

# MADISON HISTORICAL REVIEW

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## About the *Madison Historical Review*

The *Madison Historical Review* is published annually in a print and online version, featuring the work of graduate students in the field of history. Based out of the History Department at James Madison University, the journal presents a unique outlet for Master's students to submit their scholarship. The editorial board is made up of graduate students from James Madison University's graduate history program who are dedicated to maintaining scholarly integrity and setting a high academic standard. Our mission is to aid in the overall development and refinement of research, analytical, and writing skills.

Over the next few years the editorial board has taken the initiative to improve the journal and build off of the groundwork laid by our founders. In the past we have added book reviews, historiographies, professional interviews, exhibit reviews, and Digital History Profiles to our previous published content in an effort to appeal to a broader audience and expand readership. Our vision for the future rests on a commitment to contribute original scholarship to the field of history and benefit the growth and development of graduate students at James Madison University and other programs around the world.

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Anna Neubauer

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## Letter from the Editor

The *Madison Historical Review* is pleased to present our readers with this latest edition of original historical scholarship. This year is particularly special as the journal is celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. Thank you to everyone who has supported the journal over the past 20 years – to the countless editors, editorial boards, authors, advisors, faculty members and staff, and of course our readers – the journal would not be in the same place as it is today without all of your assistance. We are proud that the *Madison Historical Review* is one of the only scholarly journals run by graduate students with a focus geared toward the publication of Master’s level research. The ensuing articles represent a wide variety of graduate student scholarship, from how the government conducted surveillance on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to the history of a neo-Nazi group of gay men in Southern California, to how white enslavers in New Orleans demonized Haitian Vodou and mischaracterized it as Voodoo, to a new interpretation of the history of the abolition of widow burning in British India, to an overview of how Black activists drew on the memory of slavery in the Black Power Movement, and including an analysis of the shortcomings of the abolition of the prostitution movement in Guangzhou.

On behalf of the entire editorial board, I would like to congratulate Bailey Irene Midori Hoy, winner of the 2023 James Madison Award for Excellence in Historical Scholarship. Her article, “*Joo wa Dare? Who is the Queen?*: Queen Contests during the Wartime Incarceration of Japanese-Americans” looks at the often overlooked topic of beauty pageants located in incarceration centers during Japanese-American internment. Her work is an excellent example of graduate student research and writing skills.

I would also like to thank our editorial board; without their hard work, the publication of this journal would not be

possible. Members of the editorial board review all submitted articles and edit the papers chosen for publication. Thank you to Annette Guild, Zoe Joyner, Kade Kahanek, Thomas Kidd, Ryan Kitts, Matt Luther, Karen Luu, Mackenzie Mason, Subat Matin, Jack Morris, and Giuseppe Vitale. Furthermore, the addition of Kevin Johnson as Associate Editor provided some much needed support during the process. Thank you, Kevin, for your efforts. Additionally, I would like to thank Rebecca Kruse for her technical support and expertise in operating the journal's Scholarly Commons website. I would also like to extend thanks to Rebecca White, for her help with the MHR, including maintaining the MHR history department website, and overseeing the budget and printing. All of us at the *Madison Historical Review* are especially indebted to our faculty advisor, Dr. Christian Davis, for his guidance and support in the publication of this issue.

Support for this publication comes from the James Madison University College of Arts and Letters and The Graduate Program in History at James Madison University. A special thanks to Dr. Robert Aguirre, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, for his continued support for the *Madison Historical Review*.

Anna Neubauer, Executive Editor

## Articles

# “*Joo wa Dare? Who is the Queen?*”: Queen Contests during the Wartime Incarceration of Japanese-Americans

Bailey Irene Midori Hoy  
University of British Columbia

2023 Winner of the James Madison Award for  
Excellence in Historical Scholarship

### Introduction

In May of 1943, the *Denson Tribune* covered the beauty pageant held in conjunction with the local carnival. According to the *Tribune*, May, Tamako, Kiyō, Bessie, Kiku, Sachi, Yoshiko, Cherry and the two sets of Marys and Kays were “shining examples of femininity.”<sup>1</sup> Although they were “heavenly creatures,” they were also “warmly human,” and the contestants quickly developed loyal male followings.<sup>2</sup> Competition was fierce, with 3,859 individuals (approximately 45% of the total population) casting votes for their favourite.<sup>3</sup> Although Mary won the popular vote, it was “reserved, demure Kiku” who was crowned Queen by the judges.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Queens All, But Only One Will Reign,” *Denson Tribune*/デンソン時報 (*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark), May 14, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-14/ed-1/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Queens All.”

<sup>3</sup> “Spirited Rivalry Shown in Queen Race Voting,” *Denson Tribune*/デンソン時報 (*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark) May 28, 1943. The Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-21/ed-1/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Kiku Nakamichi Crowned Queen,” *Denson Tribune*/デンソン時報

This coverage might seem expected of the local Queen contests held around the country at the time, were it not for the fact that all the contestants were second-generation Japanese-Americans, and that Kiku was crowned behind the barbed wire of Jerome War Relocation Center. This seemingly paradoxical setting was not an isolated event; over the course of the wartime incarceration of Japanese-Americans, 80% of the permanent incarceration sites would hold at least one contest, and crown their own Queens.<sup>5</sup> These events were documented and endorsed by the Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA), who often participated in the selection of the winners. Although Japanese-American beauty pageants have a rich

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(*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark) May 28, 1943. The Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-21/ed-1/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Denson Tribune/デンソン時報 (Denson Jihō)*. (Denson, Ark), May 14-27, 1943. Library of Congress.; *Granada Pioneer/パイオニア (Paionia)*, May 10, 1944, March 14, 1944. Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata Asian Pacific Studies Collection. California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.; *Gila News-Dispatch/比良時報 (Hira Jihō)*, October 31-November 25, 1942, May 25-July 4 1943, Ddr-densho-141-15-master-fl687cd4bd. Densho Digital Repository.; *Manzanar Free Press/マンザナー自由新聞 (Manzanā Jiyūshinbun)*, June 30-July 7, 1942, September 4-25, 1943. The Library of Congress; (Minidoka) Assorted Pictures from the Blain Family, War Relocation Authority, and National Archives and Records Administration Collections at Densho Digital Repository.; *Poston Press Bulletin*, September 29-Oct 17, 1942. Densho Digital Repository. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.; *Rohwer Outpost/朗和時報 (Rōwā Jihō)*, February 3-28, 1943, June 10, November 18-December 6, 1944. Densho Digital Repository and the Library of Congress.; *Tanforan Totalizer*, vol. 1, no. 14 (August 8, 1942). Apsc\_05\_344\_001. Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata Asian Pacific Studies Collection. California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.; *Tulare News* Vol. I No. 19 (July 21, 1942). Tulare News Collection. Densho Digital Repository. ; *Tulean Dispatch/ツーリアンデスパッチ (Tsūrian Disupachi)*, August 21-September 9, 1942. Densho Digital Repository (Courtesy of Joe Matsuzawa), and the Library of Congress.

history before and after the Second World War (WWII), it was during this period that the Queen attained their most politicized and nationalistic, and yet also deracialized and assimilated, position within the community. To examine the Queens and Queen contests produced within the camps is to explore the complex and intricate power dynamics of gender, race, resistance, and Americanization which existed in these communities of confinement. Behind barbed wire, these Japanese Queens were both American and alien, glamorous and drab, assimilated and proud.

### Terminology

Although the research was conducted primarily in English, this paper does contain Japanese terms and phrases. Japanese words will be italicized on their first appearance and the characters provided when relevant. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. As this paper is about the Japanese-American Community, the terms utilized to demarcate groups will be the terms the Community tends to use themselves. As such, the Japanese diasporic community will be known as *Nikkei* (日系) or *Nikkeijin* (日系人).<sup>6</sup> Within the *Nikkei*, the various generations are delineated by their degree of removal from Japan. As such, the first generation who immigrated are known as *Issei* (一世), their American-born children are *Nisei* (二世), their grandchildren are *Sansei* (三世), and their great/great-great grandchildren are *Yonsei* (四世) and *Gosei* (五世) respectively. *Nisei* who were sent by their *Issei* parents to study in Japan were known as *Kibei* (帰米). Due to the time period examined, this paper will mostly deal with *Issei*, *Nisei* and *Kibei*. White Americans were alternatively described by the community as *hakujin* (白人, lit. “white people”). Unless using Japanese characters,

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<sup>6</sup> Contrasted to *Nihonjin* (日本人), or an ethnically Japanese person living in Japan.

names will be written in the Western order, with the given name followed by the family name.

The terminology of the site utilized by the WRA for the purpose of containing Nikkei has been a topic of much debate. As has been noted by historians Takashi Fujitani and Greg Robinson in their work on the Japanese-American Internment, to utilize the contemporary term of “Relocation Centers” is to obscure the violence and coercion which these locations served.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, “Concentration Camps,” although used on occasion by Roosevelt in regard to the sites, runs the risk of becoming conflated in our modern understanding with Nazi Death Camps.<sup>8</sup> As such, this paper will be deferring to Fujitani’s strategy within *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II*; referring to the locations either by their official names, or the term “camp.” The official names are not listed as an erasure of violence, but rather as means of identifying the specific internment camp referred to.<sup>9</sup> As the Nikkeijin held at these camps were caged bodies under surveillance, they will be referred to as “inmates.” The camps discussed were located in the United States, and as such I will be using American spelling for their names.

### Research Questions

It was the *Tribune*’s coverage of their Queen contest that first drew my interest to this topic. As a historian with a focus on material culture, I have always been intrigued as to how created objects can manipulate and influence the spaces they exist in, and in particular how clothing transforms the body on which it rests. As beauty pageants

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<sup>7</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), xix; Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), viii.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy*, viii.

<sup>9</sup> Fujitani, *Race For Empire*, xx.

and queen contests primarily exist through the display of objects such as crowns, capes, and clothing, which “enact glittery, feminized signposts of a position devoid of actual power,” they are a prime phenomena for an examination of material culture, and more specifically beauty culture.<sup>10</sup> The beauty Queen is given soft power in the image she projects, and in the objects which surround and enclose her. Her body proper becomes a space to be admired and desired. What did it mean then, to be crowned a Queen in a space where people were incarcerated for their ethnic bodies? Furthermore, why were these contests continued within the camps, despite wide scale shortages in resources and the materials typically required to designate a Queen?<sup>11</sup> If, as Fujitani states, the camps were spaces in which Japanese-Americans could be both contained as a danger and safely neutralized through the implementation of facsimiles of the “best features of liberal society,” then where did the Beauty Queen fit into this imagined community?<sup>12</sup> Was she a representation of a liberal American government, a figure promoted to showcase the patriotic, (and therefore useful) Nikkei body? Does her glamour erase the brutal injustice of what occurred to her community, or does it highlight it? Furthermore, and perhaps most hauntingly for me, who were these women? As a Nikkei girl, I had always searched for a depiction of beauty within bodies like mine. Who were these women that the community held up as beautiful enough to be Queens?

### Historiography

Although the Japanese-American community has long been a topic of scholarship for historians, Japanese-

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<sup>10</sup> Christine Reiko Yano, *Crowning the Nice Girl: Gender, Ethnicity, and Culture in Hawaii's Cherry Blossom Festival* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006). 14

<sup>11</sup> Valerie J. Matsumoto, *City Girls: the Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 162-3.

<sup>12</sup> Fujitani, 182.

American beauty culture and Queen contests have been less so. This is not to say that there is an absence: indeed, the writings of academics like Valerie Matsumoto, Malia McAndrew, Chiyoko King O’Rian, and Christine Yano have been crucial to this paper. Although King-O’Rian and Yano’s books on contemporary Queen contests within Japanese American communities are foundational works on the intersections of beauty, gender, race, culture, and identity in this field, both works neglect to mention any war-era contests, and tend to skip from pre-war contests directly to contests held in the aftermath of WWII.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is only McAndrew’s works that mention the existence of contests in the camps. In particular, McAndrew’s work, “Japanese American Beauty Pageants and Minstrel Shows: The Performance of Gender and Race by Nisei Youth during World War II” is the only article I was able to find explicitly centered around war-era Queen contests.<sup>14</sup> It is thus in awareness of this vacuum of information that I attempted to contribute a small amount of knowledge to the field.

### **Wartime Incarceration of Nikkeijin**

To form a history of Queen contests within the camps, one must first have an understanding of the historical events under which they operated. On December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service bombed Pearl Harbour Naval Base, located in Hawaii.<sup>15</sup> The subsequent entrance of the United States of America into WWII, coupled with rising anti-Japanese sentiment and

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<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Rian, *Pure Beauty: Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 62-64.; Yano, 23-24.

<sup>14</sup> Malia McAndrew, "Japanese American Beauty Pageants and Minstrel Shows: The Performance of Gender and Race by Nisei Youth during World War II," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 7, no. 1 (2014): 42-64. doi:10.1353/hcy.2014.0010.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, 59.

pre-existing fears of Nikkei loyalty following the severance of ties with Japan, would result in Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942.<sup>16</sup> As Robinson is clear to note, the order refrained from any explicit mention of ethnic Japanese. Rather, it gave the power for the secretary of war to create “military zones,” from which persons could be either excluded or confined.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the neutral terminology, Robinson is clear that “the government officials involved well understood that the order was designed solely to permit mass removal of Japanese Americans, irrespective of citizenship, from the West Coast.”<sup>18</sup> Executive Order 9102 later created the War Relocation Authority (WRA), responsible “...for the removal, relocation, maintenance, and supervision of persons designated under Executive Order No. 9066.”<sup>19</sup> Following their initial displacement, Nikkeijin were detained in one of fifteen temporary “assembly centers,” before being transferred to long-term “relocation centers.”<sup>20</sup> It was in this way that over 120,000 Nikkeijin were removed from their homes, two-thirds of which were American-born.<sup>21</sup>

Both the “assembly centers” and “relocation centers” were based off military modules, “built to disappear quickly and without a trace when their usefulness was exhausted.”<sup>22</sup> The tarpaper barracks and utilitarian facilities were not only poor protection against the often

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<sup>16</sup> Robinson, 92-94.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, 93.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, 93.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, 106.

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, 141.

<sup>21</sup> Emiko Hastings. 2011. “No Longer a Silent Victim of History: Repurposing the Documents of Japanese American Internment.” *Archival Science* 11 (1), 29; “Project MUSE - Japanese American Beauty Pageants and Minstrel Shows: The Performance of Gender and Race by Nisei Youth during World War II.”

<sup>22</sup> Kate Brown, “The Eclipse of History: Japanese America and a Treasure Chest of Forgetting,” *Popular Culture* 9(1): 87.

inhospitable environments, but also served to disrupt the family structure of many Nikkei families.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the substandard living conditions, the incarceration of Nikkeijin was characterized by the loss of personal property experienced en masse.<sup>24</sup> Any possessions brought by families was subject to the harsh environmental conditions of the camps. Under such circumstances, why did the community crown Queens?

### **The History of Nikkei Beauty Pageants and Queen Contests**

The transformation of women into symbolic royalty is a ritual that, according to Roberts, has its roots in “eighteenth and nineteenth century old world chivalry and fertility rituals.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Roberts traces their roots at least to the May Day Queens of Europe, who represented communal desire for a plentiful harvest season.<sup>26</sup> Specifically in America, Williams credits “the instigation of the American beauty contest” to P.T. Barnum in 1854.<sup>27</sup> Notably, this contest was deemed a failure, due to the apparent lack of reputable participants.<sup>28</sup> The fact that a later attempt, requiring women to submit pictures over live,

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<sup>23</sup> Stacey Lynn Camp. “Landscapes of Japanese American Internment.” *Historical Archaeology* 50, no. 1 (2016): 169–71.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03377183>; Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 152

<sup>24</sup> Brian Masaru Hayashi, “Six. “Taking Away The Candy”: Relocation, The Twilight Of The Japanese Empire, And Japanese American Politics, 1944–1945” in *Democratizing the Enemy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 180-206, <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1515/9781400837748.180>

<sup>25</sup> Blain Roberts. *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women : Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 108.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, *Pageants*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Heather A Williams. “Miss Homegrown: The Performance of Food, Festival, and Femininity in Local Queen Pageants” (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University), 2009. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 51.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, “Miss Homegrown,” 51.

public displays of their body, had significantly more success reveals the key expectation of modesty required of America's feminine ideal. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the first Miss America contest was held a few months after white women were granted suffrage.<sup>29</sup> As the Miss America contest grew more and more popular, contests became divided into what are known as pyramidal structures and local structures; pyramidal, as its name suggests, represent a host of beauty pageants that, should the contestant win on the lower level, is eligible for competition at a higher level.<sup>30</sup> These pyramidal structures often culminate in national or international contests, such as Miss America and Miss Universe. Local contests, on the other hand, are self-contained, and their rules and rituals are often designated by the community from which the contestants come from.<sup>31</sup> Yano notes that this leads to local contests becoming more and more specified, and as such "may adhere to more idiosyncratic criteria and insular standards of beauty" from their participants.<sup>32</sup> It is these local contests that will be the primary focus of this paper, although O'Riain and Yano have noted how post-war Nikkei Queen contests have become increasingly international affairs.<sup>33</sup>

Beauty pageants were not solely limited to the United States. Japanese beauty contests can be traced to the late Meiji Era, with the first 'official' amateur contest

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<sup>29</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Oakland: University of California Press 1999); Kimberly Hamlin, "Bathing Suits and Backlash" in: Watson E., Martin D. (eds) *There She Is, Miss America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2, 28, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403981820\\_](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403981820_); Williams, 53.

<sup>30</sup> Yano, *Crowning the Nice Girl*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Yano, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Yano, 15.

<sup>33</sup> O'Riain, "'The Amassadoress' Queen: Moving Authentically between Racial Communities in the United States and Japan," *Pure Beauty*; Yano, "Struggles Towards Reform," *Crowning the Nice Girl*.

sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune* through *Jiji Shinpō* in 1908.<sup>34</sup> The winner, Hiroko Suehiro, fit many of the Japanese beauty standards of the time, with “a round, pale face, a small mouth, and narrow eyes.”<sup>35</sup> Like the earlier American pageants, the contestant was selected from photographs, rather than exhibition of the live body.<sup>36</sup> Descriptions of Suehiro often focus on descriptions of her face; although a focus on the body as a marker of beauty still traditionally defined through her face.<sup>37</sup> Japan’s increased contact with the West during the Meiji period was also evident in changing ideas of beauty ideology. In examination of *bijin-ga* (美人画, lit. “beautiful person picture”), there is an increasing depiction of sharper features and large eyes, associated with white women.<sup>38</sup> The concept of beauty was also negotiated through clothing; Western influence and the rise in women’s education had greatly changed clothing options for middle to upper class women. The clothing, hair, and styling of female students not only challenged beauty ideals, but gender norms.<sup>39</sup> The adaptation of *hakama* (split skirt worn over kimono), *haori* (kimono jacket), and Western shoes (all objects with a masculine association), by educated women provoked considerable anxiety during a time in

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<sup>34</sup> Kyō Chō and Kyoko Iriye Selden, *The Search for the Beautiful Woman: a Cultural History of Japanese and Chinese Beauty* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 248; Laura Miller, *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2010), 21; Miya Elise Mizuta Lippit, *Aesthetic Life: Beauty and Art in Modern Japan*. 1st ed. Vol. 400. Harvard University Asia Center, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvrs8z69>., 105.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Beauty Up*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, *Beauty Up*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Chō, *The Search For The Beautiful Woman*, 247.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, 20-5.

<sup>39</sup> Rebecca Copeland, “Fashioning the Feminine: Images of the Modern Girl Student in Meiji Japan,” *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 30/1 (2006), University of Hawai'i Press on behalf of International Institute of Gender and Media, 20-25.

which women's bodies were beginning to become criteria for beauty. Conversely, the adaptation of corsets and bustles by Japanese elite women in spaces like the *Romeikan* created bodies that appeared to align with Western female ideals.<sup>40</sup> As Copeland is clear to note,



Fig. 1: Hiroko Suehiro, 1908.  
Public Domain.

“fashion at the time was hardly inconsequential. Clothing was very much a topic of conversation among a variety of people—from government officials to geisha.”<sup>41</sup> At the same time as many Issei were arriving in America, beauty and dress were becoming key symbols of societal structure.

The importance of appearance was not lost following the Issei's arrival to America. As

Sueyoshi argues, the adoption of Western clothing was viewed as an essential step for Issei wishing to integrate themselves into 19th century San Francisco. In comparing the actions of the community to contemporary drag performers, Sueyoshi argues that Nikkeijin attempted to use American standards of beauty and dress as a way of

<sup>40</sup> The success of this endeavor has been up to debate, see: Elizabeth Kramer, “‘Not So Japan-Easy’: The British Reception of Japanese Dress in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Textile History* 44, no. 1 (May 1, 2013): 3–24. doi:10.1179/0040496913Z.00000000017.

<sup>41</sup> Copeland “Fashioning the Feminine,” 26.

performing a “mindful masquerade,” offering an alternative, assimilable identity to white America.<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that Japanese women wanted to look like fashionable white women: Sueyoshi notes that they often were photographed in conservative Victorian gowns that had since gone out of style. Rather, “dressing ‘American’ more likely meant capturing an imagined, obviously occidental aesthetic rather than keeping up with the most recent...styles.”<sup>43</sup> For the Nikkei community, clothing and beauty culture offer the potential to negotiate the appearance of their visually othered bodies, with varying degrees of success.<sup>44</sup>

It is from these intersections of power, assimilation, gender and transformation in which the first Japanese-American beauty contest arose. Crowning Alice Wantanabe in 1935, the “Nisei Queen” contest was part of the larger Nisei Week Festival, started by Japanese businesses in Los Angeles.<sup>45</sup> Although created with both the intent of stimulating local business and improving public relations between Nikkeijin and white America, Kurashige argues that it must also be viewed as a key ground for the community to create a sense of identity, an “open text for members of the second generation to understand themselves and their role as the progeny of a historic admixture of Japanese and American civilizations.”<sup>46</sup> Nisei women were key to the success of Nisei week: although often excluded from any leadership roles, they were the visible

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<sup>42</sup> Amy Sueyoshi, “Mindful Masquerades: Que(e)rying Japanese Immigrant Dress in Turn-of-the-Century San Francisco,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 26, No. 3 (2005): 70, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137374>.

<sup>43</sup> Sueyoshi, “Mindful Masquerades,” 81.

<sup>44</sup> Sueyoshi, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Gwen Muranaka, “Nisei Week History: A Love Letter to Little Tokyo,” <https://niseiweek.org/about/#legac>.

<sup>46</sup> Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002) 41.

face of the community.<sup>47</sup> Charlie Chaplan, attending the first Nisei Week in 1934, praised the organizers for many things, but “especially its ‘beautiful Japanese girls.’”<sup>48</sup> King-O’Riain is clear to note that the Nisei Queen contest was a form of race-working for the community, standardizing white American beauty “with a Japanese-American twist.” Intended to publicly appear as a symbol of the community, the Nisei Queen was hoped, through her beauty, dress, and manner, to integrate Nikkeijin as loyal Americans in the eyes of the white festival goers.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the Queen contest was also intended to be a representative of the Japanese community, and thus should retain some Japanese elements. As the *Rafu Shimpo* wrote in 1938, the Nisei Queen must have: “the quiet charm of the Japanese wom[a]n with the more lively personality of the American girl...she must be able to wear a kimono and walk with zori [slippers] on as well as look radiant in a white evening gown.”<sup>50</sup> Although the Queen and her Court were crowned in a Western style Ball, she would be introduced to the public in a *furisode* (a long sleeved *kimono* for unmarried women), riding in an American made car, with the thoroughly untraditional styling of jewelry and tiara.<sup>51</sup> Most of her interactions throughout the week would be conducted in kimono, despite its impracticality and discomfort. Indeed, Matsumoto notes how Nisei women in kimono became key intermediaries in formal Japanese-American relations, expected to promote friendship through their American mannerisms and presentation of an exotic, Japanese form of beauty.<sup>52</sup> From 1936-1941, Alice Wantanabe, Renko Oyama, Clara Suski, Margaret

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<sup>47</sup> Matsumoto, *City Girls*, 60.

<sup>48</sup> Kurashige, *Japanese-American Celebration and Conflict*, 42.

<sup>49</sup> King-O’Riain, *Pure Beauty*, 61.

<sup>50</sup> Kirashige, 164.

<sup>51</sup> Queen and Court Program, “Past Queens and Courts”. Nisei Week Japanese Festival, <https://niseiweek.org/queen-court/#past-courts>.

<sup>52</sup> Matsumoto, 59.

Nishikawa, Shizue Narahara, Shizue Kobayashi, and Reiko Inouye would ‘walk Japanese’, and then ‘walk American’ on the tightrope of race and nationality for their community.<sup>53</sup>

### **Beauty Pageants in the Time of Internment**

Writing on the history of Nikkei Queen contests, King-O’Riain simply states that; “...pageants were discontinued during World War II internment and started up again shortly after the end of the war....”<sup>54</sup> Although it is true that the official pre-war pageants were inactive during WWII, this is not to state that Queen contests ceased for the Nikkeijin. As the *Evacuazette* quipped, “...a number of assembly or relocation centres, from Puyallup to Poston, have held or are going to hold Queen contests.”<sup>55</sup> Of the fifteen “assembly centers” I was able to find Queen contests occurring in two of them. In the ten “relocation centers,” the number was significantly higher, with eight of the camps having Queen contests.<sup>56</sup> Statistically speaking,

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<sup>53</sup> Muranaka, “Nisei Week History”; King-O’Riain, 63.

<sup>54</sup> King-O’Riain, 63

<sup>55</sup> “Blue Ribbon,” *Evacuazette* (North Portland, OR), July 17, 1942. Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata Asian Pacific Studies Collection, California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.

<sup>56</sup> *The Denson Tribune/デンソン時報 (Denson Jihō)*. (Denson, Ark), May 14-27, 1943. Library of Congress.; *Granada Pioneer/パイオニア (Paionia)*, May 10, 1944, March 14, 1944. Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata Asian Pacific Studies Collection. California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.; *Gila News-Dispatch/比良時報 (Hira Jihō)*, October 31-November 25, 1942, May 25-July 4 1943, Ddr-densho-141-15-master-fl687cd4bd. Densho Digital Repository.; *Manzanar Free Press/マンザナー自由新聞 (Manzanā Jiyūshinbun)*, June 30-July 7, 1942, September 4-25, 1943. The Library of Congress. ; (Minidoka) Assorted Pictures from the Blain Family, War Relocation Authority, and National Archives and Records Administration Collections at Densho Digital Repository.; *Poston Press Bulletin*, September 29-Oct 17, 1942. Densho Digital Repository. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.; *Rohwer Outpost/朗和時報*

this means that 7.5% of temporary camps, and 80% of long-term camps participated in some sort of beauty contest during the internment. Although the number from the temporary camps might seem significantly smaller than that of the long-term camps, it is notable for the fact that, despite the significantly shorter duration and derogatory conditions within these camps, there were still Queens being crowned. Combining the numbers, there appears to have been more Nikkei Queens crowned during the internment than in the prewar years. Why then, is there such little information on these Queens?

### Methodology

With the general lack of literary sources, most of my research was spent within primary source material. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult, and in some cases impossible, to access certain resources, the digitization of others allowed me to continue my research. I am particularly indebted to DENSHO, The Library of Congress, and the California State University Japanese American Digitization Project, whose large archives of camp newspapers were integral to this paper. Although community newspapers such as the *Rafu Shimpō* had been shut down during the internment, most long-term camps (and some temporary ones) circulated a newspaper or bulletin.<sup>57</sup> Written primarily by Nisei, these newspapers

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(*Rōwā Jihō*), February 3-28, 1943, June 10, November 18-December 6, 1944. Densho Digital Repository and the Library of Congress.; *Tanforan Totalizer*, vol. 1, no. 14 (August 8, 1942). Apsc\_05\_344\_001. Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata Asian Pacific Studies Collection. California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.; *Tulare News* Vol. I No. 19 (July 21, 1942). Tulare News Collection. Densho Digital Repository.; *Tulean Dispatch/ ツーリアン デスパッチ (Tsūrian Disupachi)*, August 21-September 9, 1942. Densho Digital Repository (Courtesy of Joe Matsuzawa), and the Library of Congress.

<sup>57</sup> Takeya Mizuno, "Censorship in a Different Name: Press 'Supervision' in Wartime Japanese American Camps 1942-1943,"

were mainly in English. Some featured a Japanese language section at the back, mostly for Issei and Kibei.<sup>58</sup> It is through these newspapers that most of the information on the Queen contests, contestants, and winners can be found. Although they are invaluable, they must not be approached uncritically, and the censorship involved in these newspapers' publication will become a topic of further discussion later in this paper. A similar mindset must be used on examination of pictures of the Queens and contests; many of the pictures available were taken by photographers working in conjunction with the WRA. This is not to discount the value of the information within these objects; rather to remember that photographs can never be fully separated from the photographers who took them.<sup>59</sup>

Another approach I took with this research was to examine the material culture within the photographs. Families were only allowed to pack a small amount of objects, and the clothing packed was often inappropriate for the extreme environments they found themselves in. Clothing could be accessed from the camp administration when available, or else from mail-order catalogues.<sup>60</sup> Most of the clothing provided was utilitarian, and many Nisei bemoaned the unfashionable options. Monica Sone, imprisoned at Minidoka, remembers her and her sister's horror upon viewing the woolen pea coats allotted to her family, declaring that they "...would rather freeze than lose our femininity."<sup>61</sup> It was only when a man froze to death

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*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (2011): 121–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769901108800107>.

<sup>58</sup> Mizuno, "Censorship."

<sup>59</sup> Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Negative-Positive Truths," *Representations* 113 (2011): 33.

<sup>60</sup> Dana Ogo Shew. "Feminine Identity Confined: The Archaeology of Japanese Women at Amache, a WWII Internment Camp." MA diss., (University of Denver), 2010. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 40.

<sup>61</sup> Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 196.

during a snowstorm that they relinquished their slacks and coats from back home, concluding “it was much better to look like headless mariners than to become a block of ice and chip away slowly into nothing.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, as Shew argues, clothing and fashion remained ways in which women could “construct... their individual feminine identities.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Beauty Pageants as Oppression?**

As local pageants with their own rules and criteria, the pageants held at the camps represent a specific negotiation between the caged communities holding the pageants, and the forces overseeing them. In this way, each Queen contest produced their own specific idea of a “feminine ideal,” as defined by the environment in which they were situated.<sup>64</sup> In the case of many of these camps, the Queen contests became intricately linked to the performance of American identity. This was explicitly evident in the Jerome Contest, where the *Denson Tribune* provided profiles of the contestants which heavily emphasized their American qualities. Mary Aoto had “a Coca Cola smile,” Kiyō Hiwano was a “triple V girl (vim, vigor, and vitality),” and Sachiye Uyemaru was nicknamed “Sylphlike Sachi.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Mary Ikeguchi, Bessie Nakashima, and Cherry Yoshimura had previously served as Vargettes, a troupe of twelve girls who were the stars of a two day show held for men in the armed forces a few months prior. Although the Vargettes performed a number of dance routines and pageants, the “patriotic grand finale” of the night was when Bessie Nakashima, as Lady Liberty, “paraded around the dance

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<sup>62</sup> Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 197.

<sup>63</sup> Shew, “Feminine Identity Confined,” 147.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, “Miss Homegrown”, ii.

<sup>65</sup> “More on Center Contest Candidates,” *Denson Tribune*/デンソン時報 (*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark), May 14, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-14/ed-1/>.

floor waving the American flag, followed by the Vargrettes carrying red, white, and blue streamers."<sup>66</sup>

Not only were these girls patriotic Americans, but they also lacked Japanese traits: Georgia Sugimoto, the *Tribune* is clear to note, "is not afflicted with a physical distortion in which too many nisei women are victims of-- 'daikon ashi.'"<sup>67</sup> *Daikon ashi* (lit. white radish legs), refers to the stocky, short legs common in Japanese women.<sup>68</sup> Daikon ashi were compared negatively in comparison to the long, slender legs found on images of American pinup girls.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in his glossary on Nikkei language, Suzuki defines daikon ashi as the "shapeless legs of a girl."<sup>70</sup> If, as Susan Bordo argued, bodies are a "cultural plastic" from which identity may be molded, then the Americanized body of the Nisei girl was a medium through which hakujin views of Nikkeijin could be negotiated with the community.<sup>71</sup> This was especially important during WWII, as McAndrews argues. Under "total war" every aspect of a nation's citizens became mobilized to bolster the nation's global power. In this time, the bodies of white American

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<sup>66</sup>"Vargrettes Featured In Two-Night Stand: Patriotic Grand Finale Climaxes Weekend Show," *Denson Tribune/デンソン時報 (Denson Jihō)*. (Denson, Ark), May 2, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-02/ed-1/>.

<sup>67</sup>"Mystery Girl Enters The Race," *Denson Tribune/デンソン時報 (Denson Jihō)*. (Denson, Ark), May 18, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-18/ed-1/>.

<sup>68</sup>Kayoko Yokoyama, "The Double Binds of Our Bodies: Multiculturally-Informed Feminist Therapy Considerations for Body Image and Eating Disorders Among Asian American Women," *Women & Therapy* 30, no. 3-4 (2007): 177-92. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v30n03\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1300/J015v30n03_13). 179.

<sup>69</sup>Yokoyama, "The Double Binds," 179.

<sup>70</sup>Peter T.Suzuki, "The Ethnolinguistics of Japanese Americans in the Wartime Camps." *Anthropological Linguistics* 18, no. 9 (1976): 416-27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30027590>.

<sup>71</sup>Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).



Fig. 2: Queen contest voting signs at Tule Lake. Courtesy UC Berkley, via the Online Archive of California  
<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2h4nb0sz/?or der=2&brand=oac4>

women became symbols, not only of American superiority over the grotesque, chartered bodies of their enemies, but indeed provided a justification for their troops, with pinup girls providing morale boosters.<sup>72</sup> In this way, the display of female bodies and beauty culture became strongly

linked to patriotism.

This is highly reminiscent of Foucault's theories of biopower. In *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II*, Fujitani directly links the total war regime with Americanization efforts of Nikkei bodies, arguing that Nikkeijin incarcerated in camps became viewed as worthy of "life, education, health, and even to some degree happiness," because their bodies became useful to "the regime's survival, prosperity,

<sup>72</sup> Jennifer Malia McAndrew. "All-American Beauty: The Experiences of African American, European American, and Japanese American Women with Beauty Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States." Phd diss. University of Maryland (2008) ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

and even victory in war.”<sup>73</sup> In a manner not dissimilar to the Nisei Week Queens, the camp Queens could become visible representatives of American assimilation.

The image of the Queen as a representative of the Nikkei community towards the white-normative structure is especially apparent in the coronation of the Queens. In nearly every contest examined during this research, the Queens were crowned by heads of the bureaucratic administration of the camp, all of whom were middle-aged white men.<sup>74</sup> These men often had the privilege of escorting the queen and having the first dance with her. Furthermore, in the case of Jerome, Rohwer, Poston, and Manzanar, members of the WRA administration were part of the judging committee.<sup>75</sup> The judging committee sometimes

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<sup>73</sup> Fujitani, 26.

<sup>74</sup> Kiku Nakamichi Crowned Queen”; ““Meet Her Majesty, Queen Nellie” *Poston Press Bulletin* Vol. V No. 11 (Poston, Arizona) October 17, 1942, via DENSHO; “Queen Coronations Tonight: Royal Ceremony Highlights Ball” *Gila News-Dispatch/比良時報 (Hira Jihō)*, November 25, 1942.; “Miss Shegeko Nakano Chosen Center Queen” *Rohwer Outpost/朗和時報 (Rōwā Jihō)*, February 28, 1942; “Meet Her Majesty, Queen Nellie”. *Poston Press Bulletin*, October 17, 1942.; “Folk Festival”, *The Tanforan Totalizer*; “Tamaki Elected Queen”, *Tulean Dispatch/ツーリアン デスパッチ (Tsūrian Disupachi)*, September 1942; “Dave Rogers, after crowning Hido [Hideko] Maeyama from Camp #2 Harvest Festival Queen, dances with her. ; Photographer: Stewart, Francis ; Rivers, Arizona.” November 26, ?, WRA no. D-683, War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, UC Berkeley; “Queen of Hunt High School”, May 7, 1943. National Archives and Records Administration Collection.; “Picnics, Games, Dances, Beauty Contest Feature Fourth of July” *Manzanar Free Press/マンザナー自由新聞 (Manzanā Jiyūshinbun)* (Manzanar, Calif.), July 7, 1942, via DENSHO

<sup>75</sup> “Kiku Nakamichi Crowned Queen”; “Meet Her Majesty, Queen Nellie” *Poston Press Bulletin* Vol. V No. 11 (Poston, Arizona) October 17, 1942, via DENSHO; “Picnics, Games, Dances, Beauty Contest Feature Fourth of July” *Manzanar Free Press/マンザナー自由新聞 (Manzanā Jiyūshinbun)* (Manzanar, Calif.), July 7, 1942, via DENSHO.

had the final say in selection of the Queen, as was the case in Jerome, where Mary Ikeguchi won the popular vote, but Kiku Nakamichi won the contest.<sup>76</sup> Even the ostensibly democratic campaigns run by Nisei boys to select their representative Queen could be overturned by the judges. In Francis Stewart's photographs of the Tule Lake Coronation, a crowd of mostly boys and young men watch as the Project Director, Elmer Shirrell, escorts Shizuka "Shiz" Tamaki to the coronation stage.<sup>77</sup> At Gila River, Stewart photographed Dave Rogers dancing with Hideko "Hido" Maeyama following her coronation (Fig. 3). Rogers faces the camera, with Maeyama's permed hair and crown her most notable features. It is clear that, despite this being Maeyama's coronation, Rogers is the centerpoint of the photograph.<sup>78</sup> In the aftermath of the Jerome Queen Contest, Roy Kawamoto noted in the *Tribune* that it would have made more sense for a former Nisei Queen to crown Nakamichi, rather than the Project Director. Indeed, Renko Abe (née Oyama) the Nisei Week Queen in 1937, was living in block 7.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the crowning of the Camp Queens remained a predominantly white male affair.

It was clear that the Queen was meant to be a symbol, but, as the *Tribune* dryly remarked at the beginning of their contest, "we wonder if it will really be a

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<sup>76</sup> "Kiku Nakamichi Crowned Queen."

<sup>77</sup> "A crowd watches the Labor Day queen go by at the coronation ceremony which was part of the Labor Day celebration at this relocation center. Note the wide eyes and open mouths of the interested spectators. ; Photographer: Stewart, Francis ; Newell, C" September 7, 1942. WRA no. D-283, War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, UC Berkeley.

<sup>78</sup> "Dave Rogers, after crowning Hido [Hideko] Maeyama."

<sup>79</sup> Roy Kuwamoto, "Potpourri," *Denson Tribune*/デenson時報 (*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark), June 1, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-06-01/ed-1/>.



Fig. 3: Hido Maeyama dances with Dave Rogers at her coronation. Courtesy UC Berkeley via the Online Archive of California.

representative vote.”<sup>80</sup> Of key interest in determining the intent of the contests lay in delineating their intended demographics. Of the copious amounts of articles written about the Queen Contests throughout the Camps, few were in Japanese. When they did exist, they normally feature basic information, under the headline “*joō wa dare??*” (女王は誰?, who is the Queen?).<sup>81</sup> Although some of the articles feature information about the contestants, including current popularity rankings, they tend to lack information on how to actually vote and participate in the contest,

<sup>80</sup> Paul Yokoto, “At Random,” *Denson Tribune/デンソン時報* (*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark), May 14, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-14/ed-1/>.

<sup>81</sup> “Today’s Feature: Who will be the Queen?” (“今日の呼物: 女王は誰??”/ *Tōjitsu no yobimono: Joō wa dare??*”) *The Denson Tribune/デンソン時報* (*Denson Jihō*). (Denson, Ark), May 18, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-18/ed-1/>.

unlike the English articles.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the coronations are treated with considerably less fanfare in Japanese, with often a few sentences devoted to naming the queen and where she was crowned.<sup>83</sup> Although this can be attributed to the smaller space allocated to the Japanese language portions of Camp magazines, it can also be interpreted as its main readership of Issei and Kibei being less involved in the contests, in comparison to the English speaking Nisei. In this sense, the Queen contests can be viewed as a thoroughly American affair.

