagement. These women were not merely responding to isolated wrongs—they leveraged the Bureau’s governing norms across multiple fronts, asserting themselves as contractually bound laborers, guardians of household order, and citizens entitled to bodily protection. Yet, these women’s performances

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33 Francis, *Playing the ‘Lady Sambo,’* 263.

operated within narrow, racialized constraints. Freedwomen's success hinged on the content of their appeals and how Bureau agents perceived their comportment, language, and demeanor. Their ability to secure recognition and redress was always contingent upon how convincingly they conformed to the Bureau's standards of virtue and propriety.

This balancing act, though applicable to all Southern women navigating the legal system, was especially fraught for Black women.<sup>34</sup> When a Georgia freedwoman directly challenged Bureau agents for their inaction, she was swiftly labeled “disorderly” and denied assistance—her assertion of authority outside accepted scripts prompting institutional rejection.<sup>35</sup> This underscores the intersectional precarity Black women navigated: they confronted not only the gendered limitations placed on all women in the legal system, but also contended with racialized surveillance and disciplinary expectations embedded in civic operations.<sup>36</sup> Negative responses such as this serve as cautionary reminders and stark warnings that recognition and protection by the Bureau were conditional, and often denied to those who stepped beyond its carefully circumscribed boundaries.

Freedwomen's appeals to the Bureau highlight a critical, understudied dimension of Reconstruction-era legal culture. Far from passive supplications or performances of submissiveness, these claims embodied deliberate methods of legal engagement, as freedwomen navigated the Bureau's moral governance to assert recognition as workers, mothers, and rights-bearing citizens. By foregrounding labor contracts as tools of civic legitimacy and tracing how freedwomen wove custody claims and bodily protection within the Bureau's moral framework, this research contributes to and refines existing scholarship. It moves beyond narratives of victimization to center freedwomen as legal strategists negotiating the Bureau's order, on their own terms. Yet, these strategies remained fraught and

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34 Emily Rapport, *Disorderly Women: Freedwomen, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the Problem of Respectability in the Reconstruction South* (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1989), 39.

35 Rapport, *Disorderly Women*, 39.

36 Hicks, *Troubling Justice*; Rapport, *Disorderly Women*, 3–5.

contingent. The Bureau's recognition of freedwomen's claims was narrowly confined to performances that upheld its expectations of respectability and obedience.

It was not uncommon for a freedwoman to be dismissed or punished for transgressing gendered expectations of deference. This was more than bureaucratic failure—it replicated the plantation order and hierarchies of slavery within a supposedly new legal framework. Even when successful, freedwomen's petitions often achieved redress only through affirming the authority of white men and the Bureau's institutional authority.

As historian Laura Edwards explains, freedwomen were sometimes granted “status,” but not full legal standing as autonomous citizens—partial recognition that ultimately sustained, rather than disrupted, white male authority.<sup>37</sup> Her work clarifies that recognition through the Bureau was symbolic, not structural; citizenship for freedwomen remained conditional on moral conformity. Amy Dru Stanley expands this analysis, arguing that this dynamic reflected how the transition from bondage to contract introduced new constraints rather than bringing full emancipation.<sup>38</sup> By reframing personal duty as a contractual obligation, she exposes how freedom itself was legally defined through continued subordination.

As underscored by Hannah Rosen, these women's legal actions demanded equality, without regard to race, and offered a progressive vision of women's citizenship.<sup>39</sup> Rosen's interpretation illuminates the paradox that the very acts of claiming civic equality often triggered moral scrutiny, reinforcing the racialized boundaries of womanhood.

Building on these insights, this research advances Reconstruction historiography by centering freedwomen as tactical legal actors who, within the limits of the Freedmen's Bureau's paternalistic governance, negotiated legal recognition, family authority, and bodily protection on their own

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37 Laura Edwards, “How Freed Slaves Extended the Reach of Federal Courts and Expanded Our Understanding of the Fourteenth Amendment,” *Judicature* (2018), <https://judicature.duke.edu/articles/rights-that-made-the-world-right-how-freed-slaves-extended-the-reach-of-federal-courts-and-expanded-our-understanding-of-the-fourteenth-amendment/>.

38 Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, xi.

39 Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 9.

terms—thereby contributing a new dimension to existing narratives of freedom-making.

Betty Carrion's petition, which opened this study, encapsulates the paradox at the heart of freedwomen's legal engagement. Her appeal to contractual justice and maternal authority was not merely an act of deference but a deliberate assertion of civic belonging within a system that measured womanhood through obedience. Through her words, the tension between performance and power becomes clear: freedom had to be enacted in the very language and posture that constrained it.

Future scholarship might explore how these strategies differed across local contexts, particularly for rural women and those routinely excluded from the Bureau's protections. Further inquiry into freedwomen's engagement with Black churches, mutual aid societies, and grassroots organizing would expand our understanding of freedom-making beyond state-centered narratives. Yet, the evidence examined here underscores a central truth: the Freedmen's Bureau was never a neutral arbiter of justice; it was a contested arena where power, recognition, and authority were performed, negotiated, and tightly policed. Black freedwomen confronted these structures with precision and resilience, leveraging the Bureau's frameworks to demand recognition as rights-bearing citizens within a system still determined to deny them equality. Their struggles reveal that freedom in the post-emancipation South was neither granted nor static—but forged and defended within hostile systems designed to constrain it. ♦



*Illustration by Mallory Finney, Chico State*

# A NEED FOR NUANCE: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN & CHURCHES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Austin Ozenne

**Abstract:** Through primarily autobiographical accounts, this essay analyzes the complex postbellum relationship between African American women and Southern religious institutions. While historians typically emphasize the positive impacts of churches on this community, there is a need for further nuance in historical discussions. As some churches opposed women's preaching, detracted from women's independence and individuality, and organized themselves in a discriminatory or hierarchical fashion, they detracted from the empowerment and success of Black women.

**W**ith her early childhood marked by the hardships of slavery, Emma J. Ray was no stranger to adversity or emotional distress. Yet when she declined to publicly pray at an 1880s religious revival, an event typically reserved for celebration, she was deeply affected by the fierce remarks of a Texan

preacher: “We have some women here that have asked me not to call on them to pray. We want no cowards in our band who will their colors fly (*sic*).”<sup>1</sup> As Ray recounts in her autobiography, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*, she was swallowed by a wave of humiliation and left the revival immediately. When considering the preacher’s harsh words and Ray’s emotional reaction, it may be surprising to learn that in the late nineteenth century, religion and church membership were seen as transformative outlets for opportunity and fulfillment, especially for Black women. In addition to Ray’s account, various secondary and primary sources, including autobiographies, newspaper excerpts, and other text-based materials, indicate that some religious institutions had negative effects on their Black female congregants.

This runs counter to the claims of recent works that identify churches as crucial to the prosperity of Black women in the late nineteenth century. For example, according to Karen Cook Bell, author of *Claiming Freedom: Race, Kinship, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Georgia*, the religious institutions of Georgia “provided spiritual and social uplift”<sup>2</sup> through their encouragement of community, economic involvement, female leadership, and emotional support. While these are legitimate contributions, historians tend to neglect the numerous barriers placed in front of Black female congregants. The current historical narrative mischaracterizes these institutions and takes away from the agency and accomplishments of African American women. A more nuanced analysis could dispel the notion that churches were a necessary and purely beneficial crutch for Black female empowerment and success. Overall, rather than exclusively aiding this community following the Civil War, many nineteenth-century churches were deeply flawed in their view and treatment of Black women. This is most pronounced in their resistance to Black women’s preaching, their detrimental effects on Black women’s independence and individuality, and their hierarchical and socially-informed structures.

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1 Emma J. Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed* (Free Methodist Publishing House, 1926), 45, [https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cbibliographic\\_details%7C3271056](https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3271056).

2 Karen Cook Bell, *Claiming Freedom: Race, Kinship, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (The University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 80.

To understand the flaws associated with religious institutions, it's important to first recognize why churches became popular outlets for Black women. The Reconstruction Era was a difficult phase for the entire African American community. As most explored their newfound freedom, they encountered several roadblocks. For example, many struggled with poverty and a lack of access to basic resources, such as food and medicine, because of the physical and economic devastation of the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> When Black women attempted to escape their impoverishment through the free labor system, they were often victims of cruel employers who paid unfair or nonexistent wages.<sup>4</sup> In response, some would fight these injustices through the courts and the Freedmen's Bureau. Elizabeth White, Caroline Starks, Amelie Candole, and other freedwomen "filed complaints for nonpayment of wages and resisted vagrancy charges."<sup>5</sup> However, these methods of response were somewhat inadequate because of a biased legal system that would go on to define the Jim Crow South. For instance, when Lucy Ross used the courts to contest the blatant kidnapping and re-enslavement of her children in the mid-1860s, she hit a major legal barrier: "State law allowed county courts to apprentice the children of unmarried black women without consent."<sup>6</sup> When Eliza Cook attempted to earn alimony and child support from James Cook, the sickening slave owner who fathered her seven children, the U.S. District Court "refused to hear the case,"<sup>7</sup> citing jurisdictional issues as an excuse. Among other things, these cases show how Black women could not always rely on government entities for support.

In contrast to legal challenges, churches were socially acceptable spaces for resistance because religion served as a backbone to Southern society. In *Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca Down*, author Brenda E. Stevenson expands on this idea as she explores religion's accessibility and power. Stevenson focuses

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3 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 52.

4 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 55.

5 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 34.

6 Karin L. Zipf, "Reconstructing 'Free Woman': African-American Women, Apprenticeship, and Custody Rights during Reconstruction." *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 1 (2000): 20. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2000.0030>.

7 Zipf, "Reconstructing 'Free Woman,'" 16.

on Aunt Rebecca, an enslaved Black woman, who would often lead prayers to a diverse audience in antebellum Virginia. Praying became an instrument for social uplift as “neither slaveholders nor slaves responded to her as a social inferior.”<sup>8</sup> With religious activities sometimes permissible before abolition, it was not considered taboo for Black women to occupy this religious sphere after the Civil War. Churches were crucial in establishing vital networks, including the numerous benevolent societies that grew out of these institutions. Benevolent societies reinforced Black women’s social and economic power by promoting community involvement and the attainment of significant leadership roles.<sup>9</sup> In addition, they encouraged financial education, which helped Black women purchase and maintain ownership of land.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite the important contributions that churches are remembered for, there were major issues within these institutions that have been largely forgotten.

This is arguably most apparent in the fact that Black women’s preaching was actively discouraged by churches. As missionary Amanda Smith reflects in her autobiography, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist*, “There were then but few of our ministers that were favorable to women’s preaching or taking any part, I mean in a public way.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, female preaching was a rare occurrence due to strict gender roles. Even when allowed, severe social pressures limited the extent to which it could be outspoken. This restriction detracted from Black women’s visibility and influence while normalizing the idea that they should be silent members of a congregation. According to Jeffrey L. Tribble in *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church*, Black women were largely relegated to social work, such as the activities of benevolent societies, even into the twentieth century and beyond. While Tribble celebrates the impact

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8 Brenda E. Stevenson, “‘Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca Down’: Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South.” *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (2005): 345. <https://doi-org.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/10.1086/JAAHv90n4p345>.

9 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 76.

10 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 77.

11 Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist* (Meyer & Brothers, 1893), 133, [https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cbibliographic\\_details%7C4358031](https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C4358031).

Black women possessed within the confines of these roles, he acknowledges that “Engaging in preaching and pulpit leadership was rarely an option for women as a mechanism of social uplift.”<sup>12</sup> This suggests that because they were prevented from preaching, Black women lacked a more prominent and visible outlet for greater status and upward mobility.

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Instead of resisting social pressures and creating momentum for Black women’s empowerment and preaching, church officials were often inactive. In the early 1870s, Amanda Smith was in attendance at Nashville’s General Conference of the A.M.E. Church. There, officials failed to address the further involvement of Black women in church activities: “The question of ordination of women was never mooted in the Conference.”<sup>13</sup> While Smith later acknowledges that churches afforded Black women more opportunities over time, she indicates that there was an initial delay in their ordination because of complacent leadership. In *The End of Days: African American Religion and Politics in the Age of Emancipation*, author Matthew Harper asserts that some bishops and church officials, such as those in North Carolina, would advocate for Black women’s right to preach. However, Harper concludes that this was rare and that “African American clergy remained almost entirely male.”<sup>14</sup> Overall, officials were less than eager to commit to progressive policies. This is on full display in the account of Julia A. J. Foote, a passionate female evangelist and author of *A Brand Plucked From the Fire*. In Boston, she was excommunicated from her A.M.E.-affiliated church for her desire to preach.<sup>15</sup> The punishment’s severity exhibits how far some institutions would go to prevent Black women from taking an active role in their congregation. As an excommunicated outcast, a Black woman would be at risk of being denied the numerous network-related benefits that

12 Jeffrey L. Tribble, *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7, [https://csu-eastbay.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL\\$UHL/on8gvj/cdi\\_springer\\_books\\_10\\_1007\\_978\\_1\\_4039\\_8091\\_5](https://csu-eastbay.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL$UHL/on8gvj/cdi_springer_books_10_1007_978_1_4039_8091_5).

13 Smith, *An Autobiography*, 205.

14 Matthew Harper, *The End of Days: African American Religion and Politics in the Age of Emancipation* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 15, [https://csu-eastbay.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL\\$UHL/13249qc/alma991070605896202901](https://csu-eastbay.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL$UHL/13249qc/alma991070605896202901).

15 Julia A. J. Foote, *A Brand Plucked From the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* (W. F. Schneider, 1879), 74, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcmassbookdig.brandpluckedfrom00foot/?sp=1&st=image&r=-0.408,-0.02,1.995,1.728,0>.

churches provided. This harsh stance against female preaching reflects a sexist-leaning culture that discouraged meaningful progress in some areas. Through both neglect and explicit policies, most church officials failed to give Black women a platform to preach. However, this was only one piece of a broader issue.

Religious institutions both intentionally and inadvertently detracted from women's individualism and independence. The previously detailed account of Emma J. Ray, in which her refusal to pray was challenged by the Texan preacher, demonstrates that some Southern preachers and institutions expected their congregants to conform to certain religious practices and standards, including praying. It suggests there was little room within some institutions for Black women to experiment and practice religion to an extent that they felt comfortable with. With Ray agreeing to participate the following evening, her account signifies how easily or quickly church activities and pressures can influence one's perspectives and actions. Ray's account also represents that religious institutions forced conformity to both moral standards and gender norms. For context, Harper shares in *The End of Days* that many A.M.E. ministers and women's groups were vocal critics of alcohol consumption, especially among Black men. Those affiliated with the Church often advocated for temperance and prohibition because of their belief that alcohol was destructive to the ideals of Black masculinity: "According to temperance advocates, by undermining black manhood (particularly qualities such as independent self-reliance and the provision for and protection of women and children), intemperance returned black men to the childlike dependence they experienced under slavery."<sup>16</sup> As Harper suggests, calls for temperance were heavily tied to gender roles, and Black women were expected to play a part.

This is especially evident in the religious revival from *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*. In her autobiography, Ray notes that the Texan preacher indirectly criticized her own husband's struggle with alcoholism: "You professed Christian women

who have husbands that are not saved, you don't pray enough."<sup>17</sup> Besides highlighting a dangerous double standard in which Black women were held accountable for both themselves and their husbands, the preacher's stance on alcoholism reflects the wider push for temperance among the religious African American community. Upon hearing the preacher's sermon, which aligned with temperance attitudes, Ray actually considered leaving her spouse: "I will have to give him up, I am going to leave him, or he will leave me. I am not happy anyway, so I will go and do my duty."<sup>18</sup> Referring to church participation as her "duty," Ray signals that this decision was partly motivated by her experience at the revival and the values, such as temperance, associated with church membership. While Ray's revelation could be classified as a positive act of standing up to her husband, the minister's interference and the religious climate likely contributed to this deep and personal decision. When religious standards reinforced her critical view of her husband, she essentially lost a piece of her autonomy when it came to this issue of separation / divorce. These examples convey that church activities and perspectives urged religious, moral, and gender conformity.

In addition, churches stripped Black women of their independence in subtle ways. One of the most vital components of pro-Church arguments is that they economically involved Black women, especially through land ownership, the teaching of financial strategies, and the work of benevolent societies. However, in *Claiming Freedom*, it is revealed that some Black women, such as Selina Stewart, would actually donate or sell their land to religious institutions for church use.<sup>19</sup> Even when sold for a fair market price, a lack of property could hurt the economic prospects of Black women. They would no longer have the same opportunity to live on that land or cultivate crops for profit. The donations would also reduce the amount they could leave to their children through inheritance, a popular

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17 Ray, *Twice Sold*, 45.

18 Ray, *Twice Sold*, 46.

19 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 76.

practice at the time.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, land held a deeper importance to this community. The possession of private property was a symbol of progress and further social recognition. When some freedpeople returned to former sites of slavery for the purpose of settlement and labor, they maintained an intimate connection with the land: “They had loved, borne children, and buried their dead on this land, and had developed a spiritual, if not religious attachment to it.”<sup>21</sup> Despite land having economic and symbolic value among the African American community, some Black women chose to sacrifice their property for the Church. This is a fascinating example of how Church mentality could encourage some to prioritize the group over the individual, or interdependence over independence. These economic implications are not the only example of how religious institutions possibly discouraged individual upward mobility.

In 1892, author, doctoral recipient, and teacher Anna Julia Cooper wrote *A Voice From the South*, in which she shared her critical observations of Southern religious institutions. She disapproves of Southern churches as a whole for their shortcomings regarding the education of Black women: “While yearly numerous young men have been kept and trained for the ministry by the charities of the Church, the number of indigent females who have here been supported, sheltered and trained, is phenomenally small.”<sup>22</sup> Cooper exposes a glaring sign of inequality when she notes that Southern churches disproportionately afforded men educational opportunities. Specifically, she states that only five women graduated through Southern church programs between 1868 and 1886.<sup>23</sup> This reflects an obvious bias and suggests that Southern churches could have been stronger proponents of Black women’s education and empowerment. Many African American women may have struggled to form independent prospects and attain high-paying work positions without the education at their disposal. These constraints on individualism and independence detracted from

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20 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 74.

21 Bell, *Claiming Freedom*, 42.

22 Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South* (The Aldine Printing House, 1892), 44, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

23 Cooper, *A Voice*, 44.

Black women's freedoms in an era when the preservation of independent thought and action was of the utmost importance. When analyzing these issues, their origins are quite obvious.

Male-dominated church structures opened the door to discriminatory policies. In this time period, there was a popular phrase among religious institutions: "Sick will be visited. Poor helped when worthy."<sup>24</sup> The "worthy" aspect of the phrase represents how religious institutions would view the less fortunate through a critical lens. This is expanded upon in an 1877 issue of the *Christian Index* newspaper, which features an interview with Dr. Gwin, an official of Atlanta's First Church. While the text reports on Dr. Gwin's various strategies for managing a church and its congregants, his words reflect a hierarchical mindset. Dr. Gwin admits that "Many of the poor and others are prevented from attending"<sup>25</sup> certain prayer meetings. With church activities organized in this fashion, one's social standing would influence the degree to which one was included. Since many African Americans, including women, struggled with poverty in the aftermath of the Civil War, some were prevented from having full access to the assistive networks that churches provided. This is a prime example of how churches could promote inequitable outcomes among congregants. Many religious events and church meetings were also tainted by the organizational structure that gave congregants little authority. In the same "Church Work" segment, Gwin not only shares his view regarding the segregation of congregants based on age and sex, but the discomfiting opinion that "the pastor is the leader and director of the whole working force of the church, and that his efforts are to be spent, not in doing the work himself, but in getting each individual member to do his or her part."<sup>26</sup> Gwin's condescending language highlights the clear divide between congregants and preachers or officials.

This divide would, unfortunately, allow for some abuses of power. The Texan preacher from *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed*

24 Cynthia Everett, "Freedmen's School Materials" (The Newberry Library, 1872-1875), 1, [https://www-aac-amdigital-co-uk.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/Documents/Images/MS\\_Everett\\_BX15\\_FL554/0](https://www-aac-amdigital-co-uk.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/Documents/Images/MS_Everett_BX15_FL554/0).

25 "Church Work." *The Christian Index*, October 18, 1877, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/2001233948/1877-10-18/ed-1/seq-1/>.

26 "Church Work."

represents this concept quite well. When he ridiculed Emma J. Ray's decision to abstain from praying, she was deeply embarrassed: "He looked right over at me, and I felt that everybody knew he was talking to me... I felt so ashamed, yet I felt I dared not to try it."<sup>27</sup> The preacher's manipulative tactic exemplifies the kinds of power and influence that a minister could employ against Black women. When he humiliated her in front of the congregation, he labeled her as an outsider and hoped that she would submit to his demands based on peer pressure. Male preachers and officials were elevated above congregants to a notable degree. This legitimized their ability to make irresponsible and unfair judgments. Their decisions were swayed by their own prejudice against Black women and the marginalized. Once excommunicated from her A.M.E.-affiliated church, Julia A. J. Foote attempted to dispute her punishment with church officials, but her complaint was ultimately ignored. In her emotionally charged text, she concludes that "there was no justice meted out to women in those days. Even ministers of Christ did not feel that women had any rights which they were bound to respect."<sup>28</sup> Foote's frustration is quite telling of how obvious this inequality was. There was a general lack of regard for Black women within some institutions. Their needs were seen as inferior to the goals and perspectives of individual churches and officials. Foote's account is so vital because it demonstrates that this problem was both recognized and despised among some Black women. The male-dominated hierarchy meant that through the threat of excommunication, officials had significant control over how congregants could express themselves. These limitations fueled Black women's dissatisfaction and wore them down to a point at which they would be forced to conform to church policies or leave their congregation.

These examples prove that churches were not perfect outlets for African American women in the late nineteenth century. When considering their many flaws, it is clear that the field requires a more layered discourse on this subject. Opposing

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<sup>27</sup> Ray, *Twice Sold*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Foote, *A Brand Plucked*, 76.

women's preaching through both inactivity and direct discouragement, some churches prohibited women from occupying powerful and visible roles. This created a dangerous culture in which Black women's influence within churches was explicitly limited. Churches also promoted religious, moral, and gender conformity through their practices and expectations surrounding praying and temperance. In addition, Church-related donations and a lack of proper educational support threatened the upward mobility of Black women. Discriminatory and male-led structures were also a source of inequitable practices. Methods of organization granted male officials the freedom to form policies that looked down upon Black women and the less fortunate. A great number of African American women were forever impacted by this sexist climate.

Yet despite these negative qualities, some Black women retained a positive view of the Church. In her autobiography, Amanda Smith clarifies that her goal as an evangelist and writer was to inspire readers and congregants, including Black women: "I pray that many of my own people will be led to a more full consecration, and that the Spirit of the Lord may come upon some of the younger women who have talent."<sup>29</sup> Smith emphasized the benefits of religiosity and church membership and she encouraged Black women to take advantage of them. While the current historical narrative mostly aligns with Smith's assessment and underscores the positive contributions of churches, these findings prove that the reality is more complex. Religious institutions had numerous faults. By further recognizing the various primary sources and the conclusions they yield, historians can more accurately discuss the era, the accomplishments of Black women, and the complex impact of churches on the African American community. These findings are a step towards a more nuanced analysis that considers all factors. ♦

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29 Smith, *An Autobiography*, 529.



*Illustration by Matthew Borrelli, Chico State*

# PERFORMING INDIGENEITY: IDENTITY, AUTHORITY & INSTITUTIONAL ACCESS

David M. Torres

Cahuilla / Payómkawichum / Asiniibwaan

**Abstract:** This research essay explores the recent proliferation of “Pretendians” (a portmanteau of “Pretend” and “Indians”) occupying spaces of academia within North American higher education, arguing that Indigenous race-shifting in these contexts constitutes a contemporary form of settler-colonial dispossession through the material and institutional appropriation of Indigenous opportunities. Three particular case studies are examined: Artist and Professor Gina Adams; University of California, Berkeley Professor Elizabeth Hoover; and Canadian Artist and Professor Cheyanne Turions. These examples illuminate and perpetuate the ongoing cultural, holistic, and financial theft of Indigenous opportunities made available through institutional reconciliation and Indigenization initiatives. While some Pretendians may deliberately present false Indigenous identities, others rely upon faulty or insufficiently investigated familial claims of descent. Regardless of intent, Indigenous race-shifting represents a continuance of historical Indigenous trauma and results in the measurable diversion of financial resources,

academic appointments, grants, and representational authority away from tribal communities. By foregrounding the material consequences of identity fraud, this essay demonstrates how Pretendianism undermines Indigenous sovereignty within higher education.

In 1969, author Mario Puzo's book chronicling the lives of the Sicilian-American Corleone family's mafia empire was optioned to Paramount Pictures, which immediately got to work on a film adaptation starring Marlon Brando. Brando—cast as the titular Godfather Vito Corleone—would go on to be nominated for, and win, “Best Actor” at the 1973 Academy Awards. Upon the announcement of his award, a beautiful Yaqui / Apache woman clad in full ceremonial regalia walked out on stage to announce that Brando would not be accepting the award. According to her, Brando was boycotting the ceremony entirely to bring attention to a current standoff happening between federal agents and the American Indian Movement taking place at Wounded Knee. She was met with a mix of jeers and applause from the audience and was barred from reading Brando's letter by the ceremony's producers. Her name was Sacheen Littlefeather, and she would go on to be an important and influential voice of Native American activism until her death in 2022. There was, however, a glaring issue hidden by Littlefeather (born Maria Louise Cruz) regarding her Yaqui / Apache identity: she wasn't an Indian. Following her death, controversial Pretendian (a portmanteau of “pretend” and “Indian”) hunter Jacqueline Keeler investigated Littlefeather's claims of Native ancestry only to find, by word of Littlefeather's sisters, that her mother was of French, German, and Dutch descent while her father was of Spanish and Mexican descent. Furthermore, Littlefeather was found to have zero ties with any White Mountain Apache or Yaqui tribes.<sup>1</sup>

Cases of Pretendians like Cruz occupying positions of Native representation in American pop culture include *Yellowstone*

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1 Jacqueline Keeler, “Sacheen Littlefeather Was a Native Icon. Her Sisters Say She Was an Ethnic Fraud,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (October 22, 2022), <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Sacheen-Littlefeather-her-oscar-Native-pretendian-17520648.php>.

actress Kelsey Asbille, who plays the Native daughter-in-law of Kevin Costner's main character, John Dutton III, patriarch of the Yellowstone-Dutton Ranch. Asbille, who claims Cherokee ancestry, came to prominence playing a Native American murder victim in Tyler Sheridan's *Wind River* (2017). In it, her character is brutally raped before being left for dead, a fate suffered by so many Indigenous women that entire activist movements (#NoMoreStolenSister) have been created addressing its prominence. Asbille has stated that "This role, more than any other, [is] in my blood."<sup>2</sup> The same 2017 *New York Times* article identifies her as a descendant of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. When asked about her tribal descendance, tribal representatives of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians stated that Asbille's (born Kesley Asbille Chow) claim of descendance does not exist, "nor has she ever been an enrolled member."<sup>3</sup>

A similar case of Pretendianism includes singer and actress Buffy Sainte-Marie, who falsely claimed her entire life to be born on the Piapot First Nation reserve in Saskatchewan, Canada, and therefore descended from this community. According to her personal website (now archived), she was "taken from her biological parents when she was an infant" and "adopted by a visibly white couple [who] raised [her] in Maine and Massachusetts."<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of her active career—most likely as the result of increased scrutiny—she backpedaled on her claims by changing the narrative surrounding her Native identity, stating she was "adopted into the Piapot family" rather than out of the Piapot Reserve.<sup>5</sup> Following a 2023 investigation by the Canadian Broadcast Company, her birth certificate was published, indicating her place of birth

2 Kevin Noble Maillard, "What's so Hard about Casting Indian Actors in Indian Roles?" *The New York Times* (August 1, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/01/movies/wind-river-native-american-actors-casting.html>.

3 "Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Says Wind River and Yellowstone Actress Is Not Enrolled nor Descended from Tribe," Pechanga.net (September 25, 2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20170925232251/http://www.pechanga.net/content/eastern-band-cherokee-indians-says-wind-river-and-yellowstone-actress-not-enrolled-nor-desc>.

4 Buffy Sainte-Marie, "Biography," Buffy Sainte-Marie (official site), archived October 26, 2023, Wayback Machine, accessed February 21, 2026, [https://web.archive.org/web/20231026193944/https://buffysainte-marie.com/?page\\_id=10867](https://web.archive.org/web/20231026193944/https://buffysainte-marie.com/?page_id=10867).

5 "Canadian Documentary Focuses on 'Icon' Who Based Career on Native Identity," Indianz.com (October 25, 2023), <https://web.archive.org/web/20231026192438/https://indianz.com/News/2023/10/25/canadian-documentary-focuses-on-icon-who-based-career-on-native-identity/>.

to be Stoneham, Massachusetts, to white parents Albert and Winifred Santamaria.<sup>6</sup>

There are potentially dozens of other cases of Pretendianism in film, television, and music, so much so that an entire Wikipedia page is dedicated to the subject of celebrities claiming some sort of Indigenous ancestry. The examples of Littlefeather, Asbille, and Sainte-Marie demonstrate cases of cultural appropriation that are chosen to navigate fields reserved for Indigenous representation within Hollywood, music, and activism. They are also disingenuous, dishonest, and knowingly deceitful. While some might consider these farces benign, there is, in fact, a measurably negative debt incurred to the truth and reality of Indigenous suffering. While speculations, personal opinions, and genuine scholarly debate does abound in answering the questions as to why an individual would adopt an Indigenous cultural identity despite its non-existence,<sup>7</sup> a more measurable impact can be made as to how Pretendianism negatively affects tribal communities via theft and misappropriation of representation. Whether deliberate or unknowingly, Pretendians violate tribal, academic, cultural, and holistic boundaries of Native American sovereignty. Their acts of cultural appropriation contribute to the historical theft perpetrated by centuries of unchecked settler-colonialism. By occupying spaces of importance and influence—spaces bravely fought for by decades of Indigenous blood, sweat, and tears—they negate Indigenous victories and perpetuate the worst parts of cultural genocide and American colonialism. As if the stakes were not already dire, Pretendians' actions also facilitate the diversion of monetary resources—government program funds, academic salaries, scholarships, fellowships, research grants, art sales, and paid speaking engagements—away from Indigenous communities. While “race-shifting” is by no means a wholly contemporary issue, genuine Indigenous scholars, academics, and activists have begun to voice their concerns and

6 “Buffy Sainte-Marie’s official birth certificate,” image file, Wikimedia Commons, accessed February 21, 2026; Buffy Sainte-Marie page, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffy\\_Sainte-Marie#/media/File:Buffy\\_Sainte-Marie's\\_official\\_birth\\_certificate.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffy_Sainte-Marie#/media/File:Buffy_Sainte-Marie's_official_birth_certificate.jpg).

7 Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale University Press, 2022); Darryl Leroux, *Distorted Descent: White Claims to Indigenous Identity* (University of Manitoba Press, 2019).

oppositions through awareness and critical examination, further bolstering Indigenous agency.

While this essay prefaced examples from American pop culture—and indeed there is an entirely separate sphere of research on that subject—the focus will be on the theft of spaces reserved for Indigenous peoples in the realm of scholarship and academia. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, while visual representations (films and television) of Indigenous culture can inform our understandings of Indigenous peoples, these depictions are specific to individual storylines and themes. Secondly, Indigenous scholarship and academia are places devoted solely to fostering and disseminating critical histories, cultures, sacred myth, language, and remembrance of Indigenous identity. For this reason, it is paramount that genuine Indigenous scholars spearhead this endeavor with sincerity of purpose, knowing full well the ethics and responsibilities. We will thus examine several particular case studies involving Pretendians in higher education with hopes of understanding, to some measurable effect, how Pretendianism hurts Indian Country.

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### “Who are Indigenous Peoples?”

It’s important to begin with a definition of Indigeneity before beginning the critical examination of Pretendianism. According to a fact sheet issued by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues titled “Who are Indigenous Peoples?,” no official definition has been adopted. However, “the system has developed a modern understanding of this term [Indigenous]” with the following criteria:

- ◆ “Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.”
- ◆ “Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies.”
- ◆ “Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources.”
- ◆ “Distinct social, economic, or political systems.”
- ◆ “Distinct language, culture, and beliefs.”
- ◆ “Form non-dominant groups of society.”
- ◆ “Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral

environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.”<sup>8</sup>

An important consideration is the lack of reference to specific blood quanta equating to indigeneity, as these qualifiers are the result of settler-colonial constructs of race and pedigree instituted to serve their specific interests (treaty obligations).<sup>9</sup> Tribal membership criteria and customs throughout the United States are as varied as the tribes themselves, but usually revolve around proof of descent from a currently enrolled member and/or a past enrolled member, using U.S. tribal census data.

### #NoMoreRedFaces: Gina Adams

**D**uring the latter half of the twentieth century, Canada sought to examine its legacy of governmental violence perpetrated against First Nations peoples throughout its colonial history. Of particular reproach was its implementation of government-run Indian boarding schools. To address the damage, they established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2007, which pledged over \$72 million in reparations to tribal communities. Part of the commission’s response was to critically engage with former students and family members in hopes of educating the general population about boarding school violence perpetrated by the Canadian government. The commission’s report was eventually finalized by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2015 with ninety-four accompanying “Call to Action” initiatives to be rolled out in the following years.<sup>10</sup> One of those specific “Call to Action” initiatives aimed to close the educational gap existing between First Nations peoples and their Canadian counterparts. Universities pledged a series of “cluster hires”—the Canadian equivalent to Affirmative Action quotas—for their respective colleges using TRC funds to “indigenize” their student and faculty populations. Prestigious colleges such as McGill University, University of Guelph, Memorial University, and the University of Waterloo initiated several rounds of cluster

8 United Nations, “Who Are Indigenous Peoples?” (2023), [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session\\_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf).

9 “Tribal Enrollment Process,” (2015), <https://www.doi.gov/tribes/enrollment>.

10 Government of Canada, “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” Government of Canada (2024), <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>.

hiring to fill TRC quotas in the following years. One such college, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, filled five positions, one of which included Ojibwe Artist/Professor Gina Adams.<sup>11</sup>

Adams, who was hired by Carr in 2019, taught two courses titled “The Foundation” and “Aboriginal Material Practice.” In the spring of 2021, however, her tribal identity would be called into question by a single Tweet: “Would you FAKE a residential school survivor backstory to sell \$35,000 quilts and land a tenure track professorship in Aboriginal Art?”<sup>12</sup> According to former Carr faculty member and colleague of Adams, Michelle Cyca (Cree), the Tweet came from an anonymous (now deleted) Twitter account titled “#NoMoreReadFaces.”<sup>13</sup> It was directed to Adams and addressed the substantial monetary value that had been attached to her curated works of art created throughout her career as a visual artist. According to a comprehensive 2022 article written by Cyca for Canadian news magazine *Macleans* titled “The Curious Case of Gina Adams: A ‘Pretendian’ Investigation,” the tweet thread by #NoMoreReadFaces disputed Adam’s ancestry claims by asserting that “Adam’s grandfather was not Ojibwe at all,” but rather “a white man named Albert Theriault, who was born in Massachusetts to French-Canadian parents.”<sup>14</sup>

Over the course of her time as a resident artist at various U.S. colleges, Adams has claimed that her grandfather, whom she describes as Ojibwe and a member of the Midewiwin society, was taken from White Earth as a child and forced to attend the infamous Carlisle Indian boarding school. Legacies of pain, suffering, generational trauma, and broken promises have become thematic canvases for her visual art. During a 2018 artist-in-residence presentation held by Dartmouth College, Adams presented a hand-made quilt documenting the 1867 Treaty with the Chippewa of Mississippi in which she claimed

11 Steven A. Stolz, Maurizio Tusciano, “A Narrative Approach Exploring the Phenomenon of Pretendians in the Contemporary University,” *Policy Futures in Education* 23, no. 2 (2025), 523.

12 Michelle Cyca, “The Curious Case of Gina Adams: A ‘Pretendian’ Investigation,” *Macleans* (September 6, 2022), <https://macleans.ca/culture/the-curious-case-of-gina-adams-a-pretendian-investigation/>.

13 #NoMoreRedFace (@NoMoreRedFace), Twitter page archived June 18, 2021, Wayback Machine, accessed February 21, 2026, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210618123312/https://twitter.com/NoMoreRedFace>.

14 Cyca, “The Curious Case of Gina Adams.”

her great-great-grandfather Wabanquot, an Ojibwe chief, along with her great-great-uncle, were signatories.<sup>15</sup> Now, all of a sudden, this identity was challenged.

In response to the accompanying controversy, Adams issued an internal statement beginning with: “My name is Gina Adams, and I am the granddaughter of Albert Edmund Theriault, and this is my family genealogy.” Adam’s narrative explained how her grandfather “told [her] that he was Chippewa: Ojibwe-Lakota descent”<sup>16</sup> and was born on the White Earth Reservation, only to be forcibly removed by a man named Charles Wright and sent to Carlisle School. He was born without a birth certificate and adopted an Eastern European surname when marrying her grandmother to sidestep miscegenation laws. Cyca’s article claimed this narrative was sufficient for Emily Carr University, but not Cyca herself. She would take the initiative via openly available public archival documentation to argue that Adams had indeed fabricated her own indigenous identity. Through further research, including statements from White Earth’s enrollment officer and Adam’s own biological sisters, the controversy had already been known by both parties; White Earth was well aware of Adam’s claims, while Adam’s own sisters were aware and antagonistic towards any further inquiry. In the end, Adam’s grandfather was found to have been born in 1906 in Massachusetts to white parents, as proved by a birth certificate. Adam would stick to her story, even applying for tribal membership with White Earth, which was promptly denied due to a lack of evidence of descent.

### Familial Lore vs. Reality: Cheyanne Turions & Elizabeth Hoover

It’s arguably safe to assume that Gina Adams had been found guilty in the court of public opinion for knowingly co-opting the trauma and experiences of Indigenous peoples to further her artistic and academic endeavors. In short and simple terms, many believe she lied. However, the case studies of Canadian

15 Gina Adams, “Dartmouth College Summer 2018 Artist-in-Residence Gina Adams,” YouTube video, 2018, posted by Studio Art, <https://youtu.be/t41VcxBCJag>.

16 Cyca, “The Curious Case of Gina Adams.”

artist Cheyanne Turions and American Professor Elizabeth M. Hoover are anything but simple. While both profited off an assumed identity, their motives demonstrate another facet of Pretendianism sometimes jokingly referred to as “Cherokee Indian Blood Myth” and/or “Cherokee Princess Syndrome.”<sup>17</sup> This occurs when an individual is told through faulty familial histories that they are descended from a long-lost Indigenous ancestor, and thus equate Indigeneity to estimated fractions of blood quantum rather than the previously mentioned criteria. Notable examples include Senator Elizabeth Warren,<sup>18</sup> Iron Eyes Cody (born Espera Oscar de Corti), Miley Cyrus, Johnny Cash, and Johnny Depp<sup>19</sup> (who used this claim to justify his portrayal of Tonto in 2013’s *The Lone Ranger*).