Photographs and drawings of the Queens also offer an interpretation of the Queen contests as a vehicle for Americanizing the Nikkei body. As Shew has shown, presentations of beauty was a way for women in Camps to assert agency over how they would be viewed.<sup>84</sup> While some women choose to resist the injustice of incarceration through embracing Japanese beauty ideals and practises, others attempt to prove their citizenship through emulating a white, middle class ideal.<sup>85</sup> These attitudes were especially marked between generations: whereas Issei women tended to wear more simple waved hairstyles and avoid makeup, Nisei girls placed great importance in the

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<sup>82</sup> “Today’s Feature: Who will be the Queen?” (“當日の呼物: 女王は誰??”) / *Tōjitsu no yobimono: Joō wa dare??*); “Queen Competition Becomes White-Hot” (“白熱化する女王 競争”) / *Hakunetsu-ka seru joō kyōsō*) *Rohwer Outpost/朗和時報 (Rōwā Jihō)* (McGehee, Arkansas), December 17, 1943. Donald Teruo Hata and Nadine Ishitani Hata Asian Pacific Studies Collection, California State University Japanese American Digitization Project

<sup>83</sup> “Tomorrow will be Grand!! Miss Kiku Nakamichi is the Queen!!” (“今明日盛大に!! 女王は中道きく嬢”) *Ima ashita seidai ni!! Joō wa Nakamichi Kiku jō!!*). *Denson Tribune/デンソン時報 (Denson Jihō)*. (Denson, Ark), May 28, 1943. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn82016475/1943-05-28/ed-1/>.

<sup>84</sup> Shew, “Feminine Identity Confined,” 55.

<sup>85</sup> Shew, 55.

voluminous perms and makeup, endorsed by the nation as a patriotic gesture.<sup>86</sup>



Fig 4. Shiz Tamaki as a Queen Candidate (left), at her coronation (centre), and announced as Queen (right). Courtesy the Library of Congress and UC Berkeley via the Online Archive of California, 4a:

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn84025954/1942-09-05/ed-1/?sp=3&r=->

When viewing photographs of the queens, they appear to embody the white beauty ideals promoted throughout the country. In some cases, illustrated depictions appear to further present them as representatives of white normative beauty: when Shiz Tamaki was crowned Labour Day Queen at Tule Lake, the *Tulean Dispatch*'s illustration made her features significantly more prominent, compared to her previous caricature and photographs of the coronation (Fig. 4). In the drawing, her chin, nose, cheekbones and eyebrows are sharply defined, in keeping with white standards of beauty. Although her pose in both caricatures from the *Dispatch* are identical, "Queen Shiz, the first" appears to be significantly more glamorous and American than Shiz Tamaki. Perhaps even more striking is the illustration that the *Rohwer Outpost* paired with their article on the coronation ball; larger than life, and facing away from the camp barracks, the Queen's prominent brow bone, sharp nose, and light coloured hair

<sup>86</sup> Shew, 144.

are significantly more in line with white features than Japanese (Fig. 5). This image was subsequently reprinted in *Lil' Daniel: One Year in A Relocation Center*, a commemorative booklet created by former inmates in 1989, describing the contest as “one of the social highlights of the year.”<sup>87</sup> Being unable to locate a picture of the Queen, Shigeko Nakano, I am unable to say how true to life the illustration was, nor if her coronation outfit matched the evening gown the image wore.<sup>88</sup>

In her pivotal work on performance and memory at Manzanar, Colborn-Roxworthy examines the clear intent of

the government to use community activities as a vehicle for positive press relations. In publicizing the “recreational and aesthetic wonders” viewed at the camp, the dominant narrative could “overshadow and otherwise distort the injustice taking place at Manzanar.”<sup>89</sup> Beauty



Fig. 5: Image of the Queen, as drawn in the Rohwer Outpost. Courtesy Library of Congress, via DENSHO. <https://cdm16855.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16855coll4>.

<sup>87</sup> George Akimoto, “Lil Dan'l: one year in a relocation center” *Rohwer Outpost* (McGehee, Arkansas), August 1989. ike\_02\_04\_001. Henry Y. Ikemoto Collection, California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.

<sup>88</sup> In some cases, the Queen and court received evening gowns as part of their prize: “Queen Contest”, *Poston City News* (Colorado River, Arizona), September 29, 1942. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

<sup>89</sup> Emily Colborn-Roxworthy, ““Manzanar, the Eyes of the World Are upon You,”” *The Spectacle of Japanese American Trauma*, 2008, pp. 120-147, <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824832209.003.0005>, 192.

pageants were included by Colborn-Roxworthy as part of the “unmistakably American” performances undertaken at Manzanar.<sup>90</sup> These performances were crucial not only in providing a public image of America’s internment camps as an antithesis of Nazi death camps, but in refashioning the image of the camps to appear “as replicas of liberal democratic societies.”<sup>91</sup> As Fujitani has traced in his examinations of Nisei soldiers, the utilization of Nisei bodies as part of the national war machine relied on a delicate balance of delineating which Nikkei bodies were “Japanese” and which were “American.”<sup>92</sup> Assimilation must therefore exist outside of the boundaries of “vulgar” racism: instead biological race, culture, religion, political ideology, and material objects would be viewed as “measure[s] of assimilability into the national community.”<sup>93</sup> In maintaining the American elements of the pre-war contests (coronation balls, interactions with powerful white men) whilst discontinuing the Japanese (kimono, *odori* performances), the Queen had stepped off the tightrope her prewar counterpoint had walked. She was no longer representative of both cultures, but rather a Japanese body who “walked American”; patriotic, glamorous, and happy.<sup>94</sup>

### **Beauty Pageants as Resistance?**

In the past few years, there has been an increasing interest in the artwork and material culture created by inmates of the various Camps.<sup>95</sup> In stark contrast to

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<sup>90</sup> Colborn-Roxworthy, “Manzanar”, 197.

<sup>91</sup> Colborn-Roxworthy, 193; Fujitani, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Fujitani, 100.

<sup>93</sup> Fujitani, 128.

<sup>94</sup> King O’Riain, 63.

<sup>95</sup> Jane E. Dusselier, “Artful Identifications: Crafting Survival in Japanese-American Concentration Camps,” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2005); Delphine Hirasuna and Kit Hinrichs, *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment*

previous work, which tended to attribute artist output to an increase in leisure time and a focus on beauty as an obstruction of injustice, recent works by Dusslier and Hirasuna argue that the beauty created by incarcerated Nikkeijin can be viewed as resistance.<sup>96</sup> In the words of Dusslier, "...art aided internees in repositioning or relocating themselves as active agents, attaining visibilities and voices that incorporated heterogeneity and resisted exploitive racialization."<sup>97</sup> The same argument may be applied to Queen contests.

Many women in the camps attempted to preserve a sense of normalcy where possible, in an increasingly disrupted world.<sup>98</sup> For Nisei girls, Matsumoto has noted that community activities were a key part of this endeavor, as girl's clubs had been a key aspect of the urban Nisei girl's pre-war social life in major communities like Los Angeles.<sup>99</sup> This is not to say that the Queen contests were a replication of Nisei girl's leadership: as is the case with the prewar pageants, the committees in charge of the contests appear to have been mostly male.<sup>100</sup> Rather, one of the

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*Camps, 1942-1946* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Dusslier, "Artful Identifications", 2.

<sup>97</sup> Dusslieler, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Nicole Louise Branton, "Drawing the Line: Places of Power in the Japanese-American Internment Landscape," Phd. diss., University of Arizona (2004); Matsumoto, 159-62.; Williams, 19.

<sup>99</sup> For further information see Matsumoto, "The Social World of the Urban Nisei," and "Nisei Women's Roles in Family and Community during World War II" in *Nisei Girls*.

<sup>100</sup> Matsumoto, 60; "Queen Contest Begins Monday," *Gila News-Dispatch/比良時報 (Hira Jihō)* October 31, 1942.; "Race for Popularity Queen Gets Under Way", *Rohwer Outpost/朗和時報 (Rōwā Jihō)*, February 3, 1943; "Festival King and Queen Contest Starts Next Week" RO, June 10 1944; "Asano Kasai Crowned Queen at JR-SR Prom." *Granada Pioneer/パイオニア (Paionia)*, May 10, 1944; "Lucy Nakano Reigns as '45 Annual Queen", *Granada Pioneer/パイオニア (Paionia)*, March 14, 1945; "'Miss Poston' To Be Chosen by Residents; Huge Campaign Planned" Poston Press Bulletin Sept 29, 1942.

manners in which Nisei girls created “spaces of resistance” was in beauty culture, of which Queen contests played an important part. In her work on resistance within Camps, Branton draws heavily on material culture, noting that examination of material objects can allow the researcher to move beyond the strict dichotomies of assimilation and cultural assertion, and rather examine how cultural identity can continue to exist under a climate of domination. This approach “emphasizes boundary maintenance and the use of material culture as signals of belonging.”<sup>101</sup>

Indeed, beauty objects and beauty culture was one of the key categories examined by Shew in her research on archeology at Amanche. Deciding one’s appearance was an individual choice that could be made about identity, during a time when the very appearance of Nisei girl’s bodies was

political. Bottles of nail polish, tubes of lipstick, and hair barrettes uncovered at Amanche represent a clear desire from some women in the camp to follow national beauty trends.<sup>102</sup> Of particular importance was hair: permanent “perms” were extremely popular among Nisei girls at the Camps, despite the upkeep



Fig. 6: Tule Lake Nisei Fashion, as designed by Martha Mizuguchi for the *Tulean Dispatch*, 1942. Courtesy the Library of Congress.  
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn85040043/1942-08-01/ed-1/?sp=6&r=0.111,0.067,1.11,0.575,0>

<sup>101</sup> Branton, “Drawing the Line,” 95.

<sup>102</sup> Shew, 137.

and maintenance required. In addition to the beauty salons located at many camps, Shew's work at Amanche uncovered metal rollers which could be used either in maintenance or a home-permanent.<sup>103</sup> In a temporary camp, Sumi Sone continued to curl her hair at night, despite the complaints of the neighbors, who could view her through the partitions.<sup>104</sup> In the continued attempts to engage in beauty culture, Shew argues that; "women

were able to exercise agency through the consumer choices they made when purchasing from these catalogues. The products that women choose to buy and use can be directly related to their attempts to create and express their identities."<sup>105</sup>

If the public image of the pre-war Nisei girl had been a predominantly exotic one dressed in kimono, Queens like Shiz Tamaki, with her permed hair, dark painted nails, and lipstick, could be arguably more in line with the "modern American femininity Nisei women sought to claim."<sup>106</sup> Although to promote the Nisei body as one that coincided with American beauty norms could be viewed as a means of assimilation into the racial hierarchy of the nation, it can also be seen as a means of resisting the predominant narrative of the Japanese body as unattractive and bestial, as seen in propaganda.<sup>107</sup> In this manner, the Queen contest created spaces in which Japanese bodies could too be considered beautiful and be celebrated.

The Queen contests, as with other forms of performance in the Camps, became important sites for the negotiation of community identity. As a program targeted predominantly at Nisei, the Queen contests are often grouped by researchers into the "American" performances that took place, compared to "Japanese" performances such

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<sup>103</sup> McAndrews, 130; Shew 143.

<sup>104</sup> Sone, 176.

<sup>105</sup> Shew, 135.

<sup>106</sup> Matsumoto, 50.

<sup>107</sup> McAndrews, 104

as *odori* (traditional dance), *go* (a Japanese board game), and *sumo* (wrestling). At the same time, the Queen contests derived from the Nisei Week Queens, and as such represented a distinctly Nikkei connection. As had been the case during Nisei Week, the Queens often were symbols of a greater discussion on how the communities they came from wished to be viewed by the white public. Within my research, I noticed a correlation between camp newspapers with the greatest coverage of Queen Contests and camps with overt acts of resistance; Tule Lake, Manzanar, and Poston all had documented instances of mass resistance against the WRA administration, and Jerome had the highest rate of negative or qualified answers to question 28 on the loyalty questionnaire.<sup>108</sup> Rohwer and Jerome also had the lowest rate of Nisei enlistment, at 2.4%.<sup>109</sup> This correlation becomes particularly interesting in regard to West and Colburn-Roxworthy's work on performance in the camps. To West, camp performances (including Queen contests) are useful as a sort of auto-ethnography, as "the type and frequency...charted the escalating tensions within the camps."<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the copious amounts of coverage the contests received (especially in comparison to Japanese activities), has been linked by Colburn-

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<sup>108</sup> Question 28 asked participants if they would "swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attacks by foreign and domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or disobedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization," which prompted great concerns on the nature of citizenship. People who answered 'no' to questions 27 and 28 were known as "no-no boys." This colloquial term gained international preeminence following the 1957 publication of John Okada's novel *No-No Boy*; please see Brian Niiya, "Jerome" *Densho Encyclopedia*, October 16, 2020, DENSHO. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Jerome>; Robinson, 164.

<sup>109</sup> Niiya, "Jerome."

<sup>110</sup> Ron West, "Captive Audience: Theatre and Performance in the Japanese American Internment Camps," *New England Theatre Journal*; 2006: 17, Performing Arts Periodicals Database, 81.

Roxworthy with strategies taken by the *Manzanar Free Press* to create a “spectacle-archive,” and thus assert some control over their public image, in resistance to the “spectacularization” performed by the WRA and outside media.<sup>111</sup> Although the Camp newspapers were subjected to both overt and covert censorship, to dismiss them as sources of information would be to deny any agency the writers may have exerted, and cast Nikkeijin yet again as accepting victims.<sup>112</sup> Rather, in documenting their own images of “American” performances, internees could show “artificial arrangements of an internment camp pretending to be a tourist destination,” a poor imitation of liberal American society.<sup>113</sup>

### Queens and Identities

Before I began research for this paper, I had a brief conversation with Fujitani in regards to Foucauldian power dynamics within the American Camps. As an aside, he mentioned seeing an image of a beauty Queen in Manzanar during his research, but had decided not to include it in his book, *Race for Empire*. In a series of emails, he generously provided further clarification on his reasonings. The image of Margie Midori Shimizu is a famous one; many of the articles cited in this paper have mentioned it. To Fujitani, the image invoked “sadness and pain,” Shimizu’s cardboard tiara a reminder that “that life in the camp could only be a pathetic copy of life outside.”<sup>114</sup> At the same time, there was also the possibility that Shimizu had joined the competition as “one of the events that could bring joy out of a sad situation.”<sup>115</sup> Crucially, although the

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<sup>111</sup> Colburn-Roxworthy, 200-3.

<sup>112</sup> Colburn-Roxworthy, 200-3.

<sup>113</sup> Colburn-Roxworthy, 202; Fujitani, 82.

<sup>114</sup> Takashi Fujitani (author, *Race For Empire*; Dr. David Chu Professor in Asia-Pacific Studies at the University of Toronto) in discussion with Bailey Irene Midori Hoy, April 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Fujitani, discussion.

photograph is public record, Fujitani could find no evidence that Shimizu had consented to the photograph being taken or distributed.<sup>116</sup>

This lack of information is a crucial theme I have found within my research on these Queens. In the photographs taken by the WRA, the name of the Queen is rarely mentioned, although the identity of the white male administrative figure is always explained in detail. In order to identify Queens I was required to cross reference dates, festivals, and WRA employee names with the coverage in camps newspapers. Furthermore, despite the rich amount of oral history available for my use, I was unable to find any first hand accounts by any Queens, or any further information on their identities and lives beyond their participation in these contests. A particularly poignant reminder of all the information that is unknown to me was found in two objects related to Kiku Nakamichi, Jerome's Queen. In a photograph of her coronation, taken by Atsushi "Art" Ishida, Nakamichi can be seen with Ikeguchi and Nakashima, all three wearing dark day dresses (Fig. 6). Assistant Project Director William O. Melton stands over Nakamichi, having awarded all three women with commemorative wooden plaques.<sup>117</sup> On the surface, this image would not seem different from the photographs taken by the WRA at Tule Lake or Gila River. Yet, the back of the photograph tells a different story: in black ink, Ishida labeled the photograph "May 27 1943 at Hosptol [sic] Jerome R.C. Queen."<sup>118</sup> Under this caption, Ishida, a Kibei, identified the women as "池口 マリー", "中道 菊" and "中島 ベシー", the Japanese transliteration of their names.<sup>119</sup> Ikeguchi and Nakashima's names are consistent with their

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<sup>116</sup> Fujitani, discussion.

<sup>117</sup> Atsushi Art Ishida, Photograph of "Jerome R. C. Queen", May 13, 1944. Ats\_03\_071\_001. Atsushi Art Ishida Collection, California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.

<sup>118</sup> Ishida, "Jerome R.C. Queen."

<sup>119</sup> Ishida, "Jerome R.C. Queen."

spelling in the Japanese coverage of the contest, whilst Nakamichi's first name has been written using the kanji for chrysanthemum. Although it is unknown whether that was the proper kanji for her name (or indeed, if Nakamichi had a kanji spelling of her name), Ishida's picture contains a distinctly different flavour from the labeling of the WRA photographs. Another object of interest is the commemorative plaque, visible in Nakamichi's arms. The plaque, currently housed at the Japanese-American National Museum, was constructed by the woodshop at which she worked as a secretary.<sup>120</sup> The back is signed with copious signatures from woodshop workers and friends, wishing her, among other things, "loads of luck and happiness."<sup>121</sup> These signatures are a reminder that, regardless of whatever politics and mechanisms they may have existed under, these Queens were real women, who lived lives outside of the symbols for which they are remembered. It is for this reason that I have attempted, wherever possible, to list the names of the Queens mentioned in this paper. Before their bodies were Japanese, American, politicized and caged, these bodies belonged to these women, and their names should not be forgotten.

### Conclusion

On her first fourth of July since being incarcerated at Merced, and then Amanche, Michi Tashiro wondered if her life would ever return to 'normal': "Will we ever again see any of our friends we have lost touch with? What is Betty doing tonight? Will I ever be queen again? Will Mama ever become an American citizen?"<sup>122</sup> Although

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<sup>120</sup> Japanese American National Museum, "Queen of Denson," Collections, News, and Announcements, May 22, 2020. <https://blog.janm.org/2020/05/22/queen-of-denson/>.

<sup>121</sup> Japanese American National Museum, "Queen of Denson."

<sup>122</sup> Brian Komei Dempster and Michi Tashiro, "'Michi Tashiro,'" in *Making Home from War: Stories of Japanese American Exile and Resettlement* (La Vergne: Heyday, 2013), 172-90.

Tashiro was speaking of a Queen contest held before the war, her brief reign is clearly conflated with her American identity. To be a beauty Queen, and to be a Nisei Queen, was to exist within the intersections of multiple competing forces that were shaping history on a global and national



Fig. 7: Mary Ikeguchi, Kiku Nakamichi, and Bessie Nakashima at their coronation. Courtesy CSU Dominguez Hills Department of Archives and Special Collections via the California State University Japanese American Digitization Project.

scale. It is tempting to try and box the Queen into an easily definable figure of Asian-American history. And yet, that would be to further remove any agency from the women discussed. In highlighting injustice against the community, we should take care to avoid inflicting further injustice by speaking for voices under the justification of academic scholarship and modern perspective. In searching for the Nisei Queen, her image, like the power she wielded, becomes intangible.

# **Intelligence Operations Conducted on Martin Luther King Jr. and His Loose Morals: The Changing Motivations for His Surveillance**

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The United States intelligence community took great pride in producing insightful intelligence for the protection of threats for their nation and its citizens. However, the government's intentions for surveillance under their administrations can be questioned when analyzing the individual governmental agendas for conducting surveillance against American citizens. One American in particular consecutive governmental administrations targeted was Martin Luther King Jr. Throughout Martin Luther King's public career there was a constant effort on the part of the government to conduct surveillance of his every move. The National Security Agency's justification (under project MINARET) for surveillance of King was claimed to be for discouraging civil disturbance.<sup>123</sup> However, agencies' motivations for the surveillance of King shifted under each change in presidency. Moreover, the National Security Agency (NSA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) surveillance of King gradually intensified over the time span from the

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<sup>123</sup> The term "civil disturbance" refers to any action that expresses civilian unrest in society, for example, riots or strikes. The government during the nineteen-sixties saw any act of disobedience of governmental institutions as being a "civil disturbance." Therefore the Civil Rights Movement as a whole was viewed as being a "civil disturbance" and anyone in its leadership was seen responsible for causing a "civil disturbance." Establishment of Sensitive SIGINT Operation Project MINARET, National Security Archive, July 1, 1969.

Eisenhower Administration into the Nixon Administration. The government's claim that King was a civil disturbance to national security never wavered, however, how the agencies themselves surveilled King to protect against this threat took different forms throughout the sixties.

Established in 1952, the NSA progressed in size and skill becoming the largest global intelligence institution of its kind.<sup>124</sup> When the agency was first established it was proposed as a line of defense for the United States against perceived external attack. With the intent of working in alliance with United States defense forces, the Army and Navy, the NSA would become a melting pot of cryptanalysis and defense. Before the establishment of the NSA practices of cryptography for the state, the American defense was scattered. The creation of this central space of intelligence allowed for the information it acquired to be used as a line of defense by the government. The establishment of the NSA increased intelligence's influence over the United States defense mechanisms tremendously. Shortly after the establishment of the NSA, the agency's surveillance turned inward and began to undermine the NSA's original intent for external surveillance. There began to be an overlap of domestic and foreign surveillance practices that had no specific category of fixed jurisdiction.

The NSA's scope of domestic intelligence operations is deemed to have "no such origins."<sup>125</sup> This is partly because, prior to the seventies, domestic surveillance was not linked to one specific operation that first began domestic eavesdropping. The increasing domestic surveillance practices of the sixties enforced the need for domestic surveillance legislation. In a letter on behalf of the NSA to the Attorney General in 1973, the agency defends

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<sup>124</sup> David Kahn, *The Code-Breakers: The Comprehensive History of Secret Communications from Ancient Times to the Internet* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 677.

<sup>125</sup> Memorandum For the Secretary of Defense The Attorney General., National Security Archive, January 26, 1971.

their practices, stating, “the NSA had no facilities or charter that would allow it to ascertain whether specific watch list entries are appropriate, and has always depended upon the agencies compiling the lists to warrant that they are entitled.”<sup>126</sup> The lack of legislation addressing domestic surveillance pre-nineteen-seventies connects its lawful origins to the late nineteen-sixties into the nineteen-seventies when formal discourse arose. However, surveillance of King and other watch-listed civilians proves that the origins of domestic surveillance conducted by U.S. intelligence agencies can be traced back to the early nineteen-sixties.

The NSA addressed, in relation to their jurisdiction of surveillance, that there needed to be a category of surveillance created that “no one will recognize, intelligence that moves back and forth between domestic and foreign jurisdictions” to efficiently protect against threats.<sup>127</sup> This proposed third category of surveillance was a legislative loophole for the NSA to justify their malpractices of domestic surveillance and espionage. Civilian surveillance operations targeted particular public figures whose leftist views were seen as a threat to governmental agendas of the time. Martin Luther King Jr. was a high-profile target of the NSA that (under project MINARET) fit into this third category of surveillance due to his domestic political platform and foreign relations.

The NSA’s original mandate was to protect the United States from external war threats through acts of information intercept and espionage. As time progressed invasive procedures through surveillance operations undermined the NSA’s original intent through illegalities of domestic surveillance. The agency’s legality had been

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<sup>126</sup> Letter to “The Honorable Elliot L. Richardson Attorney General, Washington, D.C., October 4, 1973.

<sup>127</sup> James Bamford, *The Puzzle Palace: A Report on America's Most Secret Agency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 458.

compromised when the agency acted exclusively within domestic jurisdiction by conducting surveillance of King's conduct in his private spaces. These surveillance practices of a personal nature made the NSA stray away from its original mandate to discourage civil disturbance as stated in project MINARET's legislation. This conflict of motivations against King on paper versus in practice can be expressed by analyzing each administration's separate agenda for the surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr.

Surveillance of King began under the Eisenhower administration (1953-1961). At the time the government argued that keeping a watch on King's actions was necessary because Eisenhower was resistant to the civil rights legislation King was demanding. The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 brought King into the political spotlight as a rising leader of the Civil Rights Movement and a target of the government. The Eisenhower administration marked the beginnings of governmental interest in King. He had been on the U.S. government's radar since his increasing leadership in the Black Civil Rights Movement. The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, three years after the NSA was established, was the civil rights protest that brought King to be "one of the most well-known black leaders in the United States."<sup>128</sup> At the age of 27, King devoted his life to leading a movement for equal rights of the Black population of the country. His leadership role was assumed at a time of immense anxiety for the government. Growing protest accompanied by fear of communism created "any perceived left-of-center cause risked the accusation of harboring communist sympathies."<sup>129</sup> The government's anxieties of leftist sentiment caused King's message to be distorted in the eyes of the government. His message was perceived as a direct threat to government power rather than to racial

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<sup>128</sup> John A. Kirk, *Martin Luther King Jr.* (London: Routledge, 2014), 7.

<sup>129</sup> Kirk, *Martin Luther King Jr.*, 7.

segregation.

The agency's coalition with U.S. defense forces was at the core of the NSA's mission to take measures against external threats. However, while the NSA was still heavily reliant on this coalition with the defense forces, the agency began to conduct its operations domestically so they did not need lines of defense against external threats. Rather than exclusively focusing on external threats, the agency was influenced by governmental agendas to take interest in the competing ideologies within the country. The rise of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, driven by the Second Red Scare, the legacy of the McCarthy era instilled a fear of Communism within the United States well into the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>130</sup> The political climate in the United States was tense throughout the 1960s and "by 1967 the country appeared to be going up in flames."<sup>131</sup> The threat of Communism penetrating the minds of civilians was used by the NSA to justify their overstep of jurisdiction.

The fear of Communism was pushing at the backs of the NSA and putting pressure on the agency to discourage anti-governmental sentiment. Martin Luther King's public political platform against United States structural racism put him on the NSA's radar. King spoke out against the Vietnam War, stating that "perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hope of the poor at home."<sup>132</sup> King called on the government to pull troops from Vietnam to deal with the domestic crisis that Black Americans were facing.

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<sup>130</sup>Aaron D Purcell, *White Collar Radicals: Tva's Knoxville Fifteen, the New Deal, and the McCarthy Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), xxv.

<sup>131</sup> Summary of Task Force Report on Inquiry Into CIA-related Electronic Surveillance Actives Disclosed in Rockefeller Commission, National Security Archive, March 4, 1977.

<sup>132</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam," April 30, 1967, Riverside Church, New York, speech.

The NSA categorized King to be in this third category of surveillance through his assumed position as a Communist. His public protest against the Vietnam War made the government fearful of the power he held as a public figure speaking out against government action. King expressed concern around the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War in multiple instances, saying the country would come into a state of doom because of the "militaristic posture of our nation."<sup>133</sup> King's left-of-center political views made him susceptible to be placed within this third category of a threat as defined by the NSA. This third category was under domestic and foreign jurisdiction, with the government believing that the foreign alliances King formed posed a threat to national security. Because King supported left-of-center action, such as the protest against war, he was categorized directly by the NSA as a supporter of enemy ideology. This categorization, therefore, was used as grounds for his consistent surveillance under the Eisenhower administration.

In 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected president, However, the surveillance of King continued. At this time it was argued that the surveillance of King was motivated by a "genuine concern about possible Communist influence" within the United States.<sup>134</sup> Although he was commonly viewed in a progressive light by his supporters, President Kennedy had little empathy in general for the Civil Rights Movement, believing it was a Communist movement.<sup>135</sup> Kennedy's fear of King was based in King's power gained

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<sup>133</sup> "Heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali got together with civil rights leader Martin Luther King," YouTube, March 30, 1967, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOhvupjhS3U>.

<sup>134</sup> Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 78.

<sup>135</sup> *The Assassination of Martin Luther King*, directed by BBC Worldwide Ltd, Films for the Humanities & Sciences and Films Media Group (Films Media Group, 2007).

through his leadership position in the movement. However, unlike the Eisenhower administration, King's leadership of the movement was not the only motivation for his surveillance under the Kennedy administration.

J. Edgar Hoover, the founder, and director of the FBI from 1935 to 1972 ordered an increase in their surveillance of King.<sup>136</sup> While up to this point King was targeted due to his attachment to the Civil Rights Movement and suspected Communist ideals, Hoover was the one who began to be interested in King as an individual. Kennedy himself became concerned that Hoover's order for the personal surveillance of King would become public knowledge. Kennedy's concern was out of fear that he himself would become vulnerable to charges related to malpractice of national security protocol.<sup>137</sup> The charges, if put into action, would have been justified based on the grounds of illegal surveillance practices, as the government had no direct evidence giving legal justification for his claims against King as attempting to threaten national security. This fear did not stop Hoover or the Kennedy administration from their agenda to increase surveillance. As King was preparing to give his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, the Intelligence agencies under Kennedy were partaking in mass operations of gathering intelligence through the tactic of eavesdropping.

Kennedy began to realize that King was forming a strong following amongst other important public figures who had influence over Americans. King's relations with figures such as Muhammad Ali and Pope Paul made the government believe that these relations posed a strong threat of sparking a Black revolution. Even though the Kennedy administration's term was short, it had taken an increasing interest in King's political alliances and set the tone for future surveillance of King. Kennedy's fear around

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<sup>136</sup> *The Assassination of Martin Luther King.*

<sup>137</sup> Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days*, 78-79.

these joint efforts led to the NSA's involvement in technological surveillance of King under the joint efforts of the NSA's wiretapping program, the CIA, and the FBI. The presidential and intelligence branches under the Kennedy administration marked the beginning of technological surveillance on King.

The NSA's wiretapping program had taken off during the agency's heightened suspicion of civilian activity. The surveillance mechanism of wiretapping set up the technology needed to eavesdrop on private conversations as an independent third party. The wiretapping program was the agency's main mechanism for civilian intelligence to intercept until the program shut down in 1975 due to illegalities. Intelligence on Martin Luther King had been gathered by the agency wiretapping King's telephone line, gaining access to King's private conversations. An example of this intercept is the case of the NSA eavesdropping on a telephone call between King and Pope Paul.<sup>138</sup>

The government was trying to prevent the meeting of these two civil and religious public figures.<sup>139</sup> The NSA did not want King to meet with Pope Paul due to the influence the Pope had over the Christian population's view of King's political platform. The NSA's surveillance of their communications was intended to discourage religious stamina for the Black cause. King addressed his relationship with Pope Paul as being strictly for the support of the movement. King stated, "he believed that the United States civil rights movement had received the endorsement of the most influential religious leader in the world and the head of the largest church in Christendom."<sup>140</sup> This

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<sup>138</sup> *Testimony Before the Church Committee Details FBI Plans to Intimidate Martin Luther King Jr. Ca. 1975*, directed by Films Media Group and WPA Film Library (WPA Film Library, 2007).

<sup>139</sup> *Testimony Before the Church Committee*.

<sup>140</sup> "Pope and Dr. King Confer on Rights," *New York Times*, September 19, 1964.

statement suggests King's meeting with the Pope was out of a desire for religious support, not being a threat to national security.

Another relationship the NSA was particularly concerned with was King's relationship with Muhammad Ali. King and Ali's relationship depicted Black communal strength and protest of the government's oppression of African Americans. King stated in an interview with Ali the intentions of their relationship, saying, "we had a good discussion on many matters" of a political nature.<sup>141</sup> Also, in this publicized interview, King claimed that both he and Ali supported the draft statement against the Vietnam war.<sup>142</sup> Intelligence agencies viewed King and Ali's alliance as a relationship that threatened a gain of support for the Civil Rights Movement. The government believed if King's support grew it would weaken the U.S. government's power over the movement. King and Ali's political relationship expressed common efforts of Black rights which had caused Muhammad Ali to be established as a watch-listed target of project MINARET.<sup>143</sup> In this same interview, Ali challenged the fear around Black activist meetings, explaining, "whenever a few of us come together for a common cause the world is shaken up."<sup>144</sup> Here, Ali is proving that the government's fear of his relationship with King was based upon the government's fear of the exchange of leftist ideas.

This fear is ultimately derived from a greater concern of Black power and influence in which the NSA had no legal jurisdiction for discouragement. The NSA's attempt to discourage "civil disturbance" is not justified in this instance. The fourth amendment allows freedom of

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<sup>141</sup> "Heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali."

<sup>142</sup> "Heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali."

<sup>143</sup> "Disreputable If Not Outright Illegal: The National Security Agency versus Martin Luther King, Muhammad Ali, Art Buchwald, Frank Church, Et Al.," The National Security Archive, "The Watch List," 84.

<sup>144</sup> "Heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali."

thought, therefore this exchange of ideas cannot be categorized as creating a “civil disturbance” as defined by the NSA. Again, the discouragement of this political discourse came from a fear of a Black revolution. Any attempt to gain support for the Black cause of equality was seen as an action to plot revolutionary action against the government. The technologization of eavesdropping mechanisms marked a new motivation for the agency’s surveillance of King. The NSA became increasingly interested in the alliances King created. The government saw these alliances as a purposeful strategic political move by King that were made to threaten governmental suppression of the Civil Rights Movement. This threat of King’s political alliances was an increasing concern of the Kennedy administration. These alliances correspondingly intensified government motivations and increased the agency’s surveillance of King.

The NSA’s belief that these men, King, and Ali as a duo, were a threat to national security had no legal standing as a “civil disturbance.” This undermined the agency’s justification for its surveillance as discouraging civil disturbance. The NSA’s fear of joining efforts of Black activism challenges the agency’s original claim of the reason for surveillance of Martin Luther King as being to dismantle Communism. Illegal practice of civilian surveillance on part of the NSA is evident under project MINARET’s original code of conduct of the description of a threat. The NSA’s mandate to protect against threats revolved around the protection of the nation as a whole. Some forms of civil disturbance may be justifiable as being threatening to the nation’s security such as public riots. However, King’s political discourse was viewed as threatening to governmental agendas of white supremacy rather than the safety of the nation.

This proves especially true because King’s activism was done through a non-violent platform. This contradiction raises a new theory on the NSA’s intentions

of surveillance of King, supporting the idea that the motivation for surveillance was for the discouragement of leftist political action. The governmental and intelligence agencies' motivation for King's surveillance under Kennedy had been presented as for the protection of the nation against the threat of Communism. However, because the administration took interest in King's alliances, their motivation shifted to surveillance for the discouragement of any left-of-center action that disrupted governmental structural oppression of the Black population. Kennedy's assassination led the way for a more personal relationship to take place between Martin Luther King Jr. and the government.

In 1961, after President Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson became president. Surveillance of King under the Johnson administration (1963-1969) had become personal. The motivation for the surveillance of King was driven by King's emerging label as a deviant. While President Johnson's political relationship with King was more cooperative than those of previous administrations, he had taken an increasing interest in King's conduct. The intelligence administration's agenda for the surveillance of King was to "jeopardize the image of the desegregation movement."<sup>145</sup> However, while this motivation was political, the nature of surveillance conducted on King under the Johnson administration shifted from political to personal when they used the intelligence of King's personal conduct to negatively impact the greater Civil Rights Movement. The surveillance of King's personal conduct under the Johnson administration marked the labeling of King as an individual threat to national security. Under Johnson, intelligence agencies were less concerned with King being a threat to political ideology and more

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<sup>145</sup> United States Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation: "*Martin Luther King Jr.: His Personal Conduct*," Central Intelligence Agency, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1964, 1.

interested in the threat his perceived deviant action posed to the Johnson administration's ideal picture of American society.

King was under the watchful eyes of the government due to his left-of-center political platform. Johnson had a relationship with King that can be viewed as mutually beneficial for both parties. In 1963, King had met with Johnson in hopes to speak about civil rights legislation for his cause for the Black vote. In these meetings between Johnson and King, the dialogue focused on Black access to the voting booths. However, while King's intentions for meeting with Johnson was to discuss the progression of the Civil Rights Movement, they had an underlying purpose for this meeting pertaining to the surveillance of King. Johnson had an agenda for a surveillance meeting with the Civil Rights leader, as "in their face-to-face meetings, each man had prepared carefully for their talks, the president by reading daily transcripts of the FBI's" intelligence on King.<sup>146</sup> However, while the protocol required Johnson to refer to intelligence records before these meetings, his relationship with King was optimistic in nature. Through these meetings, Johnson gave King the attention needed from the government to progress his efforts to pass a civil rights bill.<sup>147</sup>

While Johnson seemed willing to promote King's leadership of the Civil Rights Movement, he made this decision strategically. King ran his civil rights campaign with the standard of non-violence action. King's non-violent platform differed from the platform of another leader of the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X. Malcolm X disagreed with King's non-violent approach to civil rights, believing that taking a violent approach was the only way the movement would see real progress. Johnson knew he had to endorse on the side of King's non-violent action

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<sup>146</sup> Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days*, 250.

<sup>147</sup> Kotz, 68.

plan to decrease collateral violence that came with revolutionary movements and to assume as much power over the movement as possible. Johnson viewed King as an activist he could endorse over Malcolm X because King saw the availability of Johnson's time as governmental consideration for legislative action.

Johnson took advantage of his meetings with King as a way to prolong the progress of civil rights legislation while gathering intel on King's plans for the movement. This relationship allowed Johnson to not have to act immediately on King's demands for legislative progression for the Civil Rights Movement, whereas Malcolm X was more adamant on timely progress. Therefore, President Johnson's relationship with King was based upon circumstance by default. The end of President Johnson's term was January 1969, which marked the beginning of the Nixon Administration.

President Nixon's agenda for his presidency was largely directed towards the white voter which meant less tolerance for civil rights and Communist sentiment.<sup>148</sup> Under Nixon, heightened surveillance was ordered on King's every move, with eavesdropping operations on his personal life becoming common practice. Informal surveillance of King's personal affairs had no cause for concern in alignment with the NSA's and CIA's original mandate against King as a political threat. Declassified intelligence documents on the NSA's surveillance of King creates an image of King as possessing extremely loose moral behavior. In a release of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation report entitled "*Martin Luther King Jr.: His Personal Conduct*" in 1964, the case encloses surveillance of King's "sex and drinking parties."<sup>149</sup> While

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<sup>148</sup> Derrick White, and Kenneth Alan Osgood, *Winning While Losing?: Civil Rights, the Conservative Movement, and the Presidency from Nixon to Obama* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 29.

<sup>149</sup> United States Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation: "*Martin Luther King Jr.: His Personal Conduct*," Central

the societal climate of the 1960s deemed this type of activity as being deviant, differing from social norms, there is no proof within the documentation that these activities had legal standing as evidence of King being a threat to national security.<sup>150</sup> This is an instance of the NSA attempting to frame King in the worst possible light to manipulate his overall image. If King had been a real threat to national security the agency would have not had to dig for evidence to prove his ill-character through surveillance of his private affairs. Not only does this document give illegitimate evidence of King being a threat, but it is also telling of the agency's racist view and protest for the discouragement of the African American Civil Rights Movement as a whole.

The agency makes racialized claims stating “the reputation among many of the country’s Negro leaders of being heavy consumers of alcoholic beverages.”<sup>151</sup> This reference to the larger Black population suggests that the NSA was conducting surveillance of King not only out of concern of the threat he posed but also the perceived threat the Civil Rights Movement posed. This is an example of government intelligence agencies attempting to police the actors of the ideological left. The document “*Martin Luther King Jr.: His Personal Conduct*” contributes to the overall historiographic evidence of illegality within NSA surveillance practices against Martin Luther King Jr.

The NSA’s wiretapping surveillance and the CIA’s consistent intervention in King’s personal matters had made King become on edge with the realities of being targeted by his government.<sup>152</sup> Throughout the nineteen-sixties King

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Intelligence Agency, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1964, 1.

<sup>150</sup> “*Martin Luther King Jr.*,” 1-2.

<sup>151</sup> “*Martin Luther King Jr.*,” 1.

<sup>152</sup> Edythe Scott Bagley and Joseph H. Hilley, *Desert Rose: The Life and Legacy of Coretta Scott King* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 190-91.

was becoming increasingly aware of the government's agenda against him and his role in the Civil Rights Movement. This pressure from the surveillance on King was intended by the government to wear down his political agenda. However, it instead made King's anti-governmental stance stronger because King integrated his experience of governmental oppression into his public discourse in things like speeches. King viewed his surveillance as a way to strengthen his argument against governmental tyranny over the Civil Rights Movement. This leads to the conclusion that project MINARET's definition of a civil disturbance was not fixed. The NSA's use of the terminology "civil disturbance" was purposeful because it was a manipulatable term. The NSA could decide what they as an agency saw as a civil disturbance on a case-by-case basis. The term "civil disturbance" acted as a scapegoat for the NSA to justify unlawful targeting and defend unconstitutional practices of surveillance which violated human rights to free speech. The turning point of the relationship between the U.S. government and King was implicitly due to the NSA's increasing illegal and threatening actions taken against him. Once J. Edgar Hoover became the director of the FBI, the nature of all surveillance practices on King made a turn for the worse by becoming violent.

Evidence of the NSA becoming violent towards King is shown through the threat mail sent to King's home directly from the agency. The NSA's tactics against King had gone from acts of espionage and eavesdropping to direct discourse that expressed threat. In a letter from the NSA addressed to King the agency wrote, "King there's only one thing left for you to do and you know what it is. You have thirty-four days in which to do it."<sup>153</sup> This letter has come to be known as King's suicide letter by many

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<sup>153</sup> Scott Bagley and Hilley, *Desert Rose*, 190-91.

American historians such as author David Garrow.<sup>154</sup> This letter and others started to arrive at King's home just shortly before King was expected to accept the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.<sup>155</sup> The letters sent to King expressed a hostile tone, alluding to the government's desire for King to commit suicide. The letter was a "one-sided deal: destroy yourself or we will use our surveillance to destroy you."<sup>156</sup> The NSA and the CIA saw King as such a great threat to the governmental agenda of white supremacy that they believed suggesting death was a justified method to maintain unlawful control over the Civil Rights Movement.

The FBI's reference to the use of surveillance to destroy King was telling of the toll this surveillance was having on King's family life. Intelligence agencies used the vulnerability of King's family as a mechanism to break him down emotionally to weaken his political work. Through surveillance of King's personal conduct, which was then still declassified, intelligence agencies had begun to target King's family. Through intercepts like telephone wires and access to the popular press at the time, rumors of King's immoral behaviors had attempted to break down King's family structure. The NSA's suicide letter to King was only one of many direct threats. The FBI tried to destroy King's marriage with his wife Coretta Scott King. They did this through surveillance practices which caused her to become a victim of this unlawful communication. Coretta had been addressed directly in threat letters and recordings of a sexual nature of what they hoped would come off as King

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<sup>154</sup> David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Quill, 1999).

<sup>155</sup> *Testimony Before the Church Committee Details FBI Plans to Intimidate Martin Luther King Jr. Ca. 1975*, directed by Films Media Group and WPA Film Library (WPA Film Library, 2007).

<sup>156</sup> F.R. Cooper, "Surveillance and Identity Performance: Some Thoughts Inspired by Martin Luther King," *Review of Law and Social Change* 32, no. 4 (2008): 519.

himself sent on behalf of the FBI. Scholar Edythe Bagley expands on this by saying:

The letter had made accusations against King, accusing him of infidelity and other acts. From that, she surmised that the tape and knew it nothing more than another attempt to drive a wedge in between them. Neither she nor King take substantive matters on the tape seriously. However, they were both displeased that the FBI would make such a threat against them.<sup>157</sup>

Whether the accusations against King about his infidelity were true or false does not justify governmental intelligence agencies' invasion of King's marriage. This lack of lawful conduct proves that U.S. intelligence agencies did not feel restricted by any written law around restrictions on surveillance practices and privacy. At this point, NSA surveillance of King had become less about protecting the nation against, as the NSA defined it, threats but rather an effort to end Martin Luther King all together. The suicide pact, in the efforts of the government and intelligence agencies, desire for King to kill himself ultimately came to work against the NSA's claim that they had followed mandate around civilian surveillance. This instance of malpractice was evidently illegal and was by far the hardest act for the administration to justify.

King did not adhere to the CIA's desire for him to commit suicide, rather he had a more sudden cause of death. On April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee Martin Luther King was assassinated as he was leaving the Lorraine motel.<sup>158</sup> King's famous speech, "I've Been To

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<sup>157</sup> Scott Bagley, and Hilley, *Desert Rose*, 191.

<sup>158</sup> *The Assassination of Martin Luther King*, directed by BBC Worldwide Ltd, Films for the Humanities & Sciences (Firm), and Films

The Mountain Top,” given just one day before his assassination, suggests King was aware his life was in danger. He states:

longevity has its place, but I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will and he has allowed me to go up to the mountain and I've looked over and I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land.<sup>159</sup>

The language King used alludes to tensions he felt about having a target on his back, by white supremacists, and by his government. Making it publicly known that he is not fearful of any man can be seen as an effort to fight back against the government's attempt to make him fear for his life through their death threats. This violence is telling of the government's hostile feelings of King at the time. The end of the Johnson administration marks a time of great tension around governmental intervention in the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1969 Richard Nixon was elected president and his intentions for the previous surveillance operations on King was to make the surveillance practices appear legal to justify surveillance malpractices. Under the Nixon presidential and intelligence administrations, the surveillance documentation involving King was charted into an official NSA operation titled project MINARET. The rationale behind project MINARET was to discourage “civil disturbance.” The drafting of project MINARET under the Nixon administration allowed for the Church Committee to prove the NSA's illegal surveillance of King.

The NSA came to be held accountable for their illegalities by the United States Senate Select Committee,

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Media Group (Films Media Group, 2007).

<sup>159</sup> *The Assassination of Martin Luther King.*

otherwise known as the Church Committee<sup>160</sup> in 1975. This committee was formed to investigate intelligence agencies' practices. In a memorandum to the members of the Senate Select Committee from Fritz Schwartz, an accomplished lawyer and chief counsel to the committee, posed concern of NSA civilian operations. The Church Committee reviewed project MINARET's intentions and procedures out of suspicion of illegalities against U.S. civilians. They came to the conclusion that "this monitoring has included some questionable practices in the past regarding U.S. citizens and NSA technology."<sup>161</sup> With the legal grounds to question the NSA on the committee's suspicions, when confronted, the NSA discouraged any such type of public hearing. Their discouragement proves that the agency knew their illegal actions could not withstand the mechanisms of justice in a trial.<sup>162</sup> However, the Church Committee v. NSA trial proceeded even though both parties were not equally enthusiastic. The broad understanding of the agency's jurisdiction for surveillance made the investigation contested by the agencies' personnel. The legal jurisdiction of the Church Committee ultimately overruled the agency's discouragement for investigation. The NSA's lack of enthusiasm for this trial is an example of the clash between intelligence agencies' sense of entitlement to the autonomy of surveillance and the legal

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<sup>160</sup> The United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operation concerning Intelligence Activities, otherwise known as the Church Committee, was established to investigate American Intelligence. Through case hearings in 1975, the Committee brought to light the illegalities of intelligence practices of the big three agencies, the FBI, CIA, and NSA. While the hearings of 1975 were proceeded years after committed crimes of the agencies, the hearings held the agencies accountable with the law.

<sup>161</sup> Memorandum, To the U.S. Senate Select Committee from Fritz Schwartz, National Security Archive, September 19, 1975, 1A.

<sup>162</sup> NSA Hearings on Monitoring of International Lines of Communication (LLC), National Security Archive, September 19, 1975.

system's duty to hold government institutions accountable to its citizens.

With the government's increasing concern of King's political platform, the NSA made King an official threat to national security by charting an operation under NSA legislation that formally recognized surveillance of King. Project MINARET was established as a Sensitive SIGINT Operation "for the purpose of avoiding more restrictive control and security of sensitive information derived from communications" of multiple entities of the state.<sup>163</sup> The project was set up as a way for the agency to gain further jurisdiction over domestic targets. The motives of the NSA targeting Martin Luther King Jr. derived from the agency's desire to control information on individuals who were involved with civil disturbance. The NSA defined a civil disturbance as someone who they, the agency, viewed as attempting to influence U.S. organizations or individuals.<sup>164</sup> This clause went against civilians' right to free speech and exhibits efforts of tyrannical behavior by the U.S. government. Not only did project MINARET go against civilian's fourth amendment rights, but it also went against the NSA's written policy around targets and surveillance practices.

The bases for the establishment of project MINARET reflected the government's need to control their citizens. The project was illegal in nature by NSA's legal standards in itself, by targeting civilians based on their personal political views. These illegalities were ignored by the agency's personnel conducting surveillance in efforts to reach the agency's goal to dictate political dialogue in the U.S. The operation was first launched in 1969 when the NSA drafted a watch-list of civilians whom the NSA

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<sup>163</sup> Establishment of Sensitive SIGINT Operation Project MINARET, National Security Archive, July 1, 1969, 149-50.

<sup>164</sup> Establishment of Sensitive SIGINT Operation Project MINARET, National Security Archive, July 1, 1969, 150.

deemed as having posed a civil disturbance within the United States.

The NSA's definition of a threat versus how they protected the nation against said "threat" in practice was contradictory. The agency's word choice of a "civil disturbance" as a threat implies, by the word's actual definition (refer to footnote 1), as expressing political opposition to governmental agendas. Citizens that had expressed left-of-center views risked becoming targets of the NSA. The NSA's illegal motives in their surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr. were covered up by project MINARETS top-secret status within the agency. Project MINARET's legislature acted as a legal justification for the surveillance of King. By creating an operation that was classified as top secret, the NSA could get away with their illegal practices with little suspicion or evidence of their illegalities. Scholar Frederick Schwartz argues this, stating, "too much is kept secret, not to protect America, but to keep embarrassing or illegal conduct from Americans. Examples abound, including efforts to drive Martin Luther King Jr. to commit suicide."<sup>165</sup> This statement is telling of what extremes the agency was willing to go to maintain control over America's political discourse and their efforts to cover up illegal surveillance practices.

When project MINARET was first established, King was listed as a target due to his assumed position with Communism which the NSA deemed as being a political threat to national security. This reasoning shifted in practice when analyzing the direct relationship between intelligence agencies and King. This shift occurred with the NSA detaching him from his larger political platform. While the NSA first viewed King as an ideological threat, this label changed, viewing him as a threat due to his fraudulent

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<sup>165</sup> Frederick A. O Schwarz, *Democracy in the Dark: The Seduction of Government Secrecy* (New York: The New Press, , 2015), 2.

behavior as described by Hoover.<sup>166</sup> The intelligence agencies' evidence of King's fraudulence acquired up until this point did not follow NSA protocol. Hoover's claim that King was fraudulent suggests that the intelligence community viewed King's sexual habits and leftist political views as not just deviant, but illegal. The NSA and CIA used factors of King's political views and personal conduct for the justification of his surveillance. This shows the government's intentions to police civilians' thoughts through its intelligence agencies which is a violation of civilian's constitutional rights in a free democratic society.

The NSA was forced by the Church Committee to release information on project MINARET. The information the NSA and the committee settled on to disclose was facts of the operation, the existence of the U.S. names who were targeted, informal procedures, that there was surveillance of civilian communication, and that the project was terminated. Through the Committee's analysis of this information, they were able to conclude that the legality of this project needed to be challenged by the law.

The Church Committee began to align NSA technology surveillance practices with law. They came to find that surveillance performed through project MINARET was illegally in breach of the Federal Communications Act of 1934.<sup>167</sup> This act was established to regulate information intercept, with the legislature stating:

For the purpose of regulating interstate and foreign commerce in communication by wire and radio so as to make available, so far as possible, to all the

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<sup>166</sup> *Testimony Before the Church Committee Details FBI Plans to Intimidate Martin Luther King Jr. Ca. 1975*, directed by Films Media Group and WPA Film Library (WPA Film Library, 2007). Online Video, describing NSA's suicide letter to King.

<sup>167</sup> "Federal Communications Act 1934." Reports Federal Communications Commission, May 29, 2019.

people of the United States, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex, a rapid, efficient, nationwide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges, for the purpose of the national defense, for the purpose of promoting safety of life and property through the use of radio communication, and for the purpose of securing a more effective execution of this policy by centralizing authority heretofore granted by law to several agencies and by granting additional authority with respect to interstate and foreign commerce in wire and radio communication.<sup>168</sup>

Under this legislation, the NSA had been guilty of malpractice of communication by wire based on discrimination of race, color, and national origins being driven by unreasonable charges. This act prohibits intelligence agencies from targeting civilians because of their physical and mental traits. Surveillance breaches by the intelligence community around the surveillance of King increased when the ruling of *U.S. v. U.S. district court of 1973* passed. The Supreme Court ruled that the government must comply with the Fourth Amendment when surveilling an alleged domestic intelligence threat.<sup>169</sup> It is because of increasing malpractices of the NSA, CIA, and FBI in their surveillance of King that these types of laws were being passed. Cases such as King's brought attention to the illegalities that these governmental institutions were committing.

With legitimate reasons for charges under these acts, the Church Committee investigated the autonomy of the project in 1975. The targets were a large area of interest for

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<sup>168</sup> "Federal Communications Act 1934."

<sup>169</sup> "Timeline of NSA Domestic Spying 1791-2015," Electronic Frontier Foundation, September 29, 2017.

the Committee, in particular focusing on names of watch-listed civilians, in hopes that these names would give evidence of the NSA's illegalities under the Federal Communications Act. The committee required the NSA to list specific names of the left-wing and Black activists which pointed directly to the NSA's surveillance on Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>170</sup> This direction in question the committee had taken proves the extent of illegality in King's case as being victimized by wiretapping because of his intersectional label as a Black left-wing civil rights leader.<sup>171</sup> This disclosure addresses the argument of project MINARET's informal procedure and addressed loosely the surveillance of King's personal life through these informal procedures.

NSA policy on domestic intelligence of the time stated intelligence is "to be consistent with accepted standards in respect to the protection of individual constitutional rights and civil liberties."<sup>172</sup> Along with this clause of NSA domestic policy, the clause of foreign policy was just as important in this case. The clause of foreign terminal stated that for the NSA to target someone they had to have "telecommunications with one foreign terminal," with the communication having the intent of "criminal activity including drugs," "foreign support," or "presidential and related protections."<sup>173</sup> While King had many foreign allies with whom he communicated his ideas, these communications did not pose a threat to U.S. national

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<sup>170</sup> U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations concerning Intelligence Activities, "NSA Monitoring Issues Outline Top Secret," NSA Archive, September 10, 1975.

<sup>171</sup> NSA Hearings on Monitoring of International Lines of Communication (LLC), National Security Archive, September 19, 1975, 5.

<sup>172</sup> Summary of Task Force Report On Inquiry Into CIA-related Electronic Surveillance Actives Disclosed in Rockefeller Commission, National Security Archive, March 4, 1977, 82.

<sup>173</sup> Summary of Task Force Report On Inquiry Into CIA-related Electronic Surveillance Actives Disclosed in Rockefeller Commission, National Security Archive, March 4, 1977, 82.

security. His foreign relations were for the progression of his civil rights platform and did not allude to any suspicion of the threat of governmental security. While the scope of the NSA's foreign policy stood in instances of gaining support with intent to take down government power, King's foreign relations were not as destructive as the policy suggests. As stated by King when addressing his relationship with the Pope, "the Pope made it palpably clear that he is a friend of the Negro people, and asked me to tell the American Negroes that he is committed to the cause of civil rights in the United States."<sup>174</sup>

The NSA's suspicion of Martin Luther King as a threat to national security increased throughout the sixties. This suspicion grew into a fear of his political power and influence over American citizens' thoughts around civil rights. The government's fear of the activist caused King to become a target of official surveillance operations without legal justification to do so. The creation of project MINARET gave the agency justification of its assumptions of King as a threat to United States national security. The agency viewed formal operations as something that could not be challenged by any party, even the government when the operation is classified for the NSA's eyes only. This is problematic when issues around the Freedom of Information Act arise, proving that the U.S. legal system needs to have unlimited access to all forms of evidence. The NSA believed the formalization of surveillance documentation on King would make the NSA's illegal practices appear to follow proper protocol. When in reality, project MINARET damaged the NSA's reputation by establishing King as an official target without legitimate cause. Rather than justifying the agency's surveillance practices, the charting of project MINARET brought to

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<sup>174</sup> "Pope and Dr. King Confer on Rights," *New York Times*, September 19, 1964.

light the corrupt nature of the surveillance of King. Because project MINARET became a formal operation that was expected to follow legal procedure the grounds for illegality became stronger.

The motivations for the surveillance of King changed, becoming intensified and increased in malpractice from the Eisenhower administration to the Nixon administration. King's civil rights activism under President Eisenhower led King to take on a leadership position within the movement. This activism made King become a prioritized target of government surveillance with the motivation to keep tabs on the movement as a whole. The motivation for King's surveillance shifted under the Kennedy administration. Surveillance of King became increasingly motivated by Kennedy's view of King's affiliation with Communism. The view that King was a Communist derived from his left-of-center political actions, which thereby made King surveilled due to his political beliefs clashing with governmental agendas for white supremacy. The Kennedy administration taking interest in King's relations with other figureheads led to the intelligence community targeting King based on personal factors, not only of his role in the Civil Rights Movement. Under the Johnson administration, it is evident through surveillance of King's personal conduct that intelligence agencies had a new motivation against King. The motivation for King's surveillance derived from the government's view of King as a deviant. Under the Johnson administration, King was viewed as a threat, not because of his political stance, but because of the threat his personal behavior posed to the conservative society of the time. After King's death, the Nixon administration's agenda for the surveillance of King was to justify its legality.

Documentation on King's personal conduct, such as his sexual habits and invasion of marriage, proves the NSA was in breach of the agency's code of conduct. The agency's code of conduct stated that domestic surveillance

practice must fall within the third category of jurisdiction as involving a foreign threat. Due to the charting of project MINARET, the NSA was susceptible to charges based on the formal evidence the project presented. The Church Committee, in 1975, stood to bring the NSA to trial based on the evidence of illegal targeting under the Federal Communications act of 1934. The project gave evidence of restricting freedom of speech, unlawful invasion of privacy without purpose, and threatening the death of civilians. Proving that the NSA's surveillance of Martin Luther King was not just disreputable but illegal based on policing every aspect of King's life due to his anti-governmental platform around Black rights.

# **Demons in the City of Angeles: Gay Neo-Nazis in Southern California**

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## **An Unexpected Source of Hate**

Night descended upon the mission-style apartment building in West Hollywood, letting the dim lights from a solitary apartment fall upon the hacienda-style courtyard. A beach-blonde, blue-eyed young man followed the slow stream of stragglers up to the apartment steps, presenting his invitation to a flannel-clad bouncer who stood tall in cowboy boots. Climbing through the threshold, he immediately felt the eyes of dozens of men upon him: those mingling at the wet bar, standing next to the fruit and meat platters, or seated near the projection screen on the front wall. The boy awkwardly retreated to the corner of the room, taking shelter under a stretched banner that read “A New Order, A New Image.”

A man in a knockoff SS Stormtrooper uniform eagerly approached the young man, seemingly delighted at his presence. With unabashed animation, he ushered him into the prepared seats lining the cramped apartment. The leader then began adjusting the film reel in the rear, twiddling and fiddling until the booming voice of Adolf Hitler emanated from the speakers and columns of Nazi troops stretched across the white screen. Waves of light fell upon those in the crowd, from those dressed in business suits to faded Levis and motorcycle gear. The images glistened off the small black and white swastika buttons that decorated some of their collars.

Yet the film failed to hold the attention of the crowd, who began rising from their seats, mingling, and chatting among themselves. A scene of young white men wrestling on the ground briefly drew eyes to the screen, but

in the end, even Leni Riefenstahl's work did not promise enough thrill. The event's organizer, now starting to sweat under his uniform, scolded the men, shouting at them to "Come on you bastards, salute!" But almost no one paid him any heed, and others shushed him. Defeated, he fell back upon his chair, throwing looks of contempt at the guests for the next three hours.

Some exchanged pleasantries and laughter, while a select few eyed the latter with scorn, viewing the attendees in leather jackets and cycle caps with an air of repugnance. The young blonde, now unsure of his place or whom to approach, found himself face to face with a burly man: "Why not come up to my place and talk? It's too noisy here, too many distractions." The blonde declined and walked down the shallow steps back into the courtyard, annoyed at the evening's turn of events and his still unanswered questions.

Bearing more resemblance to a soirée rather than a right-wing meeting, this private screening of the infamous *Triumph of the Will* on a 1974 night seems unorthodox for a hardline neo-Nazi group; however, that is exactly what this welcome event was.<sup>175</sup> This young man had just borne witness to a typical recruiting event of the Los Angeles National Socialist League (NSL). A white power, neo-Nazi association in a cloistered LA community that lasted from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, this group obeyed many political precedents set by former white power actors. Their racist xenophobia and their conspiratorial ramblings of a Jewish plot within the United States government made them archetypes of racial extremist groups of the era. Yet they set themselves apart in one unique way: all members of the National Socialist League were gay.

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<sup>175</sup> "Hardsell: Why Don't We Go To My Place And Talk?," *Entertainment West*, 1974, National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives. (Hereinafter referred to as the "ONE National Socialist League Collection.")

Upon my first exposure, the phrase “gay Nazis” was quite oxymoronic. A fascist movement, obsessed with building a superior “Aryan” race via eugenics and a community of those that reject the conservative heterosexual model seems an odd pairing. When I stumbled upon the only records left by this furtive group in the USC ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, this perplexing fusion immediately piqued my historical curiosity.<sup>176</sup> How could those of a gay community embrace the abhorrent credos of a regime that systematically eliminated their predecessors in the horrors of the Holocaust? Yet such was the enigma that was the National Socialist League. Only receiving fleeting mentions in the media or derogatory slander by other white power and LGBTQ groups, the NSL never incurred much public recognition.<sup>177</sup> But this rouses perhaps even more intrigue for these Los Angeles “Aryan homophiles.”<sup>178</sup> Riding the wave of gay liberation in LA, the NSL’s brief and unheard story comprises a critical chapter in the history of white power in the Southland. Believing to represent the “conservative and right-wing view” in the gay community, this young crew led by Russel Veh established headquarters in West LA and Hollywood, where they committed themselves to cultivating a

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<sup>176</sup> Save for a few issues of the *NS Kampfruf* at the University of Michigan, I could not locate any other archival sources left behind by the NSL except for those at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives. Furthermore, based on my research, I have yet to find any scholarly work that mentions the National Socialist League, besides a single footnote referencing a *Los Angeles Times* article. This analysis may possibly be the first historical inquiry into this organization.

<sup>177</sup> Al Martinez, “Storm Trooper Footsteps Echo Louder,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1977; HWC, “Corresponding with the Editor,” *NS Kampfruf*, April 1, 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7.

<sup>178</sup> HWC, “Corresponding with the Editor.”

community for white separatists and homosexuals.<sup>179</sup> In unraveling the confounding existence of the NSL, I was presented with an unheard perspective into pivotal moments within Southern California's history particularly regarding the resurgence of white power and gender dynamics within racial extremism. Although not a well-known participant in the racial hate movement, the National Socialist League still illuminates a critical dimension of 20<sup>th</sup> century Los Angeles's racial topography.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> "The Gay Nazis," *NS Mobilizer*, Winter 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8; Bjarne Skrydstrup, "The Fuehrer of Echo Park," *Entertainment West*, 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 2. A note on the terminology used: the classification "white supremacist" can be applied to this neo-Nazi group, for they believed in the hierarchy of the white race. However, the term "white nationalist" and "white separatist," can also be applied, for they believed in creating a nation that should be designated for and ruled by the white race. However, the term "neo-Nazi" and "white power" are perhaps the most applicable and broad, for it describes a general movement. The terms "hate groups", "the extreme right" "far right" and "racial extremist" can also apply. While "radical right" can technically apply, I avoid using it for it usually pertains to organizations that are not openly violent and attempt to sway conventional politics in a less extreme manner.

<sup>180</sup> Few pieces of academic scholarship exclusively focus on neo-Nazis in Southern California. Ultimately, most historical works avoid the topic, and much of the new research is conducted by sociologists, journalists, psychologists. However, there are exceptions. Leonard Zeskind's *Blood and Politics* lends a meticulous account of the white nationalist movement from the 1950s to the 1980s and argues that while this movement contains diverse motivations and groups, racialists worked together to "mainstream their vanguardism" and "win over" fellow white people. Chip Berlet's and Matthew Lyons's collaborative *Right-Wing Populism in America* also explores the phenomenon of the political right from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. They contend that scholars should avoid reducing these groups down to "marginal extremism" because "these people may be our neighbors, our coworkers, and our relatives," for right-wing politics do not emerge unannounced but originate from conventional, populist issues. Additionally, Kathleen Blee's critically acclaimed *Bring the War Home*

Yet before beginning a historical inquiry of the NSL, one must puzzle together the jigsaw pieces of evidence to answer the obvious: what was the National Socialist League? In responding to this very question, founder Russell Veh claimed it “[was] an organization for white sexual nonconformists” who earned “the right to stand alongside our White racial kind” (see Figure 1).<sup>181</sup> In their manifesto, the NSL decreed that “loyalty to one’s race is a man’s highest duty,” requiring a patriotism that will fight against “leftist politicians, Jews, communists, and non-white persons.”<sup>182</sup> Although initially created by Jim Cherry, Veh assumed leadership on January 1, 1974, and the League adopted the proper name of “National Socialist League.”<sup>183</sup> A former inmate who initiated the failed American White Nationalist Party in Ohio, Veh took up residence in Echo Park, spearheaded member recruitment, hosted social get-togethers, and published the NSL’s official newsletter *The Mobilizer* (which he claimed to have 12,000 copies in print by 1983).<sup>184</sup> Letters, copies of the aforementioned magazine, and the few remaining newspaper reports suggest that the Los Angeles National Socialist League conducted the bulk of its activities from 1974 to 1979, allegedly opening branches in 29 states,

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presents a glimpse into the 1970s white power movement, which she argues began with the failure of the Vietnam War. Her work affords a necessary basis for the transition between the older white power groups like the American Nazi Party and the chaotic, unstructured violence of the 1980s White Aryan Resistance and Racist Skinhead movement.

<sup>181</sup> National Socialist League, “National Socialism: What We Stand For,” *NS Mobilizer*, 1975, 11 edition, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>182</sup> Robert Leighton, “Gay Nazis of LA,” *Los Angeles Fact Finder*, April 15, 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>183</sup> “Gay Nazis of LA.”

<sup>184</sup> National Socialist League, “Special Issue! 5,000 Copies in Print!,” *NS Mobilizer*, Summer-Fall 1983, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7.

within the cities of Greensboro, Dallas, and San Diego.<sup>185</sup> However, they hardly appeared in public, choosing to conduct their nefarious hate-filled diatribes at galas and film screenings in the privacy of apartments and club back rooms. Besides the occasional efforts to ingratiate themselves in the larger gay community and to petition against discriminatory federal policies, the NSL remained a close-knit, highly localized group.<sup>186</sup>

Within the discourse of white power in the 1970s, the National Socialist League exemplified the liminal phase between hierarchical, politically motivated groups like the American Nazi Party, and the violent and leaderless resistance of the White Aryan Resistance and Racist Skinheads of the 1980s and 1990s. Whereas much of their hateful language simply regurgitated credos that came before them, the NSL formed when neo-Nazi groups were focusing their efforts on building cohesive societies of like-minded racialists and were not overly concerned with participating in existing political structures. This signified an era of white power when those like the NSL splintered off to form specialized societies that advocated diverging

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<sup>185</sup> National Socialist League, "Progress Spotlight," 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 4; Russell Veh, "Letter to Members and Friends," July 4, 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 6.

<sup>186</sup> Russel Veh, "For Immediate Release," June 25, 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 3. Within the archival materials, the only evidence I found of the NSL sharing a similar platform with the gay community was with calls to "Fight the Briggs Initiative." The Briggs Initiative—known as California Proposition 6 on the 1978 State Ballot—would ban homosexuals from being public school employees or public servants, as their outing by employers, students, or parents would result in their immediate dismissal. This proposition allowed disparate gay rights groups to band together to overturn Prop 6, although no evidence exists that the NSL participated in this collaboration.



*Figure 1. “Build a New World Order.” (Entertainment West, no. 119, November 1974. ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 2).*

aims. The 1970s served as the “rebirth” of the white power movement, for it oversaw the surge of violent paramilitary societies and the growth of the “intellectual” white power movement under William Pierce and think tanks like the Cato Institution. This period witnessed Richard Spencer form the largest neo-Nazi group (Aryan Nations) in 1977, James Warner establish the pseudo-theological, antisemitic Christian Identity Church, and the “mainstreaming” of the KKK under David Duke.<sup>187</sup> These organizations and scores of others established the foundational principles for future white nationalists: namely, the preservation of “the white Christian republic,” the violent manifestation of masculinity, and the mass mobilization of working-class

<sup>187</sup> Barry J Balleck, *Hate Groups and Extremist Organizations in America: An Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2019), 22, 182.

white men.<sup>188</sup>

And while attractive for politicians and citizens to distance themselves as much as possible from these societies, particular Southern California events and preexisting xenophobic and racist attitudes only fed the National Socialist League diatribes. Yet, this begs the question: did these groups truly lie on the “fringe” of mainstream society? Or does evidence suggest that these agents acted rationally, and therefore should not be categorized by Leonard Hofstadter’s outdated “paranoid style” lens? And lastly—what does the presence of this group unveil about Southern California politics and society in the late 20th century?

Centralized to Los Angeles, the NSL’s perplexing story becomes a distinctly Southern California chronicle, not just in the greater tale of gendered white power movements, but of how extremism matured from distinct conditions. Situating the NSL within their local area provides an idiosyncratic perspective into Los Angeles’s political, social, and racial scene throughout the 1970s. In examining the NSL’s contention with African American activism, non-white immigration, and the politically liberal gay community, one finds that their battles were not of inane creation, but deliberately designed radical reactions to transformative social, political, and demographic events in Southern California. Accordingly, the National Socialist League’s conspiracies and hate-fueled speech may outwardly appear “paranoid,” but it was anything but. In researching the NSL, Southern California itself is reflected back: although it might be a slightly distorted mirror, warped by the ideologies of white power and racial extremism.

But to fully uncover how the NSL cemented

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<sup>188</sup> Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 7.

themselves within Southern California society, it would be apt to employ a gendered lens in this analysis. As common among the majority of neo-Nazi and white power groups, National Socialist League members practiced an elevated form of hyper-masculinity, which influenced their language, actions, and imagery. The NSL's masculinity departed from that created by neo-Nazis of the 1960s. Hoping to cast off the label of "perverse provocateurs," these men emphasized their raw sexuality, hoping to become dominant men who would stand over the submissive liberal "faggot."<sup>189</sup> It is within this masculine background that NSL members forged a "homosocial" environment, which stressed the social bonds between persons of the same sex.<sup>190</sup> Through facilitating romantic and sexual relationships, the NSL created a singular way to uphold hegemonic masculinity by enabling "closer, and more horizontal relationships with other men."<sup>191</sup> These gender structures undoubtedly informed their organizational make-up, for it compelled them to build an egalitarian network. This method was their way of maintaining what Ferber calls "the restoration of rural American masculinity," as brought forth by concurrent right-wing militants, anti-federalists, and anti-corporate groups. However, this crusade speaks to significant aspects of national liberal and conservative policies, as argued by Robert O. Self, who evaluates how politicians from Richard Nixon to Bill Clinton prioritized the reinstallation of white-

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<sup>189</sup> National Socialist League, "Brother Against Brother," 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>190</sup> Christer Mattsson and Thomas Johansson, "'We Are the White Aryan Warriors': Violence, Homosociality, and the Construction of Masculinity in the National Socialist Movement in Sweden," *Men and Masculinities* 24, no. 3 (August 1, 2021): 397.

<sup>191</sup> Mattsson and Johansson, 397; National Socialist League, "National Socialism: What We Stand For," *NS Mobilizer*, 1975, 11 edition, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8.

working class machismo.<sup>192</sup> It does not take a stretch of the imagination to see how white power groups reimagined their racism as a mission to re-establish their rugged masculinity and political supremacy; after all, the foundations for this practice were already being laid in the mainstream environment.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, a gendered viewing of National Socialist League ideologies offers a holistic interpretation of how the NSL regarded itself, and how its masculine fantasies impacted its violent rhetoric.

Given the lack of archival materials on this group—and their absence in records of Los Angeles history—one may reasonably presume that these men did not amass a public presence. But this query fundamentally rests on detecting how even the most innocuous societies expose the prevalence of white nationalist ideas in Southern California. The NSL's gendered response to the African American, budding immigrant, and leftist gay community stemmed from a particular subset of historical events tied to 1970s LA. In considering how these incidents fueled their machoism and repulsion toward non-whites and liberal gay society, one learns not only the history of Southern California but the narrative of the National Socialist League; an individualistic and private group whose obsession with nurturing a society built on racial hatred and male attachment symbolized a transitional period in the white power saga.

This episode of California history deserves acknowledgment for it tells of how white nationalist and racist philosophies arise from a specific time, place, and set of perceived threats to white male supremacy. These neo-Nazis did not live on the boundaries of contemporary Southern California society, but right at its heart.

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<sup>192</sup> Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 2.

<sup>193</sup> Ferber, *Home-Grown Hate: Gender and Organized Racism*, 31; Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 1–5.

### **Old and New Foes: African Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Preservation of white Masculinity**

For all the unexpected philosophies that made the NSL an exception among other white power actors, their core values stayed quite consistent with contemporary white nationalists. One need look no further than their characterizations of a major societal crisis: the eradication of “all-white” spaces via the proliferation of non-white persons, especially African Americans and Mexican immigrants. In the wake of affirmative action programs, school integration, and reduced barriers to non-white economic participation, the National Socialist League vehemently reacted to the perceived advancement of people of color in the Southland. While the modest strides made by these communities in no way truly threatened the white hegemonic patriarchal structure, the NSL fell back on foreseeable eugenicist and pseudoscience racial theories to “prove” the existential threat Blacks and Latinos posed to the white race. Yet their egregious antics did not stray too far off the beaten path, concerning mainstream policies. During these crucial demographic and social changes within Los Angeles, politicians (on both sides of the aisle) began employing color-blind politics to discuss ethnic groups’ abuse of welfare policies, their detrimental effect on children’s education, and criminal tendencies. Whereas the NSL employed blatant racial profiling, their fears mirrored those of many whites in the region. These fears—and an accompanying white nationalist rhetoric—emerged during a very particular period in California history: a time when the superiority of white persons was *slightly* challenged, and therefore, in their eyes, required defending.

Despite the African American community only comprising 10% of Los Angeles’s seven million-strong 1970 population, the National Socialist League made them

a primary target in their Aryan crusade.<sup>194</sup> In first evaluating how the NSL specifically characterized the African American community and its danger to white privilege, one truly does not need an extensive study to understand the basis of their beliefs. Like a majority of white nationalists, the National Socialist League toed the line in presenting racist—yet predictable—accusations against non-whites. Their false belief in the essentialist ideology (that Black and white persons were genetically different and thus evolved divergently) underlines the basis of their credos.<sup>195</sup> They subscribed to pseudo-psychological studies that African American brains and IQs “were minuscule in comparison to whites,” and therefore could not risk intermixing with the white population. In fact, the NSL members took pride in their homosexuality, as they claimed that their sexual orientation did a great service to the white race, for they were physically unable to procreate children with non-white people, and were not responsible for bringing mixed-race children into the world.<sup>196</sup> In blaming genetic defections and a predisposition towards violence, NSL literature warned of the “acts of terror” non-whites would impose on residential areas and businesses in the 1970s and 1980s; they even described how prominent civil rights leaders would specifically “pretend” to be passive protestors to hide a violent agenda to eradicate all white persons.<sup>197</sup> Overtly suspicious of Black Power and civil rights leaders (like Malcolm X and Martin Luther

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<sup>194</sup> US Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, “Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif. Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area” (Washington D.C.: US Department of Commerce, May 1972).

<sup>195</sup> Ferber, *Home-Grown Hate: Gender and Organized Racism*, 108.

<sup>196</sup> Skrydstrup, “The Fuehrer of Echo Park.”; National Socialist League, “News and Facts,” *NS Kampfruf*, n.d., ONE National Socialist League Collection.

<sup>197</sup> “The Zebra: Special Report,” *NS Mobilizer*, Winter -Spring 1982 1981, National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

King), the NSL admonished segregationists like George Wallace and the KKK for not fully demolishing Black Pride movements, which would eclipse the “Aryan white culture.”<sup>198</sup> Witnessing public and media support for these Black activists, the National Socialist League attempted to limit Black influence and “save America” in their immediate area by supporting measures to stop the federal busing of schools under integration mandates.<sup>199</sup> In response to government-sanctioned racial equality programs, the NSL concluded that “whites have been run out of Los Angeles County,” and imitated past white nationalist rambling by petitioning the complete removal of African Americans (and immigrants) from American shores.<sup>200</sup>

Although abhorrent, these men’s reactions to the African American community should not come as a surprise. And whereas criticism of African Americans and Jews constituted the bulk of their racial prejudice, the NSL also alluded to the threat of Mexican immigration into the Southland (which would play a central role in the 1980s and 1990s white power epoch). These fears arose from the fast-growing Latino populace. During the 1970s, the Latino community—now the largest minority group in Los Angeles—began making a name for themselves, climbing up the economic ladder where they neither fit into the lower

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<sup>198</sup> National Socialist League, “News and Facts,” *NS Kampfruf*, n.d., ONE National Socialist League Collection.

<sup>199</sup> National Socialist League, “White Race Unity,” n.d., ONE National Socialist League Collection.

<sup>200</sup> Lt. Roland Stryker, “Corresponding with the Editor,” *NS Mobilizer*, Spring-Summer 1978, National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives; National Socialist League, “Vantage Point,” *Race & Nation*, Fall-Winter 1985, National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 10, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

Black rung nor upper white rung of society.<sup>201</sup> By 1980, “Hispanics” made up an estimated 28% of Los Angeles County, and by 1982, the County Board of Supervisors estimated 1.1 million undocumented persons in the county.<sup>202</sup> Though only briefly mentioned in NSL writings, the pressing issue of undocumented immigrants “subverting public trust” and Mexicans abusing the welfare system pushed the NSL to draft a petition to President Jimmy Carter, imploring him to spend taxpayer money to send immigrants back to Mexico and create “home free zones” in Los Angeles.<sup>203</sup> Crucially, this evidence evokes a burgeoning xenophobic attitude directed toward non-Black immigrants, which foreshadowed the white power movement’s focus away from African American hatred to a broader intolerance for all non-whites.

Loathing for non-white members of society certainly did not make the National Socialist League extraordinary within the confines of the national white power movement. However, their heightened anxiety

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<sup>201</sup> Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>202</sup> Wayne A. Corneilus, Leo R Chávez, and Jorge G. Castro, “Mexican Immigrants and Southern California: A Summary of Current Knowledge,” Research Report Series, 36 (Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982), 11,15. The “Hispanic” category (separate from the racial category) was placed in a more prominent position in the 1980 census and sent to all households. This was because the category “Spanish origin” performed poorly and was not comparable to the amount of Spanish-speakers, for many self-described “Hispanics” did not describe themselves as “Spanish-origin.” This categorization would change in 2000, when Latino was added to the race category. Due to the fallacies in census reporting and the difficulty of government agencies in securing an accurate number of undocumented immigrants, it is realistic to assume that the Hispanic population and undocumented immigration was higher than reported; Skrydstrup, “The Fuehrer of Echo Park.”

<sup>203</sup> Skrydstrup, “The Fuehrer of Echo Park;” Lynn Mie Itagaki, *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 10.

alluded to a critical point in California racial relations. As a city of continual racial pluralism, Los Angeles served as a foundational center for Civil Rights groups in the 1960s, but also in 1970s “third world politics,” which celebrated ethnicity and leftist philosophies. In response to subtler attempts to undermine racial equality, civil rights advocates in the Los Angeles region forwarded radical activism that would seek to benefit one specific minority group.<sup>204</sup> Seen primarily with the Chicano/Chicana, Black Power, and Japanese American activists, the 1970s witnessed a transitory reign of third-world politics, as seen with the Black Panther Party, the Center for Autonomous Social Action (CASA), and the East Wind Japanese American Collective.<sup>205</sup> But akin to the other white power groups’ revulsion to the Civil Rights movement, the NSL saw these campaigners as a threat to their racial authority.

The growing mobilization of ethnic minorities and Los Angeles politicians’ endeavors to champion multiculturalism and present LA as a racially tolerant, globalized city spurred a revival in “Aryan” vanguard movements.<sup>206</sup> The NSL followed the lead of other white nationalist extremists like the Aryan Nations and the National Alliance, who envisioned new waves of non-whites as a drain on the sacred Aryan civilization.<sup>207</sup> In their eyes, minority culture and white culture could never coexist: the triumph of one meant the destruction of the other. In the midst of increased non-white agency, and the public backlash to the growing African American and

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<sup>204</sup> Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 204.

<sup>205</sup> Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, xviii.

<sup>206</sup> Zeskind, *Blood and Politics*, 28; Scott Kurashige, “Between ‘White Spot’ and ‘World City’: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism,” in *A Companion to Los Angeles* (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2010), 64, 73.