In March of 2021, the same Twitter handle responsible for outing Adams mentioned Simon Fraser University Art Curator Cheyanne Turions, who, over the course of her professional career, was able to secure substantial monetary help via grants from the Canadian Council and Ontario Arts Council intended for Indigenous artists.<sup>20</sup> Turions, who had identified as being of mixed ancestry via her maternal Ojibwe/French-Canadian grandfather, posted a thrice-updated blog statement explaining a four-word personal descriptor from her biography that read “settler and Indigenous ancestry.” According to herself, though she claims this heritage at a professional level despite zero cultural ties beyond the word of her grandfather, she would instead be changing it to “a settler with some Ojibway ancestry to whom connections have been fractured due to violence, shame and racism.”<sup>21</sup> After increased scrutiny into her claims of Indigeneity, Turions would come up short in her own genealogical research, finally settling on the simple descriptor of “settler.” In the final

17 Gregory D. Smithers, “Why Do So Many Americans Think They Have Cherokee Blood?” *Slate Magazine* (Oct. 1, 2015), <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/10/cherokee-blood-why-do-so-many-americans-believe-they-have-cherokee-ancestry.html>.

18 Astead W. Herndon, “Elizabeth Warren Apologizes to Cherokee Nation for DNA Test,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 1, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/01/us/politics/elizabeth-warren-cherokee-dna.html>.

19 Meagan Day, “No, You Are Not Part Cherokee,” *Medium* (July 5, 2016), <https://medium.com/timeline/part-cherokee-elizabeth-warren-cf6be035967e>.

20 Cheryl Chan, “Vancouver Curator Outed as ‘Pretendian’ Resigns from SFU Galleries,” *Vancouver Sun* (Nov. 6, 2021), <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/vancouver-curator-outed-as-pretendian-resigns-from-sfu-galleries>.

21 Cheyanne Turions, “The Histories We Carry,” Cheyanne Turions (Feb. 8, 2021), <https://cheyanneturions.wordpress.com/2021/02/08/the-histories-we-carry/>.

update to her blog (which remains uncategorized and only viewable when using a third-party search engine), she would commit to “[m]aking amends for the grant monies [she] received that were directed to Indigenous curators” by “making equivalent donations, over time to Indigenous-led organizations that support Indigenous futurity.” She would also seek the “professional advice of a transformative justice facilitator in making plans for further accountability and meaningful restitution.”<sup>22</sup>

A similar fate would befall University of California, Berkeley Professor Elizabeth M. Hoover when, in the fall of 2022, serious allegations were made against her tribal identity. Hoover, who had claimed Mohawk and Mi'kmaq ancestry, would publish a “Letter of Apology and Accountability” in May of 2023.<sup>23</sup> The letter detailed how Hoover’s claim of Indigeneity was based on family lore her mother told her about Hoover’s grandmother. Believing this story, Hoover fashioned her entire personal and professional identity around Indigeneity, eventually landing her professorship jobs at Brown University and U.C. Berkeley. However, when called to accountability by her peers and colleagues, Hoover relented and conducted genealogical research—only to come up short.

Many speculate that Hoover had willingly dodged the questions surrounding familial kinships, implying she knew, or at the very least had doubted her own family histories, which centered on the tragic tale of her maternal Mohawk great-grandmother committing suicide to escape an abusive relationship with her alcoholic French-Canadian great-grandfather.<sup>24</sup> In the same “Letter of Apology and Accountability,” Hoover admits to receiving substantial monetary funds in the form of “academic fellowships, opportunities, and material benefits that [she] may not have received had [she] not been perceived as a Native scholar.”<sup>25</sup> Additional monetary gain in the form of book sales, professorship salaries, and paid speaking engagements was

22 Turions, “The Histories We Carry”.

23 Elizabeth Hoover, “Identity,” Elizabeth M. Hoover (May 1, 2023), <https://www.profelizabethmhoover.com/identity>.

24 Jay Caspian Kang, “A Professor Claimed to Be Native American. Did She Know She Wasn’t?” *The New Yorker* (Feb. 26, 2024), <https://web.archive.org/web/20241203091522/https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/03/04/a-professor-claimed-to-be-native-american-did-she-know-she-wasnt>.

25 Hoover, “Identity”.

also mentioned in the same letter—all of which she promised to repay as restitution.

### The Costs & Response: Indian Country's Varied Solutions to Pretendianism

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Adams, Turions, and Hoover represent three of the more well-documented cases of Pretendians in academia, whose identities as Indigenous scholars materially benefited themselves at the literal expense of others. A *New Yorker* article written by journalist Jay Caspian Kang chronicling Hoover's story mentions Indigenous grad student Breylan Martin (who worked under Hoover) and the "difficulties she has had paying for her education, and about the necessity of fellowship and financial-aid opportunities aimed at Native Students," with Kang adding, "Hoover had seized such opportunities her entire academic life, Martin said."<sup>26</sup> Turions likewise acknowledged receiving over \$100,000 CAD in government grants reserved for Indigenous artists, while the ultimate costs of Gina Adams' deceit remain unknown (she is sticking to her story). So problematic is the theft of restitution and reparations via Indigenous "race-shifting" that Indigenous scholar Kim TallBear (Sisíthuŋwaŋ Waŋpéthuŋwaŋ oyáte) lists it among the worst "final acts of appropriation"<sup>27</sup> one can perpetrate against tribal communities. TallBear, a celebrated Professor of Anthropology, has stated, "When race-shifters take leadership and accompanying economic opportunities, leadership capacity building and resources are not going back to Indigenous individuals, families, and communities," further adding, "A key feature of structural racism in the U.S. is the historical and institutional siphoning of material wealth from Indigenous and other people of color and its redirection to white individuals, families, and communities."<sup>28</sup>

The Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), the largest independent consortium of Indigenous scholars, recognized the issue of Indigenous race-shifting a

26 Kang, "A Professor Claimed to Be Native American."

27 Kim TallBear, "Native 'Identity' Fraud Is Not Distraction, but the Final Indian Bounty," *Unsettled* (March 27, 2022), <https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/native-identity-fraud-is-not-distraction>.

28 TallBear, "Native 'Identity' Fraud."

decade ago with the release of the “NAISA Council Statement on Indigenous Identity Fraud,” acknowledging the harm caused by Pretendian scholars. In it, they echo Tallbear’s assertion that “Falsifying one’s identity or relationship to particular Indigenous peoples is an act of appropriation continuous with other forms of colonial violence.”<sup>29</sup>

Other Indigenous activists have opted for a more controversial approach. In 2018, “Pretendian Hunter” Jacqueline Keeler began compiling a list of suspected Pretendians throughout academia, politics, and pop culture. Keeler, who has actively campaigned in exposing fake Indians throughout her journalistic career, privately shared this list with prominent Indigenous thought leaders in 2020.<sup>30</sup> The response, reflecting the breadth of Indigenous diversity, was anything but united. While some academics like TallBear have supported Keeler’s efforts, others have condemned them. In 2021, prominent Indigenous news site *Last Real Indians* published a signed statement submitted by over one hundred prominent tribal members throughout the United States, calling for Keeler to cease publishing her list, opting instead to place the power of response and action in the hands of local tribal communities.<sup>31</sup> The list remains unpublished.

It’s very difficult to get a sense of how higher education throughout the United States and Canada is tackling the prevalence of Pretendians in positions of pedagogical authority at their respective universities. Indigenous health scholar Jessica Kolopenuk (Cree) spoke to the subject in a 2023 article published in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. In it, she explains how the problem is being vaguely tackled via “task forces, committees and advisory councils,” yet fears this “policy-based approach... in some measure, echoes the biopolitical approach logic of colonial governance established through the

29 “NAISA Council Statement on Indigenous Identity Fraud,” Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, 2022, <https://naisa.org/about/council-statements/naisa-council-statement-on-indigenous-identity-fraud/>.

30 Frances Danger, “Let’s Talk About Jacqueline Keeler,” *Medium* (Nov. 20, 2022), <https://medium.com/@francesdanger/lets-talk-about-jacqueline-keeler-c7b8808294b7>.

31 Last Real Indians, “Community Members Speak out Against the ‘Alleged Pretendians List,’” *Last Real Indians*, May 27, 2021, <https://lastrealindians.com/news/2021/5/9/cp3jcyawd83oe095y8npx67n6jng0>.

Indian Act, which administered the historic ‘Indian problem.’”<sup>32</sup> Further compounding this difficulty is the relative newness of Pretendian awareness. In researching this essay, difficulties arose in finding any substantial body of scholarly input on the topic when searching reputable online digital libraries such as JSTOR or EBSCO. Searching relevant keywords such as “Pretendian,” “Fake Indian,” “Native Identity Fraud,” and “Indigenous race-shifting” yielded only a few articles, all of which were published within the last few years. Oddly enough, the search results were populated with a sizable amount of articles written in Spanish. It appears—for now—that most research can only be discerned through news articles, most of which are recent and published only within the last few years.

This ratio, however, is rather unequal to the potential number of cases being uncovered regarding Pretendians. Further cases studies include University of California, Riverside Professor Andrea Smith, who posed as Cherokee and whose research includes the high comorbidities of sexual violence perpetrated towards Indigenous women; former Dartmouth College Native American Studies administrator Susan Taffe Reed, who in 2015 was removed from her position when it was revealed that her claims of Indigeneity were based off a non-profit organization posing as a non-federally recognized (fake) tribe based in Pennsylvania;<sup>33</sup> along with a slew of others who would make this research essay far more substantial.

### Conclusion: The Lingering Question of “Why?”

The essay’s introduction briefly mentioned the question of “why?” Why would someone pose as an Indigenous person? Why would a family story of ancestral Indigeneity compel an individual to base their entire identity around this? Why would that person not substantiate these claims? What does this reveal about Western-centric ideas of relations and legacy? All profoundly relevant and equally puzzling. Phillip

32 Jessica Kolopenuk, “The Pretendian Problem,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 56 (2023): 470.

33 Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (South End Press, 2005); Peter Biello, “Dartmouth College Removes Director Of Native American Program,” *NPR* (Oct. 7, 2015), <https://www.npr.org/2015/10/07/446632586/dartmouth-college-removes-director-of-native-american-program>.

J. Deloria's *Playing Indian* equates this tendency with the all-too-familiar cautionary euphemism of "having your cake and eating it too." Absorbing Indianness has allowed white race-shifters to live within the settler-colonial constructs created by a slow and gradual erasure of Indigeneity, while simultaneously (and ironically) being critical of the worst parts of American modernity. As the erasure of the American frontier reaches its climax, white race-shifters "return to the Indian" for knowledge, spirituality, kinship, culture, and primality.<sup>34</sup> Darryl Leroux's *Distorted Descent* expounds upon this argument. In it, he explains the transformative potential and utility of claiming Indigenous ancestry by writing, "Facts about long-ago ancestors are much less important to race shifters than are their current efforts to create the truth about their [own] identity."<sup>35</sup> Leroux surmises that lingering feelings of collective guilt and responsibility for Indigenous erasure are partly to blame for self-indigenizing.

In 2022, *NPR* published a short, eight-minute discussion between reporter Sam Yellowhorse Kesler (Dine'), comedian Joey Clift (Coast Salish), Anthropology Professor Circe Sturm, and Kim TallBear. Their discussion eventually came to this question regarding motives, with Sturm and TallBear both giving their opinion. While their opinions (along with those of Deloria Jr. and Leroux) are ultimately speculative, they are nonetheless insightful:

**Sturm:** So everything that they [white race-shifters] associate with, you know, white life as being like modern and alienated and not having culture—right?—these things that are associated with whiteness, the near opposite is what they're finding in Indigeneity, which is that it's culturally rich, and it's being part of a community and there's a spiritual foundation to it.

**Kesler:** Kim TallBear... agrees, though she adds another possible explanation.

<sup>34</sup> Deloria Jr., *Playing Indian*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Leroux, *Distorted Descent*, 32.

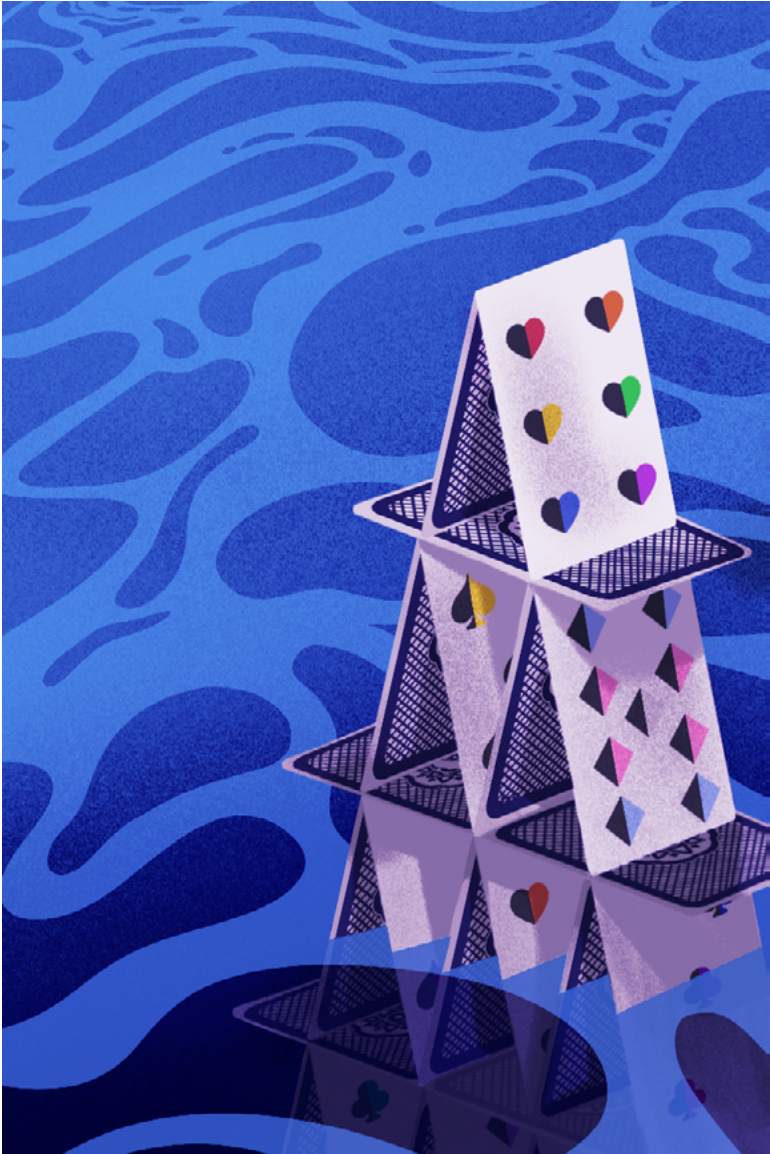
**Kim TallBear:** I think there is a deep desire to disown complicity in the settler project. I think people don't want to feel the historical guilt for living on stolen land. And I'm not saying they are obviously or explicitly thinking these things. I think a lot of this stuff is subconscious.<sup>36</sup>

Sturm, who had claimed Choctaw and Cherokee ancestry, would cease claiming descendance from both tribes following genealogical research.<sup>37</sup> The irony is plentiful; expect the Pretendians to use every part of the buffalo. ♦

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36 Sam Yellowhorse Kesler, "The Race-Shifting of 'Pretendians,'" *NPR* (Feb. 23, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/23/1082622851/native-american-communities-concerned-about-self-identification-wannabes>.

37 Circe Sturm, "Response to TAAF" (Feb. 5, 2025), [https://minio.la.utexas.edu/colaweb-prod/profile/custom\\_pages/0/1591/response\\_to\\_tAAF\\_c759fd45-99a2-4586-b679-d4a8e67d0dd7.pdf](https://minio.la.utexas.edu/colaweb-prod/profile/custom_pages/0/1591/response_to_tAAF_c759fd45-99a2-4586-b679-d4a8e67d0dd7.pdf).



*Illustration by Greyson Rout Vazquez, Chico State*

# HOW TO DISARM A MOVEMENT: EXPLORING GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT FACTIONALISM THROUGH AN EAST BAY GAY COMMUNITY PERIODICAL

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**Peter McCarthy**

**Abstract:** The Gay Liberation Movement was a period of radical community activism beginning in 1969 that sought to advance social equality for the LGBTQ+ community in the United States and around the world. A hallmark of this movement, its advances, and its struggles was the print media produced by Gay Liberation organizations. Thousands of printed movement media circulated throughout the United States in the 1970s, and *Gay Sunshine* was one of the largest. By reviewing letters to the editor, editorial notes, and author submissions, I identified many points on which internal factions of the Gay Liberation Movement disagreed. This essay explores the contours of such divisions, including the utility of incrementalism versus radicalism; the value of being closeted; whether cisgender homosexuals

and transgender, transsexual, or gender nonconformists belonged to the same movement; and the space for and role of queer women in the movement.

## Introduction

In the wee hours of the night on June 28, 1969, on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, New York, an altercation between the patrons of a gay bar named the Stonewall Inn and officers of the New York City Police Department sparked the movement for gay liberation. After a string of police raids on Stonewall and other gay bars, the community of lesbians, gay men, drag queens, and cross-dressers subjected to these raids decided to fight back. The bar patrons threw things ranging from loose pocket change and lipstick to cans of beer, bricks, and broken glass, and the scene quickly became a riot from which the police barricaded themselves into the bar.<sup>1</sup> In the following days, the queer community organized numerous public demonstrations to advocate for expanded civil rights for sexual minorities. They printed and distributed leaflets, flyers, and zines; wrote protest chants; and marched in the streets. Although there had been previous episodes of resistance against police suppression of queer people across the country in months and years prior, this week of mass organizing and demonstrations in New York City catalyzed a new decade of civil rights organizing for queer people.

The Gay Liberation Movement was a distinct episode in the longer struggle for homosexual civil rights in the United States that occurred alongside, and was inspired by, other late twentieth-century radical activist movements like the Women's Liberation Movement, the Black Liberation Movement, the American Indian Movement, and others. Gay Liberation was characterized by a militant brand of activism and revolutionary ideals that distinguished itself from earlier homosexual rights groups and their efforts. There had been an earlier movement for homosexual equality, often called the homophile movement, but gay liberation was different because homophile activists

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<sup>1</sup> Sean Heather K. McGraw, *The Gay Liberation Movement: Before and After Stonewall* (Rosen Publishing Group, 2019), 35.

advocated for queer people to exercise discretion and were typically more conservative than their liberationist successors.<sup>2</sup> The two largest and earliest homophile organizations from this generation were the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis.<sup>3</sup> Mattachine was founded in Los Angeles in 1950 by Harry Hay, and by 1953 had thousands of members and its own newspaper *ONE*.<sup>4</sup> The Daughters of Bilitis were formed in San Francisco in 1955 by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, who co-edited the group's journal *The Ladder*.<sup>5</sup> Both groups were driven by a mission to garner social and legal protections for sexual minorities, but they lacked the publicity that would be common for gay liberation groups. Like their radical social justice movement contemporaries, activists from the gay liberation movement sought to abolish prisons, called for an end to police harassment, fought to end workplace discrimination, and generally lobbied for broader social acceptance of gay, lesbian, and gender-variant people. Ideally, gay liberation meant no more secrecy for homosexuals and an end to discrimination against them. One of the central modes through which gay liberation communicated this vision was in print media.

A hallmark of the gay liberation movement was the proliferation of a gay press. Gay liberation groups nationwide produced newsletters, zines, fliers, pamphlets, lithographs, and other printed materials to distribute at protests, community events, and gay gathering spaces. Such printed creations preserved troves of noteworthy primary-source evidence about the movement's strides, setbacks, aims, and leaders in real time. One such newspaper that eventually obtained national and international distribution was a semi-monthly periodical from Berkeley, California, called *Gay Sunshine*.

*Gay Sunshine* started in Berkeley, California, in August 1970. The founding members of its editorial board were mostly members of the Berkeley chapter of the Gay Liberation Front

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2 McGraw, *The Gay Liberation Movement*, 21.

3 McGraw, *The Gay Liberation Movement*, 19.

4 Will Roscoe, ed., "Introduction," in *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder* (Beacon Press, 1996), 4.

5 McGraw, *The Gay Liberation Movement*, 21.

(GLF) who lived together in a Berkeley commune.<sup>6</sup> It was the first gay liberation periodical to reach international distribution and became one of the largest papers of the movement.<sup>7</sup> *Gay Sunshine* printed the musings of its founding collective and other gay liberation leaders from the San Francisco Bay Area, alongside submissions from its readers.<sup>8</sup> A close examination of the first ten issues of *Gay Sunshine* reveals that the gay liberation movement in the San Francisco Bay Area was rife with internal tensions. These papers reveal that the San Francisco and Berkeley chapters of the GLF quickly fell apart; that the editorial collective of *Gay Sunshine* also dissolved to factionalism; and that members of the gay liberation movement disagreed about an array of issues that ultimately rendered the movement rudderless.

The contours of the fissures within the Bay Area gay liberation movement, as expressed through the pages of *Gay Sunshine*, are the focus of this research. The first section demonstrates that *Gay Sunshine* was a movement paper, and its editors and contributors intended for the paper to appeal to the entire gay community in the Bay Area. Section two will examine three issues over which the gay liberation movement could not find common ground: coming out, movement goals, and gay separatism. The final section explores rifts within *Gay Sunshine*'s two editorial collectives and how they related to the dissolution of the local GLF chapters. By examining the contents of *Gay Sunshine* as primary source evidence, it becomes clear that internal dissent and infighting prohibited the movement from ultimately defining or achieving a coherent vision.

### ***Gay Sunshine: A Voice for the Gay People***

**G**ay *Sunshine* sought to be a mouthpiece for the movement. This was apparent from two key pieces of evidence. Firstly, on the first page of the first issue, there is a small passage by an author named Nick Benton called "Who Needs It?" Benton was one of the first contributors to *Gay Sunshine*, and

6 *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3 (November 1970): 2.

7 "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #9, October/November 1971, 2.

8 *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 1 (August 1970): 18.

an active member of the Berkeley student movement, gay liberation movement, and a liberation theologian.<sup>9</sup> The second key signal to *Gay Sunshine*'s motivations was the repeated call for submissions that appeared in nearly every issue. These demonstrated that the paper had two principal missions. They wanted to be a reporter of the gay liberation movement and the gay community in the Bay Area; the paper also wanted to represent the entire gay community by encouraging all of its gay readers to submit to the paper or join the editorial collective.

Nick Benton's contribution to the first issue of *Gay Sunshine* revealed that the paper had broad ambitions. In this brief passage, Benton grappled with the central question that necessarily accompanied a niche newspaper: Why should this exist?<sup>10</sup> What exactly is a gay newspaper, and what would its purpose be? Here, Benton spelled out *Gay Sunshine*'s founding mission: "I used to think a gay newspaper would also serve another purpose—that of being an exercise of a basic component of freedom. Gays, I felt, need a free press to protect their rights."<sup>11</sup> According to Benton, a gay newspaper would not only help protect gay rights, but "it would be a catalyst that could call forth the political potential of a subculture such as the one in San Francisco that constitutes more than 10 percent of the total population."<sup>12</sup>

*Gay Sunshine*, in the words of one of its first contributors, was meant to both advance gay rights and mobilize the gay community into a formidable political bloc. Benton knew that this desired appeal aligned with the aspirations of the growing gay liberation movement. He knew that the movement aimed to be considered a serious political entity. "Such a newspaper," Benton argued, "could wield a substantial amount of political power. The kind of power that is needed to protect the rights of the citizenry against the blatant kinds of atrocities that are common to come down on homosexuals."<sup>13</sup> As a whole, the gay liberation movement recognized that the repression of

9 Nick Benton, "Gayness & Seminary," *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3 (November 1970): 12.

10 Nick Benton, "Who Needs It?" *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 1 (August 1970): 2.

11 Benton, "Who Needs It?"

12 Benton, "Who Needs It?"

13 Benton, "Who Needs It?"

homosexuals in public life was a legal and political issue that required drastic remedy.

Previewing the contentions that the gay liberation movement had with its homophile predecessors, Benton argued that *Gay Sunshine* should appeal to the whole gay community. He wrote, “Existing gay publications—such as the *San Francisco Free Press* on one end and SIR’s *Vector* magazine on the other—almost deliberately appeal to only one sector of the total gay community in the area.”<sup>14</sup> But, as a figure in the greater wave of social justice movements in the early seventies, Benton also recognized that the paper had to speak to broader issues than just sexuality. “What is needed is a newspaper that will represent those who understand themselves as oppressed—politically oppressed by an oppressor that not only is down on homosexuality, but equally down on all things that are not white, straight, middle class, pro-establishment.”<sup>15</sup>

“Such a paper,” he wrote, “should harken to a greater cause—the cause of human liberation, of which homosexual liberation is just one aspect—and on that level make its stand.”<sup>16</sup> Benton understood that the gay liberation movement was but one moving part of a larger series of societal shifts. This brief column revealed multiple inspirations behind the founding of *Gay Sunshine*. First and foremost, a gay paper would be an exercise of free speech. Secondly, it would serve as a tool for gay community organizing and political mobilization. Thirdly, it would ideally be a counter to the established gay press that seemed to exclude broader sections of the gay community. Lastly, it would be a movement paper—not solely aimed at gay liberation, but seeking liberation for humanity at large.

Benton’s first-page article was not the sole indication that *Gay Sunshine* sought to be the voice of the gay liberation movement; the editors wrote as much outright. In the same flagship issue, August 1970, there was a small text box on the penultimate page that read, “Everything You Say We Are We Are.”<sup>17</sup> The

14 Benton, “Who Needs It?”

15 Benton, “Who Needs It?”

16 Benton, “Who Needs It?”

17 “Everything You Say We Are We Are,” *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 1 (August 1970): 18.

box was an open call for submissions: “If you are Gay, this is your paper. Feel free to write us.”<sup>18</sup> It went beyond simply calling for submissions, however. The text box also invited the readership to join the editorial collective, explaining, “This paper is run by an editorial collective. You are welcome to become a part of that collective. Make this paper your paper.”<sup>19</sup> This was the first issue of the paper, and the first piece of evidence that the founders of *Gay Sunshine* wanted the paper to reflect the broadest possible coalition of the gay community, and that they welcomed the participation of any and every gay person who showed interest in bringing the paper to life.

The design and specific wording of the call for submissions to later issues changed periodically. Once, in the second issue, the call for submissions was omitted or forgotten entirely.<sup>20</sup> Whereas the call for submissions in the first issue was on the penultimate page, the box appeared on the first page of number three, and it had new caveats.<sup>21</sup> In this November 1970 issue, the editorial staff announced, “*Gay Sunshine* is put together by a collective of people, the core of whom live in a commune in Berkeley. We put it together to serve the community. No one who works on *Gay Sunshine* gets paid; no one makes any money from it. It is to be a people’s paper.”<sup>22</sup> The editors stopped shy of inviting anyone to join the collective, but they stuck to their principle of open invites for submissions: “If you are Gay, you have something heavy and beautiful to say. Submit an article, a poem, a letter, a drawing, a photograph...add your energy to the community by letting the community in on your creativity.”<sup>23</sup> By stating explicitly that *Gay Sunshine* was a “people’s paper,” the founding collective allowed little room for interpretation: they wanted the paper to be the voice of both the local gay community and the greater movement for gay liberation.

However, such a mission was not immune to infighting and discord. An editorial in the sixth issue, dated March 1971,

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18 “Everything You Say We Are We Are,” 18.

19 “Everything You Say We Are We Are,” 18

20 *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 2 (October 1970).

21 Call for submissions, *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3 (November 1): 2.

22 Call for submissions, *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3: 2.

23 Call for submissions, *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3: 2.

signaled that the paper was affected by divisions within the broader movement, yet remained devoted to fostering solidarity and community. “*Gay Sunshine* should reflect the thoughts and feelings of our community—or reflect the lack of community, if that’s the situation, and how to bring us closer together.”<sup>24</sup> After indicating that the editorial collective had fragmented into separate working groups, the editorial once again called for the readership to give their feedback to the paper: “but more important than who does the work and the editorial deciding, is whether you let the collective(s) know your likes and dislikes of what has appeared so far, how off-base it is to your politics, sense of community and community goals, etc.”<sup>25</sup> Maintaining their founding promise or vision to be a tool of community organizing, the editors wrote, “we will try to get the paper closer to being a community paper—and, almost as a byproduct of that, get a closer community because of a better paper.”<sup>26</sup> This editorial note showed that the organizers of *Gay Sunshine* wanted the paper to serve as a movement vehicle.

### Too Many Voices

The submission by Nick Benton and the calls for community participation made it obvious that *Gay Sunshine* was dedicated to providing a space wherein the gay community could voice its opinions, and this mission was guided by the hope that doing so would be a politically salient organizing strategy. Their efforts, however, may have had an opposite effect. The paper revealed many internal disagreements among gay liberationists and other sects of both the gay rights movement and the gay community at large. There were two themes around which the gay community could not agree: anonymity or the value of being closeted, and the tension between institutionalism and radicalism—evident by the fact that early issues of *Gay Sunshine* showed that movement leaders were sometimes at odds with the paper’s audience, and that movement

24 *Gay Sunshine* Collective, “Editorial: Power to the Gay People?—A Voice to the Gay People,” *Gay Sunshine* #6, March 1971, 2.

25 *Gay Sunshine* Collective, “Power to the Gay People,” 2.

26 *Gay Sunshine* Collective, “Power to the Gay People,” 2.

leaders disagreed amongst themselves. As a movement, Gay Liberation sought fully realized social equality, which necessarily included the freedom to be “out” and unashamed of one’s sexuality. Furthermore, the ability to publicly identify as a homosexual was a central goal of the Gay Liberation movement because gay people had endured decades of state repression before *Gay Sunshine* released its first issue. During the Cold War and McCarthy era in the 1950s, hundreds of gay people were dismissed from employment in the public sector because they were “emotionally unstable and morally corrupt” and “vulnerable to blackmail by foreign agents.”<sup>27</sup> Not only were homosexuals removed from jobs they already had, but they were also preemptively barred from military service and federal employment by executive order in 1953.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to employment discrimination, gays were often subjected to violent police raids on gay bars and other meeting spaces.<sup>29</sup> If they were arrested in these raids, they were sometimes named in the local press and subsequently fired from their jobs. When police raided a gay bar in Chicago and arrested more than a hundred people in the spring of 1964, *The Chicago Tribune* published their names and occupations, and especially spotlighted those who were teachers or other school officials.<sup>30</sup> So, given that the consequences of the state-led effort to penalize homosexuality could be so extreme, fears of public humiliation and professional repercussions were justified. In the pages of *Gay Sunshine*, however, the battle over the closet in the liberation movement was still being fought. For idealists, the only way to be truly liberated was to loudly proclaim one’s sexuality and force the societal change they wished to see. For others, though, the calls to come out of the closet from movement types were tyrannical in their own right.

Coming out was such a hot topic that it was given a full-page essay in the inaugural issue of *Gay Sunshine*. Jim Lewis Stoll,

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27 Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Faber and Faber, 1995), 17.

28 Streitmatter, *Unspeakable*, 17.

29 McGraw, *The Gay Liberation Movement*, 22.

30 Tracy Baim ed., *Gay Press, Gay Power: The Growth of LGBT Community Newspapers in America* (Prairie Avenue Productions and Windy City Media Group, 2012), 26.

a minister with the Unitarian church, wrote, “feeling strongly that the problem of homosexuality in this society would be solved if individuals—particularly those in professional positions—‘came out’ and were up-front about their homosexuality, I spoke out about my own homosexuality.”<sup>31</sup> Stoll himself had come out while presenting at the Unitarian Continental College Conference in Colorado, in September 1969, and wrote to *Gay Sunshine*: “It was a good experience; the people there were very receptive and supportive.”<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the following month, Stoll was told by another official that he would be unable to find a church that would accept him as a minister, and by April 1970, he was stripped of his full ministerial status.<sup>33</sup> In the end, Stoll’s essay was in some form a hopeful message, as he was unsuccessful in finding employment within the church; he continued to speak at Unitarian conferences and convinced the church to adopt a resolution “calling for an end to discrimination against homosexuals and bisexuals, both in society generally and in the Unitarian church in particular.”<sup>34</sup>

In the second issue, Sister Brian Chavez submitted an item called “Blatant in Beautiful!” The degree of Chavez’s participation in gay liberation activism beyond this single entry is unclear. Though here Chavez mused about the value of being undeniably and visibly gay, and especially how the visibility of queerness behaved in the gay community. “Straight society,” Chavez wrote, “is really down on Blatant Gays, and that affects and oppresses all Gay people. Because Gays won’t be treated as beautiful human beings until even the most ‘Flaming Faggots’ and ‘Diesel Dykes’ are respected in Our community, as well as in Straight society.”<sup>35</sup> Recalling the National Students GLF Conference in San Francisco in August 1970, Chavez observed, “I looked around me and noticed that many of the ‘heavy Gay Lib.’ people could easily pass for straight. Only a few Gay people were Blatant-on-Sight. Straight society has so oppressed our people that some Gay people still try to blend in with the

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31 Jim Stoll, “Gay is Unitarian,” *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 1 (August 1970): 18.

32 Stoll, “Gay is Unitarian.”

33 Stoll, “Gay is Unitarian.”

34 Stoll, “Gay is Unitarian.”

35 Sister Brian Chavez, “Blatant is Beautiful!”, *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 2 (October 1970): 9.

Straights.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Chavez also acknowledged that being blatantly gay wasn’t exclusively about dress and named the specter of the closet: “It’s also your personality, which (as I see it) is either Gay or Closety. It is very important to the Gay movement...to show affection in Public. Gay People must rid themselves of the fear of showing affection in public.”<sup>37</sup> Chavez then ended the essay with a call to action for the readers. “It’s time to be YOURSELF! Don’t blend in with Straight people—that’s oppressing yourself.”<sup>38</sup>

In the same issue, one of the *Gay Sunshine* founders, Morgan Pinney, penned an opinion piece in which he questioned the value that closeted members contributed to the movement. Pinney thought it was impossible to be both closeted and truly devoted to the cause of gay liberation. To introduce his perspective, Pinney took issue with an activist’s decision to adopt a pen name and wrote, “A young gay lib activist recently showed me a notice he had written...But then it was signed with a pseudonym.”<sup>39</sup> According to Pinney, “Anyone who shouts ‘Out of Your Closets’ had damn well better be speaking from a ‘de-closeted’ position. It will do none of us any service to act as provocateur urging others to actions we are not committed to take.”<sup>40</sup> While Pinney agreed that it was an individual’s right to come out on their own timeline, he argued that liberation itself demanded public openness. Though acknowledging that such an opinion could be alienating, Pinney tempered his position by writing, “We could never say de-closetation would be a pre-requisite for participation in gay liberation[.]”<sup>41</sup> So then he elaborated: “Any homosexual organization which boasts a secret membership or any gay publication which allows pseudonyms is guaranteeing its own failure.”<sup>42</sup> In the first two issues, as expressed by Minister Stoll, Sister Chavez, and Morgan Pinney, *Gay Sunshine* clearly favored a view of gay liberation that advocated for gay

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36 Chavez, “Blatant is Beautiful!”

37 Chavez, “Blatant is Beautiful!”

38 Chavez, “Blatant is Beautiful!”

39 Morgan Pinney, “Out of Your Closets,” *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 2 (October 1970): 13.

40 Pinney, “Out of Your Closets.”

41 Pinney, “Out of Your Closets.”

42 Pinney, “Out of Your Closets.”

people to come out of the closet.

Issue six hosted the paper's sophomore editorial, wherein the editors made a call for submissions. The call included a strange new condition: "You letter writers out there, please write us... And use your name for publication[.]"<sup>43</sup> In this editorial note, the administrators announced that *Gay Sunshine* would discontinue the use of anonymous submissions. "We have one article in this issue without a name... This will be the last anonymous G-S item."<sup>44</sup> With this editorial, *Gay Sunshine* adopted a clear stance. Pinney was wrong; being out *was*, in fact, a prerequisite for participation.

This condition was not received well by at least one reader. Arlene Arnold from Columbus, Ohio, wrote a scathing rebuke to the call for "so-called liberationists" to come out, and it was published in the newly formatted "Dear Sunshine" column of *Gay Sunshine's* seventh issue. "You're forcing your views on your contributors so you won't get a reflection of where the gay community is but where you *want* it to be," Arnold wrote.<sup>45</sup> According to Arnold, anonymity could be useful in the path to coming out, and *Gay Sunshine's* demand for signed submissions was an obstacle. As seen by their quote: "What a great help to a person 'coming out' to be able to write an honest article of what they think... Not all of our community can be as 'Free' as you are... Please don't break down my closet door. Let me open it."<sup>46</sup> Bravely, Arnold included a complete mailing address and phone number at the end of the letter and encouraged the newspaper to do the same. The author justified this action by writing, "And please don't think I'm out of my closet just because I'm rapping to gay people and signing my name in a gay paper. PLEASE! Who in the hell reads this paper anyway but gay people, understanding movement people and a few minutemen and the government... my neighbors and boss *don't*."<sup>47</sup> Although Arnold's perspective was outnumbered by those who favored coming

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43 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial: Power to the Gay People?—A Voice to the Gay People," *Gay Sunshine* #6, March 1971, 2.

44 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Power to the Gay People?"

45 Arlene Arnold, Letter to the Editor, *Gay Sunshine* #7, June/July 1971, 16.

46 Arnold, Letter to the Editor, 16.

47 Arnold, Letter to the Editor, 16.

out, it ultimately showed that the editors and the readers weren't always on the same page when it came to the value of the closet.

The North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) revealed another element of internal dissent in the Gay Liberation movement. In particular, it revealed that there was a fight over who and what constituted righteous gay liberation activism and whose tactics were outdated or capitulated to the status quo. NACHO was first announced in issue one of *Gay Sunshine*. And the announcement advertised a three-day event which would be attended by "Gay Liberationists from New York and Chicago as well as many other groups."<sup>48</sup> Two months later, though, Jim Rankin, one of the founders of the Berkeley Gay Liberation Front, wrote a report in issue two of *Gay Sunshine* called "NACHO Upside Down." In this piece, Rankin described NACHO as "an alliance of Mattachine, One, and a few others," and said of the notable non-participants, "many of the most effective organizations in the Bay Area (SIR, DOB, CRH) either did not belong or took a very cautious view of NACHO."<sup>49</sup> According to Rankin, amongst those who had attended the conference, there was heated disagreement between the activists of the Gay Liberation movement and the organizers of the preceding Homophile movement. "A confrontation between the homophile movement and the gay liberation movement quickly developed... [and] what happened was three terrible, joyous days of open, honest battle."<sup>50</sup> In said battle, Rankin wrote, "the radical-conservative conflict became bitter indeed... There were threats of violence (from the establishment, as usual, contrary to popular opinion), and Larry Littlejohn threatened to call the police to throw the gay lib types out."<sup>51</sup> According to Rankin, the fallout of this clash signaled the definitive end of an era; he wrote, "This was the battle that ended the homophile movement."<sup>52</sup> Eulogizing the homophile movement and christening the ascent of Gay Lib, Rankin's report read:

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48 "NACHO," *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 1 (August 1970): 5.

49 Jim Rankin, "NACHO Upside Down," *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 2 (October 1970): 4.

50 Rankin, "NACHO Upside Down."

51 Rankin, "NACHO Upside Down."

52 Rankin, "NACHO Upside Down."

It is now time to move on, and the ground rules and basic assumptions of that movement are no longer acceptable or effective...The struggle was not over strategy or a question of there being many roads to the truth. It was that there was a deep division as to what the goals ought to be...The older group felt it had to justify itself to the world... [while] the others replied that the whole thing must be turned upside down.<sup>53</sup>

However, Rankin was not alone in his analysis of the failed NACHO experiment and the rift between older and younger gay activists. Del Martin, co-founder of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Council on Religion for the Homosexual, submitted an essay for publication in *Gay Sunshine*'s third issue, November 1970. In it, Martin wrote that "[NACHO] had displayed vividly our divisions rather than our unity[.]"<sup>54</sup> In a deeply personal admission, this pioneer of the homophile movement wrote to *Gay Sunshine*, revealing that "[l]ike NACHO I have been torn apart. I am bereft. For I have during this week of struggle between the men and the women, the conservatives and the Gay Liberationists, been forced to the realization that I have no brothers in the homophile movement."<sup>55</sup>

Martin's essay affirmed Rankin's analysis in the previous issue: the homophile movement and its organizational giants were in decline. As a result, she publicly cut ties with these entities, writing:

Goodbye, my alienated brothers... Goodbye to the bulwark of the Mattachine grandfathers, self-styled monarchs of a youth cult which is no longer theirs... I must bid them farewell... Goodbye, not just to SIR, but all those homophile organizations across the country with an open door policy for women. It's only window dressing for the public.<sup>56</sup>

In her dirge, Martin also repeated Rankin's assertion that NACHO never existed. "Goodbye to NACHO. It never really happened. It was a non-organization consisting only of reams

53 Rankin, "NACHO Upside Down."

54 Del Martin, "If that's all there is..." *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3 (November 1970): 3.

55 Martin, "If that's all there is..."

56 Martin, "If that's all there is..."

of purple dittoed rules and regulations... the steeple without the people.”<sup>57</sup> In Martin’s own words, the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations was an empty promise that marked the official close of the homophile movement.

Martin’s pain was not solely aimed at the establishment types; she also addressed the lesbian organizations and the gay liberationists, and offered a theory as to why the movement was so fractured. Writing,

Goodbye to Gay Liberation, too. They applauded the Lesbians who wished to establish common cause with them and the other men at the NACHO meeting. But somehow we are left with the feeling their applause was for the disruption of the meeting, not its purpose. There is reason for the splits within their own movement... Like the tired old men they berate they have not come to grips with the gut issues.<sup>58</sup>

In this farewell address, Del Martin revealed that the movement, which ostensibly sought to liberate all peoples, had sadly continued to relegate women to subservient roles and unequal status, and that the younger liberationist movement fought against its elders rather than recognizing their common cause.

The next month, in December 1970, a letter from a reader named Zahara echoed Del Martin’s explanation of the rift between the male and female gay liberation groups. Zahara wrote an open letter called “To Gay Males,” that succinctly expressed the same male-centric chauvinism that Martin noticed. Damningly, Zahara wrote:

I want to call you brothers—but you aren’t ready for that. [But] you aren’t ready for that because ‘brotherhood’ seems to be the extent of your humanity. You made ‘gay’ a synonym for male homosexual. In your art, ‘gay lovers’ are male lovers. In your writing, ‘gay liberation’ is ‘his liberation.’ You [ultimately] identify your oppressor as ‘straight’ society, yet gay women are struggling with their

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57 Martin, “If that’s all there is...”

58 Martin, “If that’s all there is...”

'straight' sisters against the sexism which oppresses them as women and as gay persons."<sup>59</sup>

In doing so, Zahara's appeal to gay men effectively did the same thing as Martin's farewell in the previous issue: it exposed that the gay liberation movement was afflicted by a lack of intersectional thought and solidarity. They systematically excluded women from leadership roles, from movement events, and from the pages of their papers.

*Gay Sunshine* may not have been the source or cause of the infighting within the gay liberation movement, but the editors did tacitly endorse contentious stances through editorial discretion. By favoring multiple men who wrote about the value of coming out, they disavowed that closeted gay people could be valuable partners in solidarity. When the editorial collective explicitly said that they would stop printing anonymous entries and that writers must submit their names for publication, they felt pushback. Notably, that pushback came from a woman. Nor was *Gay Sunshine* to blame for the devolution of the August 1970 NACHO conference in San Francisco, but regardless of their coverage revealed that the Gay Liberationists were poised to fight within the movement from their earliest days. Not only was there fighting between the generations of the gay rights movement, but also between the sexes. According to a founder of one of the largest lesbian societies in the country, both the homophile and gay liberation movements systematically excluded women while trumpeting their cause within the pages of their publications. Overall, these examples foreshadowed the turmoil that embattled the paper's founding editorial collective the following year.

### The Collective Falls Apart

While *Gay Sunshine* was a movement paper that was dedicated to the gay community and sought to represent all gay people and similarly oppressed peoples, its ambitions were too widespread, and this ultimately became the founding collective's undoing. The paper was dedicated to engendering

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59 Zaharah, "To Gay Males," *Gay Sunshine* #4, December 1970, 7.

solidarity with other contemporary movements and so devoted to platforming every gay person who submitted to it, that its leaders didn't recognize the warning signs of the infighting within the different wings of the gay rights movement. In January 1971, six months after its first issue, the original collective that founded the paper disbanded.<sup>60</sup> The paper was reconstituted under a new collective, which also started to fragment within six months of its charter.<sup>61</sup> The reasons for this internal upheaval, as expressed by the Gay Sunshine Collective, were ultimately slowly revealed in print over the next year of issues. At first, this collapse went unacknowledged; but, as time went on, the publishers began to print their explanations and opinions outright in editorial notes.

Even though *Gay Sunshine* was intended to appeal to the entire gay community, the original editorial collective was unable to reconcile its differences and dissolved within six months. Although the original collective never named its members, the earliest issues of *Gay Sunshine* featured a significantly more visible presence of women on its pages, both as named authors and in the subjects published. However, the paper began to give itself an explicitly gendered—and male—identity in its subhead starting in January 1971.<sup>62</sup> In issues one through four, August to December 1970, each cover page featured a central graphic, the periodical's name, the volume and issue number, and the month and year of publication, but no subhead. However, issue five was the first time the newspaper had a subhead, and it read: *Published by a Gay Men's Collective*.<sup>63</sup> The subhead of subsequent editions indicated that the publishing collective struggled to accurately represent the group and its project. In *Gay Sunshine's* sixth issue, the subhead became "published by Gay males."<sup>64</sup> The seventh issue read, "a male paper of Gay Militancy."<sup>65</sup> In each successive issue, the editorial collective continued to make adjustments, but it appeared

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60 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, August 1971, 2.

61 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, August 1971, 2.

62 *Gay Sunshine* #5, January 1971.

63 Cover, *Gay Sunshine* #5, January 1971.

64 Cover, *Gay Sunshine* #6, March 1971.

65 Cover, *Gay Sunshine* #7, June 1971.

they were beginning to find a more comfortable niche. In issues eight and nine, they chose “a paper of Gay Militancy,”<sup>66</sup> and by their tenth issue, they found the subhead that would last for the remainder of *Gay Sunshine*’s circulation: “a newspaper of Gay Liberation.”<sup>67</sup> Such fluctuation pointed to the fact that the collective and the newspaper in general experienced a crisis of identity.

Interestingly, in the sixth installment, the collective began another trend: consistently printing editorial notes. The editorial in issue six, March 1971, explicitly stated that tensions were brewing among the different subgroups of the *Gay Sunshine* collective. It read, “This issue, was put out by two groups: the still active members of the Gay Sunshine Collective and a group who wanted to work on the paper but found it very difficult to work with some members of the Collective in the ways that they found it easiest to work.”<sup>68</sup> Preceding this revelation was the statement that the paper should reflect the community, or lack thereof, and that the paper could only realistically reflect the views and opinions of those who put it together.<sup>69</sup> A dedicated reader would find this note in keeping with the collective’s cause and its general philosophy about the variety of individuals and ideologies present in the movement. However, the specific mention that the paper “[should] reflect the lack of community, if that’s the situation,” was another clue that things internally were going awry.<sup>70</sup> After this issue, editorial notes became a permanent feature.

Over the next three issues, editorial notes showed that the collective was in a tailspin, both quietly and obviously. Quietly, the paper revealed some fallout of the rift between the original collective by declaring it had a new address.<sup>71</sup> In the first six issues, August 1970 to March 1971, *Gay Sunshine* called for readers to submit to the paper through a post office box in Berkeley. In *Gay Sunshine*’s seventh issue, June / July 1971,

66 Cover, *Gay Sunshine* #8, August 1971; Cover, *Gay Sunshine* #9, October 1971.

67 Cover, *Gay Sunshine* #10, January 1972.

68 Gay Sunshine Collective, “Power to the Gay People?”, 2.

69 Gay Sunshine Collective, “Power to the Gay People?”, 2.

70 Gay Sunshine Collective, “Power to the Gay People?”, 2.

71 Winston Leyland, New Address Announcement, *Gay Sunshine* #7, June 1971, 2.

Winston Leyland announced that the paper had moved to San Francisco and that the publication schedule had switched to a bimonthly calendar due mainly to a lack of funds.<sup>72</sup> By this point, the editorial changes at the paper began to add up: the volume and issue number became simply an issue number; the collective adopted a self-identifying subhead; the paper began to run editorials and indicated that the collective was starting to work in different groups; and then editors announced that the paper's address had changed.

Less subtly, the editorial of *Gay Sunshine*'s eighth issue justified the change of address that was announced in the previous edition and explicitly stated that the founding collective had separated earlier that year. The collective wrote, "The paper was originally put out by a collective in Berkeley, but this collective disbanded in January...Its future was in doubt until February, when a group based mainly in San Francisco and including members of the old collective, committed itself to continuing publication."<sup>73</sup> They also explained that the dissolution of the original collective was related to the "ignominious collapse of both the Berkeley and San Francisco GLFs," which had "engendered much dissension, hindering our progress."<sup>74</sup> In the first paragraph of this editorial, the stylistic changes that occurred in previous issues (January, March, June) began to make sense because the paper's status was in the air in those months. But the turmoil did not end with the second San Francisco-based collective. According to the same editorial, the new collective also began to fray soon after its founding, explaining, "The Collective was working diligently on the August issue, when we learned...that a small political faction had called an 'editorial meeting' against the wishes of a majority in the Collective[.]"<sup>75</sup> After they announced that *Gay Sunshine*'s sixth issue was produced by two discordant groups, and this was the first time the collective printed that the paper was embattled by organizational mayhem.

72 Winston Leyland, New Address Announcement, *Gay Sunshine* #7, 2.

73 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, 2.

74 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, 2.

75 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8,

Recognizing that the fracture in the new collective was politically motivated and potentially destructive to the paper, they announced multiple changes to the paper's format and organization. First, they published a sort of mission statement. It ultimately repeated the paper's dedication to being a community newspaper and read, in part, "*Gay Sunshine* is an open forum for the Gay Community, providing a place for all ideas to be expressed without fear of censorship... The Collective is open to any one willing to contribute work or material and who accepts the principle of an open forum."<sup>76</sup> They also expressed that they would implement "democratic safeguards to ensure the widest possible community involvement," and "to prevent power-cliques from dominating the paper by gaining legal control over it[.]"<sup>77</sup> These changes included establishing a copyright and a state-registered coordinator, and the collective was explicit about internal factions being the catalyst. They wrote, "We take these steps reluctantly in response to a factional power-play."<sup>78</sup>

While the paper and its successive editorial collectives were in a tailspin, local chapters of the Gay Liberation Front were also falling into disarray. The San Francisco GLF was the first to collapse, but its dissolution was more related to real estate than to political factionalism. *Gay Sunshine* Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1970, hosted an update simply titled "SF GLF."<sup>79</sup> This update announced that San Francisco's GLF was in search of a new meeting space: "The organization, Gay Liberation of San Francisco, has been up in the air since its expulsion from 330 Grove over a month ago."<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, losing their meeting space was a destructive experience for SF GLF. As the mutual aid group that authored the update wrote, "This disruption has brought up the serious question to former members of what they're all about, and what Gay Liberation is about. Within the past year of nominal activity in a city that should have been more than warm to Gay Liberation, little of any significance has

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76 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, 2.

77 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, 2.

78 Gay Sunshine Collective, "Editorial," *Gay Sunshine* #8, 2.

79 Mutual Aid Group S.F., "SF GLF," *Gay Sunshine* 1, no. 3 (November 1970): 16.

80 Mutual Aid Group S.F., "SF GLF."

been accomplished.”<sup>81</sup> Continuing, the theme they wrote, “If this is an obituary, it isn’t one on Gay Liberation but on a particular organization that might have been more ambitious than its members were ready for.”<sup>82</sup> According to the Gay Switchboard column—a regular feature of *Gay Sunshine* that advertised where and when individual gay lib groups met—the San Francisco chapter of GLF continued to meet at different venues over the next few months, but its meetings became irregular and slowly petered out. In their own words, the mutual aid group’s notice of the nomadic and sparsely attended SF GLF was effectively an obituary.

Sadly, *Gay Sunshine* also chronicled the dissolution of Berkeley’s GLF. Interestingly, it happened at the same time that the Gay Sunshine Collective was breaking apart. In *Gay Sunshine*’s fifth issue in January 1971, a reader named “Miss Ann Arbor” wrote a letter to *Gay Sunshine* complaining about the conduct they witnessed at a Berkeley GLF dance. “I am a Gay brother from Ann Arbor visiting for a while,” Miss Ann Arbor wrote.<sup>83</sup> “Last night I went through one of the most disgusting experiences of my life and I would like to share it with my Gay Sister and Brothers throughout Amerika. Berkeley Gay Liberation Front held a dance at a local Free U. And essentially here is what happened[.]”<sup>84</sup> The author noted that lesbians “were emotionally and physically abused by Third World straight men,” that “some straight white men had come with women...only to turn around and cruise the Gay men in a most oppressive, voyueristic [*sic*] way,” that “male transvestites were all but ignored,” and that “the Gay people acted as if none of the above were even happening.”<sup>85</sup> This episode was not just a story of the collapse of Berkeley GLF; it also revealed that the group had sadly fallen out of touch with its activist ideals. Reeling from the final point, Miss Ann Arbor wrote, “[L]iving through this experience was bad...It was amazing that there was such a poor

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81 Mutual Aid Group S.F., “SF GLF.”

82 Mutual Aid Group S.F., “SF GLF.”

83 Miss Ann Arbor, “Berkeley,” *Gay Sunshine* #5, January 1971, 13.

84 Miss Ann Arbor, “Berkeley.”

85 Miss Ann Arbor, “Berkeley.”

unity among our people.”<sup>86</sup> The disunity that shocked Miss Ann Arbor seemed to be the disregard for violence, the dismissal of transvestite queer people, the harassment of gay women, a latent racial animus, and the admission of straight people that permeated the event.

The final collapse of the Berkeley GLF was recorded in the “Dear Sunshine” column of issue number seven, June / July 1971, alongside Arlene Arnold’s rebuke of the collective’s announcement that they would stop publishing anonymous submissions. Two readers wrote to *Gay Sunshine* about the fall of Berkeley GLF. Steve Ginsburg from Berkeley wrote, “This week I heard that Berkeley Gay Lib is no more... With Berkeley Gay Lib they rap & rap & rap but nothing ever happens or gets accomplished for all.”<sup>87</sup> Seeming to refer to the same dance that Miss Ann Arbor referenced in an earlier issue, Ginsburg clearly disapproved of the way that Berkeley GLF meetings held space for trans community members. “In January,” he wrote, “I went to a Gay Lib meeting but walked out after an hour. In that hour all that I seemed to have heard were drag types rapping that they were oppressed at a recent event. Sorry about that. If I or someone dont want to talk to a [transvestite] or drag, thats our right. Try mens clothes.”<sup>88</sup> His critique, however, was rooted in more than his transphobia; Ginsburg seemed to truly believe that Berkeley GLF achieved little more than being a group counseling session. “I’ve done my thing with gay organizations... But nothing concrete has happened in Gay Lib.”<sup>89</sup> The submission from the second author, Tony Lee from Oakland, was much shorter. Lee wrote, “It was unfortunate that there was not enough solidarity with the Gay community to hold the Berkeley GLF together.”<sup>90</sup> Lee’s analysis, though brief, was revealing and corroborated what others had observed in previous issues; a lack of solidarity tore the Berkeley GLF asunder.

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86 Miss Ann Arbor, “Berkeley.”

87 Steve Ginsburg, Letter to the Editor, *Gay Sunshine* #7, June/July 1971, 16.

88 Ginsburg, 16.

89 Ginsburg, 16.

90 Tony Lee, Letter to the Editor, *Gay Sunshine* #7, June/July 1971, 16.

### Conclusion

**T**he Gay Liberation Movement was a distinct period of radical activism in the broader social justice movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. The movement in the Bay Area was, regrettably, too focused on identifying and naming oppression, and it spent more time fighting within itself than it did dreaming of how to materially abolish that oppression. One of the movement's biggest periodicals, *Gay Sunshine*, revealed that the movement lacked the unity and solidarity it needed to bring about any significant social change. Although it set out to be a vehicle for community organizing and its founders wanted to engender unity within the movement, *Gay Sunshine* spent its first two years illuminating the fissures in which different wings of the movement would crumble. The gay liberation movement in the Bay Area was ultimately a short-lived experiment because it lacked true, sustained solidarity among different groups of race, gender, and class. Internally, the movement critiqued itself for being too white and too male-dominant. In the end, both the movement and its mouthpiece fell into chaos and eventually disbanded. Such a collapse was seemingly inevitable because the movement failed to establish a clear vision of liberation and spent too much time trying to prove its worth. ♦



*Illustration by Caitlin Dobson, Chico State*

# BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY: AFRICAN AMERICAN MODELS & THE DESEGREGATION OF POSTWAR FASHION

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**Nikki Orrett**

**Abstract:** This research essay focuses on how African American models in the 1950s broke into the fashion industry. The creation of interracial charm and modeling schools (the first of which opened in San Francisco) also allowed women of all races to experience and connect with one another. The negative stigma that came with being a model was proven incorrect by these models who became household names, such as Dorothea Towles.

**D**orothea Towles is regarded as a pioneer in the modeling industry. She became the first Black student at Dorothy Farrier Modeling School in 1945, and then the first Black model in the fashion capital of the world—Paris. Towles's

persistence was not uncommon. While many Black women had jobs in the 1950s, very few found careers in the fashion industry, let alone modeling. To enter the world of fashion and modeling, the Black fashion community had to draw its own paths and create opportunities for itself. The 1950s ushered in a new era of recognition for Black talent in the fashion industry when racial barriers in the fashion industry were challenged and dismantled by the rise of Black models with the opening of interracial charm schools, the establishment of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, and the increasing presence of Black women in high-profile fashion shows and advertising campaigns.

While women walking down the street may have been scouted by a photographer or agent, the majority of models attended charm schools to learn the social graces and aesthetics of the time, making them more favorable candidates for work. However, this was not a viable option for Black aspiring models as interracial charm schools were not established until the late 1940s. Lucille Sanderson was a white woman who worked at the infamous charm school, Dorothy Farrier's Modeling School, in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup> There, she watched girls and women be turned away from education due to their race. In 1948, tired of this segregation, Lucille opened the first official interracial charm school called International Finishing School in San Francisco.<sup>2</sup> The first class consisted of nine girls: two white girls, two Chinese girls, one Indian girl, and four Black girls. Joan Adam, a 17-year-old student, told *Ebony* magazine about her experience in the International Finishing School's first class. She describes that all of the girls were very nervous and self-conscious. Some of the girls had not interacted with people outside their own race.<sup>3</sup> During the makeup class, Adam remembers, "it was here the differences among us stood out, and Mrs. Sanderson made us help each other in criticizing and pointing out each person's favorable bone structure and features. Pretty soon, we were all chatting and the strain was gone."<sup>4</sup> The International Finishing

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1 "Model School: First Interracial Charm School Runs Hit West Coast Fashion Show," *Ebony* (July 1948), 36–41.

2 "Model School: First Interracial Charm School Runs Hit West Coast Fashion Show," 36–41.

3 "Model School: First Interracial Charm School Runs Hit West Coast Fashion Show," 36–41.

4 "Model School: First Interracial Charm School Runs Hit West Coast Fashion Show," 36–41.

School opened up new worlds to its students. The course not only taught students social graces, but also helped many students transition from not interacting with people outside their own race to becoming classmates and close friends with individuals from different backgrounds. This was one of the first times Black women were given an opportunity that helped and encouraged them to pursue a career in modeling.

By 1950, interracial charm and modeling schools began to expand as the rise of Black models in mainstream advertisements increased demand for them. While white-owned schools continued to only admit white students, black-owned schools accepted students of all races, sizes, and ages. Charm schools became a place for housewives and young girls to learn techniques of hair-styling, make-up, personality development, and social etiquette of the time.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this training, many students were able to land good-paying jobs outside of the fashion industry. Model and owner of Chicago's Crest Modeling School, Betty Lightsey, told *Jet* magazine about the students who attended her school. She points to the fact that many of the girls who came to the school wanted to learn "charm and grace" that they can utilize in their professions.<sup>6</sup> The students who excelled were the ones who became models in their free time. Lightsey stated, "The only qualification I have for girls entering my school is that they are clean and have the inclination to learn."<sup>7</sup> However, while there were more Black models, jobs remained limited. While modeling was becoming a viable career for Black women, only about 2,000 black women had successfully entered the career by 1953.<sup>8</sup> One of those successful models was Sylvia Fitt. When asked about what makes a successful model, she said, "All models should worry about their training, good grooming, and freshness. They should eat well, exercise to keep a trim figure; average from 8 to 10 hours of sleep daily; shun nightlife; read a lot to keep informed; stay abreast of fashion trends, and cultivate friends who are

5 "Model Schools: Racket or Business? Quickie Charm Courses Fade Out as Legitimate Schools Thrive on Boom in Negro Advertising," *Ebony* (Sep. 1950), 73–77.

6 "What Makes a Good Model?" *Jet* (April 1953), 38–42.

7 "What Makes a Good Model?" 38–42.

8 "What Makes a Good Model?" 38–42.

genuinely interested in their careers.”<sup>9</sup> Fitts makes it clear that modeling is a job for those who are dedicated to the work. Modeling was not easy, as it required not only consistency during a photoshoot but also a consistent figure and poise in the world. Many Black women were determined to challenge themselves, and some were able to enter the fashion industry successfully due to charm schools.

Despite models having trained at charm schools, society viewed models as promiscuous and “party girls.”<sup>10</sup> While people may view a model’s life as glamorous, for most Black women, modeling was a side job. Cover model Vera Francis was a nurse and doctor’s assistant; Juanita Green was a law student at Queens College; and Gloria Frayser was a Spanish teacher.<sup>11</sup> Sara Lou Harris, one of New York’s most-photographed models, stated, “Most of us are family girls who are simply doing a job. We are seeking a decent life and some security. We might be thought of by some as reckless and mercenary but that isn’t true. We have ideals too.”<sup>12</sup> At this time, modeling was not a full-time career for most women who worked in the industry. Many had husbands, families, and other jobs that took precedence over their modeling careers. However, society still had opinions about how these women lived their lives, simply because their pictures appeared in magazines. Chicago modeling teacher Gerry Masciana described the mentality that models needed to remain favorable to the eyes of the public: “I tell my students: ‘People are going to say everything about you, but the time for you to start worrying about it is when it’s true. They can build a picture frame for you, but you don’t have to be the picture to go in it.’”<sup>13</sup> Modeling requires a mentality that allows the model to be vulnerable in photos while maintaining a thick skin to withstand public criticism. Black women entering the world of fashion modeling had to cope with the racism that limited them from entering the field, and now the

9 “What Makes a Good Model?” 38–42.

10 “Is It True What They Say About Models? Widely-Accepted Slurs About Loose Morals is Resented by Glamour Queens of Profession,” *Ebony* (November 1951), 60–64.

11 “Is It True What They Say About Models?” 60–64.

12 “Is It True What They Say About Models?” 60–64.

13 “Is It True What They Say About Models?” 60–64.

scrutiny that came with being a model. People from the fashion industry mentored incoming models through charm schools and publications to help them navigate this complex idea of public visibility.

By 1952 and 1953, notable Black models began to emerge, becoming household names. Dorothea Towles became the first successful Black fashion model to work in Paris. She started work with Christian Dior and then Schiaparelli, making \$86 a month and living in cheap hotels.<sup>14</sup> She seemingly led a glamorous lifestyle driven by her career, borrowing clothes and jet-setting around the world. Towles once said, “French people love beautiful women! And it doesn’t matter what shade their skin happens to be. They like that which is different. And a Negro girl who really has something to offer is just different enough to suit their tastes...Each [fashion] house has its own style of modeling, and a person who wants to be a vedette [star] must be aware of them.”<sup>15</sup> Towles proved to everyone that Black models were valuable to the fashion industry by breaking into the fashion capital of the world. While the world of fashion was opened to Black women through modeling, modeling led women across the world, as well as to movie screens. Vera Francis was a model who landed a role in the 20th Century Fox movie “The President’s Lady.” This movie was relatively progressive, as it centers on a mixed-race relationship. While this was a first for Hollywood, they never embraced.<sup>16</sup> In 1957, former model Carolle Drake was approached by director Raoul Walsh when he saw her picture in a Los Angeles newspaper, and called her to offer her the role in Warner Brothers’ movie, *Band of Angels*.<sup>17</sup> This would be her debut role, which was very similar to Francis’s role in *The President’s Lady*. Both roles involved women portraying enslaved women having affairs with white slave owners, which was one of the few roles available to Black women at the time. While modeling helped Black women

14 “Paris Model: Los Angeles Girl Gets Schiaparelli Job to Become Only Negro in Fashion Capitol of World,” *Ebony* (Feb 1950), 51–57.

15 “How to Become a Paris Model,” *Jet* (August 1952), 32–38.

16 “Ike President’s Lady: Model Vera Francis Gets Explosive Role in Movie Touching on Mixed Romance Theme,” *Ebony* (February 1953), 71–75.

17 “Carolle Drake Crashes the Movies: Pretty Ex-Model Clicks in New Clark Gable Movie,” *Jet* (February 1957), 58–61.

break into new industries, these new roles were still limited by the racial barriers that initially kept them from the modeling industry. That said, these three women proved that modeling as a Black woman could lead to successful careers, filled with renown and opportunity.

In 1954, Black model work increased as companies targeted advertisements to a white audience. There was a significant development in the modeling industry when white firms began to hire Black models to display their product to their white customers.<sup>18</sup> A majority of the women shown in advertisements were light-skinned models, including Patricia Anderson, Dalphine Moore, Eileen Mills, Muriel French, Ellen Holly, Lois Rodrick, Tina Marshall, and Delorise Jackson. Anderson was one of the first women to model for a Beverly Hills store that was exclusive to white shoppers. The garment industry was a section of modeling that Black women became a part of as their figures and coloring were ideal to show the new lines of bou-doir attire.<sup>19</sup> This shift into white spaces was a notable change in the fashion industry, shaping industry standards and the culture's perception of beauty. However, while Black models began to enter white spaces of the fashion industry, white beauty standards were still considered ideal in society. The printed images of the light-skinned models made them appear caucasian, as most of the advertisement was directed toward a white audience. Marjorie Zinn, a twenty-five-year-old Chicago model, got a nose job as her "figure is of classic proportions, but whose nose (once broken) did not photograph as well as she thought it should."<sup>20</sup> Models were shaping their style and bodies to the beauty standards originally set by the opinions of white consumers. Advertisements that were targeted towards a black audience were still influenced by a white ideology. There were numerous advertisements for skin lighteners and hair relaxers in *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. This shift in the industry is complex because Black models began to gain more visibility,

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18 "Can Negro Models Make the Bigtime? Colored beauties have begun to receive jobs in general art, fashion, advertising modeling," *Ebony* (Sep 1954), 100-106.

19 "Can Negro Models Make the Bigtime?" 100-106.

20 "The Girl Who Changed Her Face: Model gets brand new nose," *Ebony* (March 1956), 77-82.

and work opportunities were still constricted and shaped by white beauty standards, following the preferences of a white consumer base.

With few opportunities that were not shaped by white influence, the Black fashion community began to create its own opportunities. In 1955, a fundraiser was held in Chicago for the Urban League. This fundraiser was organized by a group of women who called themselves the Urban Aids.<sup>21</sup> This fundraiser was a fashion show that featured five interracial fashion roundups, showcasing the fashion trends seen at the event. Big-name stars attended this event, such as Joyce Bryant, Sara Vaughan, Olga Jane, Ted Mack, and William Marshal. With the combinations of these stars and inclusivity of the fashion show, the Urban Aids were able to raise \$32,000 for the Urban League.<sup>22</sup> *Ebony* magazine played a significant role in increasing opportunities for Black models and designers. Beginning in 1958, *Ebony* hosted the Ebony Fashion Fair, which travelled across the nation, promoting Black fashion and the newest American and European styles, highlighting both Black and white models. The show was a part of the magazine's community relations program to raise \$100,000 for charity.<sup>23</sup> Inclusivity was broadened to encompass not only race but also disability. An ex-beautician by the name of Addie Edwards, having lost her sight herself, had the idea to have a fashion show for the blind.<sup>24</sup> With the help of donations and volunteers, Addie Edwards was able to host a fashion show that gave not only Black, but also blind women of all races, the opportunity to model and attend. The show provided detailed commentary that helped the blind spectators to enjoy the show and the clothing donned by the models.<sup>25</sup> The Urban Aid fundraiser, Ebony Fashion Fair, and Addie Edwards highlighted the growing influence of the Black fashion community by not only creating opportunities for Black

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21 "Backstage at Biggest Fashion Show: Urbanaide extravaganza is nation's top benefit affair," *Ebony* (August 1955), 42-46.

22 "Backstage at Biggest Fashion Show," 42-46.

23 "Ebony Fashion Fair to Tour Country: Newest American, European Style to be featured in 50 City Journeys," *Ebony* (Oct 1959), 132-138.

24 "Fashion Show for the Blind: Sightless Spectators 'See' New Styles at Unique Event," *Ebony* (October 1954), 123-125.

25 "Fashion Show for the Blind," 123-125.

talent but also showing greater diversity and representation in the fashion industry.

During the 1950s, Black models were empowered to work and make their way into an industry that once thrived solely on the beauty of white women. This emergence of Black models was an act of resistance against the systematic racism that plagued the fashion industry. Previously, the fashion industry primarily advertised to a white audience, following their preferences. Following the creation of interracial charm schools like Lucille Sanderson's International Finishing School, the opening of Ebony Fashion Fair, and the emergence of pioneering models like Dorothea Towles, public perception of Black models began to change. These women proved that the fashion industry was a space of inclusivity and representation that extends beyond race, opening the door to a new ideology that is significant today, with models of all races, genders, and sexual orientations. ♦



Illustration by Christophe Washington, Chico State

# BLACK MEDIA PERSPECTIVES ON THE MOYNIHAN REPORT, 1965–1976

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Marcus R. Kujawa

**Abstract:** This essay investigates ten years of responses to the Moynihan Report from Black publications. It explains the circumstances of the Report's release, as well as the positive and negative reactions to it. The response of Black Publications to the Report found it misguided, that society's norms were not right for everyone, and that the genuine need was for equal opportunity for success. The essay concludes by posing the question, perhaps that isn't something wrong with a Black woman-led family, but something to learn from it.

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Assistant Secretary of Labor in the U.S. Department of Labor, wrote a government document that was leaked to the press. In it, he wrote that following rulings by the Supreme Court and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "The demand of the Negro Americans for full recognition of their civil rights was finally met."<sup>1</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" (1965), 1.

“the expectations of the Negro Americans will go beyond civil rights.” As a people, they expect equal opportunities with roughly equal results. Then Moynihan wrote, “This is not going to happen. Nor will it happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made.”

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Sixty years after its publication, the Moynihan Report continues to elicit strong responses, both in support of and in opposition to it. The Report identified fatherless families as a significant problem, affecting approximately 25% of Black families at the time, and predicted that the issue would only worsen. The Report said that conditions of slavery and the ongoing racism and oppression that continued to exist in 1965 caused the single mother phenomenon, which he referred to as “matriarchy,” and was responsible for challenges in the Black population. The major fix in Moynihan’s proposition was government action; his Report is, in part, called “A Case for Government Action.” Moynihan’s solution was that Black men needed jobs so they could properly raise their families.

How did Black periodicals, newspapers, magazines, or academic journals respond to the Report? Some praised it; others claimed Moynihan was incorrectly pointing to slavery as the root cause of troubles in the Black community, and that he did not recognize the ongoing oppression of Black Americans. Some believed the Report showed that the solution had to come from the Black population, not the government. Black magazines saw the Report as blaming the victim and insulting Black America. The Black Power movement sought to empower Black Americans to take responsibility for addressing the concerns of the Black community. Some simply argued, “There is nothing wrong with us.”<sup>2</sup> While some claimed the Report presumptuously promoted White middle-class values, others encouraged Black Americans to adopt those values. Finally, some argued that it was not an issue of race, but of class and economics.

The Moynihan Report aimed to address numerous issues confronting Black Americans in particular. Once leaked to the

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2 Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 215.

public, the Report sparked controversy that continues to this day. The Moynihan Report incited varied responses from Black thinkers between 1965 and 1975—whether in Black newspapers or Black academic journals—that recurrently asserted the Report was misguided, that the Black family was strong, society’s norms were not right for everyone, and the real goal should be equal opportunity for economic success.

### Background

The Civil Rights Movement made many advancements in the mid-twentieth century. In 1954, the Supreme Court, in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, overturned the previous case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and declared the concept of “separate but equal” unconstitutional. From December 1955 to December 1956, the Montgomery Bus Boycott led to another landmark Supreme Court decision, this time in *Browder v. Gayle*, wherein the Supreme Court cited the *Brown* decision and ruled that segregated bus seating was unconstitutional. There were more achievements in the Civil Rights movement in the late 1950s, and then in 1963, Dr. King organized the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2, 1964; it banned segregation in public accommodations, schools, and workplaces and provided enforcement. A year later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted.

Even with all the progress the Civil Rights Movement had achieved, Black Americans were nonetheless not achieving the equal results with the rest of America that they sought. President Johnson had declared a War on Poverty, in part to address the concerns of Black Americans. In his administration, the Department of Labor prepared a report in March 1965. This Report aimed to identify the causes and potential solutions to the inequalities in Black America, particularly within the Black family. *The New York Times* first reported on the matter on July 19, 1965.<sup>3</sup> The Report was soon thereafter leaked. The need to address racial tensions was high, especially in light of the

3 John D. Pomfretspectia, “Capital Parley Planned; Drive for Renewed Negro Family Stability Is Pressed by White House Panel,” *The New York Times* (July 19, 1965), 1, 15.

Watts Riots on August 11, 1965. In this context, the Black press responded.

### The Report was Misguided

Remember that the Report was not intended for public release; it was an internal government document. As such, the report was met with various sensitivities from those who were not its intended audience. According to Robert Staples, author and professor of sociology, the Moynihan Report reinforced the myth of the Black matriarchy. The central point of the Report, as Staples saw it, was that the crumbling Black family was due to high levels of Black matriarchy in the Black community. Staples asserted the Report lacked credibility to all except “a group bent on making the victim responsible for the crimes of the criminal.”<sup>4</sup> The myth of placing domineering Black women at the head of the family because slavery had resulted in the “psychological castration of the Black male.”<sup>5</sup> Staples argued that the proposed solution was a return to the patriarchy; Black women needed to step down from their leadership roles, and the Black man would solve the problems. For Staples, the reality is that this view is “adding insult to injury to Black liberation.”<sup>6</sup> It was as if Moynihan was blaming the Black woman. Staples declared that “[t]he consensus of most historians is that ‘men reign dominant in all societies, no matriarchy is known to exist.’”<sup>7</sup>

Civil Rights activist James Farmer passionately commented on the Report. Acknowledging that although it was not the author’s intent, Farmer saw the Report as a “basis for several new brands of bigotry.”<sup>8</sup> Farmer complained that the Report “contains a great number of statistical facts, misread, misinterpreted, and warped.”<sup>9</sup> Farmer saw that Moynihan was not addressing the real reasons for oppression. Farmer viewed the

4 Robert Staples, “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 3/4 (1970): 12.

5 Staples, “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” 8.

6 Staples, “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” 8.

7 Staples, “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” 9.

8 Unknown, “Moynihan Report Racial Tract, Says James Farmer,” Black Studies Center (December 20, 1965), <https://www.proquest.com/bsc/docview/494186754/A16F681522B74A4APQ/15?accountid=28458&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>.

9 “Moynihan Report Racial Tract, Says James Farmer.”

interpretation of the Report as blaming the victim and insulting Black people; he said, “This kind of straw-man logic...in its most vicious form, handing the racists a respectable new weapon and insulting the intelligence of Black men and women everywhere.”<sup>10</sup> Farmer complains that Moynihan does not address the proper solution of an honest, open job market so the Black male can acquire satisfying work. In blaming Black America, says Farmer, “Moynihan has provided a massive academic cop-out for the white conscience and clearly implied that Negroes in this nation will never secure a substantial measure of freedom until we stop sleeping with our wife’s sister and buying Cadillacs instead of bread.”<sup>11</sup>

Author Alex L. Swan wrote a methodological critique of the Report. In it, he said, “Moynihan hypothesized that the social problems of Blacks are a result of a breakdown in the Black family...delinquency, welfare dependency, and poor scholastic achievement.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, says Swan, the simple presence of the father in the home is not significant because “juvenile delinquents” come from families that have a father in the house. He poses the question, “Why is a matriarchal family a disadvantage for Black children?” For Moynihan, the key indicators of instability in the family are absent fathers, divorce, and illegitimate children. Moynihan had explained that the matriarchal system started during slavery, and then, under Jim Crow, the laws and practices were such that Black men were limited in their movement, which affected their ability to make a living and support their families. Moynihan says that because of this, the “dignity of maleness became difficult for Black men to maintain.”<sup>13</sup>

Swan notes, “Job discrimination and racism certainly contribute significantly to the absence of some fathers.” However, the controversy centered on the notion that “Moynihan associates race with family instability,”<sup>14</sup> but he failed to consider other causes. Swan explains it this way: job discrimination is a significant factor relating to poverty in the Black community.