<sup>207</sup> Zeskind, *Blood and Politics*, 30.

Latino presence, the National Socialist League weaponized fanatical language in their racial crusade to reclaim a white world they felt was slipping farther and farther away.

There is no doubt that the National Socialist League displayed extreme reactions to ethnic minorities. However, their ramblings did not stray far from conventional political idioms. The NSL was not the only one to express intolerance for non-whites: it was an endemic issue in Southern California, especially during the 1970s “Post-Civil Rights Era.” This era exposed how the federal government’s “benign neglect” of fair housing policies, equal opportunity measures, and non-discriminatory mandates resulted in a white acceptance of “color blindness” and prejudice devoid of explicitly racist rhetoric.<sup>208</sup> Calls for “law and order,” and appeals to the Silent Majority of the Nixon and Reagan administrations masked the overtly racist assaults levied against minority groups: what Ian Haney refers to as “dog-whistle politics.” A central component of middle-class politics through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Haney states that “dog-whistle politics” refers to conservatives (such as Reagan, Nixon, Wallace, and Goldwater) “speaking in a code to a targeted audience” to forward xenophobic creeds without actually labeling any racial groups in particular.<sup>209</sup> Dog whistle politics utilize “thinly veiled references” to attack non-whites by referring to them as “hoodlums, welfare cheats, or aliens”, whereas the term “Mexican” or “Black” may never actually appear. These tactics allowed whites to discriminate against people of color by hiding behind a “neutral” concern for “social

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<sup>208</sup> Lynn Mie Itagaki, *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 10.

<sup>209</sup> Ian López Haney, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford University Press Inc., 2014), 4.

problems.”<sup>210</sup> In the LA basin, such policies exhibited themselves within mounting opposition to bilingual educational programs, school busing, affirmative action agendas, and expanding welfare benefits.<sup>211</sup> Whereas these political actors used more discrete methods of discrimination than the NSL, both sects addressed parallel concerns: the arrival of racial minorities and the dismantling of white hierarchy.

But the NSL’s hatred for non-white persons arose from a deeper recess, not just from the Southland’s racist antics.<sup>212</sup> Within the NSL, hatred for minorities and people of color developed from gendered anxieties. By loudly proclaiming their pledge to sexual liberation and a “non-conformist lifestyle” via homosexuality, the NSL had become ostracized among other white power groups such as the American Nazi Party and the KKK.<sup>213</sup> To combat this shunning, the NSL sought to “justify” their existence by doubling down on their racial rhetoric. Like the subset of gay skinheads of the 1990s, the NSL aimed to minimize their gay stigma by “appealing to the master status.” By shifting attention away from their sexual orientation to their rank as “white men, united by their faith [and] their race,” they tried to ingratiate themselves in right-wing inner circles.<sup>214</sup> Appeals to higher racial loyalty saturated the NSL’s campaigns, for their writings frequently referenced

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<sup>210</sup> Haney, 4, 35-36.

<sup>211</sup> Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>212</sup> Skrydstrup, “The Fuehrer of Echo Park.”

<sup>213</sup> Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2006), 80; Leighton, “Gay Nazis of LA.”; “Robert Shelton’s KKK: Gay Klansmen Sets Record ‘Straight,’” *NS Mobilizer*, September 1976.

<sup>214</sup> “Ideology of Gay Racialist Skinheads and Stigma Making,” *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 34, no. 1 (2006): 168, 177.

how they must “remove the issue of sex from politics,” for divisions over sexual conformity undermined a united alliance of white persons.<sup>215</sup> NSL members optimistically hoped that their dedication to Aryan superiority would result in the “mainstream radical right [dropping] anti-gay” viewpoints.<sup>216</sup> Subsequently, they pursued alliances with the KKK and other neo-Nazi affiliations like the National Socialist White Worker’s Party, the National State’s Right Party, and the Nationalist Social Party (although no real proof of a robust partnership exists).<sup>217</sup> Their unfettering obligation to defend white purity to avoid rejection demonstrates not only a new era of race relations in 1970s Los Angeles but also how the NSL utilized racist attitudes to deflect interest away from their homosexual identity.

However, once it became apparent that other white power groups did not wish to align themselves with the National Socialist League, NSL members no longer hid their homosexuality: in fact, they made it their defining feature. But this does not mean they rejected the hypermasculine gender dynamics of other white power players. Herein lies the befuddling contradiction within this organization. Although these men recognized that other white power groups would discriminate against them due to their homosexual image, these men presented an even more aggressively masculine image of themselves *based* on their homosexual desires and raw sexuality. Flouncing their sexual orientation—and refusing to mask their preferences under a false heterosexual label—the National Socialist League members altered the hypermasculinity of the

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<sup>215</sup> National Socialist League, “Brother Against Brother.”; HWC, “Corresponding with the Editor.”

<sup>216</sup> National Socialist League, “Progress Spotlight,” 1974.

<sup>217</sup> Lt. Roland Stryker, “Corresponding with the Editor,” *NS Mobilizer*, Spring-Summer 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7; “Personal Questionnaire,” *NS Mobilizer*, Spring and Summer 1979.

previous neo-Nazis. Affirming that “if homosexuals can be capitalists...why can’t we be national socialists?,” images of sculpted, shirtless stormtroopers with broad shoulders and bulging muscles dotted many of the *NS Mobilizer’s* pages and NS member letters (see Figure 2).<sup>218</sup> Discrediting the claims of other white nationalist groups who “have no use for Gays at all,” Veh and his devotees presented themselves as suave—but capable—macho men.<sup>219</sup> This starkly contrasted with the other paramilitary groups of the time, which described gay men as “sexually voracious and carnal...all they like to do is have sex” and were therefore useless in white nationalist pursuits.<sup>220</sup> Bragging about their rubbing shoulders with local motorcycle gangs and providing muscle and security to movie screenings, the NSL men welded sexually charged imagery to white masculinity.<sup>221</sup> This was especially prevalent within their “classified ad” sections, which frequently published letters from men in LA and the wider white power world, that solicited sex and relationships with other men. However, a majority of these ads expose members’ efforts to present an ideal masculine picture of themselves: “bodybuilder seeks strong-minded mate for a groovy way out scenes,” “British guy into leather and denim,” or “groovy young slave

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<sup>218</sup> NS Mobilizer, “NS Mobilizer Subscription Advertisement,” n.d., ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>219</sup> “Robert Shelton’s KKK: Gay Klansmen Sets Record ‘Straight.’”

<sup>220</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get Into-And Out of-Violent Extremism* (University of California Press, 2018), 145.

<sup>221</sup> “Homebodies,” *Entertainment West*, November 29, 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 2; Matt Weir, “Invitation to a White American,” 1979, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 6.

wanted by imaginative, levelheaded and Levi master.”<sup>222</sup> Given that the NSL’s manifesto decried gay men’s right to “pursue sexual fulfillment,” the appearance of such advertisement seems rather unremarkable.<sup>223</sup> Looking at



Figure 2. “Classified Ads.” (*NS Kampfruf* 1, no. 3-4, May/June 1974. ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7).

these gendered dimensions of the NSL explains how these men simultaneously reconciled a white power *and* a homosexual identity.

This blatant promotion of sexual desires within a masculine environment would seem an unwise move on the part of the NSL, especially given that a sizable portion of members expressed interest in allying with other heterosexual white nationalists.<sup>224</sup> In rationalizing this curious emphasis on sexuality, sociological work on gay skinhead groups in the 1990s and 2000s provides a possible explanation. While the organizational structure and racial goals of these groups differed, studies found that like the

<sup>222</sup> National Socialist League Classified Ad Department, “Classified Ads” (*NS Mobilizer*, 1980), ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8; National Socialist League, “Pen Pals,” *NS Kampfruf*, May 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 9.

<sup>223</sup> N.S. Mobilizer Editorial Staff, “NS Mobilizer Subscription Notice,” n.d., ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>224</sup> “Personal Questionnaire.”

NSL, these gay racialsists “experienced greater gender role stress” emanating from their gay status, which threatened to label them as “feminine.”<sup>225</sup> In keeping up with the essentialist ideologies that run throughout white power philosophies, these men understood the necessity of mimicking the emblems associated with US masculinity. Similar to the skinheads, the NSL attempted to engage their masculinity via demonstrations of their raw sexual power, and to disabuse others of their undesirable gay stereotypes, confirming that “real Nazis don’t eat quiche.”<sup>226</sup>

Savory egg dishes aside, the men of the NSL continued to spew a venomous resentment towards people of color. The NSL rarely displayed their intense hatred out in public, but their explicit aversion toward minorities exposes the shift towards ethnic plurality and minority rights that began to take hold in Southern California. And whereas the NSL’s employment of homosexual tendencies to prove their masculinity is distinctive, they still paralleled the majority of white nationalist and white separatist groups of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To avoid becoming the stereotypical gay men “with a sequined top,” these neo-Nazis exercised sexual language that would underscore their masculinity: a perplexing rhetorical strategy for a group who contended that sexual orientation and sexual exploits mattered little in a white nationalist world.<sup>227</sup>

### **Jewish Subterfuge Within Gay Rights and the Need for a Homosocial Environment**

The NSL’s regime chiefly concentrated on the

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<sup>225</sup> Kevin Borgeson and Robin Valeri, “Gay Skinheads: Negotiating a Gay Identity in a Culture of Traditional Masculinity,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 23, no. 1 (March 2015): 48.

<sup>226</sup> “The Hammer,” n.d., ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 2.

<sup>227</sup> HWC, “Corresponding with the Editor”; National Socialist League, “Brother Against Brother.”

impending demise of white purity via African Americans' and immigrants' presence. But they also saw enemies in those thought to be their allies: specifically in the gay liberation movement. The NSL's aversion to liberal politics and LGBTQ rights commented on the broader gay scene within 1970s Los Angeles and informs the reader how these men conceived of themselves within the homosexual environment. The National Socialist's League's confusing animosity toward the gay community reveals just how impactful this sexual liberation movement was to the Southland. Akin to New York and San Francisco, the gay rights movement played a central role in the area, becoming a defining component of Southern Californian history. Although this analysis examines the rationalization behind these men's hatred towards other homosexuals, it also reveals the prominence of the gay liberation movement within the Los Angeles area. Although this city became a nucleus of gay rights before the famed Stonewall and Haight and Ashbury events, the NSL still took exception to the "gay liberation" of the day.<sup>228</sup> But wouldn't this prove a self-sabotaging move? What would compel the NSL to explicitly advocate against those whose sole aim was to initiate gay men and women's acceptance into mainstream culture? The NSL's disgust toward the gay rights agenda requires careful analysis of their underlying belief system. The men of this neo-Nazi group opposed the gay rights groups for two reasons: 1) it painted a public picture of gay men as effeminate and 2) these identity politics—like all other liberal movements—had been supposedly infiltrated by the greater Jewish conspiracy which now worked to destroy "non-conformists."

The National Socialist League's first point—that the contemporary gay rights crusade reduced them down to emasculated men—found its way into their newsletters, personal correspondence, and letters to the editors.

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<sup>228</sup> NS Mobilizer, "NS Mobilizer Subscription Advertisement."

Members indicated that “as a result [of the liberal left], the straight world now pictures us with a pink Afro and a sequined top.”<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, they strove to debunk this unfavorable image by consistently referencing false historical research which suggested that men of the highest moral caliber and masculinity—Alexander the Great, Frederick the Great, Charles XII of Sweden, Nietzsche, and “thousands of Aryan homophiles” of the Third Reich—were homosexuals.<sup>230</sup> To legitimize their butch masculinity, the NSL took offense to any negative, weak depictions of gay men. Specifically, their abhorrence of the “vulgarity” and licentious nature of the LA gay scene even compelled them to engage in a rare instance of public showing. Enraged by the scenes of openly (and partially nude) gay men parading down the street with “sex devices” and strolling alongside “a cock walking down the street,” the NSL attempted to march in the 1977 Christopher Street West Association gay pride parade in LA.<sup>231</sup> Veh planned to showcase his men in their uniforms to present a stark contrast to the more ostentatious displays of sexual autonomy, and to remind others that “we [right-wing homosexual men] were there too!”<sup>232</sup> When the CSW committee denied the NSL’s petition to join the parade in June 1978, NSL leadership retorted that their banishment “[was] an affront to freedom of thought and speech,” and threatened to march regardless.<sup>233</sup> While Veh’s threats rang hollow, the mere fact that the NSL emerged out of their

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<sup>229</sup> HWC, “Corresponding with the Editor.”

<sup>230</sup> Satya, “Gay Nazis,” *The Gay Community News*, November 2, 1974, 2nd edition, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7; HWC, “Corresponding with the Editor.”

<sup>231</sup> Jim Kepner, “Off Your Knees, Pharisees,” *Newswest*, April 14, 1977, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>232</sup> Russell Veh, “Letter to C.S.W.,” May 3, 1977, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>233</sup> Russel Veh, “Letter to C.S.W. Committee,” May 25, 1977, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 1.

introverted setting to rebuff their image of homosexual men speaks volumes.

However, the NSL's overarching issue with the liberal gay community boiled down to a typical culprit among extreme right-wing ideology: antisemitism. Although the American Nazi Party and other white power groups frequently resorted to sponsoring theories of Jewish conspiracies within the communist movement or racial equality drives, the NSL pointed to a Zionist agenda inside the "left" gay political movement. In their words "gay liberation is meaningless in a land enslaved by Black terror and Jewish liberalism," and charged Jews as the puppet masters behind anti-gay government discriminatory policies.<sup>234</sup> These neo-Nazis asserted that any negative depictions of gay persons directly correlated to the size of the Jewish presence in the media, which supplied misinformation about the plagues of a homosexual lifestyle.<sup>235</sup> They accused Jewish persons of posing as allies to homosexuals while simultaneously feeding the mainstream culture with false images of gay men as effeminate weaklings. Therefore, if the Jewish conspiracy to undermine gay freedom rested within the gay liberation movement, the "sexual non-conformists" of the NSL felt a responsibility to combat it.<sup>236</sup> In their twisted logic, true liberation for gay men could only arise from the destruction of gay liberation itself.

The NSL's mental gymnastics aside, their antics hinged on the cultural and social climate of Southern California in the 1970s and early 1980s. Specifically, the history of the liberal (and radical) gay community. Lillian Faderman's and Stuart Timmons's *Gay LA* proves

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<sup>234</sup> NS Mobilizer, "NS Mobilizer Subscription Advertisement."

<sup>235</sup> National Socialist League, "What Kind of Gutless Creep Are You Whitey?," *NS Kampfruf*, June 1974, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

<sup>236</sup> National Socialist League.

invaluable for understanding Southern California's central role in LGBTQ history. Whereas 1940s LA already possessed the reputation as a "liberal city" that became the scene for civil rights radicals, the City of Angels became pivotal to the gay rights struggle of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>237</sup> Although the Hollywood industry and influx of young migrants made the gay lifestyle more visible in LA than in other metropolises, not until the 1960s did organizers begin to push back against police harassment and state discrimination. No longer willing to silently endure the label of "molesters and troublemakers," political protestors organized "gay-ins" and "be-ins" at renowned areas like Griffith Park. A pivotal moment arrived when the community fought to oust prejudicial City Councilman Paul Lampton in 1969 and elected gay-friendly member Bob Stevenson.<sup>238</sup> After achieving measurable results in their pursuit for equality (like LA's first gay pride parade in June of 1970), a growing sector of the gay community became "radicalized," and rejected "what they saw as the overly cautious approach of the homophile generation that went before them."<sup>239</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s gay rights activists hailed from the political and social left-wing, carrying tactics they previously employed in the Vietnam War and civil rights protests.<sup>240</sup> These new players quickly came to the forefront of the NSL's agenda, for they took the LA Gay Liberation Front's "guerrilla tactics" and "Power to the People slogan" as incontrovertible proof of a Jewish campaign to destroy the credibility of gay men.<sup>241</sup> Programs like PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) and the LA Gay Liberation Front, which referred to themselves as "the militant arm of the gay

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<sup>237</sup> Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 130.

<sup>238</sup> Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 165–66.

<sup>239</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 166.

<sup>240</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 167.

<sup>241</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 172, 174.

movement,” only fueled the NSL’s cries of antisemitism and sabotage within the liberation movement.<sup>242</sup>

Rejecting an association with Los Angeles’s political gay scene became a focal point of the NSL’s rhetoric, compelled by antisemitic theories of a Zionist conspiracy and the “radical” agenda of the left-wing.<sup>243</sup> But denial of one gay community did not drive the NSL into self-imposed quarantine. Although never reaching the level of public involvement of their counterparts in the American Nazi Party or the White Aryan Resistance, the NSL aspired to “reach 15 million gays” by establishing a robust league of other Aryan homophiles.<sup>244</sup> In essence, The NSL’s version of masculinity was the capacity to connect with others of similar racial disposition and sexual preference.

Alleging that the KKK, Minute Men, Wallace, and Goldwater campaigns failed to carve out a space for right-wing gay activists, the NSL quickly descended upon the task of structuring an informal setting for gay racialists in the Los Angeles region (and eventually around the world).<sup>245</sup> This setting hinged on the solidification of “homosocial bonds,” and establishing a “fratriarchal space:” that is a space created for men, by men (see Figure 3). The NSL benefitted from a community that catered to their racialized agenda and sexual identity, permitting them to associate with those excluded from neighboring white power institutions.<sup>246</sup> Admittedly, generating a singularly male setting came with the territory of other white nationalist groups, for dismal recruiting events typically

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<sup>242</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 155, 172.

<sup>243</sup> National Socialist League, “Letters to the Editor,” June 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7.

<sup>244</sup> National Socialist League, “Progress Spotlight,” *NS Kampfruf*, June 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 7.

<sup>245</sup> “The Gay Nazis.”

<sup>246</sup> “Hardsell: Why Don’t We Go To My Place And Talk?”; Mattsson and Johansson, ““We Are the White Aryan Warriors,”” 396.

force organizations to expand their operations. However, the NSL proved distinctive. By throwing parties and presenting movie nights, the NSL ultimately became concerned with building a welcoming community rather than aggressively participating in public politics or racial combat. Therefore, one can take the absence of NSL participation in parades, picket lines, and media coverage not as evidence of their lack of willpower or belief in white separatism, but rather as an exemplification of their version of masculine expression: one that supported interdependent attachments with others outside of the public purview.

Recognizing the NSL's style of masculinity and the efforts to establish an intimate gay community calls for a reinterpretation of their archival remnants. Invitations to a lavish "Hitler's Birthday Cabaret" in the Hollywood hills, Oktoberfest celebrations, cocktail parties, and showings of Nazi films where viewers could see "young boys showering, tussling, shaving and relaxing" offer a glimpse into the atmosphere this organization sanctioned (see



*Figure 3. "At the Convention." (NS Mobilizer 4, no. 38, Summer 1977. ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8).*

Figures 4 and 5).<sup>247</sup> NSL programs and magazines also encouraged followers to bring recruits and other amenable men to these “upscale” fetes that one local journalist reported to “look like a fraternity rush” more than a political meeting.<sup>248</sup> Although publishing their alleged distaste for the thriving gay scene of West Hollywood—one of discoteces (clubs with a specific catering to disco music), dance halls, and public bathhouses—the NSL in some sense replicated their own West Hollywood. To rival the liberals, they tried to populate their parties and meetings by luring in young gay men from gay bars and restaurants, accomplished by the allegedly “largest distribution [of pamphlets] to the non-conformist community in the country.”<sup>249</sup> Antisemitic conspiracy theories and cries of Black savagery may have populated NSL meetings and pool parties, but their literature suggests that political discourse took a backseat at these events, for fraternal bonding became the chief priority.

The Southern California gay liberation movement and radical politics loomed large in the NSL’s brief lifespan, for it hinted at Los Angeles’s growing acceptance of liberal social policies. Although detesting the gay liberation movement, which according to the NSL, suffered the apparent infiltration of Zionists overlords, the National

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<sup>247</sup> American Party, “Invitation to Hitler’s Birthday Cabaret,” 1974, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 10; American Party, “Oktoberfest Invitation,” 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 11; National Socialist League, “Invitation to Third Assembly,” 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 12; Russell Veh, “Invitation to World Service Film League Movie Screening,” June 22, 1979, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 12.

<sup>248</sup> “Hardsell: Why Don’t We Go To My Place And Talk?”

<sup>249</sup> Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 232, 238; National Socialist League, “NSL Opens Fall Membership Drive,” *NS Mobilizer*, Spring and Summer 1978, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 6.

Socialist League attempted to construct their secluded gay community, which had become cut off from many other white power groups and other racialisists. NSL members cultivated a very specific form of masculinity, one that emanated from personal and romantic relationships, but still abided by white power's hypermasculinity.



*Figure 4.* The front side of the invitation to Hitler's birthday party, 1974. (ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 6).

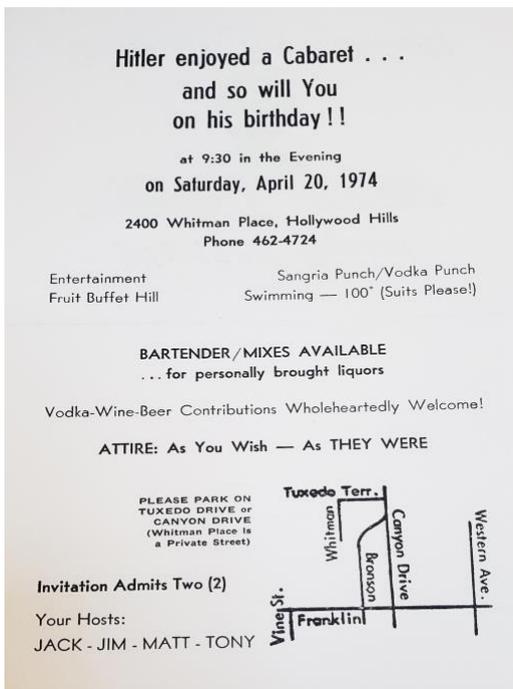


Figure 5. The back side of the invitation to Hitler’s birthday party, 1974. (ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 6).

### A Sign of Things to Come

Until the 1980s, the National Socialist League continued to endorse a masculine environment fortified by a hatred for African Americans, Mexican immigrants, and neighboring gay communities. Yet like many southern California neo-Nazis, they eventually faded into oblivion. Never accruing much media attention, the group’s records end in 1985, when the NSL last reported spreading pamphlets and copies of the *NS Mobilizer* in Northridge, California (even though Russel Veh assured members that

“we are still alive!).”<sup>250</sup> But this should not come as a surprise. The NSL balked at becoming a full-scale revolutionary force and merely fostered a masculine, white supremacist ideology within their closely guarded ranks. Promoting messages of machismo, vigorous sex drives, and racial superiority, these neo-Nazis exemplified the diversification of white power groups in the 1970s and 1980s, which did not coalesce under one unifying purpose. But their reclusive nature and smaller membership numbers should not disabuse one of their important roles in Southern California. While relatively minuscule in stature, the NSL contributed to the California narrative, for their rhetoric and dogma emerged in reaction to ethnic politics, southern immigration, and gay liberation that were indicative of 1970s Los Angeles.

Only the interlude in the grander tale of white power movements within the Southland, the NSL set up ideological dominos that future groups—such as the White Aryan Resistance and the Racist Skinhead movement—would later topple. The hatred against immigrant communities in the Southwest as well as the worship of white working-class masculinity would live on. As the NSL exhaled its final breath a more revolutionary, more violent, and more destructive white power organizations would take its place, wreaking havoc in the region and allowing white nationalists to fully emerge from the shadows.

NSL extremism proved indicative of a particular time and place. Expectedly, Los Angeles’s shifting demographics and political foci would call for new forms of white nationalism and white supremacy. Whereas this region no longer plays home to this organization, it certainly houses new white supremacist and white

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<sup>250</sup> National Socialist League, “Action Report,” *Race & Nation*, Fall-Winter 1985, ONE National Socialist League Collection, Box 1, Folder 8.

nationalist philosophies. Political watchdog agencies and news outlets continue to witness the proliferation of racial extremists, expedited by the age of social media and Donald Trump's successful 2016 presidential campaign. Instead of deriving their actions from conventional party lines, racial extremism is now *part* of mainstream politics. As put by Kevin Estep in his analysis of the resurgence of the KKK and Trump's election,

Important structural changes were taking place in the United States that cut a path for a white nationalist agenda—an agenda that not only entered our political discourse but found a warm reception from Americans, most of whom did not think of themselves as political extremists.<sup>251</sup>

White power groups like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Qanon continue to make an appearance on the national stage, in such events as the Unite the Right Rally and the January 6<sup>th</sup> Insurrection. Predictably, white supremacist and racial violence continue to multiply in Los Angeles and Orange Counties (OC), displayed at events like the failed 2021 “White Lives Matter” Huntington Beach Rally (which protested COVID restrictions and Black Lives Matter initiatives), and the 2016 Ku Klux Klan rally in Anaheim, where Klan members beat and stabbed counter-protesters.<sup>252</sup> Both LA and OC also reported a perturbing rise in hate crimes—especially those targeting

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<sup>251</sup> Rory McVeigh and Kevin Estep, *The Politics of Losing: Trump, the Klan, and the Mainstreaming of Resentment* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 12.

<sup>252</sup> Martin Smith, Hannah Fry, and Anita Chabria, “‘White Lives Matter’ Rallies Fizzled. Hate Groups Still See Chance to ‘Fire Up the Base.’” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 2021; Jason Wilson, “‘Senseless Hate:’ The Far Right’s Deep Roots in Southern California,” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2019.

Jews, African Americans, and Asian Americans: the Los Angeles 2020 hate crime report saw a 20% growth in hate crime (to 635 incidents), which they attributed to Trump's 2020 loss and the anti-Asian bias from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>253</sup> Orange County even originated the notable paramilitary group, the "Rise Above Movement," which participated in the Unite the Right Rally and violent protests from Huntington Beach to Berkeley.<sup>254</sup> Chapman University sociologist Peter Simi concluded that within the Southland "when Obama was elected, it was an opportunity for these folks to get organized...and when Trump came along, it was another opportunity for somebody on their side who was emboldening."<sup>255</sup>

Looking toward the future racial discourse and proliferation of racial extremists within the LA region and the nation, new sets of questions materialize: how will historians characterize this current epoch of white power? What roles do gender and constructions of masculinity play in racial hatred? What can we learn about these individuals, and how does this fit into the grander chronicle of white radical extremism? And lastly: what does the propagation of these groups mean for American democracy, racial liberty, and equality? To begin answering these questions, one must situate right-wing extremists within a historical context. This assessment of the National Socialist League of the 1970s and 1980s intends to do just that. It finds that one does a disservice when they ignore these extremists or move them to the back burner; now more than ever, we must accept that these groups resided right in the heart of conventional politics. To fathom how they got to this

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<sup>253</sup>"2020 Hate Crime Report" (Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 2021), 8–10.

<sup>254</sup> Wilson, "Senseless Hate."

<sup>255</sup> "Inside the Resurgence of Right-Wing Extremism in Orange County," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2021.

point—and to appreciate how to prevent the spread of their heinous rhetoric—we may look to the past for answers. Ideally, this paper exhibits how racial extremists arise from the most unlikely of places, from those we may initially discount based on our preconceived notions of gender dynamics and political alliances. But making these assumptions would be a mistake. In doing so, we blind ourselves to those that remain a potential threat to racial pluralism and freedom for others.

# ***“Savages and Sable Subjects”*: White Fear, Racism, and the Demonization of New Orleans Voodoo in the Nineteenth Century**

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This paper examines the dimensions of white New Orleanians' mischaracterizations of Voodoo, both as an idealized racist designation and nomenclature of Haitian Vodou, and representation of the hypersexualized savage African who engaged in evil, “harmful magic” like witchcraft and devil worship. This antagonistic reinterpretation emerged in the early nineteenth century and reoriented Voodoo as threatening the dominant system of slavocracy. Central to white trepidations was the assumption that Vodou/Voodoo would inspire slave uprisings much like Vodou had in Saint-Domingue.

My central argument is that the demonization of Voodoo in late antebellum New Orleans had far less to do with pious devotion, but instead was exclusively built upon the exploitative anxieties harbored by the United States particularly and white New Orleanians specifically. These forebodings would echo the dread of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and would be widely shared by white slaveholders in Louisiana. Thus, as Voodoo existed with New Orleans' creole culture throughout the nineteenth century, so too would its objectified image among white New Orleanians.

## **Introduction**

Before continuing, it is important to identify the differences between Saint-Domingue and Haiti, and Vodou and Voodoo for context. Prior to 1804, the Caribbean Island most known as Haiti was referred to as Saint-

Domingue. Originally called Española, or Hispaniola (“little Spain”) upon the invasion of Christopher Columbus, its name was changed to Saint-Domingue in 1697 when the French empire sieged control of Hispaniola from the Spanish. Once the Haitian Revolution ended in January 1804, the country’s name officially changed to Haiti, where it remains as such today.

Vodou (sometimes referred to as Vodun when indicating its position as an African Diaspora Religion) derives from the Fon, or Fon nu Agadja people of southern Dahomey (modern-day Benin) and represents “spirit,” “god,” or “image” in West African spirituality. Vodun is the conceptualization of the person to the world, as one Haitian intellectual explained.<sup>256</sup> Voodoo, conversely, is a term of condemnation; a divisive placeholder of white New Orleanians’ racist ideologies of enslaved men and women of African descent in the late antebellum period. Voodoo is, as one historian suggested, “an inexact connotation,” whose likelihood of extraction from the lexicon of American folklore, “is small.” Moreover, Voodoo is a term many historians and anthropologists reject. While scholar Leslie Desmangles described Vodou as “an inextricable part of Haitian life,” he identified Voodoo as a “distortion of the Dahomean (or Beninois) word *vodu* (meaning “god” or “spirit).”

While honoring the correct term of Vodou, this paper will use the American phrase Voodoo to denote its racially provocative theme. Vodou, then, will be used in relation to Saint-Domingue/Haiti references within the body of this work. In all other descriptions, Voodoo will be otherwise used. This, I feel, is in keeping with the language of the time and does not indicate my support for its

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<sup>256</sup> Guèrin C. Montilus, “Vodun and Social Transformation in the African Diasporic Experience: The Concept of Personhood in Haitian Vodun Religion” in *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth, & Reality*, edited by Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1.

continued usage unless within a frame of historical insight; not contemporary distortions.

An extension of West African Adja tradition, Vodou, and its substratum ‘Vodou culture,’ is a complex system within Haitian spirit theology whose primary deity Bondye (God) and multitudinous collective of spirits or orishas (*Lwa/Loa*) symbolize the clairvoyant reality and human connection to the external world. Enslaved men and women of African descent in the Americas believed the physical and divine elements were interconnected and acted in concert to each other. The sacredness of Vodou was an indispensable, irrefutable function of their connection to time, space, and history. Time offered the transcendence of the “now.” To conceive of time, according to Laurenti Magesa, was to understand it in a “cyclic and phenomenal way.”<sup>257</sup> Space occupied the physical land from which they were stolen; a place to which they could never return. Yet it also functioned as anchors to the spiritual margins between the living and the living dead; ancestors who were indeed “not dead,” but were everywhere, “in the thickening shadow...in the trees that rustles...in the wood that groans...in the breasts of the woman...in the child who is wailing...in the firebrand that flames...in the forest...in the house.”<sup>258</sup>

Those who worshiped the Vodou Supreme God Bondye believed he was the creator of all humankind. Their homes, or birth-space, were therefore sacred, stitching each person “into the natural world so closely as to share in the actual ‘livingness’ of animals, trees, rocks, and rivers.”<sup>259</sup> The external world intersected with the shadow of the

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<sup>257</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *What is not Sacred? African Spirituality* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 55.

<sup>258</sup> Obgu Kalu, “Ancestral Spirituality and Society in Africa” in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*. edited by Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 2000), 54.

<sup>259</sup> S.A. Thorpe, *African Traditional Religions: An Introduction* (Petroia: University of South Africa, 1991), 120.

body, represented as *ye*. Objects, beings, events, and facts engaged with the external light segment of the shadow, known as the *ye gaga*, its separate physical life consciousness, (*ye gil*) and metaphysical dimensions. Practitioners (worshippers) experienced dreams and visions from orishas and engaged in veneration communion with Ancestors through multiple forms of rituals bestowed upon the Lwa/Loa; borrowed lexeme from the Yorùbá language for lord (*oluwa*). Space was such a sacred extension of the person that, “To remove Africans by force from their land” was a “great injustice.”<sup>260</sup>

As the African ritual of initiation between the Adja Fon was carried across the Atlantic on slave vessels and supplanted within Afro-Atlantic religions in the Caribbean, Haitian Vodou, like Cuban Santería, Brazilian Candomblé, and Jamaican and Barbadian Obeah, became targets of scorn among white Christian missionaries in slave societies. Missionaries working to erase African paganism were also determined to “affirm the inferiority of Blacks and thus justify their repressive attitudes toward them.”<sup>261</sup> Haitian Vodou, however, remained tethered to West African indigenous religious uniformity and cosmology.

Voodoo in New Orleans, however, became the manufactured identification of slave ‘devil-worship’ in the Christian mind. While there are numerous spellings of Vodou/Voodoo, some of which exposed the depths of white racism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for the purpose of this work I will alternate between the more well-known Vodou and Voodoo when discussing Saint-Domingue/Haiti and New Orleans, respectively.

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<sup>260</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), 26.

<sup>261</sup> “Folklore and Racism” by William R. Ferris, Jr., n.d., SPC.2002.009, box 2, folder 223, William R. Ferris Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

Truly, there are no outstanding differences between Vodou and Voodoo, aside from the subtle cultural and locational variances. Indeed, any dissimilarities which emerged between the two were only composites of the exploitations and complete misunderstandings of Voodoo in the United States, including, but certainly not limited to, contemporary usage of charms, stones, and Voodoo dolls. The persistent vilification of Voodoo, then, is the result of hundreds of years of racial stereotypes. In contemporary western societies, all non-Christian religions are observed with a dose of skepticism, primarily due to the monotheistic and patriarchal worldview of religion and nationalism. Vodou was and remains in Africa.

Voodoo was always present in New Orleans from the moment the first enslaved Africans were transported from Dahomey, the Congo, and other areas in West and Central Africa. While colonial Christian dogma ordained and justified slavery – none more than the Catholic church – the interconnectedness of Vodou culture with Afro-Catholicism presented an opportunity for Christians in New Orleans to reorient Vodou as *Voodoo*. This sardonic nomenclature of Haitian Vodou did more than respell its name, however. It also reinvested in anti-Black rhetoric while directly leveraging white New Orleanians' contempt for the newly arrived Saint-Domingue refugees. Moreover, sensationalized tales of “Vaudoux” priests and priestess engaging in blood and cannibalistic sacrifices on the eve of the Haitian Revolution put many white New Orleanians in states of total panic, believing the Haitian rebels were sending, “the most warlike to Louisiana.”<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 28.

### **From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans, with Blood**

On March 24, 1791, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson confided in a letter to his eldest child that, “St. Domingue and Martinique are involved in a horrid civil war. Nothing can be more distressing than the situation of the inhabitants, as their slaves have been called into action, and are a terrible engine, absolutely ungovernable. ... An army and fleet from France are expected every hour to quell the disorders.”<sup>263</sup> Months later, Jefferson lamented to his third cousin Thomas Mann Rudolph in a letter dated August 7th that the French colony had dissolved into a state of utter chaos, “A decree of the National assembly of France, giving the rights of citizenship to the free people of colour of St. Domingo, has thrown that colony into a dangerous fermentation.”<sup>264</sup> Exactly one month later, on September 8th, Sylvanus (Silvanus) Bourne, Barnstable, Massachusetts merchant sent an urgent message to Jefferson about the carnage inside Saint-Domingue. “A new and alarming Catastrophe hath assailed this devoted Island. An insurrection among the negroes took place at Lembay. They have burned and laid waste all the Plantations. Their whole plan is marked with bitter resentment for former injuries and the cry of '*les droits de l'homme*' (human rights) is echoed through their Camp. They still continue their depredations...Here we have a lively instance of the baneful effects of Slavery, and I wish that America might add another laurel to her wreath of Fame, by leading the way to a general emancipation.”<sup>265</sup>

As Secretary of State Jefferson looked over Bourne’s letter he may have weighed the moment in with a sense of introspection. Having offered gradual

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<sup>263</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 19:604.

<sup>264</sup> Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, *Papers*, 22:11.

<sup>265</sup> Sylvanus Bourne to Jefferson, *Papers*, 22:133.

emancipation as a remedy to the problem of slavery in the United States and seeing it all but erased from the American Constitution, Jefferson was warm to the idea of general emancipation. And this he kept to himself. Instead, Jefferson's approach to the progressive loosening of the French imperial grip on Haitian slavery was to maintain a position of ignoring the rebel's cause and demands. Indeed, Jefferson was not the only white man dreading the fallout of the insurrection. Every American, white, Black, free, or slave, was in some way and to varying degrees, aware of the "catastrophe" in Saint-Domingue. Jefferson, a slave owner himself, could not help but side with the planter class, while internally apprehensive of what might happen if that "wreath of Fame" Bourne so poetically referred to, became a bed of thorns for the newly founded United States.

The Haitian Revolution had waged on for nine years by the time Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison in 1799. Two years prior, he confessed to Judge St. George Tucker of the United States District Court for the District of Virginia that he questioned whether history would look back on the Haitian Revolution as a moment of divine atonement for whites. "Perhaps the first chapter of this history," he began, "which has begun in St. Domingo, and the next succeeding ones which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity, and furnish an answer to the difficult question "Whither shall the coloured emigrants go?" Then, realizing that he fathered multiple children with his slave Sally Hemmings, Jefferson soberly and retrospectively acknowledged, "But if something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children."<sup>266</sup>

By the time he became President of the United States in 1801, Jefferson's private and written lamentations

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<sup>266</sup> Jefferson to St. George Tucker, *Papers*, 29:519.

of the Haitian Revolution alternated between sympathy, empathy, and apathy. As the last moments of the Revolution closed and a French defeat was all but inevitable, Jefferson, Madison, Claiborne, and every white person from Boston to New Orleans grew increasingly worried that an influx of refugees would flood into the Louisiana territory and threaten American sovereignty. However, as historian Emily Clark notes, the migration of free persons of color escaping Cap-Français in Saint-Domingue into Louisiana occurred in two stages, between 1792 to 1804, and 1809, when 9,000 immigrants fleeing Cap-Français entered New Orleans.<sup>267</sup> Nevertheless, seeking to ease tensions while protecting the nation's investments in slavery, Jefferson proposed to crush Haiti's post-war reconstruction by stripping crucial Haitian commerce, prohibiting ships' entry into and out of the island, and refusing to recognize Haiti's independence under Black leadership.

On January 1, 1804, Thomas Jefferson and the Atlantic World had no other option but to acknowledge the rebels' sovereignty as the Haitian Revolution came to its decisive end. In its wake, the United States was in a precarious position as no other slaving colony had ever defeated and ousted its overlord. The fact that the Haitian rebels gained their independence through a protracted military campaign waged over twelve years was mystifying and troubling.

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<sup>267</sup> Clark explains in the footnotes to her book *The Strange History of the American Quadroon* that a small number of Haitian refugees began to arrive in New Orleans in 1792. This intermittent exodus continued infrequently until the Haitian Revolution ended in January, 1804. In 1809, a larger migration occurred with 9,000 refugees indirectly entering New Orleans from Cuba. This mass exodus compelled Louisiana Governor, William C.C. Claiborne confessed to the French consul in New Orleans François Desforgues that the sudden appearance of so many immigrants into the territory would create massive inconvenience and embarrassment to the city's white citizens (42).

On the night before the insurrection a Haitian Vodou ritual was performed by dozens of rebels in the densely wooded area of the northern Morne Rouge region of Haiti, southwest of Cap-Français (modern-day Cap-Haïtien), in what became known as the Bois-Caïman ceremony. Present that night was Jamaican Vodou priest Dutty Boukman, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Georges Biassou, a sugar master and confederate of Toussaint, Spanish officer and slave Jean-François "Papillon" also known as Jean-François Petecou, Juan Francisco, and General Jean-François, and Jeannot Bullet, the latter characterized as "utterly remorseless... even towards his own kind," who, "found inspiration in cruelty; a sadist without the refinements that so-called civilization brings."<sup>268</sup> An equally dreadful description of Bullet was of a slave whose soul was "perfidious" and countenance was "frightful and revolting." Bullet was described as "capable of the greatest crimes [who was] inaccessible to regret and remorse."<sup>269</sup>

Also present was Cécile Fatiman, a Mambo Vodou priestess.<sup>270</sup> Fatiman, the daughter of an African slave

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<sup>268</sup> Wenda Parkinson, *This Gilded African* (London: Quartet Books, 1978), 43.