10 “Moynihan Report Racial Tract, Says James Farmer.”

11 “Moynihan Report Racial Tract, Says James Farmer.”

12 Alex L. Swan, “A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report,” *The Black Scholar* 5, no. 9 (1974): 18.

13 Swan, “A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report,” 18.

14 Swan, “A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report,” 21.

When Moynihan minimizes job discrimination and racism in favor of family conditions, he seems to suggest that there is an intrinsic racial component that is the cause of family instability. Swan argues that if poverty alone explained the family situation, then whites in the same socio-economic class would have the same results. After looking at the numbers, Swan concludes that “there must be something other than poverty which contributes to the father’s absence from the home.”<sup>15</sup> A re-analysis of the information Moynihan used showed, “The percentage of female-headed families is far more closely related to income level than to race: among Blacks, the low-income level is about five times as strong as the effects of race. Female-headed families are five times more characteristic of poor families than of Black families.” According to Swan, the data shows that income has a more significant effect on family instability than race does. It seems that there are more absent Black fathers as a function of the fact that Blacks are poorer. Swan believed that his argument would have greater legitimacy if Moynihan had suggested that social class has a more substantial influence on instability.<sup>16</sup> Swan also finds that the data used by Moynihan indicates that there is more instability in White families than in Black ones. “The rate of family instability is higher in the White population than in the Black population,” Swan concludes. “It would behoove any reader to approach the use of this report with deliberate caution.”

### There is Nothing Wrong With Us, Society’s Norms Are Not for Everyone

Writers in these ten years declared that the Black family was strong from 1965 to 1975. The “Black Sociology Movement” emerged within the broader Civil Rights and Black Power movements, prompting sociology to adopt perspectives that reflect the Black experience more accurately. The Black Sociology movement wanted the “death of White sociology.”<sup>17</sup> They contended that Moynihan’s depiction of the

15 Swan, “A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report,” 22.

16 Swan, “A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report,” 23.

17 Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 7.

Black family as pathological “falsely presumed the superiority of ‘White’ middle-class norms.” Robert Staples, a Black sociology critic of Moynihan, argued that Black families, sometimes led by Black women, could not be comprehended in relationship to those of White middle-class values. Lerone Bennet objected to the Report, saying it stigmatized Black Americans. He went on to say, “There is nothing wrong with us.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1971, Robert Staples and Clemmont Vontress were involved in a scholarly debate about the condition of the Black family. Staples challenged that Vontress does not mention the strengths of Black men that have allowed them to “withstand the virulent racism and exploitation” they face. Staples asserts that there are positive aspects within the Black community that offset the oppressive nature of White society.<sup>19</sup> The second point Vontress addresses is “erratic” behavior—things like drinking and drug abuse. Staples fires back with a study that says that things like suicide, mental health, and drinking occur less in lower-class society for Blacks than Whites.<sup>20</sup> Staples complains that Vontress is trying to find a political solution to the problems Black people face, in attempting to change the individual and not “oppressive institutions.” This line of reasoning allows White people to escape the responsibility for what is happening today, argues Staples. The line of reasoning is that Black people were made inferior by generations of oppressive treatment. Staples felt that, ultimately, White critics are saying that even if ‘all men are created equal’ in this society, Blacks are still inferior. The attack on Black woman-led families was part of the attack.

In 1968, Leon Shaskolsky presented profound arguments in the peer-reviewed journal founded by W. E. B. Du Bois at Atlanta University in 1897. He posed two fundamental questions: “Can the American society of today offer Negroes a ‘place in the sun’?” and “Do Negroes desire a ‘place in the sun’ in contemporary American society?”<sup>21</sup> The Black protest movement has

18 Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 215.

19 Robert Staples and Clemmont Vontress, “A Black Scholar Debate,” *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 3 (1971): 43.

20 Staples and Vontress, “A Black Scholar Debate,” 44.

21 Leon Shaskolsky, “The Negro Protest Movement—Revolt or Reform?” *Phylon (1960-)* 29, no. 2 (1968): 157, <https://doi.org/10.2307/273945>.

declared “that failure to attain upward mobility can no longer be seen simply as a determinant of one’s own personal qualities,”<sup>22</sup> asserts Shaskolsky. The situation of Blacks today is not because of a personal failing, but a public one; as Shaskolsky goes on to say, “Negroes are poor not because they lack the personal qualities to succeed but because of certain historical circumstances and because of certain structural deficiencies in the society.” Shaskolsky continues, “The problem is not only whether the dominant segments of the society can provide Negroes with opportunities and means to succeed but also whether Negroes wish, under existing circumstances, to pursue that success.”<sup>23</sup> Dr. King’s “Dream” begs this question: Is it a dream shared by Black America? The “Black Power” movement takes on an “anti-White tenor, with attendant rejection of the American way of life,” says Shaskolsky. It seems that now a situation arises where there is a discrepancy between the goals and purpose driven by society and doubts about “the validity, relevance, and value of many of these goals,” informs Shaskolsky.

The danger that exists in labeling the Black family “pathological” is that even a defense of the Black population can become precarious. Before he wrote his infamous Report, Moynihan took part in a book called *The Melting Pot*. In *The Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer and D. P. Moynihan said, “The Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect.” Likely, they were trying to defend Black Americans. That defense was faulty, and Francis A. Kornegay, executive director of the Detroit Urban League, said so. In a pamphlet, he said,

The statement of Doctor Glazer and Moynihan, though made in 1963, has been and still is the feeling, the acceptance of, and the action of the so-called liberal intellectuals which has characterized their writings and actions. It has had a tremendous influence on the minds of White Americans—not an asset to the eradication of racism—but

22 Shaskolsky, “The Negro Protest Movement-Revolt or Reform?”, 159.

23 Shaskolsky, “The Negro Protest Movement-Revolt or Reform?”, 161.

an assistance to its continuation.<sup>24</sup>

Ascribing the challenges faced by Black Americans to a “pathology” was attacking the victim, as many writers pointed out. For example, Edwin C. Berry wrote,

Yet the victims of the society we live in are still blamed for their situation, and White people disdain them and talk about broken homes... However, my conclusion would have been exactly opposite. The big story in the data was... half the families were together. If you study history and sociology of this society, you will see that it is almost impossible that these 50% are together; they just could not have survived this system and remained together, but they did. This is the story which ought to be told.<sup>25</sup>

### Equal Opportunity for Economic Success

A central theme running through much of the Black press was the need for economic equality. After all, the March on Washington was a march for *jobs* and freedom. It is such that, as scholar Alex L. Swan said, “This society is dominated by Whites, and they exploit Black people economically and discriminate and are prejudiced against them.”<sup>26</sup> Those who have the most difficult challenges are Black children. Author Michael T. Malloy of *The Chicago Defender* wrote, “After years of struggle and achievement by Black people, a larger portion of their children face the triple burdens of prejudice, poverty, and fatherlessness.”<sup>27</sup> He wrote, “Some 41% of Black children lived in poverty last year; only 25% of Black adults did.” Poverty in Black America is worse and growing for children, while Black children in two-parent homes were increasing in per-capita income. Even though Black Americans are making advancements, it is not translating to single-parent kids.

24 Jim Roche, “Survey of the Number of Honorary Doctorate Degrees Conferred Upon Negroes by Institutions of Higher Learning in Michigan,” speech before the United Negro College Fund National Alumni, February 6, 1970, in *African American Communities*, April 27, 1970, [https://www-aac-amdigi-tal-co-uk.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/Documents/Images/UIC\\_CULR\\_04\\_0067\\_0703/2#Sections](https://www-aac-amdigi-tal-co-uk.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/Documents/Images/UIC_CULR_04_0067_0703/2#Sections).

25 Edwin C. Berry, “Civil Rights and Education.” *African American Communities* (July 18, 1966), [https://www-aac-amdigi-tal-co-uk.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/Documents/Images/UIC\\_CULR\\_03\\_0278\\_2935/10](https://www-aac-amdigi-tal-co-uk.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/Documents/Images/UIC_CULR_03_0278_2935/10).

26 Alex L. Swan, “A Methodological Critique of the Moynihan Report,” *The Black Scholar* 5, no. 9 (1974): 18.

27 Michael Malloy, “Black Kids Bear Brutal Burden: The Case for National Action,” *Black Studies Center* (November 15, 1975), <https://www.proquest.com/bsc/docview/493962998/A16F681522B74A4APQ/3?accountid=28458&source=Historical%20Newspapers>.

Scholar Jacquelyne J. Jackson concludes the prevalence of single-mother families and the necessary actions to address this issue. In her 1971 article, “But Where Are the Men?” she writes, “There are not enough Black males for Black females... A sufficient supply of males for Black females is not available at this point in time.”<sup>28</sup> A point rarely discussed is that there would have to be more female-headed households when there are not enough men. Jackson makes the further point that even if all the available Black men had great jobs and were economically equal to all the rest, there still would remain single-headed Black families, because there are not enough men. A large part of the necessary solution, then, is improving the economic circumstances of the single-mother family. Jackson references Swan, who made the point that historically, Black females have been overrepresented in the Black population since 1850. In 1970, there were about 91 Black men for every 100 Black women. In absolute numbers, that means that 1,069,694 of 11,885,595 Black women are without available mates.<sup>29</sup>

Jackson further points out that the female-headed family should be recognized as a “rational alternative to an ineffective traditional system.”<sup>30</sup> Slavery is not a sufficient cause for this situation. “Frazier has noted, Black family stability continued progressively throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and up until about 1910,” Jackson points out. In 1900, there was no significant difference in marital statuses for people over fifteen of either race or sex. When there are fewer men, there are more women-headed households; when there are more men, there are fewer women-headed households. Black females are more prevalent in the population overall, so Jackson states, “There is not one absolute system of marriage and family which must be adhered to at any cost and under any circumstance.”<sup>31</sup>

Jackson makes plain the reality that there are not enough Black men available to Black women to “assure their conformity to traditional patterns of sex, marriage, and family living, as

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28 Jacquelyne J. Jackson, “But Where Are the Men?” *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 4 (1971): 33, 34.

29 Jackson, “But Where Are the Men?”, 35.

30 Jackson, “But Where Are the Men?”, 37.

31 Jackson, “But Where Are the Men?”, 41.

defined for them by the White American subculture.” The main issue is the insufficient supply of Black males. The solution, in part, is to improve Black men’s living conditions and expectations. Jackson concludes, “The critical issues confronting Black women are not those of Black matriarchy or Black female emasculation of the male, but merely that of, ‘But where are the men?’”

Aside from the reality that there are not enough men, there is success in the family. In Chicago in 1972, Virgil Carr, director of the office of the Family Service Bureau, pointed out, “Black families put up every day with reality pressures unknown in the White community. They not only survive, they often overcome.”<sup>32</sup> The Black family has succeeded despite its unique challenges. Nonetheless, the impediments faced by people on low incomes are universal. Counselor Michael Armistead makes the point that poor Black families want the same things that poor White families desire; they just haven’t been able to acquire them. Regarding Black Americans’ needs, he said, “They are the same any economically deprived group would have.”<sup>33</sup>

Although Black Americans had not achieved economic equality in the decade following the Moynihan report, comparing them with other Black populations globally is interesting. One subscriber writing to the Black periodical, *The Chicago Defender*, made several such points. While acknowledging that slavery was “the supreme crime against humanity,”<sup>34</sup> reader Robert Baker points out that native Africans have the lowest economic and cultural development in the world. Although there have been injustices, there is a greater opportunity in the U.S. than anywhere else in the world for Blacks. In 1965, the annual income of Black Americans was \$28 billion, equivalent to the combined income of Canada, Norway, and Sweden. More Black Americans own cars than all Africans and Russians, he said. Baker said that they owned businesses and properties back then. Baker contended that

32 Robert McClory, “Through Slavery into Survival: PART IV,” *Chicago Daily Defender* (January 19, 1972).

33 McClory, “Through Slavery into Survival: PART IV.”

34 Robert C. Baker, “Writer Says Negro Has Best Chance In U.S.,” *The Chicago Defender* (October 9, 1965), section “The People Speak.”

their value and income were higher than all Black investments worldwide.

The varied arguments from Black periodicals pose these questions: Do Black Americans have better opportunities than other people of African descent? Is it, as scholar Clemmont Vontress said, that Black Americans need to stop lying to themselves? He maintained that the great struggles of Black Americans could not be overcome until they “call a spade a spade, no matter how much it may hurt... We cannot solve our problems until we know what they are.”<sup>35</sup>

Or is it, as others have suggested, that the challenge is not comparing the conditions of Black and White communities—but rather that Black and White are tied together? It is not an issue of proving who is doing better or worse; all things considered, it is a situation where we all sink or swim together. Is it, as influential psychologist Dr. Kenneth B. Clark said, “The great tragedy... of the Negro and White in America is that neither can be free of the other”?<sup>36</sup> Is it, as Staples says, “There is nothing inherently wrong with a woman heading a family”?<sup>37</sup> Jackson said Blacks had a “head start”<sup>38</sup> over whites in creating alternative family structures in the absence of enough males. She emphasized that the data suggest that Whites are becoming more like Blacks.

### Conclusion

The truth is that one cannot solve any problem until it is correctly identified or illuminated. The Moynihan Report addressed numerous issues confronting the nation, particularly those affecting Black Americans. In varied responses to the Report, the Black press—between 1965 and 1975, whether in newspapers or academic journals—consistently asserted that the Report was inaccurate, the Black family was strong, society’s norms were not right for everyone, and the ultimate solution was equal opportunity for economic success.

35 Staples and Vontress, “A Black Scholar Debate,” 49.

36 Shaskolsky, “The Negro Protest Movement—Revolt or Reform?”, 165

37 Staples, “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” 13.

38 Jackson, “But Where Are the Men?”, 39.

So it remains, one is left asking: Is there a problem with the Black community, or is it an American problem? What if the matriarchy is not the problem but an answer? Maybe we should ask society to change, not the other way around. What does White society have to learn from Black America? History is rapidly evolving, and issues addressed sixty years ago remain as relevant today as they were then, perhaps more so. Historians desperately need to re-examine the circumstances, successes, and failures of our modern world in light of the exposition that emerged decades ago, as they have yet to establish a genuine liberal intellectual perspective on this inquiry.

In 1970, in “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” Robert Staples wrote, “Historically Black women have held a highly esteemed place in the culture. Think back to ancient Egypt and Ethiopia.”<sup>39</sup> Today, thinking back to the ancient Queen of the southern kingdom of Sheba, the Biblical account says, “Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold [worth some 46 million dollars] and a great amount of balsam oil and precious stones. Never again was such a quantity of balsam oil brought in as what the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.”<sup>40</sup> Modern society and contemporary historians would do well to ask themselves, “What does the Black woman have to offer me?” ♦

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39 Staples, “The Myth of the Black Matriarchy,” 13.

40 “The New World Translation (Study Edition): NWT Study Bible,” 1 Kings 10:10.



*Illustration by Alejandro Reyes, Chico State*

# LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GREAT CHINESE FAMINE

Sol Davis

**Abstract:** A deadly turning point in twentieth-century China was the implementation of the Great Leap Forward. The Great Leap Forward was an economic plan executed by Chairman Mao Zedong from 1958 to 1962 that led to the deaths of at least thirty million people in what is now known as the Great Chinese Famine. The Great Leap Forward and subsequent famine are widely regarded as tragic events in Chinese history; however, historians place the blame differently. Using books and essays from Hu Angang, Yang Jisheng, Felix Wemheuer, Chen Yixin, Ralph A. Thaxton Jr., and Gao Wanglin, it becomes clear that the difference in interpretation lies heavily within the historians themselves, their backgrounds, and the looming ties that many have to such a macabre moment in Chinese history.

## Introduction

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Within the United States' political discourse, the word "China" has somehow become controversial, and discussions surrounding it have become vexing to navigate. From economics and trade to the first discovery of COVID-19 in Wuhan, opinions on China have become wildly mixed. Nonetheless, it seems that poor sentiments prevail. This growing negative consensus was amplified by the United States' forty-seventh president, Donald Trump, starting with his references to China during the 2020 pandemic, dubbing COVID-19 "the China virus."<sup>1</sup> Recent economic events like aggressive tariffs have certainly put China in the spotlight again. However, American distrust of China is not new. While the Red Scare and Cold War were supposedly put to rest nearly three decades ago, the hesitancy to discuss Communism and its effects remains. China serves as an example of one of the few self-identified Communist states in the modern era that still maintains close economic ties with the United States.

Given the U.S. political climate, China has become increasingly relevant to Americans. The countries' competition has taken the form of economic policy, most notably through trade wars, tariffs, supply chains, and production. Though tensions have been on the rise for decades, the recent increase in shipping costs seems to have been the American wake-up call. Still, the everyday discussion of modern Chinese history is at its worst nonexistent and at its best partisan. China carries such weight in American life and the political sphere, yet the average United States resident knows so little about China's history and economic transformation. A pivotal moment in twentieth-century Chinese history was Chairman Mao Zedong's rise to power in 1949, his establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and his leadership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>2</sup> The Chinese Communist Party remains intact and continues to be the ruling party of the People's Republic of China.

1 Remarks delivered by Donald J. Trump to the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 22, 2020.

2 Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer, eds., *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 1.

Though Mao died in 1976, clearly his legacy and the impact of his decisions remain. The Great Leap Forward was an economic plan executed by Chairman Mao from 1958 – 1962 that ultimately led to the deaths of at least thirty million people in what is now known as the Great Chinese Famine.<sup>3</sup> The tragedy destroyed the lives of millions and shattered the world’s view of China. While time has caused Mao’s Great Leap Forward campaign to fall out of “common knowledge,” historians continue to offer a wide range of analyses as to why the Great Leap Forward and Famine occurred the way they did.

The differences in interpretation lie largely with the historians themselves, particularly in their backgrounds. Whether they are Chinese or American, educated in economic or social effects, and whether they have direct ties to this tragedy, all contribute to their research focus and subsequent analysis. Hu Angang’s *The Political and Economic History of China (1949 – 1976), Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1957 – 1965*, and *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution, 1966 – 1976*; Yang Jisheng’s *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958 – 1962*; and Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer’s *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China’s Great Leap Forward and Famine* all view the Great Leap Forward as a tragic event in Chinese history, however, where the blame is placed varies. The historical discourse surrounding the Great Leap Forward and subsequent famine reveals deep-rooted social convictions surrounding Communism, and further exploration of this disaster exposes cultural wounds that still need healing.

### The Political and Economic History of China: Volumes 2 & 3

**H**u Angang’s books *The Political and Economic History of China (1949 – 1976), Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1957 – 1965*, and *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution, 1966 – 1976*, were first published in Chinese in 2011 and later translated into English in 2013. Hu is a well-known economics professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China, and much of his work in outlining Chinese economic history is held in high regard within the

3 Manning and Wemheuer, *Eating Bitterness*, 1.

country. In *The Political and Economic History of China*, Hu relies heavily on primary sources, such as writings and statements made by Mao Zedong and other Chinese leaders. However, nearly all other supplementary sources that provide numerical data about the Great Leap Forward and Famine come from official records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

More broadly, the three-volume set covers China's economic history while providing context for political motivations and the decisions of different leaders within modern China. Hu's *Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1957–1965*, follows the Great Leap Forward closely and chronologically. Hu's driving argument relies on many of the primary sources and documents provided by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). While he does provide criticisms of Mao's reforms and strategies, he presents the Great Leap Forward and the switch to a communist model as a kind of necessary evil. Therefore, defending the dominant Chinese historical narrative: the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine were tragedies but also products of the Cold War. In the first section, "China's Early Nation Building Efforts," Hu argues that China's leaders made their decisions regarding economics and foreign relations out of necessity to respond to external difficulties in domestic socioeconomic factors and international pressure. Hu continues by stating that while conditions of poverty in China were extreme, and hardships were endured, the country "achieved unprecedented economic and social development. Yet the centralization of authority and decision-making had its flaws, which later led to a series of economic ups and downs."<sup>4</sup> Even when offering criticisms of Mao or the Chinese government, his argument remains constructive and places less blame on the leaders themselves. Hu argues that the Soviet model failed in China simply because "China's population base was much larger than that of the Soviets."<sup>5</sup> Hu's stance simplifies the tragedy and implies that China had no choice but to adopt the Soviet model; his argument asserts

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4 Angang Hu, *The Political and Economic History of China (1949–1976), Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1957–1965*, (Enrich Professional Publishing, 2013), 44.

5 Hu, *Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward*, 72.

that China had no alternatives given its diplomatic relations and the international context.

Unsurprisingly, the death toll in a book endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party remains nearly undefined. Hu argues that, “the drastic escalation of mortality to approximately 15 million people who were dying of starvation,” but goes on to add that American scholars estimate 16.5 million, and that other estimates range from as low as 2.3 to 30 million.<sup>6</sup> Hu does openly criticize the CCP because the Chinese government had “fabricated, deliberately hid, or downplayed data on starvation deaths,”<sup>7</sup> and he uses this to explain why there cannot be a truly accurate estimate of fatality. He asserts that scholars must rely on national and local census data, focusing on age, to get a general estimate.<sup>8</sup> Hu avoids placing the blame for the Famine entirely on Mao and instead shifts some of it to his fearful supporters. Hu argues that since Mao wanted the Leap to be successful, “his colleagues imposed wild targets in an attempt to win his trust, and they ended up with a fiasco.”<sup>9</sup> This furthers Hu’s assertion that Mao was responding to the environment around him, instead of placing the responsibility onto him as an intimidating leader.

Hu’s third book, *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976*, focuses on the years after the Great Leap Forward and Great Chinese Famine, but builds on much of the economic history surrounding that period. The Cultural Revolution led by Mao was executed to reinforce socialist ideologies and “purge” China of capitalists and revisionists.<sup>10</sup> Hu expands on his argument that Mao’s failures within the Famine, and by extension, the Cultural Revolution, were present, but that those failures were made with good hopes and goals for the people of China. Thus, Mao’s control over these events was too limited for blame to be placed solely on him. Hu argues that revisionist supporters were the “evil forces [that]...played the dirtiest, ugliest and cruelest parts

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6 Hu, *Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward*, 117.

7 Hu, *Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward*, 118.

8 Hu, *Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward*, 118.

9 Hu, *Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward*, 138.

10 Angang Hu, *The Political and Economic History of China (1949–1976)*, *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976*, (Enrich Professional Publishing, 2013), 140.

on China's political stage, and they arbitrarily committed political slaughter,"<sup>11</sup> and even goes on to say that Mao's intentions were sincere, and that his actions were for "the good of the people."<sup>12</sup> Hu's analysis of the Great Famine extends to his analysis of Mao's later actions, stating that while Mao was influential, he did not have all the power needed to cause such disasters, and he "could not replace the other component forces of his time; instead, they worked together to drive the history of China."<sup>13</sup> Hu argued that external factors led to forced internal decisions by Chinese political leaders, but those external factors were more influential in crises such as the Great Famine than the decisions made by Chairman Mao.

As Hu's books are actually used as a textbook within China to teach about this time in Chinese history, they also contribute to the field since they can serve as a record of the CCP and their views, but also track the shifting in the CCP's way of thinking during Mao's regime. The Party itself is moving away from the idea of achieving communism, likely due to an analysis of this history, so historians can use these books to better understand the CCP's current stance on the Great Leap Forward, the Great Chinese Famine, and Mao himself. Lower death toll estimates, mixed criticisms of Mao, and, most importantly, the portrayal of Mao as a near-victim of external ideologies that caused internal turmoil and unrest place these monographs on the more conservative side of the historiography of the period.

### Tombstone

Yang Jisheng wrote his book *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958 - 1962* as an indestructible memorial for his father, who died of starvation in 1959 due to the Great Chinese Famine. Though Yang witnessed his father's death, he still remained an avid supporter of the Great Leap Forward and the Chinese Communist Party until the Cultural Revolution nearly thirty years later. Once he accepted that his father's death was not an isolated instance, along with who and what

11 Hu, *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution*, 140.

12 Hu, *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution*, 206.

13 Hu, *Volume 3: The Cultural Revolution*, 221.

were truly to blame for the millions of deaths across China, Yang began his investigation and developed this tombstone for his father and all those who died during the Famine. Yang uses firsthand accounts from people who experienced the famine, memoirs from journalists who had witnessed and reported on the starvation, and his interviews with the local implementers of Great Leap policies. He also used his status as a respected journalist within China and the Chinese Communist Party to access archives with secret reports indicating the CCP's knowledge of the famine's impact and officials' orders to kill resisters. In *Tombstone*, Yang asserts that Chairman Mao recognized the disastrous effects of the Great Leap policies early on but chose to retain his power and allow the deadly famine to spread across China. Had Mao listened to those who questioned him, the death toll of the Great Chinese Famine would have been significantly reduced.

Yang argues that Mao transformed the Chinese Communist Party by creating the "Three Red Banners" of the CCP: the "General Line," the Great Leap Forward, and the people's communes.<sup>14</sup> The manipulation of the public with this ideological shift fostered unwavering enthusiasm and blind faith for Great Leap policies that would lead to the deaths of millions. The "General Line" was a shortened version of "the General Line for socialist construction," and was essentially the slogan that prompted support for the Great Leap Forward. Because of this, Yang argues that the General Line and the Great Leap forward were actually one, stating that, "the Great Leap Forward was the action guided by the General Line."<sup>15</sup> Mao's ambitions for the General Line, and later the Great Leap, were unrealistic in every aspect. Large harvests and catching up to the United States' steel production were impossible, but the propaganda swept the public into a wave of hope and support for Mao and the Leap. Yang argues that the people who criticized Mao's rash advance were seen as "hindering progress," and retaliation against those who opposed Mao was strong. Officials who

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14 Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, trans. Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian, (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008), 87.

15 Yang, *Tombstone*, 87.

worked with Mao avoided criticizing his ideas, because “flaws in the guiding ideology of 1958 were therefore attributable not only to the supreme leader and leadership group, but also to flaws in the system as a whole.”<sup>16</sup> Yang asserts that if the propaganda from the General Line and Great Leap were not so quickly and deeply ingrained into society, more people would have spoken against the Leap when the Famine was occurring, and it may have ended sooner.

Yang states that within the horrors of the Famine, acts of survival from peasants suffering from starvation were noted by the Chinese Communist Party, and that the CCP leaders strategically classified events as anomalies or even politically motivated actions against the CCP. The Chinese Communist Party was aware of the effects of mass starvation, like murder and cannibalism, but through relabeling, the Chinese government was able to refuse formal acknowledgement of the famine and redirected people towards collectivization as a form of salvation. Yang focuses on cannibalism, as he argues it was a common survival method that became politicized as a tool in the Great Leap, explaining that “Committee head Lu Mei reported on March 3, 1960, that twenty-five of the forty households in Hao Zhuang Village had engaged in cannibalism, and that bodies were being dug up and eaten nearly every night. Nothing could be done to stop it.”<sup>17</sup> Even with records such as this, instances of cannibalism were noted as “special cases” and were ignored or, at the most, were labeled as “unlawful acts.” The Chinese Communist Party would go on to make statements that those who engaged in cannibalism “sullied the government’s image,”<sup>18</sup> and that people who did so would be punished. Yang argues that the government also used cannibalism as a tool to lure more people into collective farming, because local leaders, “took pride in constructing communism, while peasants long inured to hardship were inspired by guarantees of food and clothing.”<sup>19</sup> As desperation ravaged the lives of those trying to survive, people

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16 Yang, *Tombstone*, 111.

17 Yang, *Tombstone*, 303.

18 Yang, *Tombstone*, 304.

19 Yang, *Tombstone*, 305.

turned to eating the dead and murdering one another for food. Common Chinese peasants continued to suffer yet supported the system that damned them, led astray by the false promises of provisions and supplies from a faraway Chinese government. Yang goes on to question, though, how much the government really knew.

Yang argues that Mao Zedong was aware of how deadly his Great Leap policies were, but that he refused to listen to his fellow leaders who dared speak against him; Mao even went further to be more ambitious in public efforts of “progress,” but in reality wanted to keep his power intact. Yang maintains that if Mao had listened to the dissenters of his policies, the severity of the Famine would have been lessened based on the evidence that provinces held firmer under Mao’s influence had more records of starvation. When soldiers, students, or government leaders left their homes and returned later to find much of their family dead from starvation, they “sent constant streams of letters to the Central Committee, for which they were invariably persecuted.”<sup>20</sup> Yang argues that the CCP silenced those who spoke up, even if they were simply notifying the Party or searching for answers as to why their families starved to death. Yang shows that provincial authorities also concealed the effects of starvation, particularly when foreigners visited. The government created functioning village sets, removed corpses, and brought beautifully dressed women in boats, and men would act as vendors in scenic locations, all the while barring the peasants from entering where the visitors were.<sup>21</sup> Yang argues that nearly all of this was done as a commitment to Mao’s insistence on reaching unattainable goals, and that those who worked harder to conceal the truth from Mao, or even attempt to reach his outlandish goals, killed more people in their provinces, “provincial party secretaries who kept in step with Mao during the Great Leap Forward, and who displayed the greatest ‘creativity’ in promoting the government’s policies, brought the greatest disaster upon their people.”<sup>22</sup> Yang asserts that even if

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20 Yang, *Tombstone*, 311.

21 Yang, *Tombstone*, 312

22 Yang, *Tombstone*, 397.

Mao was told the truth by higher officials, which was unlikely since he was so feared, Mao would intentionally not listen and continue to actively aid in the starvation of millions.

Yang Jisheng's work provided this field with the new "baseline" understanding of the Great Chinese Famine, as his extensive research, use of a variety of primary sources, including interviews, oral histories, and classified documents, gives historians a more complete picture of the Famine's impacts, along with who in the CCP were aware of its fatal effects. His work differs completely from Hu's; Yang focuses on the people who suffered in China and their stories, along with supplemental data not intended for the public, to craft his account. He does not allow Mao much of an "out" except in that the system Mao built became so uncontrollable that even the Chairman himself could not escape its grasp. Yang's harsh criticism of Mao, the rawness of the personal accounts he uses, the directness of his blame, and, most importantly, the unexpected access to confidential archives and data, shocked the CCP. Yang argued that at least thirty million people died of starvation in the famine, and today, *Tombstone* remains banned in China.

### Eating Bitterness

**E**ating Bitterness: *New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* is a collection of essays by diverse scholars from China and the United States that expands the historical dialogue surrounding the Leap and Famine. Each author provides a unique perspective on topics often left un-discussed in the historiography of this event, and the book as a whole argues that the less-central Party actors, outside of the likes of Mao and his highest-ranking officials, contributed to the Famine in influential ways, both in submission to and resistance against the Chinese Communist Party. Four notable historians, Felix Wemheuer, Chen Yixin, Ralph A. Thaxton Jr., and Gao Wanglin, particularly drive this argument with their sections.

Felix Wemheuer's section, "The Grain Problem Is an Ideological Problem': Discourses of Hunger in the 1957 Socialist Education Campaign," serves as the fourth chapter in *Eating Bitterness*; and like Yang, he argues that part of the impact of

the Great Leap was through propaganda and politicization. Wemheuer states that the Chinese Communist Party, when receiving complaints of starvation, responded, “the peasants had enough to eat, but some of them were pretending to be hungry so that they could reduce the amount of grain they sold to the state or so that they could request food aid,”<sup>23</sup> and Wemheuer shows that the CCP attacked this by labeling it as capitalism. As soon as Mao and the CCP labeled starvation as inherently capitalist, “the question of whether or not the peasants had enough to eat became highly politicized.”<sup>24</sup> Wemheuer does not place the blame solely on Mao, and even states that, “Mao Zedong did not believe that it was a nationwide disaster but, rather, that it was due to some local faults,”<sup>25</sup> and that Mao could have thought it was a temporary food shortage that had similarly happened in China’s recent past. This, combined with the CCP claiming that peasants were lying about starvation, removes some of the blame from Mao and places it more on the system, reinforcing such harsh economic and ideological binaries.

Chen Yixin’s contribution, “Under the Same Maoist Sky: Accounting for Death Rate Discrepancies in Anhui and Jiangxi,” is the eighth chapter of *Eating Bitterness*, and he uses provincial data, biographies, and memoirs of provincial leaders to argue against much of the leading theories as to why there are such stark differences in death rates among different Chinese provinces during the Famine. Chen argues that, while the five prevailing theories have their strengths, they make more sense when you combine much of their intersectionality. Across classical economic thought, peasants’ rights to food, government resource distribution, communal dining practices, and political radicalism, each theory posits both a great and a flawed aspect. He notes that there is a large factor that many historians leave out when analyzing causes of discrepancies: relief. Chen writes,

23 Felix Wemheuer, “‘The Grain Problem Is an Ideological Problem’: Discourses of Hunger in the 1957 Socialist Education Campaign,” in *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China’s Great Leap Forward and Famine*, eds. Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 107.

24 Wemheuer, “‘The Grain Problem is an Ideological Problem,’” 115.

25 Wemheuer, “‘The Grain Problem is an Ideological Problem,’” 126.

“It is famine relief work that makes the leadership factor so important in understanding the Great Leap Famine deaths.”<sup>26</sup> The leaders of provinces who were under Mao’s control were more likely to have a higher death toll, because they were last to start providing aid for those suffering from starvation. Chen argues that leaders who were less under Mao’s influence were able to admit defeat sooner and administer relief faster. Chen argues that the factors that determined the difference in death rates between provinces cannot be explained by one theory, but a collection of factors, like whether “a province experienced a sudden shortage of agricultural labourers, had a sufficient amount of available food, and had a set of famine relief measures.”<sup>27</sup> Chen admits that the Great Leap Forward and Famine are so complex that looking at discrepancies might only cause more confusion; therefore, each province should be studied in a detailed manner to better explain the Leap and Famine.

The final chapters by Ralph A. Thaxton, Jr. and Gao Wanglin, “How the Great Leap Forward Famine Ended in Rural China: ‘Administrative Intervention’ versus Peasant Resistance,” and “A Study of Chinese Peasant ‘Counter-Action,’” provide arguments that peasants were more involved in the Leap and the recovery period than previous historians have given credit for. Thaxton uses interviews from several provinces struck by famine and internal reference reports from the New China News Agency to drive the argument that Mao and the CCP did not stop the Famine, but the starving peasants themselves did. He argues that the government “did not save villagers through direct administrative intervention because, quite simply, they lacked the administrative capacity to do so.”<sup>28</sup> Rural people had to save themselves as the government simply pulled away from collectivization. Thaxton argues that placing the emphasis on the administration inherently takes away from the ordinary people’s

26 Chen Yixin, “Under the Same Maoist Sky: Accounting for Death Rate Discrepancies in Anhui and Jiangxi,” in *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China’s Great Leap Forward and Famine*, eds. Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 219.

27 Chen Yixin, “Under the Same Maoist Sky,” 219.

28 Ralph A. Thaxton, Jr., “How the Great Leap Forward Famine Ended in Rural China: ‘Administrative Intervention’ versus Peasant Resistance,” in *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China’s Great Leap Forward and Famine*, eds. Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 253.

recovery and efforts, and that the “error of the administrative intervention paradigm is also the product of not listening carefully to the rural people who were most directly affected by Mao’s toxic system of vigilante socialism.”<sup>29</sup> Thaxton called for a more thorough examination of the period through the lens of peasant resistance to give due credit to their involvement and impact in the Famine. He shifts the perspective away from who is to blame and instead focuses on the peasants in a way that avoids reducing them to simply victims.

Gao’s “A Study of Chinese Peasant ‘Counter-Action,’” used oral histories and local province records to argue that the CCP was actively making deals with peasants as their resistance took new forms. Gao defines peasant “resistance” as “the unassuming daily behaviour of dialogue or negotiation,”<sup>30</sup> because as peasants came to grips with the new reality of the Chinese Communist regime, they developed new ideas to resist and survive. Gao argues that this kind of resistance goes overlooked because it is not catalogued by the CCP, but that is because “large appropriation efforts were branded as ‘robbery’ by local authorities.”<sup>31</sup> In the same way that Yang identified the strategic relabeling and politicization of cannibalism, Gao takes a similar approach by emphasizing the relabeling of negotiation as “stealing.” Gao argues that these practices need more historical analysis, as the success of these negotiations greatly impacted all of the provinces and their varying death tolls.

*Eating Bitterness*, while a collection of essays, has one of the most nuanced contributions to this field of study. Because much of the research, historical analysis, and conclusions are drawn by singular scholars, their identities as Chinese or Western, along with personal ties to the period, heavily influence their analyses. *Eating Bitterness* is a dialogue by Chinese and Western scholars that highlights new contexts for the Great Leap and Famine and, in doing so, opens the door to further collaborative dialogues in the field. Since one of the collection’s

29 Thaxton, “How the Great Leap Forward Famine Ended,” 268.

30 Gao Wanglin, “A Study of Chinese Peasant ‘Counter-Action,’” trans. Sascha Mundstein and Robert Mackie, in *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China’s Great Leap Forward and Famine*, eds. Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 279.

31 Gao, “A Study of Chinese Peasant ‘Counter-Action,’” 273.

essential themes is understanding the common people of China and their impact during the Famine, it departs from dominant works like Hu's, which focus on political and economic structures, placing greater emphasis on important leaders and their impacts. It seems that *Eating Bitterness* expands on works similar to Yang, as both books hold space for the first-hand accounts and oral histories of those who directly experienced and witnessed the Famine. The specific and distinctive questions each author poses and begins to answer in their chapters open the discussion surrounding the Great Leap Forward and Famine in refreshing ways, and as more historians begin to delve into the subfields found in *Eating Bitterness*, the entire story of the Great Leap and Famine can slowly be revealed.

### Conclusion

From CCP-approved textbooks to banned monographs to collections by new historians, the discourse surrounding the Great Leap Forward and the Great Chinese Famine can vary widely. Hu's analysis reeks of anxiety and censorship, but his tip-toeing around Mao gives other scholars an understanding of China's views on this period. Yang's unfiltered analysis and deep research expose new, harsh takes on the Leap and Famine and pose questions for emerging historians, such as those in *Eating Bitterness*. Historians' analyses of modern China remain varied and relatively unknown, and the field's lack of prominence in the average American's knowledge is understandable given the political climate. As "fake news" becomes the first response to diverse reporting, this field may never be able to fully take root in the United States, but historians can continue to debate their truths and arguments as information from the Chinese Communist Party continues to be revealed. The poem "Two Birds: A Dialogue," written by Mao in 1965, weakly characterizes his criticism of Soviet-model communism through a sparrow's conversation with the roc, a mighty mythological bird of prey. The sparrow is shown as naive and gullible, as the roc guides him away from lies. Now, with a greater understanding of the events and historical debate behind Mao's actions, involvement in the Great Chinese Famine, and our own forty-seventh's

love of “fake news,” please bear witness to the deep irony of Mao’s last stanza:

Don’t farce any more!

Look, the world is being turned upside down.<sup>32</sup> ◆



*Illustration by William Gonzalez, Chico State*

# DEMOCRATIC DISSOLUTION: FASCISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST & THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MANDATORY SYSTEM

**Sam Balderas**

**Abstract:** This essay examines the perspectives of various authors who research the Middle East and fascism during the interwar era. As the region saw itself caught between world powers and foreign occupations, Middle Eastern views and debates on expansion, antisemitism, liberalism, and violence grew to shape a century of world history. From youth movements in Egypt to paramilitaries in Syria, political divides in Iraq, and ideological discourse spreading throughout the region's newspapers, fascism versus democracy was central to lively anti-colonial independence movements during the mandatory period following World War I and into the start of World War II.

**I**n November 1941, two years after the war began in Europe, Muhammad Amin al-Husayni, Mufti of Jerusalem, met with the leader of Germany and the Nazi Party, Adolf Hitler, in

Berlin. In meeting with the Führer, al-Husayni hoped, among other things, for the “establishment of a pan-Arab federation or state... [and opposed] immigration of Jews to Palestine.”<sup>1</sup> For eighty years, the image of the Mufti shaking hands with Hitler has been shown as evidence of the Muslim world’s support of fascism. Yet while the Israeli Prime Minister hints at the Holocaust growing from this meeting, were the hopes of one man symbolic of a wider fascist movement in the Middle East?<sup>2</sup> Rather than being a movement committed to the ideals of fascism, defined as a nationalist government with a single dictatorial leader that controls all aspects of public and private life, any interest in fascism is increasingly shown as a backlash from the Mandatory system that dominated the post-World War I Middle East. The people of the region made it clear, though, that as deeply as they wanted independence, fascism would not be the system they were willing to live under. This becomes clearer when examining historians’ views on the topic.

In reading Peter Wien’s *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian, and Pro-Fascist Inclinations*, Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski’s *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s*, and Götz Nordbruch’s *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option*, it is clear that the issue of fascism in the Middle East was far more complicated than simply shaking hands with Hitler. The effects of European colonialism in the wake of the Ottoman Empire’s fall, along with differences between older and younger generations’ views on militarism and nationalism, were powerful factors in Arab political movements. Yet fears over Axis expansionism, antisemitism, and the potential violence of fascism made even the most ardent nationalists reconsider. Though no fascist movements were able to take power in the Middle East as Hitler or Mussolini had in Europe, their actions still created a unique political environment throughout the 1930s to the end of World War II in 1945. To understand how the Mufti’s meeting

1 “Hajj Amin al-Husseini,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/hajj-amin-al-husayni-the-mufti-of-jerusalem>.

2 Gary C. Gambill, “Backgrounder: Hajj Amin al-Husseini,” *Middle East Forum*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.meforum.org/backgrounder-hajj-amin-husseini>.

with Hitler came to be, an understanding of the post-Great War world is required, particularly the role of the Ottoman Empire's fall.

### The Death of the Ottomans & The Birth of Mandates

After having thrived for nearly 700 years, the Ottoman Empire collapsed following the defeat of the Central Powers in World War I in 1918, with the arrival of a republic following in 1923.<sup>3</sup> Once spanning from Greece to North Africa, the former states of the Empire were now prey for Europe.<sup>4</sup> France and Britain would come to control much of the Middle East, with a system of Mandates controlling each province.<sup>5</sup>

The victorious Allied Powers argued at the League of Nations that these mandates, dictating matters of national security, commerce, and travel, were guarantees for “political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.”<sup>6</sup> The mandate rules were applied to “certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire” and were thus “subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.”<sup>7</sup> Despite the views of its supporters, many in the Middle East felt the Mandates were “not all that different from the colonized countries,” with many nations showing an “absence of both stability and of effective institutions of civil society,” with no evidence of preparation for the point at which these states could “stand on their own.”<sup>8</sup> It was this Mandatory system that would control the nations of Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, and it set the stage for the growing belief in nationalism that Peter Wien discusses in *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*.

3 “The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1807–1924,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/the-dissolution-of-the-ottoman-empire-1807-1924>.

4 “The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, 1807–1924.”

5 Peter Sluglett, “An Improvement on Colonialism? The ‘A’ Mandates and Their Legacy in the Middle East,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)* 90, no. 2 (2014): 413–27; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24538563>, 417.

6 Sluglett, “An Improvement on Colonialism,” 417.

7 Sluglett, “An Improvement on Colonialism,” 417.

8 Sluglett, “An Improvement on Colonialism,” 425.

### Nationalism & Iraqi Youth Movements

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Peter Wien is a Professor of History of the Modern Middle East at the University of Maryland in College Park, specializing in Global Interaction and Exchange, Islamic History, and the Middle East. His previous work includes *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (2017). In *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, Wien hoped to challenge “widespread assumptions that interwar Iraq was on a direct path to become a totalitarian state,” but rather a “laboratory for divergent political opinions and concepts to shape a nationalist society.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, any “Arab sympathies for Germany during the Nazi period are often explained with the slogan ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend,’ in the sense that Germany was a natural ally for those under French and British rule.”<sup>10</sup> Further, that events in Iraq, “root to a certain extent...the failure of both the Iraqi establishment and the British occupiers to deliver on the desires of the Iraqi intelligentsia and the rising middle class.”<sup>11</sup> Central to the growing anti-colonial movement were the rise of paramilitary and nationalist youth organizations like al-Futuwwa. The brewing conflict between the Young Effendiya of al-Futuwwa, “a younger generation of graduates from secondary schools and universities [that] challenged... The old elite and its dependence on the good will of the former Mandate power Great Britain” and the older elites of the Sherifian Generation is central to many feelings on fascism and their supporters in Europe. The “closed elite circles” of the Sherifian Generation would clash with the Young Effendiya as they debated the course of Iraqi nationalism, militarism, and independence.<sup>12</sup>

Explained in detail in chapter three, appropriately titled “Generational Conflict,” Wien shows how the Young Effendiya would adopt the ideas of a nation they viewed as a nationalist model: Germany. Increasingly divided and ineffective leadership of the Mandate-era parliament was reaching a breaking point amongst younger generations. This meant the “young

9 Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932–1941*, (Routledge, 2006), I.

10 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 116.

11 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 116.

12 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, I.

intelligentsia was disillusioned about democracy and began to look for new ways of answering social problems.”<sup>13</sup> They embraced a “Western concept of modernization and [used] European concepts such as ‘nation state,’ ‘state schooling,’ and ‘military service’ in order to make the nation strong against imperialism.”<sup>14</sup> As a result, “resistance against imperialist suppression [became] a unifying theme for the educated youth.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, if not for a parliament limited by European mandate, the Young Effendiya would not have existed. Here, a model also begins to emerge: rebellious youth, driven by powerful change in Europe, would become the driving nationalist, anti-mandate force not just in Iraq but in many of the nations discussed here.

These feelings of doubt in the political system led to the rise of al-Futuwwa, a youth movement pushing for “a revolution of the ‘young’ to abolish the ‘old,’” as well as the unification of Iraqis behind a single leader.<sup>16</sup> Supporters of al-Futuwwa argued that the nation “was in favor of Nazism,” and this opinion was “not because of love for it, but because of hate for imperialism.”<sup>17</sup> As the popularity of Futuwwa grew, their “militarization was penetrating all levels of the state educational system at the time.”<sup>18</sup> This led to a push for “Futuwwa units” stationed in all schools, with activities modeled similarly to the Hitler Youth.<sup>19</sup> Despite the activities of Futuwwa, Wien maintains these were little more than debates on nationalism propelled by anti-British sentiment, with most groups only adopting “fascistic” ideas with Germany as a “point of reference” with no concrete changes like what happened in European countries.<sup>20</sup> A reorganization of how political thought was spread, through schools and newspapers, would lead to an increased interest in the nationalist parties of Al-Futuwwa and others. All the while, these arguments over the future of the nation, pushed by authoritarian, “nation first” groups primarily focused on anti-British and pro-German ideas,

13 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 10.

14 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 13.

15 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 42.

16 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 36.

17 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 37.

18 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 96.

19 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 96.

20 Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 4.

continued to play out in the press between Young Effendiya and Sherifian intellectuals and politicians. The advent of new, diverse newspapers became a popular battleground.

Newspapers play a large role in Wien's argument. Chapter four covers the press, with sources including publications, with topics ranging from satire to political commentary, like *al-Siyasa*, *Habazbuz*, and *al-Hasid*, with most of the included articles published during the mid-1930s.<sup>21</sup> Wien supports his findings with modern scholarship on Arab Nationalism, including works by Israel Gershoni, Rashid Khalidi, and other historians, to show how debates in the 1930s press reflected the regional tensions between colonial influence and emerging nations. There are also many articles from a wide variety of journals, including *Des Islam*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and the *Arab Studies Quarterly*.<sup>22</sup> Memoirs like that of Elkabir do make an appearance as well. As Wien is a German scholar, many of the included sources are in German, but there are also many in English or Arabic. Considering the many times Wien references Israel Gershoni's other work, it would only be appropriate to discuss *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* next.

### Democratic Retreat in Egypt & Paramilitary Youth

**I**srael Gershoni is a former Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University. This former IDF officer specialized in Egypt and the Arab Middle East during World War II (1938-1945). His previous work includes *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900 - 1930* (1987), and *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930 - 1945* (2009), both co-authored with James Jankowski. Jankowski is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Colorado Boulder, and specializes in Middle Eastern history. Together with Gershoni, he wrote *Confronting Fascism in Egypt*. This book explores the intellectual debates among new political groups in Egypt about the future of Egypt

<sup>21</sup> Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 130.

<sup>22</sup> Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, 118.

throughout the 1930s. Split into three sections, the book addresses several topics, including modern narratives on Egyptian history, the state of local politics going into the 1930s, public discourse and the press, and the two main anti-liberal groups in the country at the time.

In direct opposition to Peter Wien's *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, the main goal of Gershoni and Jankowski's *Confronting Fascism* is combating the idea that Muslims in Egypt, particularly intellectuals and youth, were "[retreating] from the liberal values that they had previously espoused."<sup>23</sup> They also dispute the view that Egyptian youth were "progressively disillusioned by the partisan bickering of their elders [in parliament]" and "attracted to more authoritarian and presumably more efficient political models."<sup>24</sup> It is this "master narrative," which Wien is a part of, that the authors feel needs to be reworked. With the creation of *Confronting Fascism*, the authors hope to encourage readers to "critically reconsider this narrative," in large part because they believe these ideas stem from post-war views of Egypt following the 1952 Revolution and from the actions of some political elites in support of Nazism. *Confronting Fascism* is the only book among the three to argue that post-war politicization of Egypt's actions during the war is responsible for the idea that they were a pro-fascist nation and that politicization feeds into the master narrative.<sup>25</sup>

Instead, Gershoni and Jankowski believe the opposite of Wien, that "liberal ideas about both politics and society continued to be expressed with considerable vigor by Egyptian intellectuals and publicists."<sup>26</sup> *Confronting Fascism* argues that antiliberal groups that believed describing fascist-like groups as fascists was "inadequate," were "the exception rather than the norm in Egyptian public discourse."<sup>27</sup> These ideas are further expanded in chapters six and seven, with the actions and ideas of both the Muslim Brothers and Young Egypt explored in depth.

23 Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford University Press, 2020), 3.

24 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 3.

25 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 4.

26 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 4.

27 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 8.

Focusing on Young Egypt, the authors describe them as “Egyptian nationalist in outlook, paramilitary in organization, militant in operation...and giving voice to the aspirations of Egyptian youth.”<sup>28</sup> This aligns Young Egypt with al-Futuwwa and the militarization of youth, amid the ideological conflict between the Young Effendiya and the Sherifians in *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*. Young Egypt presented itself as the “new generation” that “separated...from the old generation,” of the current political parties in Egypt’s parliament.<sup>29</sup> The group hoped to achieve its goals, of “working for the amelioration of the impoverishment and distress afflicting the peasant and working majority of Egyptians,” by presenting a staunchly anti-colonial image with “the necessity of uncompromising nationalist struggle against the British occupation of Egypt.”<sup>30</sup> They deemed the current ruling party as corrupt, participating in “de facto collaboration with Britain’s colonial domination.”<sup>31</sup> In the inter-war period of the Middle East, to be working with the colonial powers of Britain or France was to be a traitor and to forsake one’s people, at least in the eyes of Young Egypt and their allies. Rather than adopt a militaristic regime, Egypt’s move towards fascism remained a debate amongst intellectuals on paper, with a growing distaste for Nazi racial theory and their possible role as a new colonial power keeping them from fully aligning with the Axis powers.

### Nazism: A New Flavor of Imperialism

Though the paramilitary actions of the group existed largely on paper, and attempts to meet with Nazi German representatives were few, with a German minister deeming them “‘extremely weak in terms of its finances’ and ‘of no great significance,’” while never meeting with Fascist Italy.<sup>32</sup> With that in mind, they never fully committed to fascism, only using it for anti-establishment and anti-colonial action.<sup>33</sup> While *Confronting*

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28 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 234.

29 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 234.

30 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 235.

31 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 234.

32 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 239.

33 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 5.

*Fascism's* views on Young Egypt's goals, like al-Futuwwa, the authors dispute the idea that this was widespread amongst Egypt's youth, the opposite of Wien, who argues it is an entire generation holding anti-liberal ideas in Iraq. Instead, antifascist ideals proved much more influential in Egypt.

*Confronting Fascism* argues that critics of fascism rejected its "totalitarian nature, its repressiveness, violence...viewed as oppressive and brutal machines which had destroyed civil liberties."<sup>34</sup> Egyptians also found Nazi racism and antisemitism to be "repugnant."<sup>35</sup> Finally, critics of fascist thought viewed both Germany and Italy as "an international menace," with their militarism viewed as a "new and more pernicious form of imperialism" that was a "manifest danger to world peace as well as to the independence of small states."<sup>36</sup> Imperialism, Racism, and rejection of repression propelled anti-Fascists, while the end of a colonial puppet government drove pro-Fascists, but again, those groups never saw any real political success in the same fashion as Germany or Italy. As Iraqi Arab Nationalism argued, liberal ideas also played out in the Egyptian press.

*Confronting Fascism* focuses heavily on editorials from certain newspapers, journals, and writers at the center of the anti-liberal-versus-liberal debate. The authors mentioned are Hasan al-Banna, leader of the Muslim Brothers, and Salama Musa, nationalist founder of *al-Majalla al-Jadida*. Modern research done by other historians is also referenced, including Peter Wien's *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, and Stefan Wild, another prominent historian who has written about fascism in the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Both Gershoni and Jankowski's previous works are referenced, those made separately and together.<sup>38</sup> Yet again, we see the importance of newspapers in sharing ideas about the state of the nation, further showing that these debates played out more on the page than in street brawls and military bouts. Aside from the periodicals published largely between 1930 and 1945, the other sources are from the 1990s through the years

34 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 12.

35 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 12.

36 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 13.

37 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 288, 318.

38 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 314.

prior to the book's release in 2010. The final book discussed here is *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option* by Götz Nordbruch, which argues that the Nazis offered a path towards a new identity in the post-Ottoman world and served as an intermediary in negotiations with France for independence.

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### The Intellectual Debate & Anti-Zionism in Syria

**N***azism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option* is part of a series of books from which *Iraqi Arab Nationalism* is also drawn, and the author, Götz Nordbruch, specifically thanks Israel Gershoni in his acknowledgments, showing the close ties between the authors of this subject. At the time of the book's publication, Nordbruch was a research associate at the Institute for Research and Studies on the Arab and Muslim World in Aix-en-Provence, France. His research interests included the History of Arab-European relations and the development of modern Arab political culture. His other work includes *Narrating Palestinian Nationalism* (2002). Like previous authors, Nordbruch begins by examining the power of youth who looked to Germany in their quest for independence in a modernizing world.

*Nazism in Syria and Lebanon* is concerned with “[reconstructing] Lebanese and Syrian encounters with Nazism in the context of an evolving local political culture,” and interpreting “public assessments of and contact with the Nazi regime as part of an intellectual quest for orientation in the years between the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and national independence.”<sup>39</sup> Each chapter of the book explores a different aspect of these public assessments between 1933 and 1945. These chapters include local politics amidst the French Mandate period of Syria and Lebanon, and the mobilization of youth against colonialism while exploring possible diplomatic action with Nazi Germany.<sup>40</sup> Nordbruch establishes that he hopes to answer three questions: Who knew about the Nazis and what did they know, how was

39 Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of The German Option, 1933–1945* (Routledge, 2009), I.

40 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, V.

this information about Germany spread, and what aspects of Nazism did the public discuss and how it related to the issues of Syria and Lebanon.<sup>41</sup>

Fascism, as Nordbruch notes, “was just one intellectual and political reference among others... Italian fascism, Kemalism, Bolshevism, or the ideas of the French Revolution would prove no less interesting.”<sup>42</sup> While Nordbruch and Wien align more often than *Confronting Fascism*, all three focus on the youth leaning towards Germany in response to colonial power, in this case, France. As both countries entered the post-Ottoman era and into the French Mandate, “basic fundamentals of social, cultural, and political life” were challenged.<sup>43</sup> Some of the biggest challenges were the “modern secular educated youth” emerging from the “growing urbanization and the modernization of social structures” in both nations, identical to the topic of youth in the previously mentioned monographs.<sup>44</sup> The desires of this generation, a group “trapped between the traditional order and growing European influence,” had an agenda focused on the “fight against colonialism” as well as “demands for substantial changes for the local order,” stemming from the “intensification of the economic crisis and the obvious failure of mainstream nationalist politics” in the 1920s.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the youth movement was again powered by their lack of faith in the current system as the world moved rapidly forward. In their minds, the formation of a new political system was crucial to the success of their nations, and this meant a commitment to militarism, leading to the rise of groups like the Iron Shirts.

### Axis Expansion & Negotiating Independence

This new generation is further detailed in chapter three, titled “Nazism and the Levant-Nazism in the Levant.” In this chapter, scouting, “could be a unifying factor for the

41 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 6.

42 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 7.

43 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 9.

44 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 9.

45 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 9.

various youth groups in Lebanon and Syria.”<sup>46</sup> Scoutism, as seen by the French, was “opposed to everything that is not Arab.”<sup>47</sup> Appearing in public with “the staging of strict discipline and order, and the militant expression of their political demands...parading in uniforms and military style formations,” these groups grew in frequency as both countries entered the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> Like both al-Futuwwa and Young Egypt, The National Youth, created “to establish a youthful grouping that would help attract younger generations to the politics of the National Bloc [political party in Syria],” adopted that militaristic style when it created the Iron Shirts, a “paramilitary branch.”<sup>49</sup> The Iron Shirts got into “often violent demonstrations,” and on occasion “acted independently of direct organizational loyalties and affiliations.”<sup>50</sup> Iron Shirts encouraged antisemitism, a position further encouraged by German propaganda in the region and saw “widespread sympathy” in places like Jerusalem, Cairo, Baghdad, and Beirut.<sup>51</sup> Though even then, nationalist leaders viewed the antisemitic policies of Germany as a “stab in the back” as the persecution of the Jews would lead to more Jewish immigration.<sup>52</sup>

Leaders of the Iron Shirts routinely talked of their “fascination for Hitler’s resolute will to rule and his authoritarian regime,” praise shared by leaders of al-Futuwwa.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, in Lebanon, the Phalangists were formed and acted in a similar style to the Iron Shirts, “to foster Lebanese nationalist identity.”<sup>54</sup> Antifascist thought still appeared, though. Negotiations with the Axis sparked fears that inviting them would “[supplement] a foreigner with another foreigner, of a yoke with another yoke.”<sup>55</sup> Many politicians held serious “misgivings about the Axis ambitions,” particularly the German policy of *Lebensraum*,

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46 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 48.

47 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 48.

48 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 48.

49 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 49.

50 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 49.

51 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 139.

52 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 139.

53 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 50.

54 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 51.

55 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 108.

questioning “how does it relate to the Arab countries?” and how far Mussolini was willing to go to “reestablish the glory of Rome in the Arab countries.”<sup>56</sup>

As negotiations with the French continued, trust in the Arab negotiators waned, encouraging nationalist groups to seek out Germany as a “potential option for support.”<sup>57</sup> The end of the French Mandate was an important driving factor for Arab nationalists. Groups like the Syrian Nationalist Party in Damascus and the Arab Nationalist Party in Beirut were formed to ensure no “compromise” when it came to their borders.<sup>58</sup> For them, Germany presented the best options towards independence, as they hoped to “[profit] from a potential German conflict with Britain, and from Germany’s expressed enmity towards Jews.”<sup>59</sup> Support for independence in Syria and Lebanon was high, and a war in Europe, as well as the disruption of the Zionist project in Palestine, was seen as more possible with Germany’s aid.<sup>60</sup> In the eyes of the Nationalist groups, “the creation of a Jewish state posed not only a serious challenge to the Arab nation, but to National Socialist Germany as well.”<sup>61</sup> Despite this, German diplomats “remained reluctant to encourage any substantial Arab-German rapprochement” in part due to the “frequent strategic shifts of local nationalist currents,” rendering any judgments on “loyalties and convictions nearly impossible.”<sup>62</sup> For Nordbruch, the “continuing reluctance of France to submit to local demands for independence considerably weakened the standing of those currents that had opted for anti-German opposition.”<sup>63</sup> This is similar to Wien, as he also concludes that the blame for shifts in ideology could ultimately be placed on the British and Iraqi authorities.

With regards to evidence, Nordbruch relies on types of primary and secondary sources that are slightly more varied than the previous authors. While Nordbruch does call newspapers

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56 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 108.

57 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 55.

58 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 56.

59 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 62.

60 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 62.

61 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 63.

62 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 66.

63 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 141.

“not only political mouthpieces, but ‘stages’ for public reflection and conflict,” the role of these publications in his book is not as large. Newspapers appear most in chapter two under the subsection “Nazism in the Local Press,” discussing public perception and discourse over the Nazis.<sup>64</sup> Included were “leading newspapers” in both Syria and Lebanon, which Nordbruch felt were “nationalist voices close to specific parties and Arab nationalist trends.”<sup>65</sup> These publications that Nordbruch mentions most are *al-Qabas* and *al-Ayyam*, two “mouthpieces” in Damascus used directly by the Syrian National Bloc that “enhanced the organization’s outreach.”<sup>66</sup> Other sources include monographs or articles by historians working in the same field. For example, both Israel Gershoni and Peter Wien were previously discussed here.<sup>67</sup> Other works by Keith Watenpaugh and Stefan Wild appear as well.<sup>68</sup>

There is a mix of authors from the period discussed, particularly Arab nationalists of the time. These include League of Nations representative Shakib and his brother Adil Arslan, both Arab nationalists, as well as leaders like Iron Shirt Secretary General Munir Ajlani, and Syrian official Nabih al-Azma, who expressed concerns over Axis expansionism.<sup>69</sup> As with the previous authors, the ability to freely share opinions through newspapers and other periodicals was paramount in the spread of fascism. Yet ironically, this spread of free thought was not possible in a fascist nation, a dilemma clearly shown in their main example, Nazi Germany. This predicament, of one caught between democratic and authoritarian imperial powers, would eventually mean that the Middle East of this period could never fully commit to either as World War II became evident in the late 1930s.

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64 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, V.

65 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 12.

66 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 11.

67 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 199.

68 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 200.

69 Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, 16, 50, 63, 108.

### The Failure of the European Model

In examining *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, *Confronting Fascism*, and *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, the biggest interpretive difference was whether or not young people were disillusioned by democracy. While youth organizations play a large role in all three, only *Confronting Fascism* argues against the idea of a “master narrative” that most young people at the time were uninterested in democracy and liberalism, while both Nordbruch and Wien argue for that master narrative. All three don’t place much focus on religion or Islam as a defining factor for why fascism was a growing trend; instead, it was the rise of a new generation that led to the creation of new nationalist political entities powered by the ideas of anti-colonialism and militarism. It was entities like al-Futuwwa, Young Egypt, and the Iron Shirts that sought to emulate Germany, a partner they believed was vital to achieving independence from the European colonial powers.

The youth, like Young Effendiya, were at the forefront of a political battle taking place in the major cities of the Middle East, sharing ideas heavily in a growing number of newspapers. It was on paper in which most of the fascism debate took place, as intellectuals weighed the paths towards independence in a colonial world. Yet, even as the use of fascism as a reference in the region grew in popularity, there were still many who were hesitant to accept the violence, expansionism, and antisemitism of nations like Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy. The Middle East was no better or different than many other nations struggling with the ideas of nationalism and independence, but unlike Europe, it did not embrace them to the point of a government led entirely by them. Rather, the Middle East and its many nations have continued to search for their own identity in a global scene dominated by Western powers. ◆

# INTRODUCTION

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## Why History Matters

The following section features three essays from **HIST 201: Why History Matters**, the introductory course for our history majors. Designed to build both community and intellectual foundation, **HIST 201** brings together students with shared interests and emerging career goals as they begin their journey in the discipline.

In this course, students develop the core skills essential to historical practice: organizing and interpreting evidence, evaluating historical arguments, and constructing persuasive claims grounded in careful reasoning. Beyond the classroom, they engage directly with the past by visiting local archives and working with physical documents, often for the first time, gaining hands-on experience with the materials that shape historical scholarship.

The course culminates in a signature essay titled “Why History Matters,” in which students reflect on the role of history in society and consider how historians can contribute meaningfully to contemporary conversations and change. The three essays included here were written by students enrolled in Dr. Ford, Dr. Francois, and Dr. Rose’s **HIST 201** courses during the Spring and Fall 2025 semesters. Together, they demonstrate the intellectual curiosity and civic engagement that define the study of history.

## WHY HISTORY MATTERS

# FOSTERING NEW PERSPECTIVES: COMPARING HISTORICAL FIGURES, THEIR MOTIVATIONS & THE WORLDS THEY SHARED

Isabella Lucas

For many people, the only perspectives they see in history are those taught in school, which is why it is important to broaden one's historical knowledge. This can be done by exploring sources that highlight people and ideas that have traditionally been ignored. Three books that would be recommended are *Wild Girls: How the Outdoors Shaped the Women Who Challenged a Nation* by Tiya Miles, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* by Mae Ngai, and *No Right to an Honest Living* by Jaqueline Jones. All three of these books have a specific focus on marginalized groups, offering readers a new perspective on history. One should strive for their continuous historical education, ensuring that they do

not become complacent with the dominant perspectives in history.

In *Wild Girls: How the Outdoors Shaped the Women Who Challenged a Nation*, Tiya Miles emphasizes how nature has affected women throughout history. In the introduction to her book, Miles explains how she wished to explore “historical actors” who navigated their social world differently because of their experience in the outdoor world.<sup>1</sup> This book gives us a new perspective on some of the most well-known historical figures, including Harriet Tubman and Louisa May Alcott. Her novel takes us through historical stories that may already be known, now reexamined through the lens of nature and how it affected these historical figures.

Miles has taken part in many public history projects, as well as environmental projects, combining her love of history and the outdoors.<sup>2</sup> One environmental project she takes part in is Eco Girls. This project is targeted at girls of color, specifically those with less access to green spaces. She has also written several books, including works of fiction, like *The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens & Ghosts*, which was published in 2015.<sup>3</sup> This historical fiction text ties into how Miles’ style of relaying history is more story-like than the reliance on empirical evidence often used in historical writing. Many of her books focus on the outdoors, African American history, and Cherokee history. In her PBS Book Talk discussion about *Wild Girls*, Miles described how her experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic influenced her to write this book.<sup>4</sup> She spoke about how the outdoors became very important to her and her family, and how being outdoors became an escape from everyday life during the pandemic. After this experience, she was inspired to write about women in history and their connections to the outdoors.

Through the first two chapters, we can gain insight into Miles’ different interpretations of nature’s influence on women’s lives

1 Tiya Miles, *Wild Girls: How the Outdoors Shaped the Women Who Challenged a Nation* (W.W. Norton & Company, LLC, 2024), 8.

2 “Projects,” Tiya Miles, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://tiyamiles.com/projects/>.

3 “Books,” Tiya Miles, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://tiyamiles.com/books/>.

4 PBS Books, “Author Talk with Tiya Miles,” YouTube, December 6, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/live/QU1yaskhhwY>.

throughout history. We can examine the first two chapters of *Wild Girls* to understand Miles's different interpretations of how nature has influenced women's lives throughout history. Chapter one, "Star Gazers," examines stories by and about women who were alive to experience or witness American slavery. Many of the women featured in this chapter were inspired by nature or used the outdoors as an escape from their painful realities. Miles focuses on how Harriet Tubman used nature as a means of survival. Chapter two, "Nature Writers," recounts stories from Louisa May Alcott's life, focusing on how nature influenced her from childhood to adulthood. Both chapters, while focusing on prominent figures, offer a new perspective by exploring how nature influenced both women's lives.

In "Star Gazers," Miles concentrates on how Tubman was able to use her knowledge of the outdoors to escape to freedom and bring others along with her. Miles describes how "Each of these ways of relating to nature—as a hideout, tool, resource, and sacred space—prepared Tubman to become the woman others would come to call 'Moses.'"<sup>5</sup> Nature is depicted in this book as a tool for gaining freedom, using several stories about different women who experienced or witnessed slavery and had a connection to nature. This chapter paints an intriguing picture of Harriet Tubman, encouraging readers to explore new interpretations of history, even when it concerns figures who may already be well-known.

In "Nature Writers," Miles describes Louisa May Alcott's life. The chapter examines how Alcott didn't quite fit societal standards of the time and looked to the outdoors as what she wasn't allowed to be. Miles informs the readers that Alcott "loved the unfettered space of the outdoors as well as the company of boys, but she was growing up in a culture that assigned the playroom and parlor to girls and the field and stream to boys."<sup>6</sup> Unlike in the first chapter, where nature is described as a tool, it is used more symbolically in regard to Alcott's story. Nature is used to show how Alcott was thought to be struggling with her

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5 Tiya Miles, *Wild Girls*, 16.

6 Tiya Miles, *Wild Girls*, 45.

“female masculinity,”<sup>7</sup> a term which Miles uses to describe how Alcott did not quite feel she fit into what was expected of her as a girl within the culture at the time. Using the outdoors to convey Alcott’s story, particularly in relation to her experiences with gender, offers readers a different angle on her childhood and how the outdoors served as a form of escapism from societal pressures. This focus on the gender expression of a historical figure pushes against the typical focus of historical research.

Miles was extremely successful in using *Wild Girls* to give her readers a new look at history through the lens of the outdoors. This book contains several interesting historical stories, including those of Harriet Tubman and Louisa May Alcott, in which nature presents itself in unexpected ways. The book also succeeds in highlighting both prominent and lesser-known women of history while discussing the role of nature in those women’s lives. The book manages to cover several historical points while still making a cohesive, enjoyable read. Although Miles does use a plethora of primary and secondary sources, she also takes liberties to create an interesting and descriptive book. Therefore, *Wild Girls* should not be recommended for those who wish to have a completely fact-based recount of these women’s stories. Miles tends to embed emotions and motivations in the narratives of historical figures, particularly Harriet Tubman, that lack sufficient supporting evidence. The book’s style leans more towards storytelling than towards a typical nonfiction book. Overall, this book does a great job of capturing and maintaining the reader’s attention through its lyrical structure and descriptive nature. It serves as a great jumping-off point for readers to explore a new, nature-focused interpretation of women from the past.

Mae Ngai, author of *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics*, earned her Ph.D. at Columbia University, where she is now a Lung Family Professor of Asian American Studies and Professor of History.<sup>8</sup> In her research and instruction, she examines immigration and the creation of immigrant

7 Tiya Miles, *Wild Girls*, 46.

8 “Ngai, Mae: Lung Family Professor of Asian American Studies and Professor of History,” Department of History—Columbia University, July 12, 2024, <https://history.columbia.edu/person/ngai-mae/>.

communities.<sup>9</sup> Much of her research surrounds immigration, in large part because of her family background. Her parents were doctors who immigrated to the U.S. from China following World War II. They raised Ngai in a middle-class community where she was one of the very few Asian people. This personal experience as a Chinese American daughter of immigrants shapes what she focuses on in history.

Additionally, Ngai cites her work as a labor union organizer in Chinatown communities as her inspiration for her research on immigration.<sup>10</sup> Ngai brings a level of investment and passion to her field of research that someone who has not directly experienced or witnessed how Asian communities are treated in the United States does not have. In the final stages of writing *The Chinese Question*, Ngai was experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. She describes how the relationship between the United States and China worsened due to this pandemic. She hopes this book can help others understand the deep historical relationship between the United States and China. Through this understanding, she reasons, we may address the racism that continues to exist within these relations in the present day.<sup>11</sup>

*The Chinese Question* is split into four parts, with an introduction and an epilogue. The first part of the book, “Two Gold Mountains,” introduces the “Chinese Question,” mostly using the California and Australia Gold Rushes as examples. The second part of the book, “Making White Men’s Countries,” discusses Chinese exclusionary policies and why they emerged. The third part of the book, “The Asiatic Danger in the Colonies,” is dedicated to Chinese labor in South Africa. The fourth part of the book, “The Chinese Diaspora in the West,” explores how exclusionary policies towards Chinese people have affected the world’s economy. Ngai uses her book to undermine the notion that all Chinese immigrants were poor, unskilled laborers,

9 “Distinguished Lecturers: Mae M. Ngai,” Organization of American Historians, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.oah.org/lectures/lecturers/mae-m-ngai/>.

10 Peter Certo, “Manufacturing Illegality: An Interview with Mae Ngai,” *Foreign Policy In Focus* (February 17, 2021), <https://fpif.org/manufacturing-illegality-an-interview-with-mae-ngai/>.

11 Mae M. Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2021).

and instead presents stories of educated, well-off Chinese immigrants.

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One of the main goals Ngai has for this book is to “slay the coolie myth.”<sup>12</sup> This myth is the idea that Chinese immigrants were indentured workers who were being oppressed and stripped of free will. The stereotypes created by the “coolie myth” have made it unlikely that people can understand the true diversity of backgrounds that Chinese immigrants came from. It allowed people to develop a bias against Chinese people, believing them to be helpless with no agency at all. Ngai demonstrates another way the “coolie myth” is harmful in chapter four, focusing on John Bigler, a California politician. She describes how he and other politicians used the idea of a “coolie race” as a scapegoat, particularly when it came to economic troubles. The coolie myth persists today, with Ngai citing an interaction with one of her students who expressed belief in it as one of her inspirations for writing this book. Ngai uses photographs to strengthen her argument against this misbelief.

While writing about South Africa, she explains that there are photographs of “educated men dressed in Western-style clothing,”<sup>13</sup> which directly contradicts the notion that all Chinese immigrants were unskilled laborers. Evidence from newspaper entries, like the journeys of Yuan Sheng, who did not come to California for the Gold Rush, but for business opportunities, allows Ngai to rid readers’ minds of the harmful biases portrayed by our national narrative of Chinese immigration. She further supports this by pulling from the Wells Fargo archives to prove that the first larger group of Chinese people to come to the United States in 1849 were merchants who willingly signed contracts under no force.<sup>14</sup> All of these sources are a culmination of her goal to fight anti-Chinese rhetoric by showcasing the wide array of professions and goals held by these immigrants, instead of painting them as unaccomplished members of society.

*The Chinese Question* also explores reasons and justifications

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12 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 15.

13 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 199.

14 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 20.

for Chinese exclusion. Ngai goes into the “Chinese Question,” which asked, “What was the appropriate role and treatment of Chinese labor in the White settler colonies of the British Empire?”<sup>15</sup> To answer this question, she presents an “Anti-Chinese Song” from 1876 to the reader while explaining the California anti-Chinese movement during the mid-1870s. The song includes the following lyrics: “We have no place among us for the Coolie or the slave./ But only for the manly, the enlightened and the brave./ Cheap labor to the freeman is the pest-house and the grave,/ As our flag goes marching on. Chorus—Glory, etc.”<sup>16</sup> These lyrics were created during the rise in anti-Chinese sentiments in California. The transcontinental railroad had increased unemployment and poverty, preceding a depression from 1873–77, leading to white laborers using Chinese workers as scapegoats. These “anti-coolie clubs”<sup>17</sup> used boycotts to push Chinese workers out of manufacturing jobs. As a part of their movement, these clubs created songs that represented their anti-coolism, as well as their “manly patriotism,” which Ngai uses to show that the reasoning for exclusion was both racism and the fear of losing jobs. The lyrics she chose to highlight in this book clearly emphasize wages as the major factor behind the Californian anti-Chinese movements. Racism was certainly the reason why Chinese people were targeted, but the so-called need for a scapegoat was born from the working-class being underpaid.

Using a speech delivered by Henry George, a political economist, Ngai further explains how a main concern regarding Chinese laborers in California was wages. In his speech, George asserted that “As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down, and some day or other white men will be glad to get those diggings that the Chinamen are now working.”<sup>18</sup> When wages became lower, the white people, according to George, would then want what they considered to be the less desirable jobs that were being done by Chinese immigrants.<sup>19</sup> People were

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15 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 188.

16 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 144.

17 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 143.

18 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 87–88.

19 Ngai, *The Chinese Question*, 87.

scared of the state of their livelihoods, and officials like George purposefully used Chinese immigrants to shift blame away from the government and corporations when it came to this issue of wages. This pushed white people to fight Chinese people for their livelihood, instead of looking to those in power who created the issue in the first place. The use of sources like songs and speeches from the time strengthens Ngai's arguments pertaining to the reasons for Chinese exclusion. This encourages people to think critically about race-based exclusion, its proponents, and the impact on those who are ostracized by these policies.

The evidence Ngai presents throughout this book is exceedingly successful in changing how Chinese immigrants have been viewed for years. Instead of perpetuating the image of poor, unskilled, and uneducated laborers, Ngai makes an effort to prove that many Chinese immigrants were actually best described as wealthy businessmen. In this book, Ngai also presents the idea that the reasons for Chinese exclusion were not solely about racism, and instead describes the multi-layered issues that intersect to create this complex problem. Overall, Ngai's use of unique primary sources provides a strong argument against previous perspectives on Chinese immigration, particularly in the United States.

Someone interested in Chinese American history and the history of the relationship between the United States and China would find this book helpful. Much of the book goes into great detail about Chinese immigrants' experiences with coming to and living in the United States. Anyone researching the topic of Chinese-American history would certainly find reading this book time well spent. This book should not be recommended to someone more curious about a wider scope of Chinese immigration history. While the book title mentions global politics, and Ngai does get into the Australian Gold Rush and South African colonies, her biggest focus in this book is on Chinese immigrants who arrived in the United States during the California Gold Rush. This would not be helpful for anyone planning to study Chinese immigration on a more global scale. It is important for people to read books such as *The Chinese*

Question to fight against national narratives that perpetuate stereotypes. This book specifically helps readers understand the complexities of Chinese immigration and exclusion.