<sup>269</sup> John Rely Beard, *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Negro Patriot of Hayti* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1853; 2012), 63. It should be noted that Mr. Beard was a nineteenth century English Unitarian minister, and as such, may have exhibited racial bias in his description of Jeannot Bullet. As with many first person accounts from whites of this era, their personal assessments of Black people, especially those who engaged in rebellions, become complicated by the racialization of those they are describing. However, by some accounts, Bullet was indeed viewed as a vicious participant and leader in the early stages of the rebellion. After the execution of Dutty Boukman in November 1791, Bullet, along with Jean François Papillon, Georges Biassou, and Toussaint Bréda assumed leadership roles in the rebellion. Papillon would later arrest and execute Bullet that same month, reportedly due to the latter's uncontrollable depravity.

<sup>270</sup> Historian Etienne Charlier described Fatiman as a "the daughter of African Nègresse and a Corsican Prince," who was a "green-eyed Mulâtresse [with] long black and silky hair." in *Aperçu sur la formation*

woman and a white Frenchman from Corsica presided over the Vodou ceremony during a torrential thunder and lightning storm. As those gathered prepared for battle, Fatiman emboldened everyone to take revenge against their French colonizers. Extending her sharpened knife to the sky in preparation to slaughter a pig in a ceremonial sacrifice, Fatiman and Dutty stood before the insurrectionists and demanded they, “Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us.” Fatiman was said to have invoked the *lwa*, no doubt for protection and success. The ceremony represented what Aisha Finch referred to as the concept of “sacred accompaniment,” where the one who calls upon the *lwa* becomes possessed and “walks with divine presence.”<sup>271</sup> Most Haitian Vodou practitioners believe Fatiman was possessed by the *lwa* Erzulie or Ezili, as Finch further remarks.<sup>272</sup>

Most whites believed only a supernatural force could have contributed to the rebellion's success, with many whites suggesting that it was the use of devil worship which aided the rebels. One such person was the late eighteenth-century French creole writer Moreau de St. Méry. Writing two years before the Bois-Caïman ceremony, Méry's sexualized fetishisms of “the mysterious cult of Vaudoux” spoke directly to how whites – both French and English – misunderstood and sensationalized Haitian Vodou. In his travel archive from Saint-Domingue, Méry characterized enslaved people as engaging in public

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*historique de la Nation haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince: Presses Libres, 1954), 49; Aisha K. Finch “Cécile Fatiman and Petra Carabalí, Late Eighteenth-Century Haiti and Mid- Nineteenth-Century Cuba” in *As if She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Women and Emancipation in the Americas* edited by Erica L. Ball, Tatiana Seijas, and Terri L. Synder (London: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 295.

<sup>271</sup> Finch, 306.

<sup>272</sup> Finch, 307.

dance, “without a doubt to weaken the alarm that [it] causes in the Colony.” Moreover, Méry maintained that “nothing is more dangerous...than this cult of Vaudoux.” His assessment affirmed that, “It can be made into a terrible weapon - this extravagant idea that the ministers of this alleged god know all and can do anything.”<sup>273</sup> Indeed, for men like Méry, Vodou was unpretentiously a superstitious cult dangerous to the structure of Saint-Domingue slavery.

Despite white planters, travelers, writers, and government officials marginalizing Haitian cosmology, Vodou culture, and the ritual spaces, notwithstanding the overarching pursuit for liberation from French imperialism, the rebels of Haiti would indeed obtain their freedom, much to the chagrin and horror of white New Orleanians.

### **From Vodou to Voodoo**

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall, William C.C. Claiborne, Governor of the Mississippi Territory and Governor General and Intendant of the Province of Louisiana ordered a proclamation just one month after the end of the Haitian Revolution in February 1804 by stating, “It having been represented to me that a number of Negroes belonging to the Citizens of Louisiana, had escaped from the service of their Masters, and were running at large to the injury of such their owners and whereas, I have been requested...to take some measures to induce such runaway Slave forwith to return to their duty.”<sup>274</sup> Several months later, in July 1804, Governor Claiborne wrote a correspondence to Lieutenant Colonel Constant Freeman seeking assistance with the problem of immigrants from Saint-Domingue. “There is another duty,” the Governor

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<sup>273</sup> Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince: Le Natal, 1983), 3; Finch, 301.

<sup>274</sup> William C.C. Claiborne to Secretary of State James Madison, *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne*, 1:379-80.

wrote, “which I must request you exact from the Officer...to bring hither, as great a number as possible...of *persons* without regard to their Character.” Those *persons* the Governor was requesting were slaves from “the English Island” who, “may be imported,” with some coming from “the Brigands from St. Domingo,” however, with “precautions.”<sup>275</sup> Claiborne’s request offers an interesting glimpse into the struggles the territory was facing. On one hand, men and women from Boston to New York, Philadelphia to Richmond, and Charleston to New Orleans were knowledgeable of the insurrection in Saint-Domingue to varying degrees, with many having varying opinions. On the other hand, a ban on the importation of slaves into Louisiana was received by the U.S. Senate in January 1804. Indeed, a portion of those entering New Orleans were slaves coming with their slave masters. But this was far less than the total number of native-born slaves in the city. However, this still placed New Orleans in a precarious economic position.

Juan Vicente Folch y Juan, Governor of West Florida, was equally invested in the problem in New Orleans. In a private letter to Secretary of State Robert Smith in May 1809 and found within the official letters of Governor Claiborne, remarked upon his ten days spent in the Crescent City by emphatically stating, “I can assure you, without being afraid of incurring a mistake, that there exists at present in this city and its limits from four to five hundred deserters and malefactors...who have come to take refuge under the sovereignty of the U. States.”<sup>276</sup>

By the time Louisiana joined the Union in 1812, Haitian Vodou was resurrected as Voodoo in the white imagination. As the Haitian Revolution moved further into America’s rearview, so too did the looming threat of Haitian Vodou. However, white New Orleanians remained

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<sup>275</sup> Claiborne to Col. Freeman, *Official Letter Books*, 2:361.

<sup>276</sup> Governor Folch to Robert Smith, *Letter Books*, 4:353-4.

ever cautions of potential slave uprisings. In New Orleans it was imperative that free persons of color and enslaved men and women from the former Saint-Domingue not influence the city's slave population, especially as it pertained to the presence of Haitian Vodou. The transformation of the creole culture of New Orleans coincided with the gradual modification of Vodou into Voodoo. While on the surface this shift could be viewed simply as an alternative spelling, what Voodoo would embody in the succeeding decades after the Haitian Revolution reinforced the racism from those like Moreau de St. Méry.

Voodoo, as far as whites were concerned, was not a religion, but an exhibition of savagery, fetish and demon worship, animal sacrifice, cannibalism, nudity, drumming, sexual promiscuity, and interracial orgies.<sup>277</sup> Among enslaved men and women in New Orleans, however, it represented what a true liberation force could look like. Those already suspicious about what enslaved people were doing religiously were now terrified at the prospect that their "Voodoo" would inspire domestic rebellions. One such incident was reported in 1825 when "One of the Negresses brought from Santo Domingo [was] said to have purchased her freedom through secret Voodoo practices." This Haitian refugee named Sanité Dédé, was said to have earned enough money by selling sweetmeats, "in front of the Cabildo in order to support herself." However, this would have not earned her enough money to purchase her freedom. Still, it was believed that Dédé conducted her business "at the brickyard in Dumaine Street and was probably the first to lead a band of cultists into the habit of holding their gatherings on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain."<sup>278</sup> The story of Sanité Dédé and Voodoo's

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<sup>277</sup> Michelle Y. Gordon, "Midnight Scenes and Orgies: Public Narratives of Voodoo in New Orleans and Nineteenth-Century Discourses of White Supremacy," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (December 2012): 769.

<sup>278</sup> Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (New York: Pelican

hypersexualized powers would be written in an account by J.W. Buel, who claimed to have witnessed a ceremonial ritual involving snakes, a Black cat, drums, a banjo, and “half a dozen white men and two white women.” “Zoro,” an older slave who Buel identified as a seller of palmetto and sassafras roots, “leaving his tam-tam, went up to the altar...and again drew forth his snake. He forced it to wriggle and writhe over and around the company, uttering the words which were repeated by sixty voices, “Voudou! Vodou Magnian!”<sup>279</sup>

To any casual observer in the late antebellum and Reconstruction period, first person narratives from men like Buel were terrifying and damning. Unlike Marie Laveau, the famous nineteenth century New Orleans Voodoo priestess who captured the imagination and service of white and Black New Orleanians, women like Cécile Fatiman and Sanité Dédé in Haiti and New Orleans respectively, Cuban priestess Petra Carabalí, and men like Haiti’s Dutty Boukman or the New Orleans figure known simply as Zoro, were largely considered dangerous orchestrators of violence, sexual degeneracy, witchcraft, and of course, in the case of Fatiman and Boukman, anarchy.

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Publishing, 2003), 44.

<sup>279</sup> Tallant, 44-46. At the time, Buel’s assumed account was one of the only narratives of pre- Marie Laveau female Voodoo priestess in southern Louisiana. Laveau, the famous New Orleans Voodoo priestess in the mid to late nineteenth century, married a Saint-Domingue refugee, Jacques Paris, and was herself a child of a free man of color. Laveau’s influence in the Black and creole communities of New Orleans was due, in no small part, to her familiarity with Haitian Vodou, her status as a quadroon, and her ownership of property, including two slaves and \$500 worth of personal artifacts bequeathed to her by her father upon her marriage to Paris. Though Laveau’s rich legacy as the leading Voodoo priestess of her time would be most certainly a welcome addition to the body of this work, I will only briefly mention her here since Laveau was revered and celebrated during her time, avoiding the demonization that many others could not escape.

Vodou/Voodoo, thus, emerged in the post-Haitian Revolution Atlantic world as a symbol of spirit worship for descendants of Africa, but an emblem of slave revolution in its most perverted and destructive form to white Americans. As one historian explains, “In terms of revolution, Vodou was a definite advantage because of the way it’s organized. It is cellular, it is nonhierarchical, and it might just as well have been copied from a manual on guerilla warfare, it’s just that strategically sound.”<sup>280</sup> However, the real threat to white New Orleanians reached beyond what Voodoo represented in its revolutionary sense, but also what it signaled to the changing socio-political and economic landscape in the Atlantic. As mentioned above, as more free persons of color escaped the carnage of war-torn Saint-Domingue, their presence caused much disconcertion among white citizens. Chiefly affected were the plantation owners, both small and large, who not only had to contend with a sudden influx of persons of color who were free, some of whom were themselves slave owners, but the perception that the territory’s administration was interfering with its established slavocracy.

Months after the end of the Revolution, Governor Claiborne wrote privately to Etienne de Bore, Mayor of New Orleans, about the problems of new slaves the territory was facing. “With the view of remedying the evils to be apprehended from the improper introduction of Slaves and other people of Colour from the Islands, I had thought it sufficient to cause all persons of this description to be stopped at Plaquemines until they obtained my permission to ascend the River.” Concerning the prohibition of any person of color, free or slave, into the territory Governor

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<sup>280</sup> Madison Smartt Bell, *All Souls' Rising* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 52. Also see: Kirstin L. Squint “Vodou and Revolt in Literature of the Haitian Revolution.” in *CLA Journal* vo. 51, no. 2 (December 2007): 173.

Claiborne added, "I shall avail myself of your proposition for additional precautions: therefore no person shall introduce Negroes into Louisiana of any description whatever, until they have first been stopped, by the Commandant of Plaquemine who shall forward to me list of their number."<sup>281</sup>

Speaking on behalf of slaveholders in a letter dated September 20, 1804, to James Madison, Governor Claiborne addressed the continued concerns of white New Orleanians. "Sir, I enclose [for] you a Petition addressed to me and signed by a number of respectable Inhabitants of this City. You will discover there is some apprehension of an insurrection among the Negroes and that much alarm exists, altho' I am not myself of opinion that we are in as imminent danger, as the Memorialists seem to think, I have nevertheless taken every means of precaution in my power."<sup>282</sup>

On the 16th of October 1804, Governor Claiborne received an urgent letter from the Civil & Military Commandant Edward D. Turner. Turner informed the Governor of an uncovered slave uprising which involved, "the Negroes of one or two plantations," planning to "scheme to desert to Nacogdoches." Before anyone could be forewarned, the nine runaways, "had got off, after breaking open a House and stealing a quantity of powder and Lead Arms & they took with them a number of slaves one who was preparing to join their gang, was discovered and shot at by the Patrol and though not wounded, was so bewildered in consequence, that he lost his way and the next day gave himself up he has turned informer and has already implicated thirty."<sup>283</sup> Information about runaways plotting insurrections was certainly not new in any slaveholding territory or state, even in Louisiana. However,

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<sup>281</sup> Claiborne to Mayor Bore, *Official Letter Books*, 2:113.

<sup>282</sup> Claiborne to James Madison, *Official Letter Books*, 2:337-8.

<sup>283</sup> E.D. Turner to Claiborne, *Official Letter Books*, 2:387.

the unique circumstances which the territory faced was its proximity to Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, and Barbados. Runaway slaves who may have heard of the Haitian Revolution were certainly inspired by the fall of the French. Moreover, it is probable that much of the rumors spread around plantations about the usurpation of power came from those who either had first-hand knowledge or were at the very least deeply familiar with its ties to Vodou. That the Governor continued to feel the pressure of imported slaves infiltrating his territory showed that the insurrection in Haiti had a profound impact upon New Orleans, and if that were the case, Vodou was just as dynamic.

Six years prior to Louisiana earning statehood, legislation was used as a vehicle of racial oppression in Louisiana after the Haitian Revolution. None of the legislation, however, spoke about Voodoo as a religion, yet it was highly implied that Voodoo was the culprit for what Emily Clark identified as fears of “racial amalgamation.”<sup>284</sup> The territory’s reactionary tactics to prevent insurrections like Stono notwithstanding, additional legislation was passed like the April 1807 Act to “*prevent the emigration of free negroes and mulattoes into the Territory of Orleans*” and the February 1809 Act to “*provide for the delivery fugitive Slaves to their owners, inhabitants of the Spanish Provinces adjacent to the Territory of Orleans.*” Moreover, those suspected of “pretending to be free” had to produce documentation from a magistrate of their free status and obtain a certificate, or otherwise be considered a fugitive slave according to slave acts of the time.

Over the next two years white New Orleanians witnessed an unsteady stream of migrants from Haiti enter the Crescent City. Their anxieties growing, time had arrived to put a stop to the continued wave. In 1806, Louisiana legislators submitted several proposals specifically targeting free persons of color. Among these

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<sup>284</sup> Clark, 120.

initiatives was the territorial legislation prohibiting entry of free Black men into the territory while at the same time ordering all Black non-native born Louisianans fifteen and older to leave. While this portion of the legislation was never fully enforced, others were, including limiting the movement of Black slaves in and out of New Orleans. In 1807, Congress passed federal laws “to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States.”<sup>285</sup> Also illegal was the crossing of borders and state lines by slaves without accompaniment by their owner. What would later become the Fugitive Slave Act, this racially discriminatory legislation, also known as the *Territorial Legislation/Black Code of 1806*, was loosely borrowed from the South Carolina Act of 1740, itself a reactionary set of laws passed in response to the Stono Rebellion.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> While certainly ambiguous to most states, and otherwise ignored in part or wholly, the gradual abolition of international slave trafficking into the United States did not affect slaveholding states all the same, nor did it deter most slaveholding states from continuing to import slaves from Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. In fact, most slaves who came into New Orleans after the 1804 legislation were considered to have breached the law and could therefore be reenslaved. Moreover, Governor Claiborne protested the legislation, noting in a letter addressed to Secretary of State Robert Smith dated May 19, 1809 that, “The difficulties which the Law of the U. States oppose[d] to the introduction of these slaves into the Territory, have induced a number of a very respectable and humane [sic] Citizens, to address to me a Petition... The situation of these unfortunate People excites in a great degree my sympathy. But my powers do not permit me to interfere in their favour, otherwise than to lay their case before the President” (4:354). As shown, Claiborne felt his hands were tied and sought to steer petitioners in the direction of President Madison.

<sup>286</sup> The Stono Rebellion of 1739 began on September 9 on the banks of the Stono River 20 miles southwest of Charleston, South Carolina. It was the largest slave insurrection on United States soil until the Nat Turner Rebellion a century later. While what triggered the uprisings that September in South Carolina remains speculative, some blamed the Spanish for enticing slaves to flee to St. Augustine, Florida. In turn,

The Stono Rebellion was the largest slave uprising up to that point and signaled for colonial and later white Americans that enslaved men and women of African descent would continue to resist their enslavement, even if it meant the deaths of themselves and their white captors. Despite the Stono Rebellion erupting near Charleston, South Carolina sixty years before the Haitian Revolution would set the island of Saint-Domingue ablaze, whites remained in a constant state of panic and fear that those they held in captivity would eventually seek their freedom. No less inspired by the purpose of being a free human being, many white New Orleanians recognized the relationship between Haitian Vodou and the insurrection. In fact, some understood it in a comparative light, as Christianity represented whiteness and white dominance. Thus, as Louisiana gained statehood in 1812, it carried not only the massive prospect of national expansion through the fabled Louisiana Purchase, but something more depressing in the minds of many white planters: if given the opportunity, Voodoo would become a dangerous instrument of rebellion.

### **“Voodoo is Not Always Harmless...It Can Kill”**

Although *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* was published in 1926, Newbell Niles Puckett echoed the opinions of a prior generation by coolly placing the onus of white New Orleanians' fears about Saint-Domingue migrants on Voodoo. “In 1809... Haytian (Haitian) planters with their slaves fled from Cuba, where they sought refuge during the Haytian Revolution, to New Orleans and made their residence there. These Africans too, were faithful

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those who ran away were promised emancipation. Despite the rebellion being swiftly put down less than a day later, an estimated twenty whites were murdered until a militia between twenty and one hundred armed whites put down the insurrection.

adorers of the serpent. Such were the principal sources of the Voodoo religion in the United States.”<sup>287</sup>

As shown above, the serpent as a figure in Vodou/Voodoo rituals helped to shape Black men and women as purveyors of evil and witchcraft in the imagination of whites. That the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) characterize the serpent as the enemy of God, the trickster of humanity, was certainly not lost on those who found Voodoo to be perverse. Still, professed first person accounts of animal and human sacrifices over saturated the imagination of whites. One such “Story of Voudou Horrors” spun a horrific tale of a ritual where a white goat was sacrificed along with a “female child [who was] stupefied with drugs, its veins opened, and the blood sucked.”<sup>288</sup> As Michelle Gordon explains, “Nineteenth-century public Voodoo narrative played an authenticating role in the social construction of black criminality and predatory hypersexuality, which became “the central justifications for the terrorism, mass black incarceration, labor exploitation, and regulation of female sexuality.”<sup>289</sup>

Images of serpents, sacrificial goats, and the dissection of children played directly into the hands of white patriarchal supremacy. If the Black male could be linked to the most perverse physical violence, then white men were inclined to respond in kind. Rumors of Voodoo orgies involving white women struck a nerve so viscerally that white men in New Orleans were encouraged to take up arms against Voodoo’s public and private eroticism, a racial play which was allegedly for the protection of white womanhood. However, white men’s fanatical defense of the white woman masked their more authentic motives; unyielding racial oppression and anti-Black violence.

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<sup>287</sup> Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 178.

<sup>288</sup> Gordon, 774.

<sup>289</sup> Gordon, 772.

Indeed, whites never organized around Black Catholics in New Orleans the way they mobilized against Voodoo. “Black barbarity, criminality, and sexual promiscuity,” Gordon further emphasized, “rendered Voodoo such a fertile site for white supremacist imagination and discourse.”<sup>290</sup> As a result, New Orleans’ Black creole culture became the target of scorn from white Christian missionaries equating the Crescent City as a haven of spiritual wickedness. Such perceptions twisted in the psyche of white New Orleanians. By the middle of the nineteenth century Voodoo was unequivocally known as the most “evil and repulsive form of African slavery.”<sup>291</sup>

Although it would not be until the 1850s when Louisiana newspapers would consistently print biased and highly exaggerated reports of “sorcery under the name of Voodooism,” rumors of children being “stolen and made away with,” or accusations about the “evil practices attributed to the “Vaudous” of Louisiana,” Voodoo continued to be presented as an inherent illness of slaves. In *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro*, Newbell Niles Puckett predictably drew from a Kentucky study the deeply inaccurate assessment that, “the only class of contributions made by the Negro to our stock of superstitions is that of the Voodoo or hoodoo signs.”<sup>292</sup> Depicting Black depravity as generational became a successful trope to maintain white supremacy and would continue to have unfortunately long-term effects of anti-Black racism. Indeed, discounting Black any form of spirituality that is not Christian remains a strong tactic employed when racists attempt to pin the woes of Black people on so-called Hamitic and generational curses of people of African descent.

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<sup>290</sup> Gordon, 772.

<sup>291</sup> Carolyn Morrow Long, “Perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo: Sin, Fraud, Entertainment, and Religion” in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (October 2002), 87.

<sup>292</sup> Puckett, 166.

As accounts of Voodoo's horrors intensified, journals and newspapers seized upon opportunities to sensationalize their worries. It should be noted most accounts of Voodoo followed the same trope and was given almost exclusively by white men. How or perhaps more importantly why these white men found themselves in the company of Voodoo priests/priestess and witnessed Voodoo ceremonies strains credulity. Vodou was and remains an extremely secretive religion. While some aspects of Vodou's rituals can be performed openly during certain holidays or celebrations, most of them are private and only shown to those who are considered initiates. That white men in New Orleans during the late antebellum period were so privy to such intimate information suggests that much of their "accounts" were either strongly exaggerated retellings or flat out lies. However, the sensationalizing of Voodoo captured the imaginations of whites while exploiting their deepest fears.

One of the earliest newspaper articles documenting the evils of Voodoo was published in the *Louisiana Gazette* in August 1820. Dated the 16th of August, the story notes that several illegal nighttime meetings for "occult practice and the idolatrous worship of an African deity called *vaoodoo*" was discovered, resulting in the arrest of several persons of color and one white man."<sup>293</sup> Stories with outlandish headlines like, "*Voudous on the Rampage*" and "*The Virgin of the Voudous*" fed into the stereotype of sexually perverse Black women "sables" and male "savages" attacking white women further fanned the flames of anti-Voodoo racism. Sexual politics soon replaced secular misgivings which reinforced opinions that Voodoo operated as a pseudo religion preying on white women and children by lustful Black beasts. Nineteenth century writer

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<sup>293</sup> "Idolatry and Quackery," in *The Louisiana Gazette*, 16 August 1820. See: Long, 88-89.

Thomas Nelson Page, playing into the trope of Black savagery vis-à-vis Voodoo, insisted, "The crime of rape had its baleful origin in the teaching of equality and the placing of power in the ignorant negroes hands during Reconstruction. The intelligent Negro may understand what social equality truly means," he conceded, "but to the ignorant and brutal young negro, it signifies but one thing: the opportunity to enjoy, equally with white men, the privilege of cohabitating with white women."<sup>294</sup>

By the middle of the century, the demonization of Voodoo had hit its injurious stride. An August 1850 article in the *New Orleans Weekly Delta* described a commotion which erupted among a group of free Black people in the city. The cause of the outbreak was listed as a Voodoo celebration. Receiving word of the disturbance, the third municipality, "Made a descent on a party of colored people, engaged in celebrating the rites and mysteries of Voudouism...No spell or incarnation which they could weave was sufficient to prevent the police from doing their duty, and so they made prisoners of the party."<sup>295</sup>

A Virginia chronicler, warning of the dangers of Black emancipation and Voodoo, lamented free Blacks would, "relapse promptly into the Voodooism of Africa."<sup>296</sup> Remarked a white New Englander in 1867 after visiting the South, "The great mass of the colored people [are] deplorably ignorant, often sadly immoral, and in their manner of religious worship, wild and extravagant, often mistaking mere animal excitement for true religious emotion and joy."<sup>297</sup> As always, African folk beliefs and

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<sup>294</sup> Thomas Nelson Page "The Lynching of Negroes - Its Cause and Prevention" in *North American Review* Vol. 178 (1904): 36, 45.

<sup>295</sup> "The Virgin of the Vodous." in *New Orleans Weekly Delta*, 12 Aug 1850.

<sup>296</sup> Basil Davidson, *The African Genius: An Introduction to African Cultural and Social History* (Boston: Little & Brown Publishing, 1969), 126.

<sup>297</sup> Davidson, 126.

rituals represented in Voodoo were reinterpreted as harmful supernatural occurrences, visions of ghosts or spirits, or other afflictions. Interestingly, whites also sought to undermine Voodoo by suggesting supernatural harming was reflective of a larger problem among the Black population: rebellion. Writing in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, Julien A. Hall declared: “The readers of the Journal are no doubt familiar with many of the superstitions and beliefs of the Negro race regarding ‘conjuring’ and ‘tricking.’ These beliefs were brought here from Africa by the first comers and continue in full force to this day.”<sup>298</sup> Also, in the *Journal* William Wells Newell wrote: “It is very desirable that someone should examine these beliefs and ascertain whether any form of Voodoo worship can be substantiated in Louisiana.”<sup>299</sup>

A June 1896 *New Orleans Times-Democrat* article described a particularly frightening Voodoo ceremony, which included the boiling of a Black cat. “The Voodoos had worked themselves to such a frenzy,” the article begins, “that they began tearing off their clothes . . . until finally . . . nearly a half hundred impassioned black savages danced as naked as islanders to the beating of ox skulls and tom-toms, the weird crooning of the hags, and the sharp ejaculations of bucks and wenches.” To the targeted reader, labels like “hags, bucks, and wenches” would have conjured up memories of slavery when older Black women were “hags,” Black men being used as breeding instruments were known as “bucks” and young slave girls were called “wenches.”

The article continues to describe the scene. “At the height of the revel the King kicked out the fire, and in the light of the embers upset the cauldron on the ground, and

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<sup>298</sup> *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 10, no. 30 (September 1897): 241.

<sup>299</sup> “Reports of Voodoo Worship in Hayti and Louisiana.” in *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 2, no. 4 (March 1889): 42.

grasping the cat in his fingers, began thrusting the awful mess into his mouth, the others following his example. The dance was now nothing but the lewdest and most outrageous orgy.<sup>300</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the language used in this article would have ensnared every white man from Missouri to Louisiana. Likewise, the description spared no imagination about immorality on display. By overlapping Black male hypersexuality and Black criminality with terms like “orgy” implies a type of racial “amalgamation” which threatened white men through the threatening of the white woman. The description of the Black “buck” engaged in unfiltered “ejaculation” furthermore portends the idea that white women could become victims of Black savagery. The irony only lies in the fact that a white man writing in a white newspaper would alert white readers to the “diabolical practices of enslaved Black men.”<sup>301</sup> This was and remains a centuries-old allusion used by white men to create fear of Black men as “savages and sable subjects, typically of the darkest skin and unattractive features,” or the Black “beast rapist” that the white racists declared were, “a real and symbolic threat of Negro domination.”<sup>302</sup>

The cynical and deliberately racist tone of journals and newspapers of the late nineteenth century mirrored most public opinion of Voodoo. White New Orleanians saw justification in their racist attitudes toward Voodoo because of bizarre and dangerous reports which spoke to their phobias and racist conceptions about Black men and women; both free and slave. Moreover, white New Orleans newspapers navigated through a deceptive web of lies to convince its readers that Voodoo posed the greatest threat

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<sup>300</sup> “Dance of the Voodoos,” in *The New Orleans Times-Democrat* (24 June 1896), 2.

<sup>301</sup> Yvonne Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 76.

<sup>302</sup> Gordon, 769.

to the safety of white women and children. Yet, those who often gave testimonies of what they witnessed often failed to realize that they were also complicit in the sexual barbarity of Black men by attending these rituals as simply “observers.”

A September 1893 story in the *Times-Picayune*, titled “A Voodoo Priest Terrorizes Kentucky” sought to distinguish Voodoo during slavery from Voodoo post-emancipation, no doubt to infer that Blacks were less harmful –and thus whites much safer– when Black people were enslaved. The story reads in part: “While many features of this sacred lore, so vividly described in Sir Spencer St. John’s work on the sect in Louisiana and other gulf states will not be found faithfully produced at this period, yet it is synthetically similar to be easily recognized as a part of that barbarous ceremony peculiar to the superstitious adherents of Voodoo worship. Their rites, however, do not partake of those ghastly features that characterize the practices of many of the slaves imported directly from the African coast to the United States.”<sup>303</sup>

In extrapolating the context of this story, it is easy to recognize the paternalistic mentality gripped by the writer. While the story uses the phrase, “this sacred lore,” it simultaneously uses words like “barbarous,” “ghastly,” and of course, “Voodoo worship” as racist language. Nowhere in this story is New Orleans Voodoo compared, favorably or unfavorably to Christianity. In fact, as the writer continues, familiar tropes of Black superhuman qualities are invoked to further white patriarchal supremacy. “About the close of the war,” the writer persists, “a powerfully built negro calling himself Elisha Bordeaux made his appearance in this vicinity. At the time he appeared to be about 70 years old, though vigorous as a mule.”

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<sup>303</sup> “A Voodoo Priest Terrorizes Kentucky,” *Times-Picayune*, September 8, 1893.

The *Times-Picayune* writer further included that Elisha immediately became prominent in the community, though no one could utter his name. To this point, the writer attempted to make clear that the old man had simply tricked everyone, continuing: “Before the old man had resided in the vicinity a year, miraculous powers were attributed to him by the ignorant negroes. A few of the colored people were too intelligent to be deceived, but his influence with the majority was so great that those better informed were not anxious to assert their skepticism.” An article in the *New York Evening Post* attempted to calm the fears of white New Orleanians by confirming that reports of Voodoo rituals were “tame compared to their horrible midnight orgies...which the white man is not allowed to witness.” The writer goes on to state, “we can only form an idea of their barbarity from the rumors that come to us...or the reports of some of their more enlightened brethren.”<sup>304</sup> Perhaps Voodoo was not that harmful to white men, after all.

### Conclusion

By 1900, most Louisiana newspapers began to move away from their campaign to demonize Voodoo. Part of the reason was the massive expansion of the nation which caused more attention to be paid to the political and economic fortunes of the Union. While Voodoo still hovered around the periphery of the white consciousness, it quietly ceased to be the prevailing thought on most white men’s minds.

The passion to associate Voodoo with witchcraft was simply a racist patriarchal system predicated on maintaining slave subordination through fanatical fear mongering. William Adams, a former slave from Texas noted that whites rejected what they scoffed at as Black superstitions because they did not appreciate enslaved people’s relationship with God:

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<sup>304</sup> Gordon, 774.

“There am lots of folks, and educated ones too, that says we-uns believes in superstition. Well, 'tis cause they don't understand. 'Member the Lord, in some of His ways, can be mysterious. The Bible says so. There am some things the Lord wants all folks to know, some things just the chosen few to know, and some things no one should know. Now, just 'cause you don't know 'bout some of the Lord's laws, 'tain't superstition if some other person understands and believes in such.....When the Lord gives such power to a person, it just comes to 'em.”<sup>305</sup>

Whites saw no failure in their ministry despite preaching salvation to those in life bondage.

The burgeoning Black press of the late nineteenth century sought to reorient its Black readership to the truth of white newspaper's disingenuous reporting of Voodoo. The *New Orleans Republican*, *New York Age*, and *Chicago Defender*, among others, realized the harm white Louisiana newspapers were causing innocent Black men and women and became vocal opponents of anti-Black racism permeating through the pages of multiple newspapers. While the damage had no doubt been inflicted, Blacks were made aware of the “intentionally distorted” reports of Voodoo. That aside, what may be most remarkable is the tenacity of the spirit of Voodoo to survive such a vicious onslaught. A significant amount of this is due to the descendants of enslaved Africans in Louisiana whose cultural footprint could not be erased. White Americans, like the French before them, were less threatened when they believed enslaved men and women were unlikely to revolt against

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<sup>305</sup> Chireau, “Conjure and Christianity in the Nineteenth Century: Religious Elements in African American Magic.” in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* vol. 7, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 231.

their oppressors. It was only after the Haitian rebels successfully overthrew the French crown that white New Orleanians began to panic over Voodoo. The paradox of a religion used as a source of resistance was ignored because of their racist ideologies. So long as white New Orleanians convinced themselves that enslaved men and women of African descent were docile and compliant, they paid little mind to Voodoo. White fear, hatred, and demonization of Voodoo came from a place where whites could not understand or appreciate the special bond enslaved people shared with their ancestors and homelands. Whites did not fear or hate Voodoo because it stood contrary to all things European and Christian, but because of what it could represent in the hearts and minds of the enslaved, especially after the Haitian Revolution. As Stephanie Mitchem remarked, “Beyond enslavement, the continued social construction of black bodies to be perceived as inferior was held firmly in place with the use of technologies of racism.”<sup>306</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, whites had all but managed to successfully demonize Voodoo in the American imagination. As the Black church morphed into the prominent role of revolutionary vanguard of Black people during the first half of the twentieth century, Voodoo’s place as the religion of revolution receded. Black Christians, tethered to the salvific model of Black bourgeoisie adopted some of the racialized stereotypes of Voodoo employed by whites a century earlier. Eventually, Voodoo became marketable primarily because it was no longer to be feared. Once this occurred, whites seized the opportunity to exploit Voodoo once again, this time for fetish commoditization. Thus, the white man’s magic was not the Black man’s magic.

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<sup>306</sup> Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *African American Folk Healing* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 44.

Today, the American concept of Voodoo is displayed in the most profitable of ways. The New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum entices visitors on its website to “Explore New Orleans Voodoo: Unlike anything you’ve ever seen before.” While certainly an engaging and interesting composite of New Orleans Voodoo history, it fails to cover most of the authentic elements of Haitian Vodou or the history of its demonization. Instead, it offers a visual aid to draw in curious spectators, researchers, and those seeking psychic readings. To say this is a long way from the moments in history when Voodoo practitioners in New Orleans were doing the “devil’s work” is certainly an understatement.

This is not to cast aspersions against the museum, but to illustrate the dynamics of Voodoo, both then and now. Voodoo sells, in many forms, which is understandable to a certain point. Beyond that, it is a gross exploitation of a religion which Haitian rebels looked to as they prepared to die for their independence. Could there be no bigger dichotomy than this?

And yet, this is where Voodoo retains its power. Through the memory of resistance. As one historian notes, “In terms of the slaves’ condition or black-white relations, magic never significantly altered the status quo. But it gave the slaves and later the freemen, who were effectively denied any semblance of collective power, a measure of individual power.”<sup>307</sup> Therefore, Voodoo never lost its power. It was simply reset for greater purposes.

Religion then, was never truly the source of white anti-Blackness toward Voodoo. It was always about power and the attempt to strip it away from those who understood its value in association with freedom. It was only when whites began to feel threatened that slaves would be

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<sup>307</sup> Jim Haskins, *Voodoo and Hoodoo* (New York: Original Publications, 1978), 72.

influenced by the events of the Haitian Revolution that they began to think of Voodoo as evil. But Voodoo was only evil to those whose deeds were evil themselves.

The legacies of Haitian Vodou and late antebellum Voodoo in New Orleans have not been extinguished but remains a symbol of resistance for Black men and women in the Diaspora. Indeed, there are those who remain ever diligent in protecting its power and mystique. Therefore, Voodoo shall always be at the core of the Black resistance experience to be displayed as a foundational element of ancestral veneration and spirit worship.

## “Out of sheer love”<sup>308</sup>? The Abolition of Widow-Burning in British India

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The 1829 abolition of the Indian practice of suttee,<sup>309</sup> in which widows would commit ritual suicide by mounting their husbands’ funeral pyre, was lauded by nineteenth century Britons as a humanitarian achievement of the first order. The British decision to abolish suttee, however, came only after a prolonged period of hesitation and debate, in which British colonial administrators oscillated between toleration and regulation of the practice. In this article, I will outline the process by which this “humanitarian achievement” was accomplished, examining the role various parties—including colonial officials, missionaries, and the home population—played in crystallizing British policy and opinion with respect to suttee.<sup>310</sup> My main goals are to examine the function suttee came to serve in Indian society as well as gain insight into the role of external pressure, whether from missionary organizations or the British public at-large, in motivating the colonial administration’s decision to prohibit the custom.

Although some historians of humanitarianism have argued that civil society and public opinion were central in

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<sup>308</sup> Francisco Pelsaert, excerpt from *Jehangir’s India*, in *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrea Major (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), 43. See page 139 for the full quote.

<sup>309</sup> I will employ the anglicized term *suttee* to refer to the general practice of widow-burning, and *sati*—which, in certain contexts in Sanskrit, means “ideal wife”—to refer to the widow who self-immolates.

<sup>310</sup> This is not to say that such a thing as a monolithic “British opinion” on the subject ever existed; even if a majority view ultimately emerged, there was never a lack of dissenting voices.

effecting social reform in British territories, this is by no means an incontestable formulation.<sup>311</sup> It seems, in fact, that internal pressure from colonial officials was considerably more influential in bringing about the colonial administration's move from regulation to prohibition than missionary efforts and public opinion ever were. My central focus, then, is on the motivations of the British colonial administration in abolishing suttee. However, before I can embark on an account of the actions and policies of British officials in India, I must first discuss the specific characteristics widow-burning in India took on. Without having an understanding of suttee itself, we cannot hope to understand European attitudes towards it. And European opinions on the practice varied greatly, in particular during the early modern period: Although many commentators condemned the practice and called for its abolition, others admired it, albeit on its own cultural terms, and recommended non-interference.

Following into death is not unique to India. Various peoples, including the Scythians and Prussians in Europe, the Natchez people of the Lower Mississippi, sub-Saharan Africans, New Zealanders, and East Asians, have incorporated it into their cultures at various times. In some cases, following into death was abolished from within—for example, human beings were killed and buried in the graves of Chinese rulers until the second century BCE, at which point they were replaced with terracotta figures.<sup>312</sup> In other cases, rule by foreigners played a role in effecting the custom's suppression—in Indonesia and sub-Saharan Africa, European rule brought practices of following into

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<sup>311</sup> For cultural transformation in India during the first half of the nineteenth century, see, e.g., Claude Markovits (ed.), *A History of Modern India: 1480-1950*, trans. Nisha George and Maggy Hendry (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 330-43.

<sup>312</sup> Armin Selbitschka, "Miniature Tomb Figurines and Models in Pre-Imperial and Early Imperial China: Origins, Development and Significance," *World Archaeology* 47, no. 1 (2015): 20-44.

death to a rapid end. In India, however, following into death was maintained much longer than anywhere else in the world, and would prove difficult to quickly abolish; widow-burnings continued to occur in India even until the later twentieth century.

Jörg Fisch, in *Immolating Women*, provides a useful categorization of different kinds of following into death. By invoking it here, we gain insight into the nature of suttee, and the difficulties (imagined or real) inherent in British efforts at effecting its abolition. Fisch delineates two forms of following into death: the *institutional* and the *individual*.<sup>313</sup> The institutional form of following into death is practiced after the death of a person of high status. In this form, persons commit ritual suicide or are murdered to provide a dead ruler with a large burial retinue. Such a retinue serves to emphasize and strengthen the politico-social position of the deceased. Since in its institutional form following into death emphasizes the power, and not the personal relationships, of the deceased, coercion is often used to procure the burial retinue. Whether the ruler's wife, for example, loved her husband or wants to accompany him in death is irrelevant to her fate—she dies because he is the ruler, and not because he is her husband. As a result, in the institutional form of following into death, only the powerful few are entitled to be accompanied in the grave by a human retinue. The exclusivist nature and use of coercion inherent in institutional following into death meant that such practices had uneven support from the population at-large, while also contributing to societal acceptance of social stratification.<sup>314</sup> With that said, when

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<sup>313</sup> Jörg Fisch, *Immolating Women: A Global History of Widow-Burning from Ancient Times to the Present*, trans. Rekha Kamath Rajan (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998), 13.