*No Right to An Honest Living: The Struggles of Boston's Black Workers in the Civil War Era* by Jaqueline Jones sheds light on the treatment of Black workers in Boston, particularly focusing on the job market and how they have been historically excluded from opportunities on the basis of their skin color. The focus of this book contrasts the way it has historically been ignored how the North was not exempt from blatant racism and segregation. Jones attempts to open her readers' minds and asks them to acknowledge that history has never simply been black and white, or the North versus the South. She specifically highlights how when it came to Boston, there was an alarming lack of support and advocacy for Black workers who weren't able to make a living nearly as easily as their white counterparts.

Jones was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the aforementioned book, with praises from the Pulitzer committee stating that she had an amazing "original reconstruction of free Black life in Boston that profoundly reshapes our understanding of the city's abolitionist legacy."<sup>20</sup> Jones is extremely experienced in the field of Black American History, with awards such as the Taft Prize in Labor History and the Brown Publication Prize in Black Women's History.<sup>21</sup> She stated in a 2020 interview that oftentimes, Americans choose to believe that this nation is a meritocracy while many marginalized communities, no matter how hard they work, have been suffering.<sup>22</sup> This ties into the theme of the exclusion of Black laborers in Boston that Jones highlights in the book.

*No Right to An Honest Living* is organized by different time ranges. Part I of the book covers the years 1850 – 1860; Part II, 1861 – 1865; and Part III, 1865 – 1875. Throughout the book, Jones uses her focus on each time period to discuss the

20 UT, "Pulitzer Prize Awarded to History Professor Emerita," *UT News*, May 7, 2024, <https://news.utexas.edu/2024/05/07/pulitzer-prize-awarded-to-history-professor-emerita/>.

21 "Pulitzer Prize Awarded to History Professor Emerita."

22 History, "Giving Voice to History: An Interview with Jacqueline Jones, 2020 pro Bene Meritis Recipient," The University of Texas at Austin (History, 1970), <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/news/giving-voice-to-history-an-interview-with-jacqueline-jones-2020-pro-bene-meritis-recipient>.

experiences of Black Americans trying to make a living in Boston from 1850 to 1875. She specifically points out how differently abolitionists and white allies treated Black Boston neighbors when compared to the enslaved people of the South. In her talk for the Massachusetts Historical Society, Jones stated that her book focuses on how Black workers were being forced to stay in the more menial, temporary jobs despite major historical developments like the New England Industrial Revolution, the Civil War, and the emergence of the commercial retail sector.<sup>23</sup> She encourages her readers to fight against the black and white fallacy that paints Northern cities as inherently anti-racist.

The book pushes against the common idea that Northerners were mostly abolitionists who supported Black people's rights to freedom. Jones points out how, despite being "free," many Black Bostonians were unable to find and maintain a well-paying job. As described by Jones herself, "This book examines how the casual cruelty endemic to the Boston job market contrasted with the soaring rhetoric of egalitarian-minded White men and women during the turbulent era of the Civil War."<sup>24</sup> Jones highlights how Black Americans living in Boston were being discriminated against in the job market, with no effort from their supposed white allies, who turned a blind eye to their plights.

When describing the political climate of the 1870s Jones describes how "...advocating for Black suffrage was considered a radical stance for a northern white politician, calling for expanded opportunity for Black workers would have been a self-destructive, career-ending move."<sup>25</sup> In an effort to look out for their own advancement and political position, politicians refused to even consider helping to create more opportunities for Black workers. This lack of support from Republican politicians, Jones explains, is why people like Robert Morris and Edwin Walker began to advocate for separate Black political parties. In including this in her book, Jones highlights how even

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23 Jacqueline Jones, "Jacqueline Jones on *No Right to an Honest Living*...." YouTube, January 20, 2023, <https://youtu.be/rY5nFAqtXfU>.

24 Jacqueline Jones, *No Right to an Honest Living* (Basic Books, 2023), 17.

25 Jones, *No Right to An Honest Living*, 409.

in “free” post-Civil War northern states, those in power were not on Black people’s side and would rather leave them to struggle than risk public support.

This book was successful in demonstrating that while slavery was abolished, it didn’t mean that Black people who were living in free states were protected from hardships and discrimination, especially when it came to making a living. Jones does a great job of presenting the reader with information about the perspectives of Black Americans who were trying to have support from white allies but were instead denied help and forced to desperately try to find ways to make a living. For example, in chapter 4, “Boston in the Shadow of Slavery,” Jones details the experiences of “Blacksmith Peter” Randolph in the 1850s as she explains how “...echoing their southern counterparts, many white Bostonians insisted on seeing all Black people through a lens of inherent ‘racial’ inferiority.”<sup>26</sup> Despite Boston being home to abolitionists, most did not view Black people as equal to them. Their inferior view of Black people allowed white Bostonians to not feel any obligation to stand up against the segregation of the workplace and discrimination of Black workers. This is not typically an aspect of history, particularly when referring to the northern states of America, that is focused on. Jones often takes this approach: highlighting the experiences of Black people, like Randolph, who had to experience what was happening in the Boston job market, in order to convey to readers the truths of segregation and discrimination in Boston.

Anyone who is an avid reader of American historical books would enjoy reading *No Right to An Honest Living*. The book is rather dense, filled with historical anecdotes and facts to support Jones’ point about the Black labor force in Boston from 1850 to 1875. Someone who would like a quick run-down of the workforce climate in Boston at that time would not likely enjoy this book, seeing as it contains a lot of information that may make it difficult to sift through. This book would suit someone who is already knowledgeable in economics, Black American history, and the post-Civil War United States.

The books discussed in this review are great ways to broaden one's historical perspective. They all focus on United States History, making for valuable resources for American History buffs. Both *The Chinese Question* and *No Right to An Honest Living* provide dense, information-heavy narratives about their respective topics. *Wild Girls* is a book that is more digestible and would be best suited for students to pique their historical interests. All three books do a great job of presenting new perspectives on what has already been told about the more marginalized groups in society: women, Chinese people, and Black people. These books help to fill a void in historical research, ensuring that non-dominant identities are represented in history. Reading books such as these will help readers expand their views of history and push back against the myths we are often taught about this country and its people. ◆

# HISTORY IS OUR COMPASS

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Michael Cassidy

History is the exploration of how relationships between people, societies, and events shape human experience. It is humanity's inventory tool, allowing us to learn from the past and move forward with greater awareness. Three excellent examples of history's power to expand our understanding are *Oil Palm: A Global History* by Jonathan E. Robins, *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era* by Emily Marker, and *Before the Movement: The Hidden History of Black Civil Rights* by Dylan C. Penningroth. In *Oil Palm*, Robins uses the history of the oil palm as a means of analyzing labor, globalization, and sustainability. In *Black France*, Emily Marker turns a critical eye on education policies in post-World War II France and its African colonies to show the racial boundaries of French postwar identity. In *Before the Movement*, Penningroth tells the story of "Black legal lives" to give a fuller representation of African American life and the development of civil rights.<sup>1</sup> Each of these books approaches broad historical arenas with specificity and thoroughness that yield new insights. Together, they exemplify history's ability to question inherited assumptions and broaden our understanding of how societies evolve, and how they might choose to change.

One of the fundamental lessons of history is that human overuse of natural resources stresses the environment and negatively impacts communities that work with or depend on the resource. The story of palm oil, an agricultural commodity

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<sup>1</sup> Dylan C. Penningroth, *Before the Movement: The Hidden History of Black Civil Rights* (Liveright, 2023), xix.

found in modern products ranging from cookies to cosmetics, is one such story of resource extraction and its attendant societal harms. In *Oil Palm*, Jonathan E. Robins argues that the history of palm oil as a commodity reveals the ways that capitalistic resource and labor extraction magnify power imbalances and harm ecosystems. Using archival data from corporations, quotes from government officials, and news articles as primary sources, Robins analyzes the layers of the global palm oil story, from its earliest cultivation to modern times.

Humans are at the center of the oil palm story. Robins uses oral histories of aboriginal African tribes and archaeological evidence to show thousands of years of Native oil palm cultivation to make food products, to make material goods, and for religious ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> This history is frequently overshadowed by “bad science and Eurocentric thinking [that] created a false past for the oil palm, disregarding the ways Africans used oil palms on their own terms.”<sup>3</sup> Robins shows how the oil palm’s dubious cameos in nineteenth century histories of Ancient Egypt and Biblical interpretations were used in an attempt to whitewash the history of a supremely useful resource the European powers wanted to control.<sup>4</sup> These conjured histories were built on a racist foundation that has driven the treatment of the people who cultivate the palm over the last three hundred years.

Robins places the palm at the center of the human rights story of the eighteenth century and, in doing so, illustrates the ability of rigorous historical scholarship to shine a light on current societal issues. He describes the role of palm oil in the transatlantic slave trade, where it served variously as a ration, a writing implement, and makeup to cover the visible scars and stress of the Middle Passage.<sup>5</sup> As the slave trade slowly died out in the Western world, palm oil gained significance as an industrial export. Robins argues that Europeans failed to learn the best way to cultivate the trees from Africans who

2 Jonathan E. Robins, *Oil Palm: A Global History* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 13–22.

3 Robins, *Oil Palm*, 3.

4 Robins, *Oil Palm*, 22–23.

5 Robins, *Oil Palm*, 31–32.

specialized in it, but made up for this ignorance by “harvesting [their] labor.”<sup>6</sup> He relays several instances where palm oil cultivation succeeded only through the implementation of plantation labor systems that accelerated the Scramble for Africa. Palm oil plantations along the West coast of Africa were central to European colonization.

The path of the palm was a human path of subjugation that is inextricable from the legacies of colonization and impediments to self-determination that continue to plague modern African and Asian countries. In their arguments for the development of oil palm plantations, the colonial powers used indigenous people’s passive, seasonal use of land as evidence of it being unused altogether.<sup>7</sup> This “waste” was “remedied” by colonial development. In the 1950s through 1970s, when many of the colonies achieved varying levels of independence, corporations continued the process of disenfranchisement begun by colonizing governments. Private companies changed the game from colonization to land reform, but “in too many cases, land reform simply provided legal cover for land-grabbing.”<sup>8</sup> The developing countries that were home to oil palm cultivation frequently suffered from their associations with multinational corporations in search of cheap land and labor. Robins illustrates how palm oil is a perfect example of how, in the globalized economy, the people who live closest to the source of modern-day commodities are often the most disadvantaged.

At its core, *Oil Palm* is about the relationship between the things we use and how we treat each other. From its earliest applications and cultivation by Europeans, palm oil was a test case for unfree labor, environmental overuse, and global political maneuvering. A commodity history such as this shows us how humans can cherry-pick people and places that fit their needs, with no respect for existing claims and local customs. Robins’ book is extremely effective at tying the themes of global consumption, climate change, and power inequality into a single cohesive narrative that shows how great history

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6 Robins, *Oil Palm*, 98.

7 Robins, *Oil Palm*, regarding Africa: 43, Asia: 145, 160.

8 Robins, *Oil Palm*, 250.

writing exposes the causes of contemporary societal and environmental challenges.

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Colonization is not just the extraction of natural resources and labor. It must also be seeded and maintained in national identity. Emily Marker's *Black France, White Europe* explores the French government's effort to invigorate French youth through education reforms, while simultaneously resisting calls for decolonization and reform in francophone Africa. The book begins at the end of World War II. French leaders sought to reunify Europe by developing a European-aligned French identity that would resist future extremism or continental division. French bureaucrats pursued this by redesigning education to reflect these new values. These reforms sent implicit and explicit messages about who could be French and European. This new identity did not include the millions of African residents in France's colonies. Marker uses diplomatic correspondence and government reports from archives throughout France, Belgium, and Senegal, as well as firsthand accounts from memoirs and histories by diplomats, officials, students, and professors, to show the contradictions that undermined official visions of unity. Marker's diplomatic sources illustrate the systemic issues that caused significant differences between intention and action in Europe and Africa. By tackling this history through the lens of education, Marker explores a novel historical point of view. Historical writing more often favors the older power-holders in society. *Black France* gives voice to French and African youth demands for equity. The way a society shapes its youth is often an expression of its vision for the future.

France was still reeling from defeat by Nazi Germany and the cultural division that followed when World War II ended. Much of the blame was placed on French educational systems for failing "to produce competent leaders and a united citizenry."<sup>9</sup> The Nazi racial war that had engulfed Europe motivated the vision for European unity. Postwar French leaders rejected racism and voiced full-throated support of the French Union across France and the colonies. This spirit of unity was adopted

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9 Emily Marker, *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era* (Cornell University Press, 2022), 29.

by colonial subjects in Africa, who shared the desire for better education and better opportunities. To francophone Africans, the defeat of Nazism represented the defeat of racism.<sup>10</sup> But it quickly became clear that “African and European conceptions of what a postwar world without racism would look like differed markedly.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, the French colonial administration was unwilling to consider Africans as equals. Colonial education for Africans, where it was available, was built on upholding colonization, not encouraging French Africans to equal pursuits with white French in Europe. Africans were taught to see themselves as inferior to French people and French culture, rather than encouraging the sort of pride that France encouraged for French youth.<sup>12</sup>

This ideological campaign for young minds was comprehensive in its vision, and Christianity provided moral and spiritual heft. Marker describes how Christianity was sewn into the grand unity messaging as a bulwark against Communism.<sup>13</sup> But even the divine component contained exclusivity. The new Christian European ideal doubled as moral grounding for the rejection of Islamic instruction in French Muslim schools. Even as policy makers preached decolonization of the French Union, “fears about international youth mobilizations...converged with more particular anxieties about Franco-African and European integration, further deepening the purchase of postwar racial common sense and the culturalization of Christianity.”<sup>14</sup> Colonial education continued to perceive African youth in the colonies as primitive and susceptible to “outside ideas” such as Islam.<sup>15</sup> This anti-Islamic education policy denied African Muslims education that reflected their identities. This was contrary to France’s professed anti-racist identity and further reduced trust among francophone Africans. Marker’s artful mapping of these disconnections reveals foundational biases baked into colonialism and its negative consequences for the colonized.

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10 Marker, *Black France*, 104–106.

11 Marker, *Black France*, 104.

12 Marker, *Black France*, 110.

13 Marker, *Black France*, 19.

14 Marker, *Black France*, 185.

15 Marker, *Black France*, 194.

*Black France, White Europe* is historical writing as a cultural compass. The division between a new aspirational identity for postwar Europeans and the cold realities for French colonial subjects in Africa reveals the political and cultural double-speak that is page one of the colonizers' handbook. French policy-makers in the postwar era were more concerned with colonial order than "liberté, égalité, fraternité" (liberty, equality, fraternity) for francophone Africans. Societies that profess deep commitment to democratic ideals cannot be "spared the taint of associations with colonialism in the past" as they attempt to create a new national identity.<sup>16</sup> *Black France* shows us the ways that societies that fail to question their historical narratives perpetuate division and exacerbate social injustice.

Of course, France is not the only country to fall short of its democratic ideals. Racial narratives in the U.S. have always warped the definition of American identity as well. Dylan C. Penningroth's *Before the Movement* addresses the power of historical narrative forcefully. His history of Black legal lives challenges the traditional U.S. History narrative that African Americans have lived only along a continuum from bondage to freedom. Penningroth argues that this telling of history "has helped make Black history synonymous with the history of race relations, as if Black lives only matter when white people are somehow in the picture."<sup>17</sup> Penningroth grew up hearing stories of enslaved ancestors who owned property and participated in business transactions. These stories challenged the traditional narrative of enslaved people as entirely without civic agency. They inspired him to research how their legal agreements were executed and acknowledged. Penningroth combed through court records across the American South to "tell a history of Black legal lives and, in so doing, to pull back a curtain on seldom-seen parts of Black life itself."<sup>18</sup> The result is a potent exploration of diverse arenas where Black rights were acknowledged and upheld in ways that also suggest a more everyday relationship with civil rights for all citizens.

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16 Marker, *Black France*, 8.

17 Penningroth, *Before the Movement*, xvii.

18 Penningroth, *Before the Movement*, xix.

*Before the Movement* begins with a simple, but powerful idea. More than courts and police, the rule of law depends on community agreements. If two citizens, regardless of race, agree that a piece of property is worth ten dollars, that piece of property can indeed be sold for ten dollars, without the involvement of a judge or lawyers. Penningroth argues that white southerners acknowledged enslaved people's right to own and make contracts "because slaves' privileges stood upon the same widely shared understandings about law that white people's rights did."<sup>19</sup> Penningroth shows that enslaved people had property and engaged in contracts in ways we seldom learn about. These "privileges," while heavily restricted, were significant because they demonstrate how Blacks learned and used the tools that were available to them with intelligence and awareness. These transactions are evidence of Black ingenuity in the face of profound adversity.

The traditional narrative of Black civil rights fails to account for the interconnected nature of legal decisions. Judges make rulings based on previous decisions and judgments in similar cases. Penningroth shows how this implies significant Black contributions to American civil rights before the official Civil Rights Era. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment granted Blacks equal rights of citizenship, but in state and county courts, Black people "drew from the same pool of legal ideas and assumptions that white people did."<sup>20</sup> Black people were not waiting for civil rights to be handed to them from white politicians in Washington. They understood that the law was a mechanism to define their property and autonomy in the same ways as whites. Judicial decisions and jury awards in these cases informed local laws and future decisions. Black legal acuity was baked into "life's ordinary business."<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes the simplest narrative is the one that gains the most traction in changing times. Great history writing combats this by looking back and asking if that simple narrative holds up. In his section on the traditional Civil Rights Movement,

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19 Penningroth, *Before the Movement*, 4.

20 Penningroth, *Before the Movement*, 201.

21 Penningroth, *Before the Movement*, 201.

Penningroth shows how many Movement leaders were from land-owning families that experienced the benefits of property and contract law. In their speeches, these leaders sometimes relayed an ignorance of law on the part of Black southerners that calcified into the broad historical narrative that southern Blacks were downtrodden and powerless when they were not. Penningroth links this to his historiographical argument about Black history, that “activists bequeathed to historians... deeply flawed assumptions” about what civil rights were and where they come from.<sup>22</sup> He argues that the everyday use of law in Black life represents agency and influence that have been left out of history and legal scholarship.

The way we talk about historical events is as important as the events themselves. *Before the Movement* challenges our accepted version of Black lives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and offers a broad narrative shift for all Americans. The story of civil rights in America, when told in the traditional way, exaggerates the importance of federal institutions and diminishes local, everyday law. The implications of this disconnect for American citizens are significant. Our current national conversation includes constant talk of judges and lawsuits, but we lack an underlying faith or basic understanding of the power of our local agreements, laws, and institutions. This book shows that history can speak directly to the present moment. Penningroth’s stories of Blacks arguing their right to property in the face of laws that ban them from most public spaces are reminders of the immense power ordinary citizens have today.

Each of these books uses careful research and incisive writing to challenge accepted assumptions about what happened and what it means. In doing so, they offer readers a different view of the world today. Jonathan E. Robins shows how the story of an ingredient found in the pantry of every home is also the story of environmental injustice and global inequality. Emily Marker reveals a generation of thinly-veiled, racially-motivated policies that illustrate how the tendrils of colonialism maintain their grip long after officials claim victory over racism. Dylan

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22 Penningroth, *Before the Movement*, 340.

C. Penningroth maps one of the most well-trodden periods of American History with new topography that recontextualizes Black history and makes civil rights more accessible. These books advance historical arguments that pose clear questions about how we see our future relationships, societies, and the natural environment. They are examples of how history elevates society with awareness of the past and hope for the future. ♦

# HISTORIANS: COMBATING SOCIETAL AMNESIA

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Maximiliano Gómez

It seems more and more frequently the fog enveloping the American *zeitgeist* thickens and obscures more of our history, effectively causing us to lose touch with our roots. Combating this fog is a slow, yet necessary, process for progress. Being able to pierce that fog is a rare talent, one that authors and historians, such as Mia Bay, Kellie Carter Jackson, and Tiya Miles, possess. Their ability to weave narrative and historical fact is just the talent needed to fight the encroaching, thickening societal amnesia.

Dr. Mia Bay's written works shed light on the not-so-distant racism faced by African Americans in her book *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance*. Dr. Carter Jackson details the obscured history of African American abolitionists and their fight for emancipation, and the recognition of their humanity thereafter in her book, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence*. Dr. Tiya Miles describes the fundamental role the outdoors played in the development of important women throughout the nineteenth century in her written work, *Wild Girls: How the Outdoors Shaped the Women Who Challenged a Nation*. Throughout these various examinations of history, these authors have been able to draw back the fog that has so clouded our memory, reminding us of the true importance of history.

Traveling as a person of color, specifically, an African American, has never been easy. Dr. Mia Bay examines exactly how these difficulties came to be within her written work, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance*. Bay examines the long and troubling history of institutionalized racism within the three modern eras of transportation: locomotives, automobiles, and aircraft. Bay also examines how, in many ways, African Americans today struggle to exercise their rights to move freely within their own country. In summarizing her book, Bay describes the conditions African Americans faced at the dawn of locomotive travel: “We associate Jim Crow cars and buses with the South, but travel segregation was never neatly confined to one region of the country.”<sup>1</sup> The term Jim Crow is ubiquitous with the institutional racism that formed in the South after the American Civil War, most recognisably manifesting as segregation. Yet this practice was pioneered by the North prior to the twilight of the American Civil War and the ratification of emancipation. This could seem counterintuitive, as the American North is often recognised as a sanctuary for both runaway slaves and African Americans. Despite this preconceived notion, Bay is able to push back that encroaching fog and give her audience a more objective view of historical events.

Bay continues to illustrate the reality for African Americans who chose to travel via rail during the nineteenth century: “The passage of separate car laws, and the subsequent failure of state and federal courts to require truly equal accommodations, sent a clear message to railroads: conditions on board Jim Crow cars would never be subject to careful scrutiny.”<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the maintenance of these “separate but equal” laws and the facilities that were created was now under the jurisdiction of both state and federal courts. This shift in authority made it incredibly difficult for African Americans to make their voices heard on issues regarding the very laws they were subject to. This also does not take into account the lack of representation the African American community had within these

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1 Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Harvard University Press, 2021), 4.

2 Bay, *Traveling Black*, 64.

positions of power. As such, the combination of no maintenance and zero repercussions for those in power meant that conditions would only deteriorate as time dragged on. Unfortunately, these laws were not limited to terrestrial traversal.

Travel by aircraft would also be subject to the previously mentioned “separate but equal” laws that had infested the American South’s transportation industry. Prior to this legislative change, the field of aviation already had its own unique link to racism. Bay illustrates this in the following passage: “Acclaimed by many as Western civilization’s greatest achievement, aviation became a measure of the racial greatness of white Westerners.”<sup>3</sup> The intrinsic link between aviation prowess and racial superiority endured despite clear evidence to the contrary. In fact, this link was championed by several famous Anglo pilots of the era, such as Charles Lindbergh. Bay describes the incredible influence these early white pilots had, writing: “Both Lindbergh’s and Collings’s assessments of Blacks as wholly unfit to fly were echoed by American military leaders.”<sup>4</sup> The sentiments championed by Lindbergh and echoed by American military leaders would result in a racially discriminatory feedback loop. This loop consisted of African American soldiers being denied the ability to apply to aviation schools based on their skin color, all while military brass cited the lack of black pilots as proof they were unfit to become pilots. Ultimately, this loop would only work to exacerbate the discrimination experienced by the African American community. But also drove individuals to shatter these racist views regarding the false link between skin color and pilot aptitude. Despite this, Bay was not only able to provide examples of the various ways in which the African American community suffered under Jim Crow, but also illustrate the ways in which these communities will continue to suffer under the same power structure that oppressed their forefathers.

Almost every political or social movement has a leader at its forefront who belongs to a community that is fighting an oppressive force. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King and

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3 Bay, *Traveling Black*, 194.

4 Bay, *Traveling Black*, 195.

Malcom X are often regarded as the champions of the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s. As time marches forward, our collective memory begins to fade, and the haze surrounding historical events thickens, obscuring fact from fiction.

An example of this very phenomenon can be seen in the American Abolitionist movement, although it is commonly thought of as primarily white, historians disagree. Dr. Carter Jackson explains the origins of the Abolitionist movement in her written work, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence*. Carter Jackson dissects the foreign inspiration of the movement along with its lesser-known Black leaders and their strategic use of violence. As the author details, the genesis of abolition and, more broadly, black liberation, has its roots in foreign soil and was quenched with Anglo blood.

Carter Jackson argues that the inciting moment that inspired American Abolitionists was the Haitian Revolution: “The success of the Haitian Revolution convinced black abolitionists that the ending of slavery would entail a revolution and that revolutions entailed violence. Thus, antebellum history is replete with examples of black Americans inspired by the newly liberated and independent Haiti.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the actions of these brave French slaves, who successfully overthrew and exiled their enslavers, demonstrated to enslaved people in America that they, too, had the power to do the same. Moreover, the Haitian Revolution had confirmed a deeply disturbing notion to American slave owners. Carter Jackson describes it as so, “According to McCune Smith, expecting white Americans to embrace black humanity required physical engagement.”<sup>6</sup> The newfound solidarity between American slaves and now liberated Haitians was deeply disturbing to Americans, who feared slave revolts across the country.<sup>7</sup>

The hidden tie between these two seemingly disconnected events illustrates the common lack of understanding of key moments in United States history. These misconceptions not

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5 Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 21.

6 Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 8.

7 Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 9.

only surround the genesis of the Abolitionist movement but also one of its crucial moments: John Brown's infamous raid on Harpers Ferry. Carter Jackson categorizes the misconceptions in two distinct ways: the lack of recognition for the sources from which Brown drew his interpretation, and the lack of recognition for the people of color who helped him organize. Jackson confronts the first type of misconception, "Brown would not have become the fearsome abolitionist he is known as had he not chosen to take inspiration from the pantheon of defiant and militant black figures."<sup>8</sup> Carter Jackson attacks the position of privilege from which Brown was able to make the choice of becoming an abolitionist, whereas those black militant figures from whom Brown drew his inspiration had no other option but to take up arms.

Carter Jackson goes on to discuss the lack of attention given to the people of color involved with the organization and funding of Brown, "there are several books that focus solely on this half dozen group of white men connected to Brown's plan, but there is not a single book devoted to the five African Americans who joined Brown or to the black leaders who helped to fund him."<sup>9</sup> Carter Jackson effectively calls into question the system that perpetuates the Anglo-centric perspective of history. Wherein John Brown is positioned as a figurehead, when in reality, John Brown was nothing more than a foot soldier in the Black abolitionists' movement. Jackson is able not only to confront the fog that has enveloped the historically significant abolitionist movement but also to effectively disprove and recontextualize prominent misconceptions.

Places can be powerful forces of radicalization. Oftentimes, our environment can be just as political as the forces that shape our world. After all, the environment is merely a reflection of the current systems of power. This fact is often overlooked and forgotten by many. The conditions around us can imprint not only on our bodies but also on our minds. Tiya Miles discusses the relationship between the outdoors and important women

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<sup>8</sup> Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 112.

<sup>9</sup> Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 114.

throughout history in her book *Wild Girls: How the Outdoors Shaped the Women Who Challenged a Nation*. Nature has often been disregarded when considering the conditions that bring about change not only in the United States but around the world. Seen as a passive sphere that can be exploited and conditioned into something productive, Miles steps back from this notion and instead focuses on the important role the environment plays in the development of historical figures, particularly women.

Miles describes the outdoors as “a place where the walls of the known world are crumbling but where alternatives might still be possible if only we are willing to imagine them.”<sup>10</sup> This sprawling blank canvas allowed young figures to imagine a world free of a preexisting social structure. Structures that were designed to harshly oppress both their bodies and civil liberties, but failed to oppress their spirits and minds. This innate freedom afforded by the untamed wilderness allowed many of these historical and political figures to develop their minds and spirits freely. One such historical figure who benefited from this wild freedom was Harriet Tubman, Miles describes her relation with the outdoors, “as a hideout, tool, resource, and sacred space”<sup>11</sup> and follows with, “[The Outdoors] prepared Tubman to become the woman others would come to call ‘Moses’, navigating the outdoors in wonder and power.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the wilderness imprinted upon Tubman the skills she would employ to free members of her community. In this way, her environment was a powerful force of radicalization and actualization. By shedding light on this often-overlooked aspect of the “outdoors”, Miles was able to peel back the fog that has clouded our perception of places as powerful forces of radicalization.

As time passes and the gap between our present and key-stone events widens, details of these important events seem to fade into a haze. This fog enveloping the American *zeitgeist* has caused us to lose touch with our roots. Combating this fog

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10 Tiya Miles, *Wild Girls: How the Outdoors Shaped the Women Who Challenged a Nation* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2023), 123.

11 Miles, *Wild Girls*, 123.

12 Miles, *Wild Girls*, 17.

is a slow, yet necessary process for progress. At the forefront of this fight are the authors and historians, such as Mia Bay, Carter Jackson, Tiya Miles, and countless others. Each of them was able to effectively weave their respective narratives with historical facts. Effectively fighting the encroaching and thickening societal amnesia that is perpetually enveloping our collective memory. Now more than ever it seems that politicians and government officials have vested interests in outright erasing events from our collective history. Allowing them to bend historical facts to fit whatever narrative they are pedaling. Adding confusion to the already mounting fog of forget. Therefore, as both citizens and historians, it is our responsibility to uphold the truth and to understand the shared reality we live in. ♦

## ORAL HISTORIES

# AN IMMIGRANT'S DAUGHTER

Jenni Elliott-Henninger

I first met my friend, Tanya, in my first year of high school in drama class. We both shared a love of the arts and theatre, so much so that we believed that we were destined for stardom. Our Hollywood dreams didn't pan out, but our friendship has brightly shone for over thirty years. Cheesy, I know, but there is no other way to explain how I cherish our friendship and how she is the shiny light to everyone she meets.

The eldest of four children, Tanya, was born in Anaheim, California, to immigrant parents. Her father, Mario, traveled to the United States from Mexico at the age of seventeen and found work wherever he could, including in agriculture. Working in the orange fields of Southern California, found himself sleeping under orange trees. After establishing himself and receiving a green card through a previous marriage, Mario sent for Tanya's mother, Maria, to come to the United States from Mexico. She was nineteen at the time. Mario and Maria set down roots in Garden Grove, California, and had four children: Tanya, Gina, Mario, and Kimberly. Mario Sr. found work in construction and became employed by a construction company with a union, which earned him a pension when he retired, which is rare in the construction industry. Maria was a stay-at-home mom until

the children got older. She worked as a bus driver for the local school district until she retired.

Remembering her early childhood, Tanya reminisces about family road trips to Mexico to visit extended family. Road trips were her favorite way to travel: picking up snacks, piling into the van with her family, and looking out the window at vast landscapes, even pretending the mountainsides at night were dinosaurs. Visiting historic Mexican sites, such as locations of the Mexican Revolution, and learning about Mexico's leaders instilled pride in their family's Mexican heritage. Maria shared little informational books about Mexico's history, and Tanya recalls looking at them and stories of her mother's humbling beginnings: showering in the river, and not having toilet paper.

Raised in a traditional Mexican Catholic family, the Church was essential. Early in Tanya's life, she and her family would attend church every Sunday, participate in Catholic classes, and attend her first communion. Tanya rebelled against religion; she simply couldn't understand why she had to confess her sins to a priest when she could talk to God directly. Her parents wanted her to attend their church's Catholic school. Tanya's rebellion went to the next level, where she remembers purposely failing the entry test so she wouldn't have to attend. Slowly, her family attended church less and less, and as she got older, stopped entirely. As an adult, she isn't a traditional religious person. Still, she is spiritual, believing in science and logic, and trying to understand how humans fit into the energy and consciousness of the universe.

After being rejected from Catholic school, Tanya attended the elementary school down the street from her house. Tanya recalls loving school and the politics of "girl" friendship, where if you were friends with one girl, you couldn't be friends with another. Some childhood friends would move away or move on to another person, but Tanya always remembers having one best friend, and when she didn't, her dog, a lovable mutt, Mitch, was her best friend. An independent and free spirit, Tanya decided to walk off campus and head home during the school day. She remembers the telephone ringing, but didn't

answer it. The teachers and school must have been in a fright, but Tanya realized that she lived so close by and wanted to go home. She didn't get in trouble but was told never to do that again. Tanya's interests in junior and high school included performing in plays, participating in class competitions, and being a cheerleader (though she had to beg and plead with her overprotective parents to let her). To follow her friends to the same high school, Tanya had to be a Latin transfer student, which meant taking Latin for all four years. After three years of surviving Latin, Tanya began to fail the class, even though she loved her teacher and her teaching style. The class felt more like an interactive workshop than a traditional lecture-and-exam class. After "moving" or submitting a new address to the High School, Tanya was within the school district's boundaries and no longer required to take Latin. Though her arduous journey with the Latin language was over, she admired her teacher, Mrs. Schultz, so much that she made a point of going to tell her, "It's me, not you. I failed the class, and you are a great teacher."

Family values are fundamental in the Miramontes household, and Tanya always felt taken care of and provided for, even when they had little money. Growing up with three siblings meant having playmates all the time. Her father also instilled that you have to have relationships with your siblings. Tanya was often annoyed by how overprotective her parents were when she was growing up. She couldn't go to a friend's house without taking her young sister, Gina, who is three years younger. Now, as an adult, she understands how meaningful sibling relationships are and is thankful for the family values she grew up with.

At home, Tanya's parents expected chores to be done, and her father always made a point of reminding her to keep her room clean. When it came to chores, Tanya remembers her mom chasing her with a broom or throwing a *chancla*. Thinking back to these memories as an adult, Tanya says she gets it; she understands why her mom would do such things. Maria was a young mother with four little kids, and they were probably all driving her crazy. Eating out was a foreign concept as her mom always cooked at home. Not only did she make the best

food, but it's still Tanya's favorite food today. Tanya's love for her mother's cooking made her want to learn her traditional recipes. She made a goal to discover and record one recipe a month; she made it to six months. Tanya hopes to get back to learning her mom's recipes because again, Maria's food is the best, and I can agree, having had many of her delicious dishes. As a Mexican-American household, Tanya and her family had traditional American Thanksgivings with Turkey and the works, but at Christmas time, it's always tamales. Though Tanya didn't get the cooking bug, her youngest sister, Kimberly, did, so much so that she went to culinary school. What Tanya did catch on to was her father—Mario Senior's—financial independence. He constantly ingrained "savings, savings, savings." Spending money on something you wanted was a foreign concept; she was taught to buy only what you needed. He also made her write out checks to help teach financial responsibility. Tanya's father's insistence on fiscal responsibility changed her career trajectory after high school.

As a college freshman at Cal State Fullerton, Tanya was a theatre arts major. She loves movies, and she got a job at a local movie theatre, which she claims is her favorite job of all time (not the waitressing job with our other best friend and me—no offense taken). Understandably so, Tanya got to watch movies for free in between cleaning the theatres and eventually moving into the box office. In a conversation with her father one day, he asked what jobs she could get with a theatre arts major and how she could make money. As he was paying for her college, he suggested that she major in business. After weighing her options and considering the pros and cons of theatre arts versus business, she decided she didn't want to be a struggling actress and changed her major. Tanya chose accounting; she felt it was a good fit for her, as she was already handling the bookkeeping at the restaurant where we all worked. She decided to go into public accounting, her dream job to work at PricewaterhouseCoopers, because they handle the ballots for the Oscars. After graduating from college and working at a local accounting firm for several years, Tanya decided to work for herself, earn her CPA license, and leave the stressful corporate

environment. She attributes her financial success to the lessons that her father taught her. She saved money and bought herself a condo in Los Angeles.

In 2014, she had a thriving tax business and the opportunity to become a CFO for a VR startup. Tanya embraced the challenges of managing finances, raising capital, and leading people, including building a working relationship with her future husband, Dylan. During her tenure as the CFO, she and Dylan learned to get along and work together, though she says, as a couple, “they are still trying to figure it out.” The company had to pivot from VR to AI due to the pandemic, and, more importantly, the future is in AI. Now, down to just Tanya and her husband, she hopes to start her own business by providing online accounting courses, but as life happens, sometimes things aren’t on your time.

Never to have been the one to have baby fever, Tanya didn’t see herself as a mother—but as the universe would have it, she became pregnant at forty-two and had a baby boy named Rome. The experience was challenging and rewarding, marked by her love for family and her childhood with her siblings. She hopes to give her son a sibling sometime in the near future. Listening to a recent podcast by physicist and electrical engineer Fredrico Faggin, Tanya explains the four phases of life: growing, working, family, and retirement as the fourth life. She sees herself coming into her third life. There is still time for her goals and dreams as she wants to create accounting and tax courses. She currently does Instagram and TikTok accounting videos. With her success and love for family, she’s sought to repay her parents by spending quality time with them and taking them on trips. Most recently, a memorable trip to Peru, where they visited Machu Picchu.

When asked whether she has a motto or words that inspire her, Tanya says, “We are stronger than we know,” and “we are powerful beyond measure.” These sayings have carried her through the most challenging times, especially during her eight-day bike ride on the Camino de Santiago—traveling a total of 250 miles, thirty miles a day, and even biking fifty miles in one day. She kept moving, though she was tired and sore.

This project has given me a deeper understanding of my friend. Tanya loved the idea of interviewing one another, so much so that she asked me for the list of questions I used so that she could do an oral history of all our other friends. I have enjoyed getting to know my friend of thirty years better and learning about her life. This project comes at a time when a loved one has passed away, and I am saddened that I was not able to ask him these questions, but I am grateful for Tanya and her words that I can do hard things. ♦

# MARY CHRIS: ALWAYS LEARNING & GROWING

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Nikki Orrett

**W**ith the rise of Christian ideology being the center of President Trump's political agenda, the idea of the hate surrounding the religion is in question. While I was not raised in a religious home and did not follow any religious doctrine, my mother does. She is what I imagine when I think of Christianity. I wanted to talk to her to understand how she was raised in a religious home and did not fall into a hateful path, and how she carried that through her life.

My mother, Mary Christine Malpede, was born on January 8, 1968, in Fremont, California. Her parents were Richard and Mary Ann. Richard was a corporate pilot and then an architect, while Mary Ann was a stay-at-home mother to their three children. My mother and her two brothers were raised Catholic. She went to church every Sunday and on holy days and attended a private Catholic school for all years of schooling. From first to eighth grade, she attended Holy Spirit School and then Moreau High School. When I asked what it was like and how it influenced her, she said, "I didn't know any difference. So, to me, it was normal. It was just what I knew."