<sup>314</sup> Quentin Atkinson, Joseph Bulbulia, Russell Gray, Oliver Sheehan, and Joseph Watts, "Ritual Human Sacrifice Promoted and Sustained the Evolution of Stratified Societies," *Nature* 532, issue 7598 (April 2016): 228-31.

the political authority of those who were entitled to a funerary retinue was subverted or usurped, the practice of institutional following into death often died too—a good example of this is the almost immediate disappearance of the practice in the west African Kingdom of Dahomey after the establishment of French colonial rule.<sup>315</sup>

Individual following into death, unlike the institutional form, requires a close personal relationship between the deceased and his attendant. As a result, in the individual form, of which suttee is an example, the attendant often dies by committing suicide—i.e. dies voluntarily. Like the institutional form, which serves to reinforce hierarchies and emphasize the power of the dynastic clan of which the deceased is a part, the individual form also serves to propagate inequality. In the case of practices like suttee, however, the overarching function is not the maintenance of a specific political order, but instead the (symbolic and real) domination of the female gender by the male.<sup>316</sup>

Unlike instantiations of the institutional form, suttee became deeply entrenched in the society whence it originated, and efforts at abolishing it were met with resistance. This was despite the fact that most widow-burnings were far removed from the idealized picture that some supporters of the custom painted. Although the ideal called for the sati to be graceful, cheerful, and composed as she descended unto the funeral pyre and unflinchingly burnt to death, the reality was that widow-burnings were rarely, if ever, voluntary.

It is true that most satis expressed a wish to follow their husbands into death. Often, however, some form of coercion (whether direct or indirect) was used in order to ensure that the widow made good on her intentions. For example, satis were commonly tied to their deceased

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<sup>315</sup> Fisch, 14-15.

<sup>316</sup> Fisch, 14-15.

husbands or restrained upon the funeral pyre by large pieces of wood placed on top of them. And even when such indirect restraints were absent, the spectators to the widow-burning formed a final line of defense. Even in cases where the widow was not physically restrained, this did not mean she was free to escape. Often, widows who left the pyre were pushed back into it again by spectators who wanted to see the ritual fulfilled. In a few exceptional cases, widows who ran away far enough to avoid a return to the flames were killed by other means. It is important to emphasize that direct coercion and murder were the exception, and not the norm. Indirect coercion, however—whether by means of ropes or logs—was indeed the norm, even though no Hindu text recommended it.<sup>317</sup>

The widow's original intention was seen as definitive, and attempts at escape were considered not as changes of heart, but moments of weakness. As a result, organizers of widow-burnings saw it as their responsibility to ensure that the sati met her death.<sup>318</sup> Given the extent to which coercion was used in the ritual of widow-burning, it is remarkable that the practice went largely unchallenged until the early nineteenth century.

Of course, to follow one's husband into death did offer the widow certain spiritual benefits. Indian society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had deviated greatly from the Vedic ideal, in which women participated in public life, married relatively late (at approximately seventeen years of age), and were able not only to remarry after the death of their husbands, but also initiate divorce.<sup>319</sup>

In a later age, in an India where women were excluded from education and married young to markedly older spouses, and thus made almost completely dependent

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<sup>317</sup> Fisch, 314.

<sup>318</sup> Fisch, 316-18.

<sup>319</sup> Fisch, 329-30.

on their husbands and priests, it is easy to see how sati status—its great price notwithstanding—would have held an undeniable appeal for widows. For widows in early modern India could not remarry as they had in Vedic times. Instead, they were implicated in the untimely death of their husbands and impelled to live ascetic lives. As a sort of expiation for failing to satisfactorily take care of their husbands, widows were supposed to shave their heads, sleep on the ground, wear only the roughest of clothes, eat one meal a day, and have no social interaction. Their sexual death was also taken for granted.<sup>320</sup>

The alternative to such a miserable existence was self-immolation. The act of suttee allowed a widow to escape the privations of life after marriage, and go to her death in “a single violent display of self-annihilating devotion,” thus ensuring for herself eternal honor and respect.<sup>321</sup> Given that the alternative was a life of isolation and contempt, it should not surprise us that some widows voluntarily chose to burn on their husbands’ pyre. By making such a choice, women could gain in death a status far superior to what was available to them in life. The sati, in many ways, transcended her spouse in spiritual prestige, even though it was on his behalf that she self-immolated.<sup>322</sup> In the end, shrines and temples were erected in her

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<sup>320</sup> Fisch, 333-34 ; Ian St. John, *India under the East India Company* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 139. “Indian reformers like Mohan Roy also condemned the practice [suttee] as a corruption of Hindu teaching, pointing to the *Laws of Manu*, where sati was not endorsed, it being instead prescribed that the Hindu widow should ‘emaciate her body by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots, and fruits . . . Let her continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding every sensual pleasure, and cheerfully practicing the incomparable rules of virtue which have been followed by such women as were devoted to one only husband.’”

<sup>321</sup> Major, introduction to *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, xxix.

<sup>322</sup> Fisch, 338.

memory, and not in his.<sup>323</sup>

Whatever the spiritual honors widows received upon becoming satis, it must be remembered that in this life, suttee served as a mechanism by which husbands could retain control over their wives even after their own deaths. Even though widow-burning was seen for much of its history as a religious custom, it was most likely political and social phenomena which prompted its rise to prominence. In other words, widow-burning was made common not because of any evolution in Hindu religious belief or practice, but instead as a result of the same political and social forces (migration, conquest, social stratification, etc.) that caused Indian society to take on a deeply patriarchal character. The Vedic period, from which the oldest Hindu texts date, was ostensibly an era of relative equality between the sexes, in which widow-burning, if at all practiced, was restricted to the warrior caste. In the Rig-Veda, which encompasses the oldest Indian texts, the despairing widow is implored to remarry and embrace life. The relevant excerpt reads thus: "Rise up woman, thou art lying by one whose life is gone; come, come to the world of the living away from thy husband, and become the wife of him who grasps thy hand and is willing to marry thee . . ." <sup>324</sup>

The drastic departure of Indian society from the Vedic ideal (at least with respect to relations between the sexes) can perhaps be attributed to the long effects of the Indo-Aryan migrations. The migrations of Indo-Aryan peoples into Northern India were accompanied by violent clashes with local inhabitants, who far outnumbered the

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<sup>323</sup> The last suttee to have occurred in India was that of Roopkuvarba Kanwar, in 1987. Kanwar's shrine in Deorala, in the State of Rajasthan, continues to receive veneration to this day.

<sup>324</sup> Excerpt from *Rig-Veda*, in *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrea Major (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), 3.

entering groups.<sup>325</sup> Jörg Fisch argues that in such a scenario, differences among the conquerors—even between the sexes—would endanger their survival. However, as the conquerors consolidated power and increasingly married women from among the local inhabitants, equality between the sexes ceased to be valuable. The conquerors’ subjugation of the local population ensured a sufficient labor force, resulting in a decrease in women’s economic importance. Additionally, local women could not claim a position of equality with their conqueror husbands.<sup>326</sup>

In time, the religious and cultural practices of this population were modified to reflect its increasingly patriarchal character. Asceticism, central from the outset to Brahmin identity, was made mandatory for widows, and in this way repurposed to subordinate and control women. The same can be said for suttee, which quite possibly originated among the Kshatriyas as a female response to the archetypal death in battle of the male warrior.<sup>327</sup> In this case, too, the practice, originally honorific (as well as religious) in nature, was repurposed in order to buttress patriarchy. As an alternative to asceticism, suttee proved extremely attractive for dealing with widows. Tragically, motivating widows to end their lives was seen as the best way of ensuring their chastity.

For even the most severe strictures on widow’s behavior were no guarantee of fidelity—an ascetic widowhood, by increasing a woman’s vulnerability and dependence, might even pose a threat to her chastity: it is possible that the dependent widow could face sexual advances from male relatives, and, if not adequately

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<sup>325</sup> For a thorough presentation of scholarly perspectives related to the Indo-Aryan migrations, see Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>326</sup> Fisch, 336.

<sup>327</sup> Fisch, 341.

supported, resort to prostitution in order to survive.<sup>328</sup> The only way to guarantee continued control was to ensure that the widow was immolated with her husband, on his funeral pyre. Whatever their ultimate origin, the spiritual incentives which motivated many widows to become satis came to function as a tradeoff meant to ensure social consensus, and make all-pervading patriarchy more palatable for women. The very structure of Indian society provided an additional safeguard against the erosion of consensus: A Brahmin woman would not unite with a Shudra woman to speak out against suttee, even if both were opposed to the practice. This system of “checks and balances” preventing direct challenges to suttee, although at first glance insubstantial, proved remarkably effective at keeping the practice largely uncontested until the nineteenth century and British rule.

Early Western observers were not unanimously ill-disposed towards widow-burning. Travelers like Duarte Barbosa and Ibn Battuta (and their contemporaries) treated it as a curious, if troubling, characteristic of an alien society, and recorded instances they witnessed in a matter-of-fact manner. Medieval and early modern accounts of suttee rarely include explicit value judgments on the custom. Ibn Battuta, for example, comments only in his account of a suttee that “the place looked like a spot in hell,” and that the widow’s gruesome act almost made him fall off his horse, “if my companions had not quickly brought water to me and laved my face.”<sup>329</sup> Duarte Barbosa, writing in 1514, approaches suttee in a similar manner. Unlike Battuta, however, he does not provide remarks on his personal reaction, even though he also describes a gruesome instance of widow-burying, in which the widow is put “standing” into “a grave . . . a little deeper

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<sup>328</sup> Fisch, 335-36.

<sup>329</sup> Ibn Battuta, excerpt from *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, in *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrea Major (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), 22.

than she is tall,” covered with earth and stones, and left there “alive and covered with earth until she dies.”<sup>330</sup>

Later European accounts, however, go beyond merely reporting suttee as an alien curiosity (akin to cannibals and people with horses’ feet), and commonly include the author’s opinion on the practice, as well as attempt to explain the widow’s motivations for self-immolating. This shift in narrative approaches can be explained by a tightening relationship between Europe and the rest of the world. In the age of exploration and the early stages of European colonization, the world became a much smaller place. India, and the “Orient” more generally, was no longer a place only the brave and well-resourced few could reach. Contact with non-European peoples in remote lands became a possibility for most Europeans, and part of the job description for traders and government officials. Asia was still, in many ways, a mysterious place, but it no longer seemed all that remote. As a result, fictional accounts of cannibals and one-eyed monsters appeared less and less in travelers’ accounts. Real curiosities like widow-burning moved to the fore. And as European contact with Eastern societies increased, so also did Europeans’ belief that they understood the cultural practices they were witnessing. Thus, travelers’ accounts began not only to include descriptions of widow-burnings, but also travelers’ opinions on the practice.

The medieval framework of Christian morality saw the nature of woman as encapsulated in the Genesis story—i.e. like Eve, all women were seen as frail and sinful. Women’s sexuality was seen as a threat, and, as a result, it was recommended that the widow retire to a convent or chateau, and live a chaste, quiet life. The European widow did not, of course, face the same isolation and contempt as

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<sup>330</sup> Duarte Barbosa, excerpt from *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, in *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrea Major (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), 25.

did the Hindu widow: chastity and silence were, however, recommended for widows in both cultures.<sup>331</sup> Given these parallels, it is not surprising that some early modern accounts of suttee paint the practice in an unabashedly positive light. The seventeenth century trader Francisco Pelsaert, for example, writes that a widow's desire to become a sati emerges from "as great a love as the women of our country bear to their husbands, for the deed [is] done not out of compulsion but out of sheer love."<sup>332</sup> A similar account of the sati's motivations was given by both the seventeenth century English traveler John Ovington and the playwright John Dryden, who writes, additionally, that while he "dares not vindicate" the practice, "so neither can . . . [he] wholly condemn it."<sup>333</sup> Dryden's view is reflective of the general European ambiguity toward widow-burning in the early modern period. Even though the unnecessary loss of life that suttee caused made the practice incompatible with Christian morality, its patriarchal undertones resonated in a Europe obsessed with female obedience and chastity. Although Europeans could not openly admire widow-burning, they were nonetheless drawn to it.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, European views on suttee became significantly less ambiguous. The subtle admiration Europeans expressed for the sati in earlier centuries was replaced with her portrayal as a wretched victim, manipulated into death by cruel priests. As Europeans became significantly more invested in Asian societies and governments, suttee—once seen as a custom of an alien society which Europeans could do

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<sup>331</sup> Andrea Major, *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2006), 48-51.

<sup>332</sup> Francisco Pelsaert, excerpt from *Jehangir's India*, in *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrea Major (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), 43.

<sup>333</sup> Andrea Major, *Pious Flames*, 43-45.

nothing about—became a direct European concern. Accordingly, the discourse on widow-burning shifted away from the individual motivations of the widow, and to more abstract ideas about the religious and social bases for the practice itself—to matters relevant to formulating a course of action with respect to widow-burning. The scholar and filmmaker Lata Mani argues that in comparison to earlier European discourse on suttee, accounts from the nineteenth century are problematic for completely ignoring the question of the widow's subjecthood.<sup>334</sup> This is an unfortunate aspect of nineteenth-century European accounts of suttee, and might result from the fact that questions of the sati's courage and motivations were secondary to the issue of formulating a political and legal approach for dealing with widow-burning. Even if every woman in the Indian subcontinent had declared her support for the practice, this would not have swayed Britons from their conviction that suttee was cruel and morally wrong. Whether such an outpouring of support would have influenced the colonial government's approach to regulating widow-burning is, of course, another question altogether.

Another explanation for the consolidation of European opinion on suttee in the early nineteenth century might lie in the concurrent shift in European attitudes toward women. In Britain in particular, the rise of evangelicalism among a newly-formed middle class fostered an elevation in women's status. As the middle class moved from agricultural and artisanal production to commercial and industrial enterprise, there arose a uniquely middle class separation between work and home, between the public and private spheres.<sup>335</sup> Men worked outside the

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<sup>334</sup> Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 77.

<sup>335</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: The

home, and were absent for most of the day, and women—due to the relative affluence for which middle class status allowed—could devote their time and energy to their homes and children. Needless to say, such a division was impossible for working class families, which often had to rely on the labor of wives and children in order to survive.

The middle class separation between work and home also was a separation between male and female spheres. Evangelical theology, which called for a rejection of landed wealth as the source of honor and insisted on the primacy of the inner spirit, lent considerable prestige to the woman's role as godly wife and mother.<sup>336</sup> Although women were still considered dependent and vulnerable, their role as mothers, educators, and moral examples was seen as crucial for the spiritual well-being of society. In such a climate, more than ever, violence against women simply could not be tolerated. Coincidentally, the same era which saw the rise of the Evangelical movement also marked the East India Company's assumption of direct rule over parts of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>337</sup> Given such a coincidence, it is not surprising that widow-burning would garner such great attention, from colonial officials and the British public alike, in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

In the early stages of the British colonization of Southeast Asia, suttee was not considered as a matter which the British had a right to address. The East India Company was interested in economic extraction, and not social reform. Interference in indigenous custom could provoke unrest, and unrest would inevitably hamper trade. By the 1750s, however, the EIC had become much more than a mere trading body. The British gained control over Bengal,

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University of Chicago Press, 1987), 359.

<sup>336</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 450.

<sup>337</sup> Ian St. John, *India under the East India Company* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012).

Bihar, and Orissa in 1757, and by the 1790s had taken the administration of these territories into their own hands. Indians were no longer a foreign people, but British subjects, just like Londoners and Edinburghers. Europeans could no longer turn a blind eye toward suttee. For how could people considered British subjects practice a religious ritual in which they burned their widows to death? In an era of renewed religious fervor that brought elevated respect to society's godly wives and mothers, suttee was seen as pernicious, demonic, and intolerable.

Surprisingly, the East India Company's rigid policy of non-interference in indigenous religion did not erode enough to allow for action with respect to suttee for quite some time. Although by the end of the eighteenth century (when a good portion of the colonial government's administrative reforms were complete) it would have been possible to take measures against widow-burning, the British did nothing of the sort. British administrators in India, at least in the early stages of rule, saw most indigenous behavior as unreflective and dictated by religion, and thought that Hindu religion had its sole basis in Brahmanic texts.<sup>338</sup> Suttee was therefore seen as a practice almost exclusively religious in character, and one Indians would fervently cling to. To attempt its abolition would be to threaten the stability of British rule.

On the other hand, the practice could only be ignored for so long, especially since the East India Company was increasingly coming under the control of the British government. Following the Bengal famine of 1770, in which up to one-third of the Indian population perished, the Company was in dire economic straits. Some scholars have argued that until this famine, the colonial state in India was a thin, rent-receiving, marginal entity operating through economic extraction, and unable to legally enforce

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<sup>338</sup> Mani, 29-30.

its arrangements.<sup>339</sup> The East India Company Act of 1773 sought to change this. In this act, Parliament assumed sovereignty over the Company, established a supreme court in Calcutta, and ordered that British judicial personnel be sent to India to administer the already-existing but limited court system. In the fifty years following the famine, the British turned their once-meager colonial government into a highly centralized and symmetrical affair.<sup>340</sup> Parliament's reforms of the East India Company following the Regulating Act of 1773 were most likely central to the turnaround.<sup>341</sup>

As the British government in India underwent administrative and bureaucratic expansion, the number of British officials on the ground greatly increased. Junior officials, unlike administrators in Calcutta or Bombay (within which the practice was banned), were likely to come into contact with widow-burning in the course of their official duties. In the Mughal Empire, and also in other Islamic and Hindu states, widows had to seek official permission in order to perform suttee.<sup>342</sup> Many thought that this was still the case under British rule, and so junior officials, to their surprise, found themselves responsible for deciding whether widows should live or die.

Some prohibited the ceremonies from taking place, despite the official though little-known policy of non-interference. Others had no idea how to respond, and asked the opinion of their superiors in the central government. Unfortunately, there was no established protocol for how to deal with widow-burning, and junior officials were told that they did not have the legal authority to interfere, and could

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<sup>339</sup> Mani, 13.

<sup>340</sup> Mani, 14.

<sup>341</sup> For the Regulating Act of 1773, see Marie Xavier Loubert, SSJ, "The Regulating Act of 1773: Backgrounds and Consequences," (MA Dissertation in History, Fordham University, 1956).

<sup>342</sup> Fisch, 368.

only attempt to persuade the widow not to self-immolate. Although the government conceded that the practice was “repugnant to humanity and the first principles of religion,”<sup>343</sup> its prohibition was out of the question, constituting as it would a violation of the British colonial administration’s policy of non-interference in matters of indigenous religion. Nonetheless, suttee posed for the colonial administration a moral dilemma of the first order. By the nineteenth century, Europeans were united in seeing suttee—and all forms of following into death—as immoral, cruel, and criminal.<sup>344</sup> However, since suttee was considered a religious practice to which the Indian people would inevitably cling, its abolition would fly in the face of Britons’ idea of themselves as just, benevolent rulers, respectful of indigenous liberty and custom. Interfering with suttee was an act of tyranny, and tyrants were always overthrown.

As noble as such a relativistic view of rule sounded in abstraction, the vagaries of reality called for more concrete action. Requests for advice from district officials were piling up, and the colonial government found itself unprepared to respond in an authoritative manner. A clear protocol had to be established, and quickly. Since the British thought of suttee primarily as a religious practice, and considered Brahmanic texts the ultimate authority on Hindu religion, the first approach of the highest criminal court, the *Sadar Nizamat Adalat*<sup>345</sup> (which consisted

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<sup>343</sup> Government to M.H. Brooke, January 28, 1789, quoted in Fisch, 368.

<sup>344</sup> The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its general aversion to human sacrifice—as exemplified in the aborted sacrifice of Isaac—was hugely influential for the modern novel, which saw its apex of influence in the nineteenth century. See, for example, Harold Fisch, *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>345</sup> For a broad discussion of criminal law and procedure in India under British (EIC and direct) rule, see Elizabeth Kolsky, “Codification and

entirely of British judges despite its Persian name), was to consult with Hindu pundits.<sup>346</sup> The British were not yet willing to abolish the practice, but they did want to develop a protocol for regulating it. Since it was a primary priority to regulate suttee without provoking unrest, the courts, in formulating an authoritative opinion on the practice, went primarily through indigenous channels. In 1805, indigenous experts were asked to give their opinion on the matter, on the basis of religious law. Such an approach, however, had its problems. Whatever European beliefs might have been, there did not exist a codified legal system which dictated Hindu religious practice. The recommendations of “authoritative” Hindu texts were often vague and contradictory, and many important aspects of the administration of justice—especially among the lower castes—were governed by unwritten custom. Moreover, although by the nineteenth century suttee was firmly-rooted as a religious practice, its history seems to point to a secular origin, related to the relationship between conquering and conquered peoples in Ancient India. Of course, a prerequisite for the custom to develop in the first place was a societal belief in the afterlife. Religion, in other words, was a necessary—but by no means sufficient—condition for the emergence of suttee.

Given the probable origins of suttee, it is unsurprising that the Brahmanic texts the courts relied on could only provide vague and contradictory information. Ultimately, mentions of suttee in religious texts were not foundational to the practice, but instead reactions to it: contradictions and unclear formulations were sure to abound. In the end, however, indigenous experts were able to establish a set of criteria upon which a widow-burning’s legality could be judged. According to the final

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the Rule of Colonial Difference: Criminal Procedure in British India,” *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (2005), 631-83.

<sup>346</sup> Fisch, 371.

recommendation, widows of all four main castes were allowed to self-immolate. Performing suttee was not permitted if the widow was pregnant, prepubescent, menstruating, or had small children for whose care she had not arranged.<sup>347</sup> Most importantly, the widow had to go to her death voluntarily: All forms of coercion, whether direct or indirect, were strictly prohibited.<sup>348</sup> The *Nizamāt Adalat* accepted the legal opinion of its advisors, and suggested to the colonial government that police be ordered to monitor widow-burnings and prevent cases prohibited by Brahmanic law.

For the next seven years, the government took no action. Finally, in 1812, the high court asked the government what became of its suggestions, and received a response communicating the government's intent to accept the legal opinion of its advisors, and distinguish between legal and illegal suttees. In 1813, orders were issued to all police officers to monitor widow-burnings and prevent illegal cases. These orders, however, were only police guidelines, and not laws. Therefore, even though participation in illegal suttees was prohibited, such participation did not constitute a legally-punishable crime. Regardless of this, organizers of illegal widow-burnings were regularly doled out lenient punishments during the period of suttee-regulation (1813-1829). The colonial administration's move to regulate suttee, although half-hearted, succeeded in establishing a protocol for dealing with widow-burning in British India.<sup>349</sup> Additionally, by consulting native pundits before making its decision to allow widow-burnings permitted by Hindu religious law,

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<sup>347</sup> Fisch, 372.

<sup>348</sup> Fisch, 372.

<sup>349</sup> Fisch, 373-374; see also, for documents related to the period of suttee regulation, Vasudha Dalmia-Lüderitz, "'Sati' as a Religious Rite: Parliamentary Papers on Widow Immolation, 1821-30," *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 4 (January 1992): PE58-PE64.

the colonial government tried to safeguard itself against potential backlash. In the end, the British were not invoking European legal and moral standards in regulating suttee; they were merely enforcing indigenous ones.

This is not to say that the policy of regulation was successful, or for that matter could have been successful. The ultimate goal of regulation was not to maintain suttee, but to motivate its end, albeit in a subtle way. No British administrator was sympathetic to the custom; the only thing preventing abolition was fear of unrest. It was by no means an unsubstantiated fear. The early nineteenth century was a turbulent time for India's British overlords. The Vellore Mutiny of 1806 and the unending Anglo-Maratha wars contrived to make colonial administrators more than a little uneasy about the stability of British rule. It was this uneasiness, and not any sympathy toward widow-burning, which prevented the custom's outright abolition. The policy of regulation was itself an optimistic attempt at abolition. As early as 1789, the colonial government had expressed its desire that "the natives themselves will, in the course of time, discern the fallacy of the principles which have given rise to this practice, and that it will of itself gradually fall into disuse."<sup>350</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed in an 1824 letter addressed to the EIC Court of Directors. Fisch paraphrases the government's message thus: "Although 'even the best informed classes of the Hindoo population are not yet sufficiently enlightened to recognize the propriety of abolishing the rite,' yet hopes continued to be placed in the spread of education."<sup>351</sup> The government's policy of regulation—acting in concert with missionary efforts at education and conversion—was intended to effect an eventual disappearance of widow-burning, and, therefore, amount to the same thing as

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<sup>350</sup> Government to M.H. Brooke, January 28, 1789, quoted in Fisch, 368.

<sup>351</sup> Fisch, 392.

abolition, albeit without risking unrest. It was an almost ludicrously optimistic plan.

In order to ascertain the effects of regulation on the frequency of widow-burnings, the government ordered police to register every incidence of suttee. Registration began in 1815, two years after the beginning of regulation, and was limited to the territories of the Bengal Presidency. Police recorded 8132 cases between 1815 and 1829.<sup>352</sup> It is widely held that the actual figure was higher, if not by much. The frequency of widow-burnings was relatively constant throughout the period of regulation, with the exception of the years 1817-1818, in which there was a marked increase in cases. As a summary of these statistics shows, regulation did nothing to quell widow-burning. If anything, it might have even exacerbated the number of cases. The increase in suttees in 1817-18 provoked doubts in the colonial administration about the effectiveness of its approach to suttee. The *Nizamat Adalat* worried that “the methods publicly adopted, with the humane view of diminishing the number of these sacrifices, . . . have not rather been attended with a contrary effect than the one contemplated.”<sup>353</sup> The Court of Directors was of like mind, and later issued a statement in which it opined that the government’s allowance of “legal” cases could very well have been considered by Indians as a recommendation to burn widows.<sup>354</sup>

Following the spike in widow-burnings in 1817-1818, the colonial government’s policy of suttee regulation was met with widespread criticism from within the administration, the Court of Directors included. Lata Mani writes that the East India Company contemplated “only those reforms . . . that in no way interrupted the logic of

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<sup>352</sup> Fisch, 476.

<sup>353</sup> *Nizamat Adalat* Proceedings, June 4, 1818, quoted in Fisch, 381.

<sup>354</sup> Court of Directors to the Privy Council, undated, quoted in Fisch, 383.

accumulation.”<sup>355</sup> But the colonial government was by no means a monolithic entity, and there was no lack of voices opposing the policy of suttee regulation. The opinion of the Court of Directors, made known to the colonial government several times between 1823 and 1829, is especially striking. An 1823 communication reads thus: “It is . . . with much reluctance that we can consent to make the British government, by a specific permission of the suttee, an ostensible party to the sacrifice; we are averse also to the practice of making British courts expounders and vindicators of the Hindoo religion, when it leads to acts which, not less as legislators than as Christians, we abominate.”<sup>356</sup> In addition to pressure from the Court of Directors, the colonial government had to deal with dissent and insubordination within its own ranks. *Nizam Adalat* judge Courtney Smith was among the more vehement dissenters. In November 1826, he mounted an especially sharp attack. It is worth quoting at length, for its eloquence and unashamedly inflammatory tone:

The most decidedly and atrociously cruel rite that anywhere exists . . . upon the face of the globe is carried on by the express sanction of the ruling power . . . The plea, and the only plea, for this is, that prohibition might cause discontent and create disturbance among the natives. Discontent at hundreds of human beings . . . being rescued from the most excruciating and lingering torment! Disturbance, because we showed a disinterested sympathy with human suffering . . . So long as, having the power, we want the will, or having the power and the will, we want the energy to abolish it, it may fairly be doubted whether we are de jure

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<sup>355</sup> Mani, 41.

<sup>356</sup> Court of Directors to Parliament, June 16, 1823, quoted in Fisch, 389.

rulers of the country.<sup>357</sup>

Whereas Smith stopped at inflammatory words, others would go as far as outright insubordination. In 1828, William Cracroft, a judge in the Dacca Court of Circuit, informed the *Nizamat Adalat* that the prohibition of widow-burning for the lower castes in force in his region had not been lifted despite orders from Calcutta. Cracroft added, provocatively, that the orders he received from the high court did not have the weight of law, as they had been signed by only two of the *Nizamat Adalat*'s five judges.<sup>358</sup>

Smith and Cracroft were not exceptional in their dissatisfaction with suttee regulation. By the end of the 1820s, the view that attempts at regulating widow-burning should give way to the custom's complete abolition had gained the support of most colonial officials. By abolishing the practice in 1829, Lord William Bentinck<sup>359</sup> was not taking radical action. He was instead doing what everyone in his administration expected him to do, and bringing to its inevitable close a process begun in 1813 with the beginning of suttee regulation. Why could it be said that abolition was inevitable? Because, in the end, even if regulation were to have proven successful in reducing the frequency of widow-burnings, India's British overlords would have still seen it as a failure. Even if some early observers had a sympathetic opinion of widow-burning, suttee had always been irreconcilable with European legal, moral, and religious views. In the early nineteenth century, at the height of the Evangelical movement, European condemnation of widow-burning was stronger than ever,

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<sup>357</sup> Courtney Smith to Government, November 1, 1826, quoted in Fisch, 395.

<sup>358</sup> Fisch, 397.

<sup>359</sup> For Bentinck, see John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: The Making of a Liberal Imperialist, 1774-1839* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974).

and precluded European support for its indefinite maintenance. It is important to remember that even the policy of suttee regulation was seen as a discrete approach to abolition, to be implemented in tandem with missionary efforts at education and conversion. When it became obvious that regulation could never affect abolition, many colonial officials publicly voiced their dissatisfaction, and some even went so far as to blatantly disregard higher orders. “No house divided against itself will stand,” and so Bentinck was compelled to bow to his administration’s demands and abolish suttee.

Many Indian nationalist historians, among them Ajit Kumar Ray,<sup>360</sup> have argued that indigenous opposition to widow-burning was central to paving the way for Bentinck’s 1829 abolition of the custom. This, however, does not seem to be the case. An organized indigenous opposition emerged only in 1818, years after the official debate on suttee had begun. Additionally, since the indigenous anti-suttee movement was considerably smaller than the indigenous pro-suttee movement, it is unlikely that the support of Rammohan Roy and his allies played a major role in reassuring the colonial administration of the safety of abolition.<sup>361</sup> This is not to say, however, that Roy’s influence on indigenous attitudes toward social reform was insubstantial. It was anything but.

Finally, what role did missionaries and the British public play in suttee’s abolition? Missionaries, long considered antithetical to the EIC’s policy of non-interference in indigenous religion and a threat to political stability, were not permitted entry into British India until 1813. British missionaries, however, had been active in India for more than a decade before they were officially granted access, and during this time initiated the public

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<sup>360</sup> Ajit Kumar Ray, *Widows Are Not For Burning* (New Delhi: ABC Publishing House, 1985).

<sup>361</sup> Fisch, 408-411.

debate on suttee. The general public's first exposure to suttee came in 1811, when the Baptist missionary William Ward included in his comprehensive work on Hinduism<sup>362</sup> an analysis of widow-burning, in which he sharply rejected the custom. The following two decades saw an exponential rise in British interest in widow-burning: it became a favorite topic for missionary periodicals and mainstream newspapers alike. From about 1818 public discussions about widow-burning increased in extent and intensity, reaching their peak between 1827 and 1829—directly preceding abolition.<sup>363</sup> Although the goal of missionary periodicals in providing accounts of suttee was not to stimulate political action, but instead exploit the custom's sensationalism to raise funds for missionary work, it is directly due to the wide readership of these periodicals that by the end of the 1820s, Parliament was swamped with petitions demanding a quick end to widow-burning. Petitions, of course, were not an effective means for the achievement of political ends. But it is not insignificant that Bentinck's 1829 abolition of the practice came at the height of public furor over it.

For in the end, colonial administrators and officials were just as much a part of the public as everybody else. They did not just pop into existence in the streets of Bombay, or Calcutta, or Cairo, and thereafter resume their official duties. They were raised and educated in the heart of the empire, and, thus, were inevitably molded by the character of their times. The widely promulgated accounts of missionaries like William Ward, which implored readers to take pity on the "seventy-five million of females in Hindoosthan, frowned upon in their birth, denied all education, and exposed to a thousand miseries unknown

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<sup>362</sup> William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindoos*, 2 volumes (Serampore, India: Mission Press, 1815).

<sup>363</sup> Fisch, 404.

among females in Christian countries . . .”<sup>364</sup> doubtless were just as heartrending for colonial officials as they were for middle-class housewives. And unlike a middle-class housewife, who could only support the cause by means of a financial contribution, a colonial official might indeed have the power to “put out” the fires, and “close forever” the graves.<sup>365</sup>

The abolition of widow-burning was, strictly speaking, an internal affair. Bentinck’s decision to abolish the custom was motivated primarily by pressure from an increasingly dissatisfied and insubordinate body of colonial officials. But ultimately, the repugnance toward widow-burning that motivated colonial officials’ insubordination had its root in broader societal phenomena. Even though some early European observers were sympathetic toward the custom, and the majority stopped short of outright condemnation, suttee had for long been incompatible with European moral and legal standards. With the rise of middle class evangelicalism, sympathy for the practice, or even its toleration, was no longer possible.<sup>366</sup> Violence against women, the godly wives and mothers responsible for the spiritual well-being of society, became the most heinous of crimes. It is not surprising, then, that colonial officials (many of which, Bentinck included, were devout Evangelicals) could not stomach suttee, and called for its abolition at all costs.

In the end, the abolition of suttee was not the humanitarian victory it was later made out to be. It is true that following the 1829 declaration, widow-burnings in the

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<sup>364</sup> William Ward, excerpt from *Farewell Letters*, in *Sati: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Andrea Major (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), 85.

<sup>365</sup> Ward, 85.

<sup>366</sup> On Evangelical missionaries in the British Empire, see William C. Barnhart, “Evangelicalism, Masculinity, and the Making of Imperial Missionaries in Late Georgian Britain, 1795-1820,” *The Historian* 67, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 712-32.

Bengal region ceased almost overnight.<sup>367</sup> The ostensible success of abolition, however, was due to a distressing fact: One still knew how to deal with widows.<sup>368</sup> The end of suttee did not give widows the freedom to remarry, and live full lives. They were still condemned to an ascetic, impoverished existence, in which their sexual and social death was taken for granted. Like all humanitarian causes, suttee was just the tip of the iceberg.

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<sup>367</sup> Fisch, 432.

<sup>368</sup> Fisch, 434.

# **Black Power and the Slave Trade: How the Memory of Slavery Disrupted White Supremacy, 1959- 1989**

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## **Introduction**

The powers opposed to Negro progress will not be influenced in the slightest by mere verbal protest on our part. They realized only too well that protests of this kind contain nothing but the breath expended in making them. They also realize that their success in enslaving and dominating the darker portion of humanity was due solely to the element of FORCE employed (in the majority of cases this was accompanied by force of arms).

Pressure of course may assert itself in other forms, but in the last analysis whatever influence is brought to bear against the powers opposed to the Negro progress must contain the element of FORCE in order to accomplish its purpose, since it is apparent that this is the only element they recognize.<sup>369</sup>

-Marcus Garvey

Marcus Garvey defied unfavorable odds disproportionately stacked against Blacks worldwide in the early twentieth century. Born in the British colony of Jamaica, he recognized that only through the use of force were whites able to control the Black race during and after slavery. Therefore, he advised Africa and its descendants to reciprocate aggressive measures to reclaim their autonomy.

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<sup>369</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, *The Philosophy & Opinions of Marcus Garvey or, Africa for the Africans* (Dover: The Majority Press, 1986), 16.

Garvey's Black nationalist politics served as the preface to the larger narrative of the 1960s Black Power Movement, making him a transformative figure in the fight to end the longstanding reign of white supremacy by drawing upon the collective and public memory of slavery. Collective memory is constructed through the recollection and interpretation of the past by individuals and various groups. These memories are often fragmented, but when put together, they narrate history in a way that relates to the prevailing views held within groups or by nations.<sup>370</sup> Therefore, collective memory even within the same country can differ depending on which social group or institution is in possession of those memories. For Garvey, the collective memory of slavery was assembled in part by his father whose family escaped slavery to establish free communities in Jamaica's mountainous hinterlands.<sup>371</sup> A descendant of the maroons, it is arguable that resistance was an intrinsic trait within Garvey's identity due to the collective memory of slave resistance within his family.<sup>372</sup>

Collective memory can and often does produce public memory. "Public memory...is a mode of memory that can only exist through the voices and actions of established living groups, composed by individuals who assert their presence in the public arena through relations of power."<sup>373</sup> It can involve materializing thoughts and recollections of the past often through physical remembrances such as monuments, statues and museums or intangible commemorations such as holidays or cultural celebrations. Most prominently, however, public memory is reliant upon people or organizations who strive to achieve a

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<sup>370</sup> Ana Lucia Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 4.

<sup>371</sup> "National Heroes: Marcus Garvey," The National Library of Jamaica, <https://nlj.gov.jm/qcontentnational-heroes/>.

<sup>372</sup> Tony Martin, *Race First* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1971), 4.

<sup>373</sup> Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory*, 5.

historical understanding within the public sphere in order to accomplish a political outcome.

As a United States immigrant, collective and public memory of slavery was at the root of Garvey's global rebellion against white supremacy. Garvey formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 to serve as an international platform to amplify the tone of "New Negroes" which resounded with the three core tenants of Black nationalism. By urging the Black community to establish a separate nationhood to meet their own socioeconomic needs, he aroused race pride, resistance, and self-determination which would subsequently establish Black Power sentiment throughout the African Diaspora beginning in the late 1950s.<sup>374</sup> Through the UNIA, Garvey was the transnational megaphone for Blacks who sought to cross their names off the racial contract that bound them to lives of oppression due to the residual impact of slavery.<sup>375</sup> He inspired successive leaders who echoed the public memory of slavery throughout their own political activism during the Black Power Movement.

This research supports two main arguments: Black Power drew from the public memory of slavery to explain causes of racism and rationalize militant methods of Black protest against white supremacy; and Black Power leaders drew from each other to inform their own activism, thereby creating a lineage of activists who reconstructed the memory of slavery to achieve racial justice. Nation of Islam (NOI) minister of information Malcolm X was the son of Garveyites, and his own teachings blazed a path for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chairman Stokely Carmichael, Black Panther Party for Self-Defense co-founder Huey P. Newton, British Black Panthers leader

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<sup>374</sup> Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, 22.

<sup>375</sup> Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

Obi E. Egbuna and Black Power advocate and entertainer Tupac Shakur. The public memory of slavery was foundational to Black Power demands. This work spans from 1959 when X's teaching began to receive widespread attention, to the year of Newton's death and the release of Shakur's ode to the Black Panther Party in 1989.

Part I of this study, "Black Power Leaders and the Memory of Slavery," will reveal how X, Carmichael, Newton, Egbuna, Shakur and the social groups they represent leaned on the memory of slavery as the essence of their Black Power philosophy with the destruction of white supremacy as their utmost intention. It will present a chronology of Black nationalists who were prominent during the Black Power Movement predominantly in the United States while also demonstrating their diasporic influence. By explicitly and implicitly naming slavery as the root of Black oppression, X, Carmichael, Newton and Egbuna underscore white supremacy as a problematic global production that can only be eliminated through Black Power. Shakur is an exception to the temporal dimensions of the Black Power era. Nonetheless, each leader used their platform to demonstrate a clear connection between slavery and the causes of their political activism. This section will dissect the following speeches: X's "The Race Problem" delivered at Michigan State University in 1963; Carmichael's 1966 speech at the University of California, Berkeley; Newton's interview with pamphlet publication *The Movement* in 1968; Egbuna's essay written from prison in 1971, "Destroy This Temple"; and Shakur's 1989 song "Panther Power." Each text will be examined for how the memory of slavery is used to underscore the causes of racial injustice as well as to insist upon the empowerment and self-determination of African Americans to improve their own circumstances.

Part II, "Black Power Legacy and the Memory of Slavery," will demonstrate the heritage of Black Power advocacy that X, Carmichael, Newton, Egbuna and Shakur

consulted or referenced to inform their activism, thereby creating a Black Power tradition grounded in the memory of slavery. Black Power leaders frequently highlight the ideas, accomplishments and heroism of their predecessors to further educate the public and encourage Black pride. In this way, an ancestry of key thinkers and advocates within the Black Power Movement is established with the memory of slavery as a unifying entity of their collective activism. Inadvertently, the heritage of Black Power is memorialized by Black Power leaders themselves. This section will exhibit excerpts from the following speeches: X's 1958 address at a Marcus Garvey Day celebration in Harlem; Newton speaking about X in 1968 in *The Movement*; Egbuna recalling Carmichael speak at the 1967 Dialectics of Liberation conference in London; and a 1994 interview of Shakur briefly noting the work of the Black Panther Party. Each text will demonstrate how one leader was influenced by a previous leader's memory of slavery.