She looks back fondly on her time in Catholic school and appreciates its structure. She had to keep up a good grade point average, and ditching class was strictly frowned upon. Any infractions would lead to being kicked out of the school. As her parents were not wealthy—she admits that she does

not actually know how they paid for her schooling—it was very important that she not get expelled. She notes that, in retrospect, she appreciates the strictness, but she loathed it as a teenager. She remembers wanting to rebel, but knew that her parents were working hard to keep her in that school. Her family had significantly less than the other students, whose families were very wealthy. She notes that a big difference between the private and public schools was the drugs. She emphasized that she did not partake, but she knew many people who did. The rich private school students had access to “high-end, rich drugs” such as cocaine and heroin, versus public schools that only had access to marijuana and alcohol.

We were stuck on this idea for a while because, as my mother pointed out, most parents send their children to private religious schools to ensure that they receive structure and daily religious education. The hope was that their children would apply their religious teachings and the structured environment to lead more pious lives. However, it seems this strictness pushed children to rebel more. We compared it to my siblings’ and my lives, as I attended public schools while my half-sister attended a Catholic school. My sister felt the need to rebel while attending Catholic school, whereas I, attending public school, did not.

My mom did not raise me religiously, but it did influence how she parented. Her parents taught her to treat everyone equally, regardless of race or religion. She was open to learning about other religions and other people’s experiences. She passed this belief onto my siblings and me. She taught me that religion should be used as a source of comfort and stability. All of my siblings began leaning toward different religions or no religion, and she chose to learn about them, accept them, and even cater to them. Considering the current political climate, I asked my mother if she had come across anyone in her church who tried to use religion to push their hateful rhetoric. She remembers many people from her church doing so, but it was not as broadcast as it is now. She said, “If somebody was going off the deep end on the way that they were preaching and spewing hate, I kind of chalked them up as more of a crazy person...if you’re going to go that route and you’re that obsessed with hate and

have to broadcast it and have to spew hate, I just ignored it.” She remembers her church in the 1970s and 1980s used religion to dictate who belonged. “As a child, I did not understand why they would not allow people who were gay or lived a different lifestyle to join the church. I only understood the parts of the church that allowed treating everyone with kindness and equality. And that’s what I hung onto and left everything else to them.” When I asked her if she ever protested or brought up concerns, she told me this story:

After my dad passed away, I got into an argument with the priest because he said that we could not bring my father’s ashes to the church. Apparently it was against the religion at the time. Anyways, I kept asking him ‘Why? My father wanted to be cremated, not buried in a casket. And he was a devout member of the church.’ He said something like, ‘It is against the religion because the funeral is to pray for the body.’ I continued to fight because it did not make sense because the ashes were still his body, just in a different form. I wasn’t going to take no for an answer, so I finally said, ‘Well I can just put his ashes in a brown paper bag and have him sit next to me in the pew that way!’ I vividly remember my mom yelling ‘MARY!’ after I said that, but I didn’t care because it didn’t make sense.

She used this tenacity in her career, as she had an unorthodox approach to entering the world of web development. She originally wanted to work in the field of psychology, but, with only a few credits left to obtain her associate’s degree, she decided to go into the workforce. She took a position as a receptionist at a law firm. During the initial interview process, she was told that the position required a typing speed of thirty words per minute, which she could not achieve. She informed them that she was not qualified, as she could barely type. They still hired her as they liked how she sounded on the phone. This job improved her typing skills as she had to dictate audio recordings.

While working as a receptionist, her friend Tracy called and asked her to come in for an interview for an accountant position.

“Tracy, I’m not an accountant.”

“You’re not a receptionist,” Tracy said.

Tracy told my mom that she knew she could do it. While my mom did not think she could, she credits this moment as the foundation of her entire career. She interviewed for the job and was very up front about the fact that she had no idea how to do the job.

“Do you have an accounting degree?”

“No.”

“Do you have accounting experience?”

“No, I do not.”

“Why are you interviewing for this position?”

“Because Tracy said I could do it.”

She was shocked when they hired her. Tracy trained her and later told her that my mother was the best project manager they ever had. And from that point on, she realized that she could do anything she was taught. This was her mindset going forward in her entire career.

She was improving her skills in typing and accounting in Sacramento when her father was diagnosed with lung cancer. She decided to move home to the Bay Area to help care for him, so she took a job as an administrator at a company called Documentum. This is where she started her design work. She learned how to use Photoshop and other design software to help her work on the marketing team. This was in the early 1990s, so computers and the Internet were starting to take off and becoming a pivotal part of society. The company was just starting to build its website when, one day, her boss came to her and told her she would be in charge of it. She expressed her concerns about not knowing how to code, so her boss handed her an HTML book and told her to figure it out. With her “I can learn anything” attitude, my mom read the book and taught herself how to code in HTML and JavaScript. This was her shift in web design. The company eventually built a web team, and my mom continued learning about coding and web development for fourteen years at Documentum.

She was one of the many who got laid off after the company was bought. She moved on to a web development company called Moonstone, where she worked as a project manager. She built her skill in content management, learning different

software. After ten years at Moonstone, she left to take a job as a web developer at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. She continues to work there and notes that she continues to learn and develop her skills to keep up with ever-changing technology. She credits her career to Tracy telling her that she can do anything.

Being associated with the computer sciences, I asked if she has seen any differences from when she first started in the field to now. She recalls that the field was primarily men. She notes that she was lucky enough not to experience any sexism from her male counterparts and that they treated her as an equal. When I mentioned that there are now so many more women in the field, she thought about it and realized that she does work with more women than when she started: “Now that I think about it, there are quite a few women [at the lab] that I’ve met, which is actually surprising. That’s great!”

Considering the pay gap between men and women in today’s society, I asked whether she has noticed any difference between when she started and now. She said, “As women, we got paid less. Still to this date, we get paid less.” She knows that her male counterpart is paid significantly more than she is. She notes that he has more developed skills than she does, but she uses that as motivation to develop her own.

As I recount my discussion with my mother, I recognize that my interest in social justice comes from her. While she tries to stay very neutral—having two brothers on opposite sides of the political line—she holds onto the values of all people being equal and spreading kindness throughout. When I inform her of things that are happening, such as Donald Trump’s fascist tendencies and the reasons behind the Black Lives Matter Movement, she remains open to learning and understanding other people, no matter their views. She wants to learn about everyone’s thinking and ideals before forming any judgment. This may be due to her love of psychology, which she never got to professionally explore, but she still carries with her. And when she says that she has no idea where I got my need for justice, I am going to remind her of the priest she fought with over a brown paper bag. ♦

# JUPITER SHINING ON EARTH

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James Tom

Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system; King of the Gods; the God of thunder and lightning. This is what my sister's boyfriend wanted me to make his alias for this paper. I met Jupiter in person on Thanksgiving last year. I had heard about him through my parents and relatives, and apparently, I had talked to him briefly before they were dating, when I called my sister on a road trip, and he was in the car while we talked about hot dogs or some other random topic. He is my sister's first boyfriend, so it was also a new kind of relationship for me to navigate. I learned that he's a fun guy! We played ping-pong; we're pretty evenly matched. We played chess, which I dominated. He is great with jokes and rolling with the punches, and most importantly, my sister likes him. I've gotten to know him a little better through other experiences with my sister, such as going to the flea market, other holidays, and recently, I stayed with them for around four days for a little "staycation." Despite all of this, there are a lot of parts of his life I don't know about. I have heard bits and pieces of his life, but with this project, I had a good excuse to learn more about him.

Jupiter was born in 1989. He was named after his father. Both of his parents were born in Mexico in the state of Jalisco, around 1960. He described his mom as very caring, nice, and always worrying. Even as an adult, he feels like he's her baby, and thinks this may continue even until he enters middle and

old age. His dad is very quiet, hardworking, and stern. It was harder for Jupiter to ask things from his dad growing up, so he would ask his mom, who would then often respond, "Ask your dad." Growing up, Jupiter remembers his dad as always busy and working, a trait he feels he has inherited. That being said, his parents have become more relaxed as they've gotten older.

His mom was a stay-at-home mom while he was growing up. She took care of him and his siblings, including taking them to the doctor, dentist, and wherever they needed to be. Jupiter believes that his mom would have been a great nurse. She is also a great cook, and he reflected on his friends coming over to eat, especially during the holidays, when they would have tamales. His dad had a small rug company as a side gig, where he sold carpet remnants and worked with individual clients, hotels, and even Disney. But his dad's main job was working with a flooring company. Jupiter actually worked with him as his first job growing up, and learned to drive a forklift.

Jupiter has two siblings. His sister is two years older than him and was born in Mexico, and now has a child, making Jupiter an uncle. His brother is a year younger and was also born in California. They grew up in Lake Forest, California, a city in Orange County. Growing up, Jupiter tended to be a worrier. He worried about what would happen to his parents in particular. However, as he got older, he became calmer. He was lucky that many of his friends lived on the same street as him. They did a lot of activities together like skateboarding, snowboarding, fishing, and doing donuts in the trucks they later got. Also, growing up in Lake Forest was beneficial for Jupiter because it was basically fifteen minutes away from anything he cared about like the beach and the skate park. He described it like a movie, growing up on the street with friends.

Jupiter did not enjoy school when he was younger. He went to a very big high school and felt that he was distracted. As an adult, he reflected on whether part of this was because his school was predominantly white, which made him feel different, but he didn't think about that at the time; it was likely more subconscious. Despite not enjoying high school, it is where he took his first steps into his future career. His friend from high school

told him that he would be a good architect since he was good at drawing and math. One time after wood shop class, Jupiter peered into a different room that had these big tables and was intrigued. It turned out that his school offered drafting classes. He talked to a friend in the class and asked them if they had to present their drawings, and they didn't, so he signed up.

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Community college was a different story for Jupiter than high school. Jupiter felt like he had an opportunity to start from scratch and began to excel in his academic endeavors. He continued to pursue architecture, and he later transferred. He described his time at university after he transferred as transformative because he was exposed to people outside his neighborhood, which made him more open and curious, and also more appreciative of the ways in which he was different. During the COVID pandemic, he decided to pursue graduate education, and later got a graduate degree on the East Coast. Part of it was being single, and the solitude he was experiencing, which caused him to think more deeply and reflect on what he wanted out of life. Additionally, creating greater financial stability in his life was really important to him because he didn't have much growing up.

Jupiter now works as an architect. He is appreciative that he has a good job and doesn't have to worry about money, but still makes sure to set goals for the future. He goes into the office three days a week and works from home two days. On the days he works from home, he can focus more on his work in a more relaxed manner. Every day, after waking up, he rinses his face and goes to the kitchen to make coffee. He grinds his own coffee beans and makes a little breakfast. He usually thinks about work before he gets to the office or starts work from home. My sister usually makes dinner, and he'll help when he gets home or throughout the whole process if he is already home. They sometimes will go on a walk, have a chat, and watch something. They get to bed at around 10 to 11, because my sister wakes up early.

He described his love life as great, and my sister as his "partner in crime" and buddy. His passion is not his job, but growth in general, which can include his work but also extend

to relationships, fitness, and self-expression. Looking forward, his hopes and wishes are to be healthy and for his friends and family to be healthy as well. A specific dream of his is to design a small house with two bedrooms, filled with art and crafts, and with a large garden, especially because my sister loves gardens.

Jupiter considers my sister one of his most important friends, even though now she's his girlfriend, because they started out as friends. He has several college friends he is close with, one of whom is accompanying him and my sister on a trip to Japan soon. He also maintains friendships he developed in grad school and the childhood friends he grew up with on the same street. Recently, one of his friends hosted a raclette party, which is a French, family-style, potato-and-cheese dinner party that he and my sister went to.

His leisure activities include getting into HAM radio, and he has passed an exam that will get him closer to his dream of operating one. He has several distractions and topics he likes to explore on YouTube, including researching Japan for the upcoming trip, fountain pens, and getting back into sketching and fine drawing.

In terms of Jupiter's point of view of current events, he expressed that the recent ICE raids have been horrible and that he tries not to watch the news or pay attention to politics too much. He also told me he felt disheartened and in disbelief, considering all the injustice occurring in the world, including the ICE raids, genocide, and war. He said that even though we will be going into 2026 soon, it seems like we're living fifty or even a hundred years in the past.

It was a really interesting and unique experience getting to ask Jupiter these questions. Some of the stories we had talked about before, such as his friends growing up on the same street during his childhood and about his dream to design and own a small house. During my little "staycation" with them, I got to observe some of his and my sister's daily routine. However, I also learned a lot about Jupiter through this interview. I didn't know much about his parents before, but after this interview, I could see a clear connection in how his father's work ethic and his mother's compassion shaped his personality. Another thing

that stood out to me was that his academic endeavors really took off in community college, and he viewed it as a clean slate. I appreciate that he was so willing to share about his life with me and take the time to do this. It is interesting to think about how taking the time to record aspects of our daily lives could be so informative to future historians or anyone trying to understand our present moment. Though times will be different, I'm sure they will be able to resonate with Jupiter's humanity, his care for his friends, his dreams, and his ability to evolve and grow from the challenges life has given him. ♦

# A LIFE CHOSEN

Kelcee Stokes

Donna Lee Branham was born on February 17, 1951, in Waltham, Massachusetts, but her life truly began in the windswept, working-class neighborhoods of Seaside, California, where her family resettled when she was just fourteen months old. Her early years unfolded in that coastal community—one shaped by the shifting ideals of mid-twentieth-century American family life. Over the course of her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, Donna navigated the expectations of her Catholic upbringing, the pressures placed on girls and young women, the changes of postwar California, and the profound experience of loss that reshaped her understanding of family and identity. Her biography, drawn from her own detailed oral history, is not only a portrait of one woman's life but also a window into the social transformations of the American West from the 1950s onward. As her grandchild, I selected her life as the focus of this biography not only to honor her legacy, but to preserve her experiences for the insight they offer into how broader social forces were lived and understood by women of her generation.

Donna was born to Anne Margaret Testa and Ruben Noelle Ponce, two people from strikingly different backgrounds whose marriage brought together Italian American and Mexican American family histories. Her mother, Anne, was born in Massachusetts to Italian immigrants from the Naples region, part of the early twentieth-century wave of Southern Italian migration to the United States. Donna's father, Ruben, came from South Texas, born into a family

with deep Tejano, Spanish, and Indigenous Mexican and Irish roots.

The couple met when Ruben was in the Navy and stationed in Massachusetts. Their courtship was brief; something Donna always wondered stemmed, at least in part, from an unexpected pregnancy or a complicated romantic life her parents never discussed openly. Throughout her childhood, her parents spoke little about their pasts, their early years together, or the challenges they faced before Donna and her younger sister, Sandra, were born. “My parents weren’t real talkative about their lives,” she recalled, “and prior to me and my sister coming into the picture, I don’t really know much.”

Their move to California in 1952 brought Donna into the orbit of her father’s extended family. The Ponce’s lived first in a small house behind her grandparents’ home, a multigenerational arrangement common among Mexican American families, particularly of that era. Her father soon began work as quartermaster at Fort Ord, a civil servant managing the base’s domestic goods. Her mother stayed home with the children before later taking on various jobs, such as childcare, card merchandising for Hallmark, and retail at the Naval Post Exchange and the local five-and-dime, Sprouse-Reitz.

Her parents were Catholic, and for many years the family faithfully observed religious rituals. Donna attended catechism, memorizing prayers under the stern instruction of nuns. But as she grew older, her attachment to the Church waned. By her teenage years, she resisted attending services, and eventually her parents stopped insisting. Donna’s home life, however, was shaped less by religion than by emotional restraint. Her mother, who had endured a difficult and often painful childhood, struggled to express affection. Her father, dedicated to work and shaped by traditional gender roles, offered praise sparingly. Donna grew up wanting more warmth than her parents could give, a reality she would later acknowledge as central to the woman she became. “Consequently, I’m very different,” she said. “Subconsciously I [knew I] didn’t want my children to experience that kind of [hurt], so I always made sure I said ‘I love you’ to them. I still do.”

Still, her childhood was not without joys. As a very young girl, she remembers the countless days she spent with her paternal grandmother, standing on a stool at her elbow and watching her make tortillas early in the morning, kneading and frying them in the kitchen as sunlight filtered through the window. Like a puppy, she followed at her grandmother's heel; fascinated at the inexplicable green thumb she had in the garden, hypnotized by the rhythmic movements of her hands on the washboard as she did laundry, and diligently absorbing the lessons to be learned from a kind, compassionate woman whose life had been happily defined by caretaking. For Donna, these memories remain among the clearest and most beloved of her earliest years.

Beneath the surface, however, tension filled Donna's nuclear family. Her parents, as she now believes, were not happy together. Her mother's fixation on social appearance, her father's emotional reserve, and their shared aversion to confrontation created a household where love was expressed through material fulfillment rather than affection—and sometimes through secrecy.

One of her father's "secrets" involved Donna's half-sister, Aminta. Donna's father had married at sixteen after impregnating an older woman; his parents quickly had the marriage annulled. Aminta was born shortly after and was raised in poverty in Texas with her mother and her extended family. When Donna first met her as a child on a family trip, plans began to be made for her mother to adopt the girl and bring her to California without Aminta's mother's consent. When the plan was discovered, relatives in Texas "hid" her before she could board the plane. Donna did not see her half-sister again until late adulthood, an emotional rupture that lingered for years. Shaped by decisions beyond her control, this loss was largely unspoken about again, becoming just another part of the emotional landscape of Donna's childhood.

Donna's youth was otherwise mostly normal for the era, reflecting the rhythms of postwar California life: modest homes, close-knit extended families, and the aspirations of a middle class just beginning to solidify. The town itself was relatively diverse, ethnically and economically; however, as was common,

there was a divide that could be seen neighborhood by neighborhood—the middle-class and more advantaged areas were predominantly white, while the lower-class and disadvantaged areas were predominantly African American, with little variation in between beyond school. As a child, the family moved from her grandparents' property into a two-bedroom log cabin-style house in Seaside, a home whose unusual "Lincoln-Log" exterior she remembers vividly.

Education, too, formed an early foundation of identity. The start of kindergarten is a memory that sticks with her: "I remember feeling so abandoned by my mother as she took me to school and left me with all these strange people that I didn't know. I just remember crying so much and thinking she wasn't going to come get me." Though she fared better for her remaining days of elementary school, Donna was self-conscious about her weight and dealt with teasing—milder, she believes, than today's bullying, but still deeply painful. In her free time, she rode bikes with neighborhood kids, stopped at the local market for after-school treats, and spent long afternoons playing at the school playground. These scenes capture a mid-century California childhood: free-roaming, lightly supervised, imaginative play limited only by the oncoming dusk turning the streetlights on.

Junior High brought a newfound confidence; the bullying stopped, and, having lost some of her "baby fat," Donna began to feel comfortable in her own skin. She adored history and did well in English, though she never took to math. During a brief rebellious period, she began to hang out with a rougher crowd, taking up smoking and cutting class to loiter in the park. Prior to this, the most mischief Donna ever got up to was, at a very young age, shoplifting a pencil from Sprouse-Reitz, the store where her mother worked, alongside her friend, who took a headband. Running from the store, they were sure the police were on their tail, cuffs ready to lock them away for life. The guilt and paranoia overwhelmed the girls; they threw their ill-gotten gains into a vacant field on the walk home and never looked back. This would remain her single foray into "crime," as she jokingly put it.

By adolescence, Donna also had become acutely aware of the racial boundaries present in her neighborhood and within her own family. Her junior high years were spent in close proximity to her African American classmates—Fremont Junior High was “50/50” Black and white, she remembered—but at home, her parents expressed the common racial prejudices of their generation. When an African American boy named Anthony Smith showed interest in her from sixth grade through junior high, Donna slowly realized she liked him back. Fondly, she recalled what drew her to him: “He was so nice, he really was. He had extremely good manners and stuff like that, and he was tall and he was very striking.” But the relationship never went beyond this casual verbal courting; Donna knew it never could. She had already internalized one of the few rules her parents had on choosing a partner: “Don’t ever, ever, ever get involved with a Black boy,” they insisted. While she didn’t harbor their beliefs regarding race—and never would—their stern disapproval left a mark that would shape her early understanding of racial barriers and what her parents expected of her as a young woman.

High school introduced new social pressures, both expected and unexpected. Donna describes the campus crowds using familiar archetypes: the jocks, the cheerleaders, the “bad boys,” the “bad girls,” and those in the middle who either flitted around, group to group, or kept to their schoolwork and extracurriculars. Having long since dropped the raucous friend group she had in junior high, she found her place with a new group of friends. Though she wasn’t sure which archetypal crowd they would have been part of, they found each other partly through cooking and sewing classes—electives often marketed to young women preparing for future homemaking roles at the time. For most middle-class young women, college or university was not presented as a natural next step; rather, work, marriage, and homemaking loomed as the markers of adulthood. So, as a senior, Donna joined the Regional Occupational Program (ROP) offered by her school and attended Beauty College in downtown Monterey in the afternoons. The program was her first real step toward adulthood and economic independence; her

next step was into romance, meeting and beginning to date the young man who would later become her husband.

Donna knew about James “Jim” Lasiter from school and had spoken in passing before. He had a subversive reputation that made him cut an intriguing, though not particularly inviting, figure. When their paths crossed at a Moose Lodge teen dance, Jim’s presence surprised her; she had thought he’d moved away due to his parents’ separation. They talked, unexpectedly connecting, and by the end of the night, he offered to drive her home; soon, they were inseparable. Her mother, who longed for Donna to settle down, practically ensured the relationship resulted in marriage. When Jim needed money to buy an engagement ring, Anne offered to pay him to paint her kitchen. He did, and the ring was secured. Donna finished high school, completed Beauty College, and entered the workforce as a young married woman at the dawn of the 1970s.

Like many women of her generation, Donna left paid work when she became pregnant with her first daughter, Tammie. Two years later, she gave birth to Jennifer (“Jenni”). Her life became oriented around motherhood—marked by ordinary routines, the joys and stresses of parenting, and the expectations placed on young wives during an era when the traditional nuclear family still held cultural dominance.

The most devastating loss of Donna’s life came decades later, when her mother died suddenly at age fifty-four. The day had seemed ordinary: she had spoken to her mother over the phone at 6 P.M., mostly regarding the recently passed Christmas holiday and the impending return of Donna’s husband and daughters from visiting her in-laws. However, the relatively mundane conversation had an unexpected ending: before disconnecting, a clear and sincere “I love you” came, almost casually, from Anne. Donna had paused momentarily in surprised confusion. “[It’s] the only memory [I have] of my mother telling me she loved me,” she said, explaining her slight bewilderment. Not lingering on the sudden turn of events, she happily returned the sentiment and their call ended. Three hours later, her father called to say she was gone. Donna didn’t believe him; she angrily accused him of lying, unable to accept the possibility, let alone

the reality. But her mother, plagued by lifelong and neglected health issues, had suffered what was likely a massive heart attack. Donna was twenty-nine. “She must have known the end was coming,” Donna said, recalling those final words. “I don’t know how exactly, but she must have.” The moment reshaped her understanding of their relationship—and, in many ways, her understanding of herself.

A few years after her mother’s death, Donna’s father had changed dramatically. The reserved man who struggled to express affection gradually grew more emotionally open and nurturing, especially toward her children. Donna equates this change to Alice, Ruben’s third wife, whom she initially struggled to accept into the family. It wasn’t until later, after she divorced and remarried, that understanding began to take place. “It took my own relationship...to realize that Alice was the love of my dad’s life, and my dad the love of her life.” For Donna, these pivotal moments of transformation offered both healing and clarity: silence does not always equal the absence of love; the cost for preserving an unhappy marriage is the mutual infliction of trauma, which ripples out and harms those nearest; and people can always change, no matter their age.

After the end of her first marriage, Donna’s second marriage emerged not from youthful urgency or social expectation, but from familiarity, mutual respect, and shared life experience. She had known Ronald “Ron” Branham for several years before their relationship turned romantic. Both were married at the time and connected through their children’s schools and scouting activities, moving within the same social orbit as friends and parents. Donna initially thought of him as “like a big brother,” remembering him as kind, steady, and deeply devoted to his three daughters, Joelle, Janeen, and Jennifer. As both marriages unraveled independently, their friendship gradually evolved into something deeper. Ron, ten years her senior, was an auto mechanic with what Donna described as a “rugged” type of handsome, with a quiet confidence shaped by years of hard work, military service, and fatherhood. He had enlisted in the Army at seventeen, served twelve years, and completed a tour in Vietnam—experiences that forged his grounded,

pragmatic demeanor. When Ron accepted a management position in Santa Rosa, California, a city a handful of hours away from Seaside, the couple made the practical decision to relocate together, bringing their blended families under one roof. After living together briefly, they married in a simple courthouse ceremony, ironically witnessed only by the two children most opposed to the union, Joelle and Jenni. Though the act itself was quick and pragmatic, the marriage was—and remains—a partnership rooted in an undeniable, unyielding love sustained by mutual understanding, genuine compassion, unwavering support, side-splitting laughter, and a chosen family that was as hard won as it was cherished.

In reflecting on her life as it stands now, Donna understands her present not as a simple continuation of the past, but as the product of deliberate emotional choices shaped by experience, loss, and growth. Through adulthood and into later life, Donna forged a life very different from the one in which she was raised. Both she and her sister Sandra actively cultivated the emotional openness within their individual families that they longed for as children, and built relationships with their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren rooted in warmth rather than reserve. Looking back on her parents' unhappy marriage, the end of her first marriage, and the enduring strength of her second, she has come to believe that endurance alone is not a virtue when it comes at the cost of emotional well-being. She rejects the idea, so deeply ingrained in her upbringing, that maintaining appearances at all costs ensures stability; instead, she values honesty and sincerity above all else. Her reflections highlight that people are not fixed by their pasts, that fulfillment can come later than expected, and that meaningful relationships are built not through obligation, but through mutual care, communication, and the courage to choose happiness when the opportunity arises.

Donna's biography, as captured in her oral history, is not defined solely by the events she lived through, but by the meaning she has drawn from them. She has learned from her parents' limitations, embraced the diversity of the places she grew up, and carried forward the traditions that mattered – love

of family, pride in heritage, and the resilience formed by navigating hardship. Her memories of her grandmother's kitchen, her father's late-in-life affection, her adolescent insecurities, and her mother's final words all remain powerful aspects of her journey toward self-understanding. Ultimately, Donna's story is less about the hardships she endured than about the meaning she made from them. Through experience, reflection, and choice, she learned that healing is not found in the emotional stagnation offered by the past; only through its empathetic reevaluation can clarity, compassion, and change be found. ♦

## BOOK REVIEWS

# THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR ON PALESTINE: A HISTORY OF SETTLER COLONIALISM & RESISTANCE, 1917–2017

Jason Crabb

A sociopolitical history spanning the century that was 1917 to 2017, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* illuminates the roots and ramifications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Author Rashid Khalidi's identity is central to this book: a Palestinian-American historian whose family has deep roots in the region, a professor emeritus of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University in New York, and a scholar-activist who lends his intellectual skills to the Palestinian cause. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* reflects these overlapping components of Khalidi's identity, resulting in a deeply personal and compelling history of the Palestinian struggle.

Prevailing narratives tend to frame the conflict either as a clash over two peoples' legitimate rights to the same land, or as a conflict driven by Arab Muslims' hatred for Jews (9). Khalidi quickly puts forth a counternarrative, arguing that “the modern

history of Palestine can best be understood in these terms: as a colonial war waged against the Indigenous population, by a variety of parties, to force them to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will” (9). Khalidi divides that history into what he conceptualizes as six successive *declarations of war*, each one taken up individually in the book’s six chronologically arranged chapters. Settler colonialism is the theoretical framework guiding this book. Coupled with Khalidi’s innovative use of archival documents ranging from the personal to the bureaucratic, the result is a welcome and necessary intervention in the historiography.

Khalidi carefully delineates the specific characteristics that set the Zionist project apart from other colonial campaigns. First, this was a *settler* colonial project. The Eastern and Central European Jewish immigrants arriving in Palestine planned to create an exclusively Jewish nation-state—they intended to stay. For early Zionist leaders like Theodor Herzl, removing the indigenous population and taking their land was necessary to that end. Secondly, this colonial-cum-national project is deeply imbued with religion. Biblical connections to contested holy sites are deeply significant to Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike. Third, this colonial project has required the unwavering political, economic, and military support of the preeminent Western imperial powers, Britain and, later, the United States.

The Balfour Declaration (1917) and the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine (1922) constitute the first declaration of war. Khalidi asserts, “The surest way to eradicate a people’s right to their land is to deny their historical connection to it” (34). By failing to mention Palestinians in the Declaration and denying them national or political rights in the Mandate, the settler colonial project of elimination first took place on a discursive level. Indeed, this denial of Palestinian identity, present in the earliest writings of Zionist leaders like Theodor Herzl, would prove indispensable to the Zionists and their acolytes over the next century. As Jewish settlement increased exponentially in the decades following the first declaration of war, so too did Palestinian resistance. After years of “congresses, demonstrations, and futile meetings with... British officials” facilitated by

an ineffectual Palestinian elite, the conflict reached a boiling point in 1936 (41). A six-month general strike, led by Palestine's younger and increasingly politicized urban middle-class, soon escalated into full-scale revolt. Thus, while a carefully calibrated British policy statement later codified in international law constituted the first declaration of war, Britain's subsequent *waging* of that war (1936–1939) involved brute force. “Of all the services Britain provided to the Zionist movement before 1939,” argues Khalidi, “perhaps the most valuable was [its] armed suppression of Palestinian resistance” (44).

The *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948 saw the violent removal of nearly eighty percent of the Arab population from their homes. As a preface to this catastrophe, Khalidi points to the November 29, 1947, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 as the second declaration of war. Backed by the United States, Resolution 181 called for the unequal partitioning of Palestine in “what was still an Arab-majority land” (71). In the wake of the Arab majority's resolute rejection of partition, the Zionists embarked on a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, crafted by the United States two decades later (1967), reflected a new U.S. tolerance for Israeli territorial acquisition by war. The ambiguous language in this third declaration of war allowed Israel to continue its colonization of Palestinian land while simultaneously making it harder for Palestinians to advocate for sovereignty and statehood. Like the Balfour Declaration a half-century before, SC 242 failed to mention Palestinians by name, leading to what Khalidi contends was “a whole new layer of forgetting... erasure, and myth-making” in the ongoing war (107). In sum, these consequential resolutions helped facilitate Israel's expanding settler project, one that simply could not have been undertaken without Western support.

In the final two decades of the twentieth century, the “special relationship” between the United States and Israel extended far beyond ideological, strategic, and political support.<sup>1</sup> One of the book's most personal and harrowing accounts revolves around

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1 President John F. Kennedy is credited with coining the phrase “special relationship” during a private conversation with Israeli prime minister Golda Meir in 1962.

what Khalidi frames as a fourth declaration war: the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the opening salvo in a new war targeting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Israel's stated goals were twofold: by destroying the PLO's military infrastructure and eliminating their exiled leadership in Lebanon, Israel also sought to weaken Palestinian nationalism writ large. By 1982, following decades of displacement, over 300,000 Palestinians resided in Lebanon, many in refugee camps. Over the course of ten weeks, more than nineteen thousand Palestinians and Lebanese, mostly civilians, were killed, and more than thirty thousand wounded (143). Khalidi, living in Beirut with his pregnant wife and two young daughters at the time, experienced the brutal bombardment of the city first-hand. He recalls "the screeching roar of supersonic warplanes diving to attack in the background" as he frantically drove to pick up his daughters from school (139). In Khalidi's estimation, the 1982 invasion "must be seen as a joint Israeli-US military endeavor," as the bombs being indiscriminately dropped by Israel were supplied by the United States (162).

Chapter five analyzes a series of deeply flawed peace talks that occurred in the wake of the First Intifada (1987 – 1993) and culminated in the signing of the first Oslo Accords in 1993 (206). Khalidi contends that the restrictive conditions agreed to by a politically acquiescent and ineffectual Palestine Liberation Organization made Palestinian leadership complicit in what amounted to yet "another internationally sanctioned American-Israeli declaration of war" (206). The book concludes with a sixth declaration of war (2000 – 2014), one that entailed increasingly draconian measures of Israeli military and settler occupation to control and contain the Palestinian people. But it's important to note that chapter six merely marks a *figurative* end to an ongoing war. Characterized by the destructive Second Intifada and a steep rise in Palestinians' support for Hamas, this sixth declaration of war saw the intensification of US-backed Israeli violence in the West Bank and Gaza—a precursor to the unfolding genocide taking place in the present. Published three years before the events of October 7, 2023, Khalidi predicted that a "second century of war would be marked by a new and

even more destructive approach to the issue of Palestine, with the United States in closer coordination with Israel..." (236).

*The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* is a timely, cogent, and meticulously researched account of settler colonialism and resistance in Palestine. While the book occasionally employs a comparative lens to highlight the similarities between settler projects in Palestine and places like North America, expanding this incredibly important yet under-explored facet of the book would undoubtedly benefit readers in the West. Furthermore, given the Khalidi family's deep ancestral roots in Palestine, together with the many personal anecdotes he's woven into the book, questions of authorial bias will surely arise. However, Khalidi's sharply critical assessment of Palestinian leadership, coupled with his objective analysis of British, Israeli, and Palestinian primary sources, evinces his deep commitment to rigorous historical scholarship. At the same time, Khalidi succeeds in giving a nuanced voice to an often distorted and frequently erased Palestinian people and their past, humanizing a topic that many still know little about. ◆

# WEST OF SLAVERY: THE SOUTHERN DREAM OF A TRANSCONTINENTAL EMPIRE

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Luana Beltramini Vilela

The narrative of the American Civil War has long been polarized between the North and the South as the main characters of the dispute. The West is usually forgotten and considered only during the Reconstruction period. Nevertheless, as historian Stacey L. Smith points out, “Violent conflict in the West anticipated, paralleled, and helped determine the course of federal state-building during the Civil War era.”<sup>1</sup> With the historical wave of reframing and rethinking history, fresher looks at the West’s role and politics showed that it cannot be left out of the Civil War narrative and must be embedded in the roots of the conflict. The book *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* explores this new narrative and presents arguments for a broader Southern perspective on the West’s conquest. The author, Kevin Waite, is a professor at Durham University, and his research interests include nineteenth-century American History, with a focus on

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1 Stacey L. Smith, “Beyond North and South,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 4 (2016): 567, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26070456>.

slavery, imperialism, and the West—all topics this book explores in depth.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part begins with the Southern imagination, exploring how Southerners saw the West and what they expected of it. Here, the author explores the territorial conquests to reach the Pacific and presents extensive arguments in the sectional ideas already spreading years before the Civil War. Moreover, he states that the failed attempts to conquer the West before the Northerners created valuable bonds between the South and West, fundamentally developing the continental South. One interesting discussion Waite brings up in this first section is the capitalist modern view that is mostly related to only the North, arguing that all this Southern planning to expand West to make a transcontinental empire makes them as capitalist and modern as Northerners, challenging this traditional narrative.

The second part focuses on how the Western states viewed the South, adding to the Western picture by bringing the politics of the other states beyond the 110° meridian line into view. Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona are some of them, plus California; Waite discusses several foundational points of their politics, like the Mormon uprising and how they found their own justification for slavery and continued to impose white supremacy. One of the most important arguments for the Continental South thesis is also discussed in this section as “the other slavery.” The Western flank of the transcontinental slavery trade planned by the South was led by native slavery, as they were easier to find and therefore cheaper than transporting Africans into the country.

In the third part, Waite takes us to the western part of the Civil War and the unfolding of the post-war period. The Confederates are trying to pass themselves off as the victims, only wanting to be alone without any overseas territorial conquest, but not counting the Western lands. The book highlights the California rebel supporters and the direct stand the newspapers took in supporting the Confederate war, even reaching out to Napoleon III, who sent money and munitions to the cause. The author notes that, through war, the Republicans gained power in the


West; but Southern power did not entirely disappear, and the post-war scenario confirms this.

Throughout the book, Waite focuses on answering several main questions about the development of the West and its political framework. One of them is the concept of the Continental South and how it was created, destroyed, and later reemerged in the American West. For Waite, its creation came straight from the Southern imagination, with the aim of expanding their federal power and markets to the West and of creating a transcontinental empire connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific lands through a railroad. This appendage of the slave states fell by the end of the Civil War, in which Republicans gained influence in the West and began implementing civil rights laws that disempowered proslavery ideas and Southern lawmaking. However, the difficulty of passing the new regulations and Amendments shows that the Continental South was still very much active and, as the author states, “The age of emancipation turned into an era of exclusion” (236).

Moreover, *West of Slavery* also challenges the traditional Civil War narrative, trying to answer how this Western program influenced the conflict. From the first disagreements over railroad placement to the slave question in the free states, the race between the North and the South to conquer the West sparked sectionalism. Waite states that while the South shaped the West, the West gave the South power, making them feel more powerful than the North and feeding sectional ideas—concluding that the West conquest and development had a primary role in the following conflict and left marks that we can still find in Confederate monuments spread across California.

To summarize, Kevin Waite’s *West of Slavery* offers a compelling revision of the traditional American Civil War narrative by foregrounding the West’s role in shaping the conflict. Through his analysis, Waite reveals how Southern aspirations for a transcontinental empire, rooted in slavery and territorial expansion, were fundamental to the sectional tensions that led to the war. The book emphasizes how the South’s political and economic strategies not only shaped the West but also fueled the Civil War and the Reconstruction era. In conclusion, it is a

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very well-written book, and Waite brings multiple arguments to support his thesis and reframe the traditional narrative. 

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# BAD MEXICANS: RACE, EMPIRE & REVOLUTION IN THE BORDERLANDS

Alondra Rodriguez

In 1915, Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and other minorities participated in one of the largest uprisings against white supremacy in U.S. history, known as El Plan de San Diego. This little-known historical event led to the destruction of some industrial items in Texas, in hopes of combating the violence of white settlers towards Mexicans. In response, white Texas Rangers responded with even more violence, killing up to thousands of Mexicans. Historian Kelly Lytle Hernández describes this tragedy by stating, “the final death toll will never be known” (257). This uprising was inspired by the Mexican Revolution and, more specifically, by the works of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM). Hernández examines the uprising and the PLM ideals in her book *Bad Mexicans*. Hernández is currently a history professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, with her historical interests in race, immigration, and mass incarceration. *Bad Mexicans* won the 2023 Bancroft Prize, showing the importance of her scholarly work in the historical relations between the United States and Mexico.

The main issue this book examines is the PLM fighting against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and how this issue expanded beyond Mexico, but also in the United States. Hernández

argues that PLM efforts and the Mexican Revolution make us understand that “the rise of U.S. Imperialism, the making of the American West, and the rebellion against the color line are just three of the major themes in U.S. history that cannot be understood without Mexico and Mexicans” (15). In other words, the United States was deeply involved in Mexican politics and affairs, making it essential to connect them in historical narratives.

*Bad Mexicans* is organized into four parts, each examining different characters and events that connect to the argument about Mexico, helping us understand the major themes in U.S. history. The first part examines the Mexican political state when Díaz was growing up, which was a constant battle between the liberals and conservatives for the Mexican government. Díaz was thus influenced by and helped Benito Juárez in his campaign, gaining military experience, which Hernández notes heavily influenced Díaz’s dictatorship. When Díaz entered power, he “...oversaw an era in which tens of thousands of U.S. citizens laid claim to more than 130 million acres of Mexico, amounting to more than 27 percent of Mexico’s arable land, and in which U.S. corporations and their executives came to dominate key industries in Mexico...” (35). Hernández repeatedly emphasized the amount of land U.S. companies held in Mexico, which helps explain the important relationship between the U.S. and Díaz. In addition, these actions in Mexico also show the rise of U.S. imperialism. Unsurprisingly, many Mexican citizens were removed from their lands so that Americans could have access to them. This caused many citizens to want to fight the Díaz regime. An essential figure, Ricardo Flores Magón, published the newspaper *Regeneración*, where anti-Díaz material appeared, starting a road to revolution in Mexico.

The second part of the book examines the continual effort by the Díaz regime to silence Flores Magón and other PLM members who shared anti-Díaz material. *Regeneración* called for protests against U.S. companies that had stolen Mexican land, and of course, the removal of Díaz. This part also examines a labor strike in an American company in Mexico. The strikes caused “trading of all Mexican-based stocks ground to a halt, as U.S.

investors worried about the security of their lives and properties in Mexico. Mexican citizens began to question Díaz's omnipotence" (117). Therefore, this part details how these revolutionary ideas were now posing a threat to both the U.S. and Mexican governments.

Part three changes the shift to the PLM activism in the United States, and how American officials were constantly working to capture them. The main person in charge of these captures was a man by the name of Thomas Furlong, who was hired by a Mexican consul to "aid him in 'pursuing and dispersing the PLM Junta'" (151). With the help of American officials, Furlong was able to obtain many secret letters sent by PLM members and was able to break down many of the secret codes in these letters. These letters became essential primary sources to Hernández's work, as she describes how PLM members did their best to destroy anything related to them. Due to the work of Furlong and other American officials, Flores Magón and many PLM members residing in the United States were eventually captured. Americans believed that the capture of these members finally saved U.S. interests in Mexico.

In part four, we see how, even though essential figures were in jail, that the PLM movement soldiered on. There were still raids and upraising aimed at dismantling the Díaz regime, which, in turn, affected U.S. companies in Mexico. There were also many white allies helping expand the PLM cause. Hernández writes that, "The PLM had been seeding insurrection for years in the borderlands and the PLM's Anglo-American allies had recently detonated a political bomb that created space for Mexico's revolutionaries to maneuver on U.S. soil" (221). However, despite all these efforts, the PLM did not achieve any military success against Díaz's troops. Inspired by PLM ideals, it was figures like Francisco Madero and Pancho Villa who successfully removed Díaz from his presidency.

This long series of events shows how Americans were in a constant state of panic with regards to PLM revolutionary ideals, so much so that Americans ultimately attempted to silence and capture PLM members. These stories help develop Hernández's argument that, "in the process of confronting the Díaz regime

in Mexico, they rattled the workshop of U.S. empire, challenged the global color line, threatened to unravel the industrialization of the American West, and fueled the rise of policing in the United States” (257). Therefore, Hernández stresses the importance that there is more to the Latino narrative than is perceived. Thus, this book is directed towards a more general audience, with a constant narrative that is easy to follow and helps understand the role of American-Mexican relations in the making of the United States. Americans had strong connections to Mexico and sought to profit from its culture and resources, while the Mexican government sought to capitalize on this interest. All in all, Hernández’s book opens up a new historical perspective on not only how the Mexican Revolution is understood, but also how one understands United States history. ◆

# SUNNI CHAUVINISM & THE ROOTS OF MUSLIM MODERNISM

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**T**eena U. Purohit's *Sunni Chauvinism and the Roots of Muslim Modernism* examines the development of Sunni Muslim identity and its impact on modern Muslim thought, with a particular focus on the exclusionary tendencies within Sunni Islam. Purohit, an Associate Professor of Religion at Boston University, specializes in Islamic intellectual history, Sufism, and the interplay between religion and politics in South Asia. Her research, as demonstrated in this book, critically examines Sunni orthodoxy and its historical development, particularly its role in shaping modern Muslim identity and marginalizing other sectarian groups.

The subject of the book centers on the rise of Sunni chauvinism—the belief in Sunni superiority over other Islamic sects—and its influence on Muslim modernism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Purohit explores the relationship between sectarianism and modernity in the Muslim world, illustrating how Sunni reformers often promoted a narrow version of Islam that excluded non-Sunni communities like Shias, Sufis, and Ahmadis. She argues that this exclusionary version of Sunni Islam became the dominant narrative, shaping intellectual and political discourses

and contributing to sectarian divides within the broader Muslim world.

The main issue Purohit addresses is how modern Sunni reformers, while engaging with modernity and colonialism, reinforced a limited understanding of Islam that privileged Sunni orthodoxy. This process, she contends, silenced the rich diversity of Islamic thought and created a Sunni-centric version of Islam as the only legitimate expression of the faith. Her thesis is that Sunni chauvinism, which emerged during this period of reform, became central to the construction of modern Muslim identity, shaping how modernity and Islam were understood. In doing so, this form of Sunni modernism sidelined other Islamic traditions, thus contributing to the long-standing sectarian tensions and divisions within the Muslim world.

Purohit's analysis takes an intellectual and cultural history approach. She examines the texts, ideas, and movements that shaped Sunni Muslim identity, revealing how they constructed a dominant narrative that marginalized other sects within the Muslim community. Her historiographical method focuses on key Sunni thinkers who reinforced this narrative in their attempts to reconcile Islam with modernity, particularly during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Purohit also engages with postcolonial studies and sectarianism, exploring how colonialism influenced modern Islamic discourses and how Sunni orthodoxy interacted with concepts of modernity.

In terms of genre, the book can be classified as intellectual history, focusing on the evolution of Sunni thought, and cultural history, addressing how religious identity and sectarianism were culturally constructed. Additionally, there is a political history dimension as Purohit examines how Sunni chauvinism shaped Muslim political movements and identity politics in the modern era. The book's structure is thematic, focusing on key intellectual and ideological issues in Muslim modernism.

The central thesis of *Sunni Chauvinism and the Roots of Muslim Modernism* is that the modernist movements within Islam were profoundly influenced by a Sunni chauvinism that marginalized non-Sunni groups and traditions. Purohit argues that this Sunni-dominated narrative became central to modern

Muslim thought, shaping both intellectual discourses and political movements. She asserts that the rise of Sunni modernism, closely linked to colonialism and modernization, contributed to the construction of a narrow Muslim identity that suppressed diverse Islamic traditions, reinforcing sectarianism and shaping the intellectual frameworks of contemporary Muslim societies.

Purohit supports her thesis through detailed historical analysis, critical readings of texts, and engagement with both primary and secondary sources. Her argument is logically structured, beginning with an analysis of how Sunni orthodoxy evolved in response to colonialism and modernity, and demonstrating how it systematically excluded other Muslim sects. For example, Purohit discusses the influence of Muhammad Iqbal, one of South Asia's most prominent Islamic philosophers, in shaping Sunni modernism. She notes that Iqbal viewed the reforms in Turkey as an example of how Islamic law could evolve while staying true to the principles of *tawhid*—the oneness of God. According to Purohit, Iqbal believed that Turkey's modernization efforts aligned with *tawhid* by promoting social unity, freedom, and solidarity, demonstrating that Islamic law could undergo fresh interpretation in the context of modern nation-building (102). This highlights her broader argument that *tawhid* provided the foundation for a reformist vision of Islam that could adapt to modernity.

However, Purohit also critiques groups like the Ahmadis, accusing them of undermining this reformist potential. She argues that the Ahmadis' beliefs, rooted in what she terms "Magianism," represent a form of backward thinking that compromises both the civilizational progress of the Indian Muslim community and the dynamic nature of *tawhid* (134). This criticism reveals Purohit's broader contention that Sunni modernists framed themselves as the only true reformers of Islam, dismissing other sects as obstacles to progress.

Purohit's engagement with the ideas of Ali Shariati, an influential Iranian intellectual, further supports her thesis. She notes that Shariati admired modernist Sunni thinkers not only as intellectual reformers but also as activists committed to revolutionary change. For Shariati, *tawhid* was not just a religious

principle but also a philosophical and ethical force that could drive social and political transformation. Purohit argues that Shariati's vision of *tawhid* as both an ideal of early Islam and a framework for future societal reform reflects the revolutionary potential embedded in Sunni modernism (179). This interpretation aligns with her thesis by demonstrating how Sunni reformers used *tawhid* to promote both intellectual and political change, while also reinforcing a Sunni-dominated vision of Islam.

One of the biggest strengths of Purohit's book is her nuanced analysis of the intersection between Sunni chauvinism and modern Muslim identity, particularly her ability to trace how exclusionary practices shaped both religious and intellectual developments. She effectively uses a variety of sources, including literary texts and colonial-era documents, to argue how sectarian divisions were reinforced through political and cultural narratives. However, one of the largest potential weaknesses is that her focus on Sunni chauvinism occasionally overshadows the agency of heterodox communities, limiting a more in-depth exploration of their own responses and contributions to modern Muslim thought.

Ultimately, Purohit's *Sunni Chauvinism and the Roots of Muslim Modernism* is a significant contribution to the field of Islamic studies, offering a nuanced understanding of how sectarianism and modernity intersected in the shaping of modern Muslim thought. While the book primarily focuses on intellectual elites and is somewhat limited in geographic scope, its rigorous analysis and challenge to conventional narratives make it an essential work for scholars interested in the complexities of Muslim identity, sectarianism, and intellectual history. Purohit's work provides valuable insights into how dominant narratives of Sunni superiority have shaped not only religious discourse but also political structures in the modern Muslim world, reinforcing sectarian divisions that continue to influence contemporary Muslim societies. ◆

# CLAIMING FREEDOM: RACE, KINSHIP & LAND IN NINETEENTH- CENTURY GEORGIA

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Kelcee Stokes

**I**n *Claiming Freedom: Race, Kinship, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Georgia*, Karen Cook Bell presents a compelling micro-historical analysis of how enslaved and formerly enslaved African Americans in Georgia's low country mobilized community networks and resources to preserve their cultures, identities, and kinship ties, while also laying the social, political, and economic foundations necessary for their collective future amid slavery, conflicting notions of freedom, and rising racial tensions in the rural and urban pre- and post-war eras.

Bell explores how lowland Georgia's isolation shaped enslaved people's cultural and economic practices, arguing that plantation communities' separation allowed enslaved Africans to preserve distinct traditions, language, and beliefs, which later informed their resistance and adaptation. As Bell highlights, slave narratives show these practices sustained identity and resisted the erasure of African culture: "As a means of empowerment and identity formation, the testimony of formerly enslaved claimants and their witnesses underscores the fact

that oppression created solidarity... The oppression of slavery created and reinforced social ties and community” (30).

Shifting the focus to freedwomen’s agency in shaping post-emancipation Georgia, Bell challenges previous scholarship that often foregrounds freedmen’s experiences. Using census records and Freedmen’s Bureau documents, she shows how freedwomen leveraged family and community ties to access resources, maintain land ownership, and resist economic exploitation. They pursued land as a path to true freedom, marrying legally to secure property claims or forming female-headed households for autonomy.

Bell notes that by engaging in education, legal action, and community organizing, freedpeople broadened their political participation beyond elections. She expounds on how Black activism during Reconstruction laid the groundwork for future struggles for racial and gender justice through labor resistance, agricultural alliances, and land advocacy.

Community building served as a powerful form of resistance to post-Reconstruction oppression, particularly in low country Georgia, where African Americans fostered independent identities through grassroots organizing, legal advocacy, and mutual aid. Through Black churches, mutual aid societies, and all-female benevolent organizations, they reinforced economic independence and solidarity. Bell examines these efforts, highlighting how all-Black towns and landowning communities enabled freedpeople to exercise self-determination.

Karen Cook Bell’s *Claiming Freedom* offers a fascinating and deeply nuanced look at how African Americans in Georgia’s low country fought to shape their own futures after emancipation. While her focus is narrow, the depth of her research makes it an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Reconstruction. By centering kinship networks, land ownership, and gendered resistance, Bell expands the conversation beyond the typical freedmen-centered narratives and brings Black women’s agency to the forefront in a way that feels both refreshing and necessary.

Bell’s meticulous use of local records and community-based strategies makes her research feel tangible and alive. She

doesn't just analyze historical trends—she brings forward the voices and struggles of people who fought to claim land, build communities, and carve out spaces of self-determination. Her work left me thinking about how much history gets lost when we don't look closely at the everyday actions of those left out of dominant narratives.

More than just a contribution to Reconstruction historiography, *Claiming Freedom* is a powerful reminder that land, kinship, and collective struggle were not just survival strategies—they were the foundation for true liberation. Bell's work makes me appreciate the resilience of those who came before and pushes me to rethink how we tell the story of Black life after the Civil War. ♦

# KOREATOWN, LOS ANGELES: IMMIGRATION, RACE & THE “AMERICAN DREAM”

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Michael Cassidy

The story of Los Angeles is the story of diverse groups and interests arriving and combining at different times and places. Like most cities in America, Los Angeles hosts many neighborhoods with racial identities. The best way to get a sense of the history of a city as large as L. A. is to dive into specific histories of these neighborhoods. They are the puzzle pieces that come together to reveal the full image of the city itself. Shelley Sang-Hee Lee’s book, *Koreatown, Los Angeles: Immigration, Race, and the ‘American Dream,’* provides a portrait of the Koreatown neighborhood in Los Angeles. It is a thorough exploration of how immigration and race together shaped the development of central Los Angeles between 1965 and the present.

*Koreatown, Los Angeles* tells the history of Koreatown and the broader Korean American community, to pierce the traditional “American Dream” narrative. Korean Americans are often held up as paragons of the American Dream—a group who “makes it” through hard work and grit, and never asks for “handouts.” Lee

illustrates the limits and complications of this story. She argues that the experiences of Korean Americans often contradicted post-Civil Rights racial optimism and neoliberal economic idealism, revealing a 1970s and 1980s America with significant racial and wealth stratification. The book situates this disconnect within the frame of burgeoning globalism to illuminate how growth and expansion often leave behind the very groups they are meant to benefit. In *Koreatown*, Lee combines common topics in immigration and the economic forces that shape many ethnic communities with individual stories of Korean Americans that illuminate the multi-generational challenges of identity and belonging.

The spirit of Lee's argument is that the details of history reveal deeper truths. She uses recurring characters to transform this belief into a device that threads throughout the book. Lee introduces each chapter with a person who lived through or gave voice to the argument in that chapter. In chapter one, Lee introduces David Hyun, a Korean immigrant to the United States who later becomes an influential architect and thought leader in Koreatown. In chapter two, Lee introduces Sonia Suk, a Korean real estate agent and civic leader. Suk and Hyun give the book a cohesive chronology. Their career trajectories support the presentation of the region's history, but their personalities and experiences also add nuance and background to the arguments Lee is unearthing. The reader gains a sense of Suk and Hyun's place in history, so their thoughts have additional authority.

*Koreatown* focuses on the decades following the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, which led to a significant increase in Asian American immigration, especially to California. The chapters tell the story of Koreatown's development chronologically from the late 1960s to the aftermath of the 1992 riots. Chapter I provides the background of national and local economic forces that gave Korean immigrants and the development of Koreatown rising visibility in Los Angeles culture. The combination of deindustrialization and "re-industrialization," which coincided with increased Asian and Latino immigration, laid the foundation for the racial dynamics that present throughout the book (16).

The loss of middle-class jobs moving overseas, compounded with the reduction of social welfare programs and increased suburbanization, had an outsized effect on Los Angeles' Black communities. Lee's analysis homes in on how the city became "simultaneously more segregated and diverse" as new arrivals established themselves in central Los Angeles. Segregation, combined with Black-Asian intercultural contacts, forms the backbone of Lee's subsequent analysis of the L. A. Riots in chapter five.

Having given context for the geopolitical landscape of the Korean influx, *Koreatown* next turns to the neighborhood dynamics and civic narratives around development. Chapter two argues that while the development of Korean-identified spaces was desirable for recent Korean immigrants, it also fostered a narrative among city leaders and media that the existing inhabitants were incapable of community improvement. This disconnect made Koreans over-representative in the narrative of renewal and "obscured the reality of... government divestment in poor neighborhoods with large numbers of immigrants and non-whites" (59). Lee introduces Sonia Suk as a "place entrepreneur," a community leader with the specific intention of making Koreatown a destination and neighborhood with a defined identity and a defined location of commerce (38). Suk was a self-made Korean real estate agent who became an important voice for the growing Korean community in the broader city conversation. Suk's story of success and advocacy for Korean representation provides a powerful example of the Korean American work ethic that mainstream "American Dream" narratives attributed to the Koreatown's successful development.

As the structures of Koreatown were being built, so was the Korean American identity. Chapter three argues that rising Korean immigration exposed significant division within the Korean American community. Intergenerational disagreements over the importance of Korean identity, as well as debates about the desirability of assimilation and participation in "mainstream America," were triggered by the expansion of the community in Los Angeles. The idea of belonging contains as many definitions

as there are people in immigrant communities. Lee introduces the English-language newspaper *Koreatown Weekly* as a source for the kaleidoscope of Korean experiences. This evidence provides wide-ranging perspectives that bring home uniquely Korean struggles with identity. Chapter three departs from the civic and intraethnic narrative of the rest of the book, yet it strengthens the book's overall analysis of Korean American identity.

The book returns to a wider view in the second half. Chapter four explores how the branding of Los Angeles as a global city during the 1970s and 1980s also exposed the city's wealth inequality and racially selective narratives associated with its progressive, multicultural presentation. Chapter five returns to interracial dynamics associated with Koreatown expansion. In it, Lee argues that despite shared status as racial minorities, Black and Korean relations were strained due to wealth and opportunity inequalities. These differences reached a boiling point during the riots following the verdict in the trial of the LAPD officers who beat Rodney King. Lee maps how Black community businesses in South Central shifted to Korean-owned, accelerating the sentiment that the two overlapping communities had competing interests. The physical proximity, injustice of the verdict, divestment, and reinvestment "caused the powder keg to explode" (132).

Methodologically, Lee focuses on "intraethnic relations" by placing Korean, Black, and "mainstream" American news sources in dialogue to reveal contradictions between popular narratives of immigrant success and lived experience (4). As an example, Chapter five begins with an interview with the actress Marla Gibbs in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a Black newspaper. Gibbs' 1983 comments present the racial animosity in central Los Angeles as Koreatown grew (108). Later in the chapter, Lee analyzes film portrayals of Korean characters to show the differing racial views of Asians in the 1980s and 1990s (125). This diversity of perspectives allows Lee to connect historical events with how different communities understood them.

One criticism of the book is that it gives too little attention to the forces in Korea that motivated Koreans to immigrate and

assimilate in such force. Lee summarizes the governmental and economic elements, but because her analysis throughout the book is committed to cultural layers of the immigrant experience, the passages on Korea itself feel thin. A detailed exploration of immigrant expectations and hopes for their American life is missing. For example, there was a slight disconnect between descriptions of how Korean entrepreneurs worked to succeed as shop owners and how this became a laudable narrative about them from non-Korean Americans. I wanted to know more about why the shopkeepers worked themselves so vigorously, aside from their general desire to succeed.

*Koreatown, Los Angeles* is an effective history of the Koreatown neighborhood and the Korean American community in California. Lee succeeds in presenting the complication and nuance of the immigrant story in an unequal and racialized society. Her analysis of economics, identity, and power challenges the traditional American Dream narrative. The book connects Korean American history with the histories of Black and Latino Angelenos, and the global city itself. In doing so, *Koreatown, Los Angeles* provides historical background for the housing challenges, racial segregation, and opportunity inequality that challenge Koreatown and Los Angeles today. ♦

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

### **SAM BALDERAS**

Sam Balderas is a graduate student in the History Department at Cal State East Bay, currently on the Public History track in their final semester. Their interests include World War II and Oakland history. Sam has published essays in the last three volumes of the *East Bay Historia* and served as an editor for Volume 8. They also served as President of Cal State East Bay's Phi Alpha Theta chapter from Spring 2024 to Fall 2024. Sam currently works on campus in the University Communications and Marketing Department.

### **MARGARET BALK**

Margaret Balk is a graduate student in Cal State East Bay's History Department, with a concentration in public history. She has taken a circuitous route to her love of history: from earning a B.A. in Psychology from Reed College; to working in psychology research labs in San Francisco, North Carolina, and Belgium; to completing her Master's in Social Welfare at U.C. Berkeley. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she got roped into a "Pandemic Project" digitizing correspondence from the 1870s between a mother and daughter who lived in her hometown of Fremont, California. Her interest in history exploded from there. She hopes to use her passion for history and her love of research to present local histories in new ways that engage community members who think history is dry and dull; in fact, it is quite the opposite.

### **LUANA BELTRAMINI VILELA**

Luana is a graduate student whose academic work reflects a strong commitment to global and comparative history. While earning her B.A. in History in Brazil, she was among the first scholars at her institution to research bilingual schools and the Brazilian History curriculum. Her current interests span American, African American, Brazilian, African, religious, and educational history. Driven by a deep curiosity about cultures

and the forces that shape them, she plans to pursue a Ph.D. and return to the classroom as a professor.

### **MICHAEL CASSIDY**

Michael Cassidy is an undergraduate History major at Cal State East Bay, concentrating in Social Justice and Citizenship. He is interested in legal, popular, and unpopular definitions of belonging and “American” identity in the history of the American West. He began his college career at Los Angeles City College and transferred to Cal State East Bay in 2025.

### **JASON CRABB**

Jason Crabb is a graduate student in the history program at Cal State East Bay. A product of both the CSU and California community college systems, he holds a B.A. in Comparative Ethnic Studies and Associate’s degrees in Sociology and Social Justice Studies. Rooted in an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship, Jason’s current research focuses on histories of policing and prisons in the United States.

### **SOL DAVIS**

Sol Davis is a recent Cal State East Bay graduate, currently pursuing a Single Subject Social Science Credential through East Bay’s credential program. Sol initially obtained their B.A. in History-Social Science: Teacher Preparation for Middle and High Schools in Spring 2025. While much of the work in their bachelor’s program focused on pedagogy, Sol’s history courses offered them the opportunity to explore their historical interests and develop their writing style. Sol is currently student-teaching in a U.S. History/Ethnic Studies class at a local Hayward high school and will receive their preliminary teaching credential in Spring 2026. They are grateful for their experiences as a young East Bay historian, and Sol is beyond excited to begin teaching the next generation of historians.

### **JENNI ELLIOTT-HENNINGER**

Jenni Elliott-Henninger is a graduating senior at Cal State East Bay, majoring in History with a concentration in Social Justice

and Citizenship. She is a member of Phi Alpha Theta. Passionate about History, Historic Preservation, and Librarianship, Jenni will pursue her Master's degree in Library and Information Science at San Jose State University in the Fall. She hopes to share her passion for history and libraries with others as a university archivist or academic librarian.

### MAXIMILIANO GÓMEZ

Maximiliano Gómez has always had a profound interest in history. He has always looked up to his mother, a lifelong preschool teacher, and growing up, he spent his afternoons in his mother's classroom. In an effort to combine these two passions, Maximiliano is pursuing a career in teaching and wants to become a high school history teacher, focusing on covering the relationship between Latin America and the United States' imperialistic interests in the region. Currently, Max is in his junior year at Cal State East Bay, after transferring from Las Positas College with an A.D.T. in History. Max, a Dean's List recognized student, is currently pursuing a B.A. in History with a concentration in Sustainability and Modernization. After achieving the aforementioned degree, Max plans to pursue an M.A. in History via the FAST 4+1 program.

### STEPHANIE JONES

Stephanie Jones is a graduating senior at Cal State East Bay, where she is completing a double major in History, with a concentration in Social Justice and Citizenship, and Comparative Ethnic Studies. She transferred from Rancho Cucamonga College after earning an Associate Degree for Transfer (A.D.T.) in History. At Cal State East Bay, she is a member of Phi Alpha Theta and Tau Sigma and has been recognized on the Dean's List. As a returning student, Stephanie brings a deep commitment to community engagement and local social justice initiatives to her academic work. Her scholarly interests include American history, Reconstruction, and the study of resistance and social justice movements. She plans to pursue graduate study in history and aspires to teach at the post-secondary level.

**MARCUS R. KUJAWA**

Marcus R. Kujawa is an aspiring history teacher. He plans to attend graduate school and, after earning a Master's Degree, wishes to teach history at the community college level. Marcus has always loved history, and he wishes to share his passion with his future students. Marcus transferred from Mt. San Jacinto College with an A.A. in History for Transfer and one in Liberal Arts. He is a member of Tau Sigma, the Academic Honor Society for Transfer Students, and Phi Alpha Theta. He serves as the Historian for the Alpha Rho Theta chapter of Phi Alpha Theta.

**LI LI**

Li Li is a graduate student in History at Cal State East Bay and a member of Phi Alpha Theta. He earned his B.S. in Biological Sciences with a minor in History from U.C. Davis. His research centers on alliance politics and crisis decision-making in Europe from 1871 to 1914, drawing comparisons between pre-World War I security dynamics and today's international order. Drawing on his background in the sciences, he brings an interdisciplinary perspective to historical research. Li plans to pursue a Ph.D. and a career as a history professor, committed to helping students understand the relevance of the past to contemporary global challenges.

**ISABELLA LUCAS**

Isabella Lucas is a recognized Dean's List student in her fourth year at Cal State East Bay and is pursuing a major in History-Social Science Teacher Preparation and a minor in Philosophy. She is committed to becoming a high school social studies teacher so she can foster students' love for history and encourage them to explore their historical questions. Her personal historical interests include women's history, immigration, and revolutionary movements. She enjoys spending her free time with friends, family, and her cats.

### PETER McCARTHY

Peter McCarthy is a Cal State East Bay alum from the class of 2025. While pursuing a B.A. in History with a concentration in Migration and Globalization, Peter was on the editorial board of *East Bay Historia* Volume 8, an officer of the university's Phi Alpha Theta chapter, a volunteer research assistant for National History Day, and an exhibit design intern at the California Historical Radio Society in Alameda. The capstone essay herein was the product of several visits to the Cal State East Bay Library archives and the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society archives. Peter is now completing a Master's in Education and a single-subject teaching credential through the Alder Graduate School of Education, in partnership with the Oakland Teacher Residency at Oakland Unified School District.

### AUSTIN OZENNE

Austin Ozenne is pursuing a B.A. in History-Social Science with a Teacher Preparation concentration. As a graduating senior at Cal State East Bay, he looks forward to soon obtaining his teaching credential and beginning his career as a middle or high school history teacher. Interested in U.S. history from a young age, he transferred from Norco College in 2024 with three A.D.T.s in History, Social and Behavioral Studies, and Humanities, Philosophy, and Arts. When not engaged in coursework, he enjoys spending time with friends and family, listening to music, and traveling.

### NIKKI ORRETT

Nikki Orrett is a current History undergraduate student at Cal State East Bay with a concentration in Social Justice and Citizenship, and is a member of Phi Alpha Theta. She plans to obtain a graduate degree in Public History at Cal State East Bay. She has a special interest in law and crime, women's history, and fashion history. Her goal is to help make history more accessible and engaging to the public. Outside of history, she is interested in painting, sculpting, and spending time with her senior dog, Kaz.

**ALONDRA RODRIGUEZ**

Alondra Rodriguez is a recent M. A. History graduate from Cal State East Bay, with a concentration in Teaching History. She also earned her B. A. from Cal State East Bay, with a concentration in Social Justice and Citizenship, and her historical interest centers on microhistories. Her recent project focused on incorporating Latin American participation into well-known WWII history. Thus, through her research, she hopes to bring new perspectives and unknown stories to students. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with loved ones and traveling.

**KELCEE STOKES**

Kelcee Stokes is a graduating senior at Cal State East Bay, where she is completing her undergraduate studies in History, with a concentration in Sustainability and Modernization, and a minor in Black Studies. She transferred from Santa Rosa Junior College after earning an Associate of Arts Degree in History and a second in Social and Behavioral Science. During her time at Cal State East Bay, she has been recognized on the Dean's list and is a member of Phi Alpha Theta. Her current scholarly interests include folklore, myth and legend, race and gender studies, and disability history, with a particular emphasis on centering lived experience, marginalization, structural inequality, and perseverance in the face of these forces. Her post-graduation goals include pursuing a career in archival research and preservation, with the possibility of undertaking graduate study to further develop her training and expand her expertise in the field.

**JAMES TOM**

James Tom is an undergraduate student in his junior year at Cal State East Bay. He is currently the secretary for the university's Phi Alpha Theta chapter and is recognized on the Dean's List. He is pursuing a B. A. in History with a concentration in Sustainability and Modernization. His current scholarly interests include the history of jazz and the modern Middle East. Outside of his academic interests, he enjoys making music, cooking, and drinking coffee.

**DAVID TORTES**

David Tortes is a graduating senior at Cal State East Bay pursuing a degree in History-Social Science with a Teacher Preparation concentration. He an Indigenous Californian (Cahuilla/Payómkawichum/ Assiniibwaan) and avid lover of all things history! Following graduation, he will either pursue his single-subject teaching credential or apply to graduate school to further his educational aspirations. He credits his community college history professors, along with East Bay's faculty, with nurturing a deep fascination with the story of humankind. Because of this, he would ideally like to teach history at the community college level. Most of his historical student research has been spurred on by peculiar and oftentimes humorous personal observations of the world around him.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

### TIFFANY ABRAMS

Tiffany Abrams is majoring in Studio Arts at Chico State with an emphasis in sculpture. She takes great pride in her participation in the campus sculpture club and the Digital Filmmakers Guild (DFG). She served as treasurer of the DFG for two years, until the sculpture club was established in the fall of 2025. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career in the film and theatre industry, building sets and props and creating special effects.

### MATTHEW BORRELLI

Matthew Borrelli is a senior Chico State student majoring in Studio Arts with an emphasis in digital media. Matthew is a leader, and he gets the most enjoyment out of life by serving others and creating art. He has had various leadership roles, including being president of a Toastmasters club, teaching various youth job readiness skills, and serving as a keynote speaker for non-profit events. Currently, he holds a cabinet role in the Neurodiversity and Disability club on campus and enthusiastically helps manage weekly events. He continues to build on these skills while working towards his dream of being an animator, teacher, and influencer. With the skills he learns, Matthew hopes to create his own inspiring illustrations and animations, and to teach others how to do the same.

### ALAN BUELL

Alan Buell is a junior at Chico State, majoring in Studio Arts with an emphasis in digital media. Oftentimes, they can be found doodling, animating, or crafting, whether it be for class or for fun. Taking an interest in all things animation since elementary school, Alan hopes to one day lend their skills, passion, and unique experiences to the art of visual storytelling.

### CAITLIN DOBSON

Caitlin Dobson is a junior at Chico State, majoring in Art Education. Their work focuses on digital media such as

illustration and animation; however, they also enjoy exploring more physical mediums like printmaking and ceramics. In their spare time, they find themselves photographing local wildlife, due to it being one of their major inspirations for their art. In the future, Caitlin hopes to encourage other young minds as a high school art teacher.

### **WILLIAM GONZALEZ**

William Gonzalez is a junior at Chico State majoring in Art Studio with an emphasis in digital media. When he isn't working on illustration or design projects, William can often be found at Chico State's WREC Center, putting the same level of effort into training as he does into his creative work. Throughout the week, he balances his studies with a part-time job while also attending meetings with an off-campus organization dedicated to raising awareness for Alzheimer's disease. William is passionate about developing the technical and conceptual skills necessary to succeed in the graphic design industry. His time at Chico State has allowed him to explore illustration, visual storytelling, and design practices that shape his creative voice. After earning his Bachelor of Arts in Art Studio, William plans to enlist in one of the United States military branches in a technical or information-based role, with the goal of gaining valuable experience and building a strong foundation for his future career.

### **MAL FINNEY**

Mal Finney is a third-year Studio Arts student at Chico State with an emphasis in printmaking. Though primarily focused on prints, they have also been known to dabble in illustration and ceramics on the side. In addition to being a student, they also co-run MurderSquash, a small art business they run with their best friend out of their tiny apartment.

### **EVAN HENDERSON**

Evan Henderson is a junior at Chico State. He majors in Studio Arts with a digital emphasis and minors in Theatre Arts. He has a passion for visual storytelling and attention to detail. In his downtime, he can be found drawing, writing, animating, fighting

with swords, and finding many ways to marry the teachings of Theatre Arts into his Studio Arts studies.

### ALEJANDRO REYES GAYTAN

Alejandro Reyes Gaytan is a fourth-year Art Studio major at Chico State who hopes to pursue a career in animation. He aspires to create his own animated show or develop original characters that reflect his passion for art, design, nature, and diverse cultures through the lens of animation. Outside of his artistic pursuits, Alejandro is dedicated to giving back to his community. He participates in community service activities such as fundraisers, donation drives, trash cleanups, and other philanthropic efforts. In addition to art, music is Alejandro's second greatest passion. He enjoys playing the accordion and saxophone, and loves exploring a wide range of musical genres and songs.

### GREYSON ROUT VAZQUEZ

Greyson Rout-Vazquez is a Studio Arts major at Chico State with an emphasis in digital media and a passion for animation. With ambitions to work in animation as a career, they spend much of their free time enjoying physical print art, in the form of comic books and trading cards.

### CHRISTOPHE WASHINGTON

Christophe Washington is a graduating senior at Chico State who majors in Game Development with minors in Art Studio and 3D Modeling. He combines his love for games and artistic expression through a wide variety of different mediums: modeling, digital sculpting, printmaking, painting, and digital illustration, to name a few. Additionally, Christophe interns at Tech Toss, a locally founded non-profit that focuses on collecting electronic waste and recycling or refurbishing it to promote education for those in need. Following his graduation, he aims to earn an M.A. in Game Design at Norwich University of the Arts.

## COLOPHON

### IMBUE

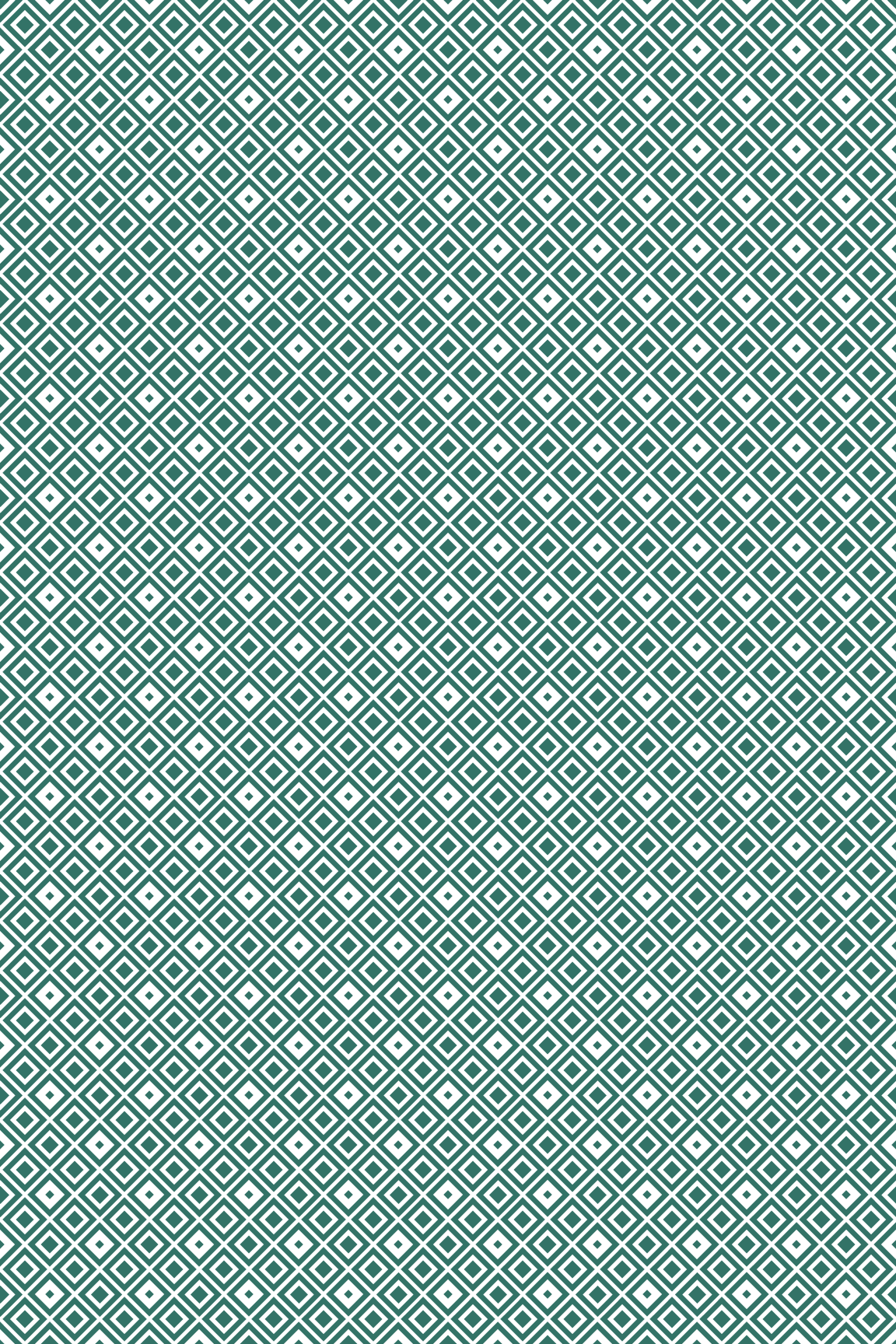
*East Bay Historia's* current headings are set in Imbue, a variable Didone typeface designed by Tyler Finck. While it bears a passing resemblance to other Didone types such as Bodoni or Didot, Imbue's pronounced vertical stress and gentler lacrimal serifs confer an air of fashionable, lighthearted confidence—a superlative choice for the journal's display text. More of Finck's work with typography can be found on his homegrown digital foundry, Etcetera Type Company.

### MUNDIAL

TipoType's Mundial reprises its role as the journal's typeface of choice for bylines and subheadings. Translated from the Spanish as “worldwide,” Mundial is a modern geometric sans serif with a humanist instinct: though it retains the circular counters and uniform stroke widths which ground its proportions in the realm of geometry, Mundial boasts true italics, old-style numerals, and a charming double-story “a”—features that exemplify TipoType's bold, multidisciplinary approach toward typographic design.

### PUBLIC SANS

Public Sans, originally developed for the United States Web Design System (USWDS), is utilized for *East Bay Historia's* body copy. Based on Libre Franklin, it is an open source, neo-grotesque sans serif with a strong and neutral design—ideal for reading flow in longer texts. Public Sans' robust multilingual support, variable weights, and regularized strokes ensure it remains an excellent typeface in both web and print applications.



## THIS ISSUE

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