## **Part I: Black Power Leaders and the Memory of Slavery**

### **Malcom X and the Nation of Islam**

The Nation of Islam was an organization of African American Muslims who adopted the principles of Black nationalism. Introduced to religion while in prison, Malcolm X joined the Nation of Islam and became its minister of information. In January 1963, he was invited to speak at Michigan State University by the African Students Association and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Campus Chapter. Titled "The Race Problem," much of the speech states his opposition to the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders who worked toward the equal treatment of Blacks and whites. As the national spokesman of the organization, X encourages complete separation of Blacks and whites and regularly references the slavery past to build membership within the Nation of Islam. This particular speech includes

perhaps his most famous extended metaphor of slavery. Describing Black integrationists in the United States as the “old Negro,” X says these men and women represent house slaves who adopted the ways of their master.

The house Negro usually lived close to his master. He dressed like his master. He wore his master's second-hand clothes. He ate food that his master left on the table. And he lived in his master's house--probably in the basement or the attic--but he still lived in the master's house. So whenever that house Negro identified himself, he always identified himself in the same sense that his master identified himself. When his master said, "We have good food," the house Negro would say, "Yes, we have plenty of good food." "We" have plenty of good food. When the master said that "We have a fine home here," the house Negro said, "Yes, we have a fine home here." When the master would be sick, the house Negro identified himself so much with his master he'd say, "What's the matter boss, we sick?" His master's pain was his pain. And it hurt him more for his master to be sick than for him to be sick himself. When the house started burning down, that type of Negro would fight harder to put the master's house out than the master himself would. If someone came to the house Negro and said, “Let’s go, let’s separate,” naturally that Uncle Tom would say, “Go where? What could I do without boss? Where would I live? How would I dress? Who would look out for me?” That’s the house Negro’?<sup>376</sup>

Here, X uses the memory of slavery to vividly portray the

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<sup>376</sup> Malcolm X. “The Race Problem,” Michigan State University, January 23, 1963.  
<https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/mxp/speeches/mxa17.html>.

pursuit of integration as counterproductive to the struggle of Blacks in America. He criticizes the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders – the “house slaves” – for facilitating efforts that underscored the belief that African Americans would be in a better condition if they were more aligned with white culture, shared white institutions, moved into white neighborhoods, attended white schools, served in the military or held jobs typically reserved for whites.<sup>377</sup> In this context, X implicitly describes his ideological rival Martin Luther King as a man still controlled by the concept of the white savior. X suggests that just as house slaves understood the master as their sole chance for survival, integrationists demonstrate the similarly misguided mindset that proximity to white people and participating in white institutions is the solution to Black problems. He denounces the belief that integration would finally put Blacks on an even playing field with whites. Quite contrarily, X contends that Blacks would thrive if apart from whites.

In the same speech, X claims the “new Negro” would have been the field slaves who wanted nothing to do with their master. “The masses- the field Negroes- were the masses. They were in the majority. When the master got sick, they prayed that he’d die. If the house caught on fire, they’d pray for a wind to come along and fan the breeze...If you went to the field Negro and said, “Let’s go, let’s separate,” he would even ask you where or when. He’d say, “Yes, let’s go.”<sup>378</sup> Here, X says that members of the Nation of Islam are modern manifestations of the field slaves. These are Black men and women who recognize that the location of freedom is anywhere that white people and white influences do not exist. Further, even if they were not Black Muslims, X says modern field slaves comprise the majority of the Black population because they

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<sup>377</sup> X, “The Race Problem.”

<sup>378</sup> X, “The Race Problem.”

are shut out of opportunities. He identifies them as the jobless or underemployed, those who live in poor housing, receive inadequate education or otherwise lack the benefits of American democracy.<sup>379</sup> These “new Negroes” recognize that freedom exists apart from rather than within close range to white people. He considers them new because the era in which he delivered his speech was one of resistance to racial discrimination and an overall rejection of white supremacy in ways that many Blacks had previously, and reluctantly, tolerated.

To further develop this rebellion toward white dominion, X urged Blacks to join the Nation of Islam which embraces ideals of race pride, self-determination and resistance as means to living not like minorities, but as the “dark majority who outnumber whites.”<sup>380</sup> In this way, X uses the memory of slavery to validate the existence of oppressed Blacks by connecting their suffering to slavery and the solution to the principles of Black nationalism. He tries to impress upon the Black community that they have been misled to believe their existence is insufficient without the presence of white people. In other speeches, he balances this approach by educating African Americans on their royal heritage as kings and queens in Africa while Europeans were uncivilized, living in caves. By using the memory of slavery to connect racial injustice of the 1960s to the period of slavery, X aims to unromanticize the illusion of integration. His words echo those of Garvey but also inspired successive activists. This is evident in the rise of Stokely Carmichael, once a follower of the Civil Rights Movement but most noted for his role in transitioning the attention of Black youth to the Black Power Movement.

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<sup>379</sup> X, “The Race Problem.”

<sup>380</sup> X, “The Race Problem.”

### **Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**

Stokely Carmichael enrolled at Howard University in Washington, DC as an undergraduate student in 1960. That same year, he joined SNCC, a civil rights group dedicated to challenging segregation and other forms of racial injustice in the United States. By 1966, Carmichael rose in ranks within the organization and was named chairman. That same year, he would make another name for himself as a Black power agitator.

In June 1966, James Meredith, the first Black student to integrate the University of Mississippi in 1962, was shot for engaging in an independent “march against fear” throughout the state. Having completed only 30 of the 230-mile solo trek, 15,000 people dared to continue the march where Meredith left off as he healed in a local hospital. Of those people were Carmichael and other members of SNCC. It was then that Carmichael first issued demands for Black Power. “Everybody owns our neighborhood except us! We outnumber the whites in this county; we want Black power! That’s what we want, Black power!”<sup>381</sup> Carmichael’s cry for Black Power captivated young Blacks by declaring the need for Black people to ascend the social hierarchy through aggressive, no longer passive, insistence upon change. Although SNCC started out as a civil rights organization, its members gradually exhausted themselves of the peaceful and patient approach to equality enforced by civil rights leaders. Two months later, he spoke at a student conference at the University of California at Berkeley in which he “condemned” white America for its “criminal acts against Black America.” In an attempt to explain to the majority white audience how they could further the cause of racial justice in America by supporting the objectives of Black Power within their own

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<sup>381</sup> “Negro Marchers Chant: ‘We Want Black Power,’” *Tucson Daily Citizen*, June 17, 1966.

communities, he drew from the past of slavery to pose a series of questions.

Carmichael first asks the audience, “How can Black people inside this country move?”<sup>382</sup> In other words, what rights should they expect? What opportunities could they have? How much longer were they expected to wait for racial justice? And in what ways could they demand change? While the question was rhetorical, his response to his own inquiry solidified the fact that Blacks were done asking whites for what naturally belonged to them.

We were never fighting for the right to integrate, we were fighting against white supremacy. In order to understand white supremacy we must dismiss the fallacious notion that white people can give anybody his freedom. A man is born free. You may enslave a man after he is born free, and that is in fact what this country does. It enslaves Blacks after they're born. The only thing white people can do is stop denying Black people their freedom.<sup>383</sup>

To put it another way, even though white people cannot deny Black people of what is indeed a birthright, the institution of slavery did just that. Thus, Carmichael is saying that although slavery is over, whites continue to withhold basic humanity from Black people which they must cease from doing. Further, he clarifies his purpose for being in Mississippi a few months prior. He states that SNCC was not there fighting for the integration of public spaces as many Blacks had been known to do in the racially divided southern state. Rather, he insists that he and other members of SNCC traveled to Mississippi to combat the larger issue plaguing the Black population, which was the

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<sup>382</sup> Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Book, 1965), 46.

<sup>383</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 47.

racist Jim Crow system that legalized Black inferiority. The understanding that Blacks must earn their freedom or any other rights inherent to white people is a false premise based on white supremacist ideology. Therefore, he clarifies for whites and Blacks alike that African Americans should not have to request what is rightfully theirs. Through this segment of Carmichael's speech, he uses the memory of slavery to reiterate that freedom is a natural condition inhibited only when forces oppose the right for freedom to thrive. By admonishing whites for making freedom an issue of legality, he thrusts the memory of slavery into the public domain to emphasize white supremacy as the cause of racial division and to illuminate its elimination as the cure.

Next, Carmichael begs the question of how white people who claim to be disassociated with racist institutions would maneuver to ally with Blacks seeking to tear down white supremacist systems.<sup>384</sup>

How can you, as the youth in this country, move to start carrying those things out? Move into the white community. We have developed a movement in the Black community. The white activist has miserably failed to develop the movement inside of his community. Will white people have the courage to go into the white communities and start organizing them? That's the question for the white activist. We won't get caught up in questions about power. This country knows what power is. It knows what Black Power is because it deprived Black people of it for over four hundred years. White people associate Black Power with violence because of their own inability to deal with Blackness. If we had said "Negro power" nobody would get scared.

Everybody would support it. If we said power for

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<sup>384</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 46.

colored people, everybody'd be for that, but it is the word "Black" that bothers people in this country, and that's their problem, not mine. That's the lie that says anything Black is bad.<sup>385</sup>

In this statement, the memory of slavery is implied by Carmichael as he defends his call for Black Power while simultaneously soliciting political action from white radicals who theoretically renounced their affiliation with white privilege in exchange for loyalty to the entire human race, not just their own. Without mincing words, Carmichael shames the presumably liberal white audience for their slow demonstration of allegiance to racial justice by asking them to consider venturing into their own communities to establish coalitions that support the Black Power Movement. However, he does not define power here. Instead, he contends that not only are white people familiar with the meaning of the word because they yielded theirs over Africa and its descendants "for over four hundred years," but they continue to deny Black people power post slavery.<sup>386</sup> Black Power was not something white people should fear, he suggests, but it was yet another birthright that Blacks were reclaiming. Here, Carmichael uses the memory of slavery to remind white people of what they possessed in their own communities as a result of denying it from others. However, this was no longer going to be tolerated under the watchful eye of SNCC and its bold commands for Black Power.

Lastly, Carmichael asks the audience to evaluate the extent to which they are willing to help ensure Blacks acquire the financial means necessary to "live like human beings."<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 57.

<sup>386</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 57.

<sup>387</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 46.

We have found all the myths of the country to be nothing but downright lies. We were told that if we worked hard we would succeed, and if that were true we would own this country lock, stock, and barrel. We have picked the cotton for nothing; we are the maids in the kitchens of liberal white people; we are the janitors, the porters, the elevator men; we sweep up your college floors. We are the hardest workers and the lowest paid...Black people are economically insecure. White liberals are economically secure. Can you begin to build an economic coalition? Are the liberals willing to share their salaries with the economically insecure Black people they so much love? Then if you're not, are you willing to start building new institutions that will provide economic security for Black people? That's the question we want to deal with!<sup>388</sup>

Although only slightly mentioned, the impact of the memory of slavery in this statement by Carmichael is heavy. By stating "We have picked the cotton for nothing..."<sup>389</sup> he is referencing the hundreds of years in which enslaved Blacks were financially unstable because their forced labor was unpaid. These legacies of slavery lived on through menial jobs in which many Blacks were prequalified due to meager education which led to ungainful employment opportunities, or educated Blacks dealt with discriminatory hiring practices that blocked Black professionals from gainful work. Therefore, while most Blacks worked for pay during the 1960s, their earnings were often below the living wage which reinforced slave conditions. Carmichael reshapes the memory by using slavery to interrogate the audience about its willingness to unravel economic hardship that left

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<sup>388</sup> Carmichael, 54.

<sup>389</sup> Carmichael, 54.

Blacks reliant upon white families and white companies for unequal pay that promoted poverty in African American communities. Appropriately, he closes his speech with one final question: “Will white people overcome their racism and allow for that to happen in this country? If not, we have no choice but to say very clearly, move on over, or we’re going to move on over you.”<sup>390</sup>

That would not be the first time Carmichael proposed militarism as a measure of accomplishing racial justice. As a SNCC member before being named its chair, he led Alabama’s Lowndes County in a voting campaign under the banner of the Black Panther Party. Its platform was “Black independent politics with guns.”<sup>391</sup> During a visit to California the following year, he met Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. From there lies the conception of the national Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

### **Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense**

In 1968, a publication titled *The Movement* released a pamphlet containing a question and answer-style interview with Huey P. Newton, the co-founder and intellectual brainpower behind the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. During the course of the interview, Newton shares the Black Panther Party’s stance on cultural nationalism, SNCC, Black and white liberals, white revolutionaries and other topics. Although the subjects appear disjointed at times, the common thread weaved throughout his discussion is how slavery remains a lived experience for African Americans, Black people throughout the world and people of color in general. He repeatedly refers to the United States as the “Black colony” and does not mince words when emphasizing the belief that African descendants in America are still slaves due to de jure and

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<sup>390</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 60.

<sup>391</sup> Carmichael, 187.

de facto discriminatory policies upheld by institutionalized racism that are rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The Black Panther Party's platform rests on the memory of slavery. Its list of demands within the Party's Ten Point Program begins with a strong implication that African Americans were still under slave conditions in October 1966 when the doctrine was written: "We want freedom. We want the power to determine the destiny of the Black community. We believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny."<sup>392</sup> Here, the Party essentially declares that Blacks in the United States are still under the control of the white ruling class a century after emancipation. It suggests that Blacks continued to yearn for the right to make decisions about themselves, their families and the larger Black community without fear of white interference. In his interview with *The Movement*, Newton supports the first demand of the Ten Point Program, which called for the right for Blacks to determine their own destiny, through an extended metaphor about slavery.

The historical relationship between Blacks and whites here in America has been the relationship between the slave and the master; the master being the mind and the slave being the body. The slave would carry out the orders that the mind demanded him to carry out. By doing this, the master took the manhood from the slave because he stripped him of his mind. He stripped Black people of their mind.<sup>393</sup>

As a result, Newton says the slave master becomes the "omnipotent administrator" or a being with unlimited

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<sup>392</sup> Philip S. Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1970), 2.

<sup>393</sup> Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 58.

power often manifested in tyrannical fashion. Conversely, the male slave becomes the “supermasculine menial” or a strong yet degraded servant. The omnipotent administrator acted in similar ways post-emancipation. As a result, supermasculine menials were forced to remain in their roles as exploited workers incapable of self-determination. Newton expresses that this tragic denial of one’s own mental capacity can be seen among various ethnic groups. However, by 1966, a period of rebellion among the world’s exploited populations had begun. Thus, he asserts that Black and all oppressed people were fighting for the purpose of recapturing their ability to think for themselves. “They are regaining their mind and they’re saying that we have a mind of our own. They’re saying that we want freedom to determine the destiny of our people, thereby uniting the mind with their bodies. In America, Black people are also chanting that we have a mind of our own. We must have freedom to determine our destiny.”<sup>394</sup> In this way, Newton’s reiteration of the first demand made in the Ten Point Program connects to the vivid memory of slavery, but more importantly, to the resistance of slavery. He explains “the vanguard group, the Black Panther Party along with all revolutionary Black groups have regained our mind and our manhood.”<sup>395</sup> That, he says, is the first step toward walking in one’s own destiny. The Ten Point Program continues its reflection on slavery in its third demand.

We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black community. We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules was promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass

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<sup>394</sup> Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 59.

<sup>395</sup> Foner, 61.

murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities.<sup>396</sup>

Here, the Panthers begin to outline their anti-capitalist agenda by calling out the U.S. government for its failure to supply emancipated Blacks with land and resources to tend to their property. With over 100 years after freedom and the denial of land and resources, the Panthers sought the financial equivalent of those broken promises to support Black communities. In this way, the memory of slavery was viewed as both the source of and a solution to Black oppression. It is these principles within the Ten Point Program that Newton expounds upon in his interview with *The Movement*.

Newton discusses the third demand of the Ten Point Program, the end to the exploitation of Black people, by detailing the Panthers' subscription to revolutionary nationalism. He uses the memory of slavery to outline the Panthers' anti-capitalist agenda and bolsters support for socialism. Again, he shares his beliefs by way of example. Here, he describes the conflict in Algeria as "a good example of revolutionary nationalism."<sup>397</sup>

The French were kicked out but it was people's revolution because the people ended up in power. The leaders that took over were not interested in the profit motive where they could exploit the people and keep them in a state of slavery. They nationalized the industry and plowed the would-be profits into the community. That's what socialism is all about in a nutshell... The Black Panther Party is a revolutionary nationalist group and we see a major contradiction between capitalism in this country and

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<sup>396</sup> Foner, 2.

<sup>397</sup> Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 51.

our interests. We realize that this country became very rich upon slavery and that slavery is capitalism in the extreme. We have two evils to fight, capitalism and racism.<sup>398</sup>

Through this statement, Newton uses the success of socialist soldier and revolutionary Ahmed Ben Bella in Algeria to describe the ambition of the Black Panther Party in the United States. By either ousting the American government or forcing the government to pay retributive finances to the descendants of slaves in the U.S., the Panthers sought to eliminate the burden of capitalism on Black people. Under capitalism, the Panthers did not consider Blacks to be free. Many Blacks worked hard for the benefit of wealthy white businessmen while they took home just enough “crumbs” to survive. Education was still denied, white violence went unaccounted for and an end to discrimination did not appear in sight.<sup>399</sup> From Newton’s perspective, slavery was more than a memory. The Panthers considered slavery a lived experience of their time. Therefore, by fighting capitalism, the Panthers were fighting against the continued enslavement of their people. “The revolutionary sees no compromise. We will not compromise because the issue is so basic. If we compromise one iota we will be selling our freedom out. We will be selling the revolution out. And we refuse to remain slaves.”<sup>400</sup> Through the lens of capitalism as the equivalent of slavery, the Panthers could potentially be viewed as radical abolitionists of the twentieth century who left their mark on activists fighting similar struggles throughout the African Diaspora. One man indisputably inspired by Newton and the American Black Panther Party was Obi E. Egbuna.

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<sup>398</sup> Foner, 51.

<sup>399</sup> Foner, 64.

<sup>400</sup> Foner, 62.

### **Obi E. Egbuna and the British Black Panthers**

The Black Power Movement in the United States had a profound impact on liberation struggles throughout the world. In Britain, its influence on Obi Egbuna, a Nigerian immigrant, was vast; In 1968, he established the British Black Panthers similar to the design of the Black Panther Party in America. However, government officials in the United Kingdom did their best to exterminate Black Power leadership and sentiment. The Race Relations Act of 1965 was the first UK legislation to address the racial discrimination which was increasingly problematic with the influx of immigration. Formalized on November 8, 1965, section one outlawed discrimination in public places, forbidding denial of access to hotels, restaurants, entertainment centers and transportation usage.<sup>401</sup> Section six was more complex. Called the Incitement of Racial Hatred provision, it imposed a monetary fine or prison sentence on anyone found guilty of using verbal or written words with the intent of being hateful based on race or country of origin.

On July 25, 1968, after using aggressive language toward Scotland Yard officers for harassing the West Indian community, Egbuna was penalized under the Race Relations Act. While serving time in prison, he drew from the memory of slavery to write an essay titled "Destroy This Temple" in which he defends his actions. "Mine is a rebellion of the enslaved man against men who makes slaves of other men. But Powellism, on the other hand, is the rebellion of the slave master against the slave. And when a slave master starts revolting against the slave of his own creation... then the contrast between the stupidity of this 'logic' and the brain of the man stating it is obvious."<sup>402</sup> In this statement, Egbuna took the opportunity

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<sup>401</sup> Race Relations Act of 1965.

<sup>402</sup> Obi E. Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple: The Voice of Black Power in*

to criticize Parliamentary Enoch Powell. Three months earlier, Powell addressed other members of the Conservative party during a general meeting to oppose the Race Relations Act of 1968. If passed, it would amend the 1965 Race Relations Act by adding a provision outlawing discriminatory housing and employment practices on the basis of race. In his “Rivers of Blood” speech, Powell expressed disapproval over the protection of immigrant rights, but in particular, Blacks from British colonies in the Caribbean and Africa. “In this country in 15 or 20 years’ time the Black man will have the whip hand over the white man.”<sup>403</sup> It is evident that Powell drew upon the memory of slavery to suggest that Blacks in England would come to dominate whites if laws continued to protect the interests of immigrants. While he was removed from office due to the “racialist in tone,” he remained free from the prescribed persecution of the incitement provision.<sup>404</sup>

Meanwhile, Egbuna was charged for writing what police called a “murder document” that they claimed provided instructions on how to kill police.<sup>405</sup> In his essay from prison, he invokes the memory of slavery to contextualize the nature of the document for which he was arrested. He defends his message by situating himself as a slave rebelling against the master, which in his case would be the oppressive police force. In this way, he refutes his conviction for hate speech and insists that his mission was to compose a guide to self-preservation for the battered British West Indian community through the prescription of Black Power. He draws a clear distinction between his words and those of Powell. Comparing Powell to a slave master rebelling against a slave, Egbuna suggests that

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*Britain* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1971), 127-28.

<sup>403</sup> Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood,” April 20, 1968, United Kingdom.

<sup>404</sup> “Heath fires Tory for ‘racist speech’,” *The Province*, April 22, 1968.

<sup>405</sup> Robin Bunce and Paul Field, *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 37.

Powell attempts to war with Blacks who came to the UK seeking opportunities better than those afforded to them in post-slavery Caribbean colonies and perhaps even Egbuna's own home in Nigeria.

Further, Egbuna blasts the imbalanced use of the Race Relations Act for its own contradictions. The law was used to impose discriminatory sentencing against Egbuna for rhetoric that was characteristic of Black Power leaders throughout the African Diaspora while it let an overtly racist state representative off the hook for hate speech. Unlike other Blacks who Egbuna says are fooled by the myth that racism is more of an American problem, he, himself, was not surprised by his predicament.

To compare the racialism in America with the racialism in England is like comparing a bad slave master with a good slave master. I prefer the bad slave master any day. The bad slave master at least makes the slave aware that slavery is evil. From his attitude, he can make the slave realize without being coerced that slavery is a wicked thing which must be destroyed at all costs. But the good slave master is the sly one. He makes the slave think that slavery can be a good thing, that evil can be made palatable, that one can compromise with man's inhumanity to man...America is like a bad slave master. England is comparable to a 'good' slave master. In Mississippi, the white man tells you straight that he does not want you in his neighborhood and you know where you stand with him. In Wimbledon, the Englishman will apologize most profusely when he refuses you accommodations on racial grounds...This is the centuries old method they have employed to make the unsuspecting Black Tom here actually enjoy his slavery.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 141-42.

Here, Egbuna conducts a comparative analysis of racism in the United States and England through the memory of slavery. While he concludes that racism in both countries is substantial, he states his “preference” for the overt ways in which America expresses its anti-Black sentiment, the outcome of which is the materialization of the “angry freedom-loving and uncompromising revolutionary.”<sup>407</sup> By dictating racial discrimination through its laws, America allows Blacks to not only experience second-hand citizenship but to read the numerous ways in which they will be mistreated under state authority. On the other hand, the good slave master, England, produces Uncle Toms.<sup>408</sup> Thus, he implies that Britain produces a weaker breed of Blacks who are comfortable with their condition due to the deceitful ways in which Parliament demonstrates its racism. Because racism was supposedly banned under the Race Relations Act, Egbuna suggests that some Blacks were under the illusion that they would be treated fairly in Britain. However, as the organizer of the British Black Panthers, his vision was aligned with X and Carmichael whose memory of slavery allowed them to recognize white supremacy both veiled and revealed.

### **TuPac Shakur**

Not the typical Black Power leader, TuPac Shakur had a complex public persona as both an entertainer and an activist. He began rapping in the late 1980s, around 10 years after hip hop solidified as a form of expression in urban Black communities and within two years of the complete disintegration of the Black Panther Party after the death of Huey P. Newton. His lyrics are both empowering and explicit, while the characters he portrays in movie roles range from professionals to criminals. A day in the life of

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<sup>407</sup> Egbuna, 141.

<sup>408</sup> Egbuna, 141.

Shakur was equally contradictory. On one hand, he criticized public education for mandating courses that lacked real-world relevance and applauded protestors during the 1992 Rodney King riots for raging against police violence.<sup>409</sup> On the other hand, he served time in prison for sexual assault and was the eventual victim of fatal street violence. However, this study recognizes him as the son of Black Panther Party member Afeni Shakur and step-son to Black Liberation Army member Mutulu Shakur. The Black Power couple raised Shakur to exude the principles of the Black Power Movement, which he exemplified through the memory of slavery in one of his earlier songs, “Panther Power” from the posthumously released album, *Beginnings: The Lost Tapes, 1988-1991*.

As real as it seems  
 the American Dream  
 Ain't nothing but another calculated scheme  
 To get us locked up, shot up and back in chains  
 To deny us of the future, rob our names  
 Kept my history a mystery but now I see,  
 The American Dream wasn't meant for me  
 'Cause Lady Liberty's a hypocrite, she lied to me  
 Promised me freedom, education, equality  
 Never gave me nothing but slavery  
 And now look at how dangerous you made me  
 Calling me a mad man cause I'm strong and bold<sup>410</sup>

The memory of slavery is rampant throughout these lyrics and used to introduce the larger message of the song, which is a tribute to the Black Panther Party. This stanza confronts the false hopes America gave to Blacks upon receipt of

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<sup>409</sup> TuPac Shakur, Tamalpais High School interview (Mill Valley, California: 1988).

<sup>410</sup> TuPac Shakur, “Panther Power,” *Beginnings: The Lost Tape, 1988-1991*.

freedom. They did not experience “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, which Shakur highlights within the first few lines of the song. Instead, Blacks faced one disappointment after another at the hands of white greed which was stingy with its democratic principles. Rather than share opportunities, Shakur says the only thing the country did for Blacks was enforce their enslavement and cause them frustration. In this way, he uses the memory of slavery to explain the anger and discontentment felt by many African Americans not only in the 1960s when the Panthers were in their prime, but in the late 1980s when the Black Power Movement was nearing its end as the Black community still suffered. Shakur’s verse contains additional gripes with the United States which he continues to lament using the memory of slavery as the basis of his argument.

Promised me emancipation in this new nation  
 All you gave my people was our patience  
 Fathers of our country never cared for me  
 They kept my ancestors shackled up in slavery  
 And Uncle Sam never did a damn thing for me  
 Except lie about the facts in my history  
 So now I’m sitting here mad cause I’m unemployed  
 But the government’s glad cause they enjoy  
   when my people are down so they can screw us  
 around  
 Time to change the government now.  
 Panther Power <sup>411</sup>

Here, the memory of slavery is acknowledged from the infancy of the United States. Shakur implies that the nation’s founding fathers organized America without Blacks in mind, as it is well known that they were still enslaved at the time of American independence in 1776.

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<sup>411</sup> Shakur, “Panther Power.”

Thus, the patience Shakur says America gave Blacks was not actually given but required as a result of the long wait for their highly anticipated freedom. After emancipation, many Blacks went from being full time, unpaid workers to being exploited laborers or entirely unemployed. Options were few and so was government assistance. According to Shakur, the solution to this slave-induced system was Black Power through the leadership of the Black Panther Party.

## **Part II: Black Power Legacy & the Memory of Slavery The Memory of Marcus Garvey**

In 1916, Garvey established the UNIA headquarters in Harlem, the hub of Black political activism, to expedite the end to white violence against the global Black community. His message was impactful. By the time the UNIA reached its peak in 1925, it had membership of nearly one million men and women with an estimated two to three times as many participants in its activities in the Caribbean, Latin America, Canada, Africa, and the United States.<sup>412</sup> Blacks were beginning to unite. One of those members was Earl Little, the father of Malcolm X, who sometimes took his son to UNIA meetings and was eventually killed by the Ku Klux Klan for engaging in UNIA activities.<sup>413</sup> Years later when X joined the Nation of Islam, he reflected on Garvey's successful leadership:

Marcus Garvey was the first Black man to come into this country and get a mass movement, an allegiance, support of the masses of Black people. Why? Because Garvey didn't care what the white man thought. Garvey didn't care how the white man felt. Garvey had the feelings of the Black man at heart. Garvey had the hopes and aspirations of the

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<sup>412</sup> Vincent, *Black Power*, 3.

<sup>413</sup> Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 9.

Black man at heart and the Black masses detected this, they felt this, they were conscious of this, so they gave Garvey their support...because Garvey represented the Black man.<sup>414</sup>

Although the UNIA drastically declined after Garvey's deportation and subsequent death, X carried Garvey's torch by perpetuating principles of Black nationalism—the separation of Blacks and whites, pride in Black beauty and culture, resistance toward white superiority. X did not explicitly mention how Garvey connected slavery to his work in the UNIA but depicts an understanding and respect for Garvey, his politics and the foundations of his Black nationalist philosophy of which the memory of slavery was crucial. He acknowledges Garvey's pro-Black spirit and fearlessness of whites, channeling this energy into the Nation of Islam and later into his independent activism throughout the Black Power Movement.

### **The Memory of Malcolm X**

At Michigan State University on January 23, 1963, X spoke to students about the subject of race in America. During this time, he made some of his most famous remarks in which he describes the difference between the “house Negro” and the “field Negro.” He compared some Black civil rights leaders to slaves who were domestic servants that spent the majority of their time around their master. As a result, they began to identify more with the master, or whiteness, than their own people, or Blackness.<sup>415</sup> When questioned by *The Movement* about unity in the Black community, Newton referenced X's earlier remarks to articulate his response.

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<sup>414</sup> Malcolm X, “Marcus Garvey Day celebration,” August 1, 1958.

<sup>415</sup> Malcolm X, “The Race Problem,” Michigan State University, Jan. 23, 1963.

Historically, you got what Malcolm X calls the field nigger and the house nigger. The house nigger had some privileges, a little more. He got the worn-out clothes of the master and he didn't have to work as hard as the field Black. He came to respect the master...Malcolm makes the point that if the master's house happened to catch on fire the house Negro will work harder than the master to put the fire out and save the master's house, while the field Negro, the field Blacks was praying that the house burned down. The house Black identified with the master so much that when the master would get sick, the house Negro would say, "Master, we's sick!"

Newton borrowed the words of Malcolm X to demonstrate a shared sentiment in separating themselves from the "Black bourgeoisie" who they considered to be "house Negroes" due to their partnership with whites.<sup>416</sup> However, while X preached of complete separation between the races at the time of his speech, the Panthers were willing to form alliances with whites whom they saw as "white revolutionaries," or those who had severed ties with the capitalist interests of the "white mother country."<sup>417</sup> "The Black Panther Party are the field Blacks, we're hoping the master dies if he gets sick"<sup>418</sup>...If the Black bourgeoisie cannot align itself without complete program, then the Black bourgeoisie sets itself up as our enemy."<sup>419</sup> Making this his second metaphor demonstrating the memory of slavery in Black Power activism, Newton shared with *The Movement* that Black unity is desired, but it is not possible unless Blacks share the same vision and understanding of

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<sup>416</sup> Foner, *The Black Panthers Speak*, 51.

<sup>417</sup> Foner, 52.

<sup>418</sup> Foner, 51.

<sup>419</sup> Foner, 52.

how to materialize that vision.

Newton's discussion here is certainly significant because he continues to draw connections between 20<sup>th</sup> century oppression of African Americans and the period of enslavement. But what this case study and my larger research intends to illuminate is how Black Power activists drew inspiration from earlier leaders who also relied on the memory of slavery to support their efforts in the Black freedom struggle. Newton called attention to X's speech, made over three years prior to his interview with *The Movement*, after X was assassinated. Although this was not a particularly long stretch of time, it does validate the idea that X's words left a lasting impression, that his teachings lived vicariously through successive Black Power and Black nationalist leadership such as the Black Panther Party and serves as additional demonstration of how the memory of slavery is inextricably linked to and permanently ingrained in the work of racial justice proponents.

In April 1970 at Morehouse College, Carmichael spoke about Pan-Africanism which he describes as the "highest political expression of Black Power" being the formation of a "land base," preferably in Africa, where the Black fight for liberation could be headquartered.<sup>420</sup> He preempted this idea by pointing to the landmark success of two of his predecessors.

The Honorable Marcus Garvey organized around the concept of land in 1922- Back to Africa. Marcus Garvey had the largest organization in this country among Black people. No other organization past or present has been able to match Mr. Garvey...If you knew Brother Malcolm X you would know that his basic ideology was Garveyism. His father was a Garveyite. Always we must understand our history, because we will see how it moves- from Garvey to

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<sup>420</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 202-03.

Malcolm's father to Malcolm, on down the line. The second largest organization that we've had, the largest one in our community is the Muslims...<sup>421</sup>

Here, Carmichael not only honors the legacy of both Garvey and X. He also highlights the influence Garvey had on X in his primary years and most pervasively throughout his work as a Muslim activist. By calling attention to both leaders, Carmichael implies their influence on his own activism, which in turn created other leaders.

### **The Memory of Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense**

In what Egbuna calls "one of the best speeches" he ever heard, on July 18, 1967, Carmichael spoke at the Dialectics of Liberation in London about the need for Blacks in Britain to stop bemoaning their struggles and begin to organize themselves.<sup>422</sup> The memory of slavery was weaved throughout his speech to explain the root of racism in America.

It was because white America needed cheap or free labor that she raped our African homeland of millions of Black people. Because we were Black and considered inferior, our enslavement was justified and rationalized by the so-called white Christians. They explained their crimes with lies about civilizing the heathens, the savages from Africa, whom they portrayed as being "better off" in the Americas than they'd been in their homeland. These circumstances load the base and framework for the racism that has become institutionalized in white American society.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 198.

<sup>422</sup> Egbuna, *Destroy this Temple*, 16.

<sup>423</sup> Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks*, 90.

Carmichael was subsequently banned from Britain for his speech, but his words left a lasting impression on Egbuna. This was the beginning of the Black Power Movement in Britain of which Egbuna would take the reigns, stemming from Carmichael's influence. Just days after Carmichael's speech, Egbuna was invited to attend an annual meeting of the United Coloured People's Association (UCPA). Up until then, the UCPA was an integrated organization that worked collectively toward equality for Blacks. However, that meeting was pivotal. At its conclusion, the organization unanimously voted to rid the UCPA of white membership, adopt Black Power ideology and make Egbuna the chairman. Soon after, differences in direction and strategy divided the UCPA into two opposing factions, neither of which Egbuna preferred. In June 1968, he started the British Black Panthers. Thus, while Egbuna does not acknowledge Carmichael in his own speech, he is persuaded to organize Blacks in Britain after listening to Carmichael give a speech of his own in which the memory of slavery took center stage. It is further clear that Newton and the Black Panther Party also influenced Egbuna. Although the British Black Panthers were unaffiliated with the U.S. organization, its name, structure and goals were similarly geared toward the end of police harassment of the Black community.

Shakur also honors the Black Panther Party through his work and activism. Outside of his musical tribute to the Black Panther Party, Shakur continues to uplift his genetic connection to the Black Power group in various interviews. In a fiery invocation at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Indiana Black Expo in 1993, he insists on the need for Blacks to unite against police and other white authorities responsible for the killings, harassment and overall subjugation of Black people in America. The days of marching are over; the day for guns had arrived. In this way, he criticizes civil rights groups in a similar manner as X and Newton. The solution

is not peace because that was not what Blacks had typically encountered from whites. The solution was Black Power, which he preached through the lens of the Black Panther Party. "I was reading the newspaper, I saw the NAACP at a celebration for the Emancipation Proclamation. How is the NAACP still in business? They make us look bad. I'm not trying to take up for the thugs and the gangsters, but I'm coming from a different school, I'm coming from the Panthers, and that's what they need...the street element."<sup>424</sup> By once again calling upon the memory of the Panthers, Shakur revives Black Power demands that had died down in the early 1980s by breathing life into them at least a decade later. He does so by undermining civil rights organizations in a way that reflects X's attitude of justice by any means necessary, a recurring thread throughout his activism.

In 1992, four white Los Angeles police officers were acquitted after the first videotaped and televised beating of an unarmed Black man, Rodney King, during a traffic stop. A grieving city took to the streets burning down buildings, breaking into stores, and vandalizing property in outrage over the injustice, which Shakur attempts to explain revisiting the memory of the Black Panthers and slavery in a 1994 MTV interview.

We asked 10 years ago. We was asking with the Panthers, we was asking with the Civil Rights Movement. Now, those people that were asking are now all dead and in jail. So now, what do you think we're gonna do? Ask? For those wondering why all the unrest all of a sudden, it's been happening to us forever. We are the victims here. But we're tired of asking. For every day me, my parents, grandparents and ancestors have been on this soil we've been

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<sup>424</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Indiana Black Expo, 1993.

attacked by some people solely based on our race. I'm glad to see people worldwide standing with us in this battle for our lives.<sup>425</sup>

Shakur shares his exasperation with the cycle of abuse Blacks have endured since being forced into America and impatience with having to ask in the early 1990s for the same things Blacks marched for, protested against and demanded beginning in the 1950s. He issues what can be interpreted as a subtle slave reference by noting the days his “ancestors” have been on U.S. “soil” to quantify how long African Americans have been suffering from inequality and waiting for better treatment. Nearly a quarter century after Shakur’s death, not much has changed with policing in the Black community.

### Conclusion

In the past twenty years, activists have drawn upon the memory of slavery to push for the removal of monuments honoring slavery and its contributors, the renaming of institutions bearing the name of racist agents, and reparations.<sup>426</sup> In August 2018, college students toppled the “Silent Sam” Confederate veteran statue that was erected at the University of North Carolina in 1913 to “remind viewers that those students who fought for the Confederacy were heroes of the white race.”<sup>427</sup> As it was intended to be “an enduring testament to the success of white supremacy,” the fact that it was vandalized and pulled down by rope indicates a level of objection to white

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<sup>425</sup> TuPac Shakur, MTV interview with Abbie Kears (Beverly Hills, CA), March 4, 1994.

<sup>426</sup> Adam H. Domby, *The Lost Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2020).

<sup>427</sup> Domby, *The False Cause*, 13.

racism.<sup>428</sup> At the very least, the extraction of representations of slavery creates an illusion of a shift in race relations today. “Indeed, they are also decrying entrenched structures of white supremacy that perpetuate race inequalities and racism that insist in remaining alive in former slave societies and societies where slavery existed.”<sup>429</sup>

Meanwhile, proponents of reparations for slavery are seeing slow progress in some countries while the struggle to secure this financial means of reconciliation remains an international battle. Jamaicans demanding money to atone for the atrocities of slavery were outraged to learn that British Prime Minister David Cameron was constructing a new prison on the Caribbean island in September 2015 but unwilling to discuss funding for descendants of its former free laborers.<sup>430</sup> However, a reparations bill was recently approved in the U.S. by Congress for the first time since its initial introduction in 1989, leading some headlines to declare this a “historic vote.”<sup>431</sup> Other engagements with slavery in the public memory remain uphill battles. For instance, some scholars have drawn comparisons between police and slave patrols. They argue that modern policing in the United States arose from slave patrollers whose job was to hunt, discipline and control Blacks during slavery to prevent their escape, facilitate their capture and present slave uprisings. In this way, the memory of slavery is utilized to make sense of the disproportionate number of Black men and women killed by police officers in comparison to those killed by

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<sup>428</sup> Domby, 13, 1.

<sup>429</sup> Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory*, 69.

<sup>430</sup> Abdoulaye Gueye and Johan Michel, eds., *A Stain on Our Past: Slavery and Memory* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2018), 15-16.

<sup>431</sup> Maya King, “Reparations bill approved out of committee in historic vote,” *Politico*, April 15, 2021.

whites.<sup>432</sup>

Individual and group activism of the mid-twentieth century was just as burdensome. The dismantling of discriminatory laws that barricaded access to freedom for Blacks in the U.S. and around the world was a heavy load that grew from the seeds of slavery and the germination of racism. Yet it was through the public memory of slavery that Black freedom fighters forced the world to face the injustices produced by the global dimensions of white supremacist hate.

In different historical periods...societies and groups choose to highlight select elements of their pasts. When making these choices, social groups put forward specific features that help them gain social visibility and recognition and therefore acquire political power. In other words...public memory is conveyed by groups carrying specific political purposes. Memory, then, becomes public in contexts in which, to some extent, organized groups asserting a certain identity experienced the rupture of their connections with their community, or imagined community of origin.<sup>433</sup>

Within the African Diaspora, that rupture of community connections was facilitated by the atrocity of trans-Atlantic slavery. Since the age of abolition and emancipation in the early nineteenth century, Black societies have channeled the slavery past into liberation struggles. Because slavery is commonly understood by Africa and its descendants as the origin of racial injustice, its recollection is frequently used both literally and figuratively to end the evils of racism by bringing the memory of slavery into the public arena.

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<sup>432</sup> Chelsea Hansen, "Slave Patrols: An Early Form of American Policing," *National Law Enforcement Museum*, July 10, 2019.

<sup>433</sup> Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory*, 5.

Garvey experienced unprecedented political success by illuminating slavery as a monumental circumstance in the history of Africa and the forced dispersal of its population. The UNIA boasted of 800 chapters in 40 countries across four continents until its decline in the mid-1920s.<sup>434</sup> However, Garvey's ultimate achievement was the tradition of Black nationalism he inspired. Following his leadership, X, Carmichael, Newton, Egbuna and Shakur all became memory makers. Through their words, they connected the past of slavery to the racial injustice of their time. In their own unique ways, each activist drew from the slavery past in hopes of creating a better future for Black people. Their participation in the work of memory in the public space should be situated in the aftermath of the Black Power Movement both in the United States and within its global reach. "In this way, activists are able to assert arguments for the official recognition and acknowledgement of 'the contributions of the populations of African descent to the building of societies in Europe and the Americas.'"<sup>435</sup> This research spotlights only some of the countless leaders who drew upon the memory of slavery in their fight to achieve racial justice. Many men and women of the Black Power era recognized slavery as the foundation for understanding and eradicating white supremacy. It is the transmission of their liberatory politics across generations of activists that has contributed to and sustained the Black radical tradition.

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<sup>434</sup> Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, 3.

<sup>435</sup> Nicole Frith and Kate Hodgson, *At the Limits of Memory: Legacies of Slavery in the Francophone World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 11.

# The Guangzhou Abolition of Prostitution Movement and Thought in the Republic of China from the 1920s to 1930s

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The issue of prostitution is a social issue many people are ashamed to discuss but is closely related to feminism. In the early twentieth century in China, the growing problem of prostitution gradually entered the sphere of public opinion. Since the May Fourth Movement (1919)<sup>437</sup> happened in China, the feminist discourse has gradually been known by Chinese intellectuals.<sup>438</sup> Along

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<sup>437</sup> The May Fourth Movement was a significant cultural and political movement that emerged in China as a response to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which imposed harsh conditions on China, including the transfer of former German concessions in Shandong to Japan. The movement was a call for democracy, science, and enlightenment and gained momentum among intellectuals, students, and workers. It emphasized cultural and literary reform and promoted a new vernacular literature accessible to the masses. The movement contributed to the growth of socialism and communism in China and helped to establish a new cultural identity based on the principles of democracy and enlightenment.

<sup>438</sup> This opinion is from a book by Gail Hershatler. See Gail Hershatler, *Women and China's Revolutions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018).

with this was a public mass debate about whether the prostitution industry, which had existed in China for thousands of years, should continue or be abolished. These intellectuals' reflections and explorations are disseminated to the public through the mass media as the carrier of social opinion, thus leading to social changes and even social progress in disguise.

Guangzhou (also known as Canton and Kwangchow) had long been one of southern China's industrial and commercial centers. After the Wuchang Uprising in 1911,<sup>439</sup> Guangzhou declared its independence from the Qing Empire on December 9 and detached from the control of the Qing government. In the following year, the newly established government of the Republic of China (ROC) began to control Guangzhou. Before 1919, Guangzhou's prostitution industry was intermittent, depending on the personal attitudes of the warlords who controlled Guangzhou at that time.<sup>440</sup>

Before 1920, the Old Guangxi clique warlords who occupied Guangzhou had a policy of encouraging the prostitution industry in Guangzhou to maintain their large military expenditures and maintain the government. However, in November 1920, Chen Jiongming (1878-1933), a local Guangdong warlord, expelled the Old Guangxi clique warlords and gained control of

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<sup>439</sup> The Wuchang Uprising was an armed rebellion that took place in October 1911 in Wuchang, China. It was led by a group of revolutionary army officers who aimed to overthrow the Qing Dynasty and establish a republic. The uprising quickly spread to other parts of China, and within a few months, the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, marking the end of imperial rule in China. The Wuchang Uprising is widely regarded as a significant event in Chinese history, as it paved the way for the establishment of the Republic of China and the modernization of the country.

<sup>440</sup> Jianxin Peng, "Minguo Guangzhou shidian shixu de jinchang [Intermittent Prohibition of Prostitution in Republican Guangzhou]," *Minguo Chunqiu*, no. 5 (1997): 45-47.

Guangzhou.<sup>441</sup> Under the administration of the Government of the Republic of China in Guangzhou, which was established in the same year, the Guangzhou municipal government was founded on February 15, 1921, and Guangzhou became the first city of China in the modern sense. Since then, a modern municipal government has been in operation. Under the rule of Chen Jiongming and the new modern municipal government, they launched a new movement to abolish prostitution in Guangzhou.<sup>442</sup>



**Fig. 1 Photo of Guangzhou City Hall (1923)**<sup>443</sup>

<sup>441</sup> This war is also known as the First Guangdong-Guangxi War, the general course of which can be found in Diana Lary, “Warlord Studies,” *Modern China* 6, no. 4 (1980): 439–70. Also see Leslie Chen, *Chen Jiongming and the Federalist Movement: Regional Leadership and Nation Building in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 2000); Arthur Waldron, “Warlordism versus Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?” *The China Quarterly*, no. 121 (1990): 116–128.

<sup>442</sup> Jinzhu Fu, “Chen Jiongming yu jindai Guangdong nüquan yundong [Chen Jiongming and the Modern Guangdong Feminist Movement],” *Journal of China Women’s University* 21, no. 1 (2009): 99–103. In the fight for women’s rights and status, Chen Jiongming was a realist. He followed a progressive model of fighting for women’s rights and believed that in order to break with the traditional society, women’s rights should be realized.

<sup>443</sup> Unsigned newspaper photo, “Guangzhou mofan qushu [Model

Not much research has been done on the abolition of prostitution in the period after the establishment of the modern Guangzhou municipal government and before the Japanese empire took over Guangzhou. In an article published by Peng Jianxin in 1997, he chronologically organized the official-led actions to abolish prostitution in Guangzhou from 1911 until 1948.<sup>444</sup> However, this article had many flaws, as it only used a few government-issued laws and reports and ignored the fact that different governments took turns at the municipal authority of Guangzhou during this period. Furthermore, in an article published in 2006, two Chinese scholars focused their research on the movement to abolish prostitution in Guangzhou in the 1920s.<sup>445</sup> Zhang and Chen's article described the actions of various sectors of society and the government concerning the prostitution industry during this period, starting with the march for the abolition of prostitution in Guangzhou in 1922 and ending in 1926. Authors noted the frequent changes in the ruling power of Guangzhou during this time, but they focused only on this four-year period, which made it impossible to synthesize the abolitionist movement in a longer timeline.

In contrast to the above two articles, Virgil Kit-yiu Ho focused more on the views and opinions of prostitution in Cantonese-speaking societies, including Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau, during this period. In an article published in 1993, Ho compiled a series of different views of public and private prostitution from contemporary literature, newspaper reports, and government reports

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Office of Guangzhou City],” *Republican Daily News Canton*, August 18, 1923, 6.

<sup>444</sup> Peng, “Minguo Guangzhou,” 45-47.

<sup>445</sup> Xiaohui Zhang and Yu Chen, “Ershi shiji ershi niandai de Guangzhou feichang yundong [The abolition prostitution movement in Guangzhou in the 1920s],” *Guangxi Social Science*, no. 11 (2006): 107-11.

between the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>446</sup> In his article, he claimed that the vast majority of the general public was indifferent to the continuation or abolition of prostitution. Intellectuals with higher education, especially Western education, dominated the majority of public opinion. In his 2001 article, Ho explored why women become prostitutes, especially private prostitutes, from the general public's perspective.<sup>447</sup> In his view, people in Cantonese-speaking societies in twentieth-century China possessed mixed attitudes towards prostitutes and prostitution. His article showed that attitudes towards prostitutes do not conform to any simple generalization or dogmatic view of the world of prostitution, revealing both the stereotypical image of the profession and reformers' writings on the subject. Therefore, a study of the general public perception of the situation and conditions of this profession was acceptable.

There are many works in English on prostitution and feminist theory. Gail Hershatte's *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*, published in 2007, provided a literature review of the history of women in China in the twentieth century. In the book, Hershatte also discussed her research and views on the history of the prostitution of women in China in the twentieth century.<sup>448</sup> She argues that prostitution is closely related to government revenues and local economic development and that financial implications need to be taken into account when considering the abolition of prostitution. In *Women and China's Revolutions*, published in 2018, Hershatte attempted to place women at the center of a historical narrative to

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<sup>446</sup> Virgil Kit-yiu Ho, "Selling Smiles in Guangzhou: Prostitution in the Early Republic," *East Asian History* 5, (1993): 101-32.

<sup>447</sup> Virgil Kit-yiu Ho, "'To Laugh at a Penniless man rather than a Prostitute': The Unofficial Worlds of Prostitution in Late Qing and Early Republican South China," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 103-37.

<sup>448</sup> Gail Hershatte, *Women in China's long twentieth century* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

reconstruct the history of the Chinese revolution in this period, especially the feminist revolution.<sup>449</sup> She used two key themes to expand her discourse. The first was the importance of women's visible and invisible labour, which included labour that sells the body, represented by prostitution; the second was the symbolic work carried out by gender itself.

In *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, published in 1994, Tani Barlow included essays that discuss the relationship between gender and modernity in twentieth-century China. These essays discussed the relationship between women and domestic space, the femininity reflected in the texts, and how the historical process of sexualization in twentieth-century China operated during its modernization.<sup>450</sup> Susan Mann focused on how the legacy of Chinese imperial values has shaped notions of gender and sexuality in twentieth-century modern China. She traced, in turn, state policy and even its views on prostitution as well as the concept of sexuality in twentieth-century Chinese history in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, published in 2011.<sup>451</sup> Based on the previous scholars' studies, this paper will use *The Republican Daily News Canton*, other newspapers, and government reports as primary sources to restore the series of actions to abolish prostitution and related public opinion in Guangzhou from the 1920s to 1930s.

### **Public Opinion Base for Prostitution Abolition and the March**

On January 15, 1921, two authors, Chen Qiulin and

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<sup>449</sup> Gail Hershtatter, *Women and China's Revolutions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018).

<sup>450</sup> Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

<sup>451</sup> Susan L. Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Chen Yansheng<sup>452</sup> published an article in *Guangdong Qunbao*, a newspaper founded by so-called early Chinese Marxists in Guangzhou, discussing the abolition of prostitution.<sup>453</sup> These two writers mentioned three dangers of prostitution in their article: first, prostitution and human degradation, second, prostitution and social chaos, and third, the harm of prostitution to the future of the Chinese nation. In addition, the article asserted that the abolition of prostitution would contribute to the stabilization of the family and social order and the improvement of the quality and purity of the national race.<sup>454</sup>

On the 29th of that month, another so-called Marxist, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942),<sup>455</sup> who was then the chairman of the Guangdong Provincial Education Committee, also gave a speech entitled “The Women’s Problem and Socialism” at the Guangdong Women’s Normal School.<sup>456</sup> For this Marxist, the root cause of women’s oppression was the creation of private ownership. With the creation of private ownership came exploitation and class and gender

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<sup>452</sup> Their dates of birth and death are unknown, but they were both members of the Chinese Kuomintang.

<sup>453</sup> Chen Qiulin and Chen Yansheng, “Changji de weihai [Harms of Prostitution],” *Guangdong Qunbao*, January 15, 1921.

<sup>454</sup> Fapu Wei, “Makesi zhuyi zaoqi chuanbo de difangxing yangben yanjiu [A Local Sample Study of the Early Spread of Marxism],” *Guizhou Social Sciences* 354, no. 6 (2019): 29.

<sup>455</sup> Chen Duxiu was a Chinese revolutionary socialist, educator, philosopher and author, who co-founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with Li Dazhao in 1921. From 1921 to 1927, he served as the Communist Party’s first General Secretary. Chen was a leading figure in both the Xinhai Revolution that overthrew the Qing dynasty and the May Fourth Movement for scientific and democratic developments in the early Republic of China.

<sup>456</sup> Guihua Ma and Miao Chen, “Wusi shiqi hou Chen Duxiu funü guan lunxi: jiyu dui makesi zhuyi funü jiefang zhongyao lilun de chuanbo yu yundong shijiao [An Analysis of Chen Duxiu’s View of Women after the May Fourth Period: Based on the Perspective of Spreading and Applying the Important Theory of Marxist Women’s Liberation],” *Journal of Kashgar Teachers College* 36, no. 1 (2015): 20-23.

oppression, as well as the oppression of women by the patriarchy. In his speech, he declared that “the life of the real Chinese people has been improper since ancient times, either this one oppresses that one or that one oppresses this one; the government and capitalists oppress the men, the men oppress the women, and yet among the women, there is some mutual oppression...” Chen proposed to solve women’s problems from a socialist point of view. He then tried to launch a movement to call for the abolition of prostitution and prepared for a march as soon as possible.

The two statements made by the so-called Marxists show two very different reasons for abolishing prostitution. First, Qiulin and Yansheng’s article undoubtedly demonstrated the logical relationship between feminism and nationalism. They believed that the abolition of prostitution affected the morality of society and the reputation of the country. The abolition of prostitution was necessary for the nationalist pursuit of the country’s prosperity and recovery. In this discourse, feminism was only a tool used by nationalists; On the other hand, Chen Duxiu’s viewpoint differed from the previous one. He believed that the problem of prostitutes could only be solved through socialist social activities because it was essentially a form of class oppression by society. Both men and women needed to promote feminism under the socialist perspective, and males and females should unite to resist the authority and the patriarchy. However, although their theories differed significantly, their goals were the same: the abolition of prostitution. As a result, a march for the abolition of prostitution was ready.

On March 31, 1922, some students began to post leaflets advocating for the abolition of prostitution in various parts of Guangzhou. According to the statistics, although most of the posters were torn down by the opponents immediately after the advocates put them up, they managed to put up more than 2,800 posters in the

city.<sup>457</sup>

The next day, the march began. According to *Lai Fu Bao*'s report:

On April 1, the citizen of Guangzhou held a march to abolish prostitution, with more than 100,000 workers, students, businessmen, and doctors.<sup>458</sup>

The result of the census organized by the Guangzhou municipal government in 1925 noted that there were 762,198 people in the city, and since the social situation in Guangzhou was stable from 1921 to 1925, it is reasonable to assume that there were more than 700,000 people in Guangzhou in 1922.<sup>459</sup> Therefore, if *Lai Fu Bao*'s figures were accurate, the march involved about one-seventh of the city's population, showing the event's importance. Even though there were still many opponents, the proposal to abolish prostitution had gained the support of many citizens. *Shizhao Yuebao*'s report was more detailed:

The number of male and female students (in the march) was the largest. Three motorcycles and some Scouts were the pioneers of this march. They separated the pedestrians from the road to avoid congestion. Military bands, students from normal schools and orphanages played along the way, and small planes distributed dozens of leaflets on the "Chastity Movement" over the city. The various

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<sup>457</sup> Unsigned journal article, "feichang yundong [the abolition of prostitution movement], *Nanda (Guangzhou)*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1922: 46-47.

<sup>458</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, "Shishi caiji: guonei zhi bu [News collection: Domestic section]," *Lai Fu Bao*, no. 198, 1922: 15. The translation is made by Rui Li, directly from the original file, hereinafter.

<sup>459</sup> Yanxing Zhou, "1925-1926 nian guangzhou shi hukou diaocha shulun [The commentary of population census in Guangzhou city from 1925 to 1926]," Master diss., Jinan University, 2007.

drawings and paintings, as well as some role-playing behaviours, were very vivid. These would allow the public to understand the dangers of Syphilis and the need to advocate for the abolition of prostitution.<sup>460</sup>

The march participants were still mainly students, but they had received widespread support from Guangzhou's society. The protest, which included both musical performances and role-playing, naturally attracted many people to watch along the route, which increased the impact of the content advocated by the march. Some businessmen and government departments also contributed heavily and provided some scarce means of transportation at the time, such as motorcycles and airplanes, to show their support. It is worth noting that the then governor of Guangdong Province, Chen Jiongmeng, and the mayor of Guangzhou City, Sun Ke (also known as Sun Fo, 1891-1973), were both very supportive of the march's demands, apparently.<sup>461</sup> All of the above shows that the march was a success, and the demand for the abolition of prostitution was deeply rooted in people's minds.

At the same time, Sun Ke said that the relevant regulations needed further discussion. In 1922, there were approximately 2,000 official prostitutes (under municipal government control) and an estimated several hundred private prostitutes in Guangzhou. The government's tax revenue from official prostitution was between \$600,000 and \$700,000 per year, accounting for a quarter of the city's annual revenue.<sup>462</sup> Therefore, Sun suggested that a large-

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<sup>460</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, "Guangzhou zhi feichang xunxing [Guangzhou's march abolition of prostitution]," *Shizhao Yuebao*, vol. 17, no. 5, 1922: 9.

<sup>461</sup> Mi Bi, "Guangzhou de feichang yundong [The abolition of prostitution movement of Guangzhou]," *Funü Zazhi*, vol. 8, no. 7, 1922: 44.

<sup>462</sup> Bi, "Guangzhou de feichang yundong," 44.

scale abolition of prostitution would not be possible until the following problems were solved: First, how should the government fill the relevant tax vacancies? Second, after the abolition of prostitution, how should the government raise funds for the resettlement and re-education of the prostitutes concerned? Third, after abolishing official prostitutes, how could the government solve related security problems and ensure these individuals would not become private prostitutes? Subsequent events show that Sun's fears gradually became a reality.

### **Widespread Private Prostitution and Compelling Women into Prostitution**

In late April 1922, the Guangzhou municipal government introduced an executive order to regulate the prostitution industry, but its wording was vague. Apart from the closure of some public brothels, it only proposed the regulation that “girls under the age of 15 were strictly prohibited from becoming prostitutes.” In practice, the above measures had had little effect. The number of official prostitutes fell, but the number of private prostitutes increased. As a student from Nation Guangdong University, Shen Hongci<sup>463</sup> said, “The proposal is still a proposal, and the prostitutes are still prostitutes.”<sup>464</sup> While the number of prostitutes was increasing, the number of related cases, such as compelling women to become prostitutes and

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<sup>463</sup> Shen Hongci was a student representative of National Guangdong University (Now called Sun Yat-sen University) and was known for his passionate participation in student movements and his anti-communist stance. Shen was later framed by students who supported the Communist Party, resulting in him being deported from the country by the R.O.C. government. In 1937, a scriptwriter named Sam Hung-Tsz appeared in British Hong Kong, whose Chinese characters were exactly the same as Shen Hongci's. It is not known if he was the same person.

<sup>464</sup> Hongci Shen, “Feichang yundong [The abolition of prostitution movement],” *Republican Daily News Canton*, April 14, 1924: 2; Hongci Shen, “Feichang yundong [The abolition of prostitution movement],” *Republican Daily News Canton*, April 15, 1924: 2-3.

trafficking them, was also growing.

Unable to become official prostitutes, some women were forced by their families into private brothels in exchange for money. In a report published in 1924, the author told a strange story that took place in a private brothel:

There was a man named Feng Shimou, a native of Shunde County. In September last year, he was introduced by a friend and sold his wife, Luo Simei, to a brothel called Sai Hong Lou, located near Tangyulan. They signed a half-year contract, stating that he would repay the principal and interest upon maturity. Simei was a girl from the Luo clan in Daliang, Shunde County, whose beauty still survived on her face. She felt that her husband was living in hardship and did not have any occupation, so she voluntarily pledged herself to a brothel out of grief. After a while, her husband may have a job and hope to redeem her from the brothel in the future. After getting the mortgage money, Feng went to the casino every day and spent all his money in a few days. The woman was so distressed that she fell into a coma after hearing the news. Unfortunately, at the end of last year, she contracted syphilis and sought treatment from doctors in Guangzhou, but it did not help. A few days ago, the doctor approved her to go home and recuperate on her own, but on the boat home, she died... In recent days, there were often prostitutes claiming to have seen a ghost in the brothel. Last night, a customer came to the brothel to find a prostitute, and at midnight, the customer suddenly shouted that he wanted to kill Feng Shimou as if a

ghost possessed him.<sup>465</sup>

The first half of this sad report should be a true reflection of the event. In the Chinese patriarchal society, a wife was only a commodity that could be used as collateral for her husband. In this patriarchal society, women's husbands, fathers, brothers, and even female family members could sell women into prostitution. In 1923, there was a case of a maid being sold as a prostitute by her mistress:

Last night, a police detective arrested a newly-adult private prostitute, Lin Mei, at Xin Chang Fa Inn in Xidi. During the interrogation, the prostitute mentioned that she was sold to the Wei clan in Xiangshan County as a maid when she was three years old because her parents were impoverished. In May of this year, she was given to an agent, Dou Pisi, by her mistress, Wei Wushi, and taken to Hong Kong to be sold to a brothel as a prostitute. Later, she was brought to Guangzhou by an agent because of her fierce resistance and was sold into a brothel as a prostitute. Because of the lack of business recently, she was taken by the agent to various inns every night and forced to work as a private prostitute.<sup>466</sup>

The mistresses of large prominent families also had the power to dispose of servants. This was an excellent example of how the oppression of women during this time came from men and the patriarchal ideology of society as a whole. In the 1920s, when the Guangzhou municipal government began to control official prostitution, more and

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<sup>465</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, "Jiyuan you gui looming [A ghost in a brothel tries to kill someone]," *Republican Daily News Canton*, February 18, 1924, 7.

<sup>466</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, "Beibi dangchang [Forced to become a prostitute]," *Republican Daily News Canton*, November 13, 1923, 7.

more women were forced to become private prostitutes, which led to a growing number of similar cases.

Private prostitutes covered a wide range of businesses, including privately run brothels, prostitutes who travelled to various hotels and inns, and those who worked as hostesses and provided sexual services in casinos and opium smokehouses, which also drew the attention of the police. Among them, the activities of private prostitutes in casinos appeared in the newspaper report:

Private gambling was everywhere in the city, bringing disaster to the public. It has been banned by order of the municipal government. Our newspaper office has received many reports, and we were overwhelmed by the number of information, so we now summarize our survey of casinos in the city as follows.

Third, near the Lü Dongbin Temple at the foot of the Guanyin Bridge in District 8, a small casino with many gambling tables outside the casino blocking the road. From 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., the crowds of gamblers were noisy, and there were often scenes of men and women [meaning private prostitutes] having sex in the street.

Fifth, near Jinyutang on Changtang Street in District 1, there was a small casino where all kinds of games were available. There was a singing show with female actors and actresses in the evening. Many private prostitutes went around the gamblers to solicit business, which is dazzling.<sup>467</sup>

Private prostitution often went hand in hand with private

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<sup>467</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, “Guangzhou shi duchang zhi diaocha [Guangzhou city’s casino survey],” *Republican Daily News Canton*, August 10, 1923, 6.

casinos, and many prostitutes would find their customers among the winning gamblers. Related to this was the opium smokehouse, and the active presence of private prostitutes in the smokehouse also drew the government's attention:

Recently, it was reported in the newspaper that there were waitresses at various chat rooms [alias opium smokehouses] in the city. Therefore, the municipal government ordered the director of the police office to ask each precinct to find out if there were similar opium dens where waitresses were employed and prohibit them.<sup>468</sup>

The number of private prostitutes and the forms of their existence had increased as Guangzhou's municipal government had gradually tightened its control over official prostitution. However, the number of private prostitutes could not be specifically counted, but it had reached a considerable number in newspaper reports.

In summary, the official action to abolish prostitution in this period was mainly based on public opinion and the advocacy of some social groups and intellectuals. The official series of activities were only limited measures made under the pressure of social opinion and within their control, i.e., the management of official prostitution. As for the private prostitutes, the officials only dealt with some notorious cases.

Strictly speaking, the initial movement for the abolition of prostitution developed from the bottom up, as described in the previous part of this article about the March for the Abolition of Prostitution. This movement was created out of moralistic demands by the intellectuals and some students and with the public hope that the government would take practical actions to abolish

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<sup>468</sup> Guangzhou Municipal Government, "Jin yanguan nüzhadai [Prohibit the employment of waitresses in opium smokehouse]," *Republican Daily News Canton*, March 13, 1924, 7.

prostitution through social pressure such as public opinion propaganda and marches. This was because the intellectuals and government officials did not know enough about the prostitution industry.

The vast majority of intellectuals opposed prostitution because they blamed it for the spread of STDs, felt that it was contrary to good morals, and claimed that it affected the country's "face," which impacted China's possibility of becoming a modern nation. With such a public opinion base, the root of the prostitution problem was still untouched. Nevertheless, as the student mentioned above, Shen Hongci stated in his commentary,

They [referring to some public intellectuals and government officials] advocated the abolition of prostitution for four general reasons: first, it was a continuation of slavery; second, it was detrimental to the institution of the state; third, it disturbed good society; fourth, it disturbed good families... Now the official prostitution is abolished, but private prostitution was still prevalent, so is this not the same as not abolishing it?<sup>469</sup>

### **Prostitution in the 1930s and the Government's Further Actions**

As Shen mentioned, the initial series of actions by the municipal government did not solve the problems caused by prostitution. On the contrary, private prostitution had flourished under related activities, but a few years later, official prostitution was not wholly abolished but developed to a certain extent. A 1934 article described the prostitution industry in Guangzhou:

Since I arrived in Guangzhou, I have always intended to investigate the situation of prostitutes in Guangzhou to inform the public. Now, I will

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<sup>469</sup> Shen, "Feichang yundong," 2.

describe the information that I have investigated to report to those interested in improving or concerned about our society.

First, the location and number of prostitutes. There are three areas where official prostitutes gather in Guangzhou:

A. The Xifen section, including Chentang and Tangyulan. Chentang has 17 upper-class brothels with 367 prostitutes; Tangyulan has 13 brothels with 278 prostitutes;

B. The Xiguan section, including Daheji, Huangsha, and Dongshawei. Daheji has 19 brothels with 240 prostitutes, 100 Erer boats, and 24 Shiliu boats, which are traded in the currency of Western countries and are exclusively for foreigners;<sup>470</sup> Huangsha has 24 brothels with 99 prostitutes; Dongshawei has 16 brothels with 43 prostitutes;

C. The Southeast section, including both Hechang boats of Dongdi and Yihe street of River south. There are eight upper-class brothel boats with 21 prostitutes in Hechang boat, and there are three lower-class Sanda

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<sup>470</sup> Erer boats and Shiliu boats were different types of boats on which prostitution is carried out, and the various boats mentioned below all belong to this category. Prostitution on boats was mainly carried out by women of the Tanka people, a group of people who lived on boats almost all their lives on the southeast coast of China, especially in the Pearl River Delta. Although this group also spoke Cantonese, they were very different from the land-based Cantonese speaking people. The Tanka people had a matriarchal tradition before, but most of their women were engaged in prostitution. For the study of Tanka people engaged in prostitution, see E. N. Anderson, "The Boat People of South China," *Anthropos* 65, no. 1/2 (1970): 248–56.

boats with 21 prostitutes; there is one brothel with nine prostitutes on Yihe street of River south.

The number of official prostitutes in the city is 1,172, surveyed in the 19th year of the Republic of China [1930]. Now [1934] ... the total number of [official prostitutes] in the city is 16 less than in the 19th year [1930], but the increase in the lower class [prostitutes] is more harmful to the society.<sup>471</sup>

The above survey was only about the official prostitutes, and the author could not investigate the situation of private prostitutes due to the limitation of conditions. However, according to existing data, the official prostitutes were numerous.



**Fig. 2. Tanka People Living on the Coast of Macau**<sup>472</sup>

<sup>471</sup> Yuanyuan, "Guangzhou de changji [Guangzhou's prostitutes]," *Renyan Weekly Journal*, vol. 1, no. 16 (1934): 325-26.

<sup>472</sup> Lossing & Barritt., and Perry, Matthew Calbraith, 1794-1858. Narrative of the expedition of an American squadron to the China seas and Japan, performed in the years 1852, 1853, and 1854, under the command of Commodore M. C. Perry, United States Navy, by order of the government of the United States. *Tanka Boat, Macao [Graphic] / Lossing=Barritt*. Prints. [New York: D. Appleyard and Co., 1856], n.d. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.31889113>.

From 1922 until 1930, and even before 1934, the number of official prostitutes did not decrease significantly. Driven by public opinion, the city government half-heartedly imposed certain regulations and restrictions on the official prostitutes, but they still could not get away from the significant financial revenues that they generated. Yuanyuan also mentioned that:

For government-related tax revenues, Chentang could earn \$382,500 a year; the civilian correctional surcharge (a tax on clients) was \$273,700, and Dongdi and Nandi earned \$110,700 a year. The total of the above was \$763,200. That was a huge revenue, beneficial for municipal finance.<sup>473</sup>

The Guangzhou municipal government, which often suffered from fiscal shortages, could not easily give up such vast revenue. The “civilian correctional surcharge” mentioned in the quotation was a tax imposed by the Guangzhou municipal government on the official prostitution industry in 1923 to cover the financial gap. However, under the pressure of public opinion, the municipal government of Guangzhou turned its attention to private prostitutes. As a result, the police bureau started to crack down on related businesses, and they were more proactive than ever.

With the announcement of a strict ban on private prostitution by the ROC government in Nanjing in 1930, this predicament added some public support to the Guangzhou municipal government’s actions. The Nanjing government gave orders that police stations should take the initiative to investigate hotels and inns but should act with caution. If the police found a prostitute soliciting customers, a first offender should be detained for 15 days and sent to parents or family members; in addition to being

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<sup>473</sup> Yuanyuan, “Guangzhou de changji,” 326.

detained, repeat offenders should be sent to a government-run almshouse. The municipal government was pinning its hopes of reducing private prostitution on the police.

In addition to filling its lack of knowledge about private prostitution, the government also wanted to know more about the prostitution industry in Guangzhou to take more effective action. In 1930, in compliance with this order, the Guangzhou municipal government sent investigators to examine the lives of prostitutes and the prostitution industry. A journalist for *The Republican Daily News Canton* interviewed an investigator:

Journalist (J): What was the life situation of the investigated prostitutes?

Investigator (I): The investigators reported three classes of prostitutes (both official and private): upper, middle and lower. In terms of life, upper-class prostitutes were relatively free and easy, while middle- and lower-class prostitutes worked very hard and were often oppressed.

J: After the investigation, what can the director do to help them?

I: We have already worked out a way to provide relief. First, it is forbidden for older prostitutes to buy and adopt young girls as prostitutes. This is because now, older prostitutes often buy girls and train them to become prostitutes, and when they grow up and become prostitutes again, they can provide for the older prostitutes. If this phenomenon is eliminated, there will be no new prostitutes; Secondly, we need to set up more handicraft factories to recruit middle- and lower-class prostitutes for learning work. Moreover, we need to set up some educational institutions to

teach them general knowledge so that when they learn a new craft, they can maintain their independent lives; Thirdly, we need to pay attention to the health issues of various private prostitutes and even official brothels. Many brothels in the city (both official and private) are often cramped and have dirty air. Therefore, we plan to visit the brothels and the health Bureau to monitor the health issues.<sup>474</sup>

From this interview, it is clear that the municipal government was still taking some substantive action against prostitution. Measures ranging from cracking down on inheritance relationships within the prostitution industry to providing re-education and training for lower and middle-class private prostitutes who have lost their jobs are much stronger than in the previous decade. For the municipal government of Guangzhou, these private prostitutes did not generate tax revenue for themselves and harmed social security. Therefore, with the assurance of tax revenue from official prostitutes, the municipal government catered to the central government's directives and the pressure of public opinion from all walks of life in Guangzhou and began a further movement to abolish private prostitution. The above measures were commendable improvements, but in any case, prostitution still existed in Guangzhou and had not yet been eradicated. The reasons for this failure are many and varied, but there are three main ones.

The first was the issue of female trafficking. Human trafficking has long been one of the most severe social problems in traditional Chinese society, especially for women and children.<sup>475</sup> Among those problems, the

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<sup>474</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, "Jinü shenghuo diaocha hou zhi jiuji [Relief after the investigation of the life of prostitutes]," *Republican Daily News Canton*, July 5, 1930, 2a.

<sup>475</sup> Bonny Ling, "Prostitution and Female Trafficking in China: Between Phenomena and Discourse," *China Perspectives*, no. 1-2 (113)

trafficking of women also included trading women from family members to their own families. Agents generally sold women to wealthy and influential families as maids or to brothels as prostitutes. After establishing the Republic of China in 1912, the traditional Chinese clans gradually withered away, so most women began to be sold to brothels all over the country. Although various governments during different periods had enacted laws and regulations against trafficking, they had not been able to address the problem of trafficking of women effectively. Moreover, the complex and insurmountable problem of trafficking women had led to a steady source of prostitution, which was one of the reasons why the prostitution industry in Guangzhou could not be banned entirely.

The second issue was the education and employment of women (prostitutes). In traditional Chinese smallholder society, most women did not have an education. All they had to do was learn to farm in the countryside in imperial China. However, since China ended its imperial era and began experimenting with a modern republican country, modern cities have gradually developed as they converged with the world market and new municipal theory. This period's political and social turmoil, coupled with the warlords' wars throughout Guangdong,<sup>476</sup> led to the migration of many rural people to its modern capital city, Guangzhou. Few women who moved to the cities had received education or vocational skills training. Therefore, they chose to become prostitutes to survive when they could not support themselves. Because, in this case, prostitutes do not need to go through systematic training or formal education to become prostitutes, and they could

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(2018): 65–74.

<sup>476</sup> At *The Republican Daily News Canton*, news of the war in various parts of Guangdong Province could be found every day, and the level of chaos in the province during this period was evident. As a result, Guangzhou, the more stable capital, became the choice of many people to move to.

make considerable income in a short time. Insufficient education and lack of work skills were also important reasons for the problem of prostitution in Guangzhou.

The third issue was economic and financial. The existence of official prostitution and the associated taxation system provided a solid foundation for the presence of the prostitution industry. Such taxation guaranteed survival for prostitutes and brothels, even if it was a form of oppression. However, as long as the government needed this revenue, the prostitution industry developed, and the brothel owners would not give up the high profits this industry brought. Moreover, because the municipal government could not give up this promising source of tax revenue, the financial issue became the direct cause of the failure to abolish the prostitution industry in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although there were many other reasons for the issues of prostitutes in Guangzhou, such as the new women's pursuit of infidelity, these were not the main reasons for the continued existence of prostitution in Guangzhou during the Republic of China. The Guangzhou municipal government's series of strict controls and bans on official and private prostitution in the 1920s and 1930s could not be considered a success.

### **Abolition of the Prostitution Movement and Emergence of Feminist Thought**

Although prostitution has been with humankind for a long time, with the development of human civilization and the emergence of feminist and gender equality ideas, this long-established and ancient occupation needs to be gradually pushed out of the stage of history. In the 1920s, the rule of the Qing Empire ended in Guangzhou. The concept of a modern city and civilization had not yet taken root, so the resistance to abolishing prostitution was still strong. However, because of its geographical location near British Hong Kong and the long tradition of Cantonese migration overseas, some of the feminist movements in

Western countries before World War I and newly emerging theories were gradually introduced to Guangzhou. In the news reports of this period, some writers mentioned that British women fought for the right to participate in politics and won some seats in the House.<sup>477</sup> Some articles relayed the news of the establishment of women police in the UK in 1914 and advocated for equal employment for men and women.<sup>478</sup> The influx of foreign news about feminism did not immediately change the status of women in China, but it did have a catalytic effect, adding some hope for change to this traditional and conservative society.

Prostitution was a widely recognized job in traditional Chinese society. Although it had a bad reputation and was often subject to moralistic criticism, such as harming the social and moral climate and disrupting traditional families, many people still benefited from it. For many women, and even some men who used women in prostitution for income, it was their only way to make a living. Therefore, the Guangzhou municipal government's practice of controlling official prostitutes and only banning private prostitutes had a specific public opinion base, and some intellectuals approved of this practice.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a widely accepted reason for abolishing prostitution in Guangzhou was that it was detrimental to the international reputation of China as a newly emerging nation-state. Some intellectuals claimed that prostitution was a tool to cut off the nation's development potential and harm the purity of the nation. Those prostitutes were a group of "reprobates" who disturbed the morality of society. "Only by abolishing the institution of prostitution can we have new development

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<sup>477</sup> Yongsheng, "Funü diwei [Women's Status]," *Republican Daily News Canton*, April 14, 1924, 7.

<sup>478</sup> Unsigned newspaper article, "Shijie funü zhi diwei [The women's status of the world]," *Republican Daily News Canton*, April 13, 1924, 4.

and hope for the future of our country and nation.”<sup>479</sup> This was a nationalistic ideology that promoted eugenics in terms of its logic.<sup>480</sup> According to the theory of nineteenth-century social Darwinism, the existence of prostitutes would destroy the noble bloodline of the nation and thus fail to accomplish the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Therefore, in the view of some intellectuals, “the females’ issue in China was a major problem for the whole national society. The problem of prostitution the women was not only a problem of women’s happiness but also a problem of the soundness of the whole national life. Therefore, the nation must investigate the reason for this problem, study the matter, and find a solution so that the evil social events can be pushed forward to a bright future.”<sup>481</sup> Thus, the modern transformation of the prostitute’s body became an essential part of the construction of the Chinese nation-state, and the national identity of the prostitute could not match the nation-state imagined by these intellectuals.

Although most advocates for the abolition of prostitution based their position on a nationalist ideology, there was still a small group of intellectuals who held a different view. For example, Chen Duxiu, as mentioned above, believed that the essence of prostitution was not just the oppression of women by men but the oppression of women by patriarchal society as a whole.<sup>482</sup> Prostitution results from a patriarchal social order that subordinates

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<sup>479</sup> Chen Qiran, “Changji de cunfei wenti [The issue of preservation and abolition of prostitutes],” *Renyan Weekly Journal*, no. 38, 1935: 748-49.

<sup>480</sup> On the case of the implementation of eugenics in Puerto Rico and related theories, see Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 74-108.

<sup>481</sup> Chen Qiran, “Changji de cunfei wenti,” 749.

<sup>482</sup> Jinzhu Fu, “Chen Jiongming yu jindai Guangdong nüquan yundong [Chen Jiongming and the Modern Guangdong Feminist Movement],” *Journal of China Women’s University* 21, no. 1 (2009): 100.

women to men and makes gender inequality a reality in all aspects of social life. Chen believed that in primitive societies, men and women were supposed to be equal and that women were in a free position and sometimes in a position of respect. The rise of inequality between men and women co-occurred with the great division of labour and the development of productivity, the emergence of surplus commodities, the disintegration of the original commune, the private ownership of the means of production, the establishment of the system of exploitation, and the transition of society from matriarchy to patriarchy.<sup>483</sup> Chen Duxiu meant that the social status of women in different societies and periods of history changed according to the changes in the society's political and economic relations. Chen also believed that the suffering of prostitutes is closely related to economic problems. Only with the implementation of socialism could this problem be solved.

These were some of the mainstream views of the intellectuals in Guangzhou in the 1920s and 1930s on the abolition of prostitution. However, in terms of quantity, most of the intellectuals were nationalist eugenicists.

### Conclusion

Prostitution had always existed in traditional Chinese society, even in small villages, but after the founding of the Republic of China, society was transitioning from traditional to modern, and the problem of prostitution gradually became magnified and complicated. With the establishment of a modern Guangzhou city and its municipal government, prostitution gradually became a severe problem for Guangzhou's intellectuals and government officials. The patriarchy oppressed these

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<sup>483</sup> See Chen Duxiu, "Funü wenti yu shehui zhuyi [Women's issue and socialism]," *Guangdong Qunbao*, January 31, 1921; Chen Duxiu, "Women weishenme yao tichang laodong yundong yu funü yundong [Why we should promote labor and women's movements]," *Laodong yu Funü*, 1921: 2.

prostitutes, not only through men but also through women who bought and sold other women at will and forced them to become prostitutes, always in low social status.

However, the series of measures taken by the Guangzhou municipal government in the 1920s and 1930s encountered many obstacles. First, the government tried to control the size of official prostitution, but financial pressures prevented them from abandoning this lucrative tax-generating industry. Then, the government tried to abolish private prostitution as much as possible, starting with a strict ban on private prostitution to meet public opinion. However, the movement was not successful because it could not solve the problem of female trafficking and the re-employment of unemployed prostitutes.

Finally, Chinese intellectuals' conservative concepts and nationalistic ideology were so deep-rooted that they advocated the abolition of prostitution only for eugenics, which could not touch the core of the problem of prostitution, and the movement to abolish prostitution could not be completed. The Marxist view of feminism, which exists on a small scale, has not been widely discussed because it is not widely accessible to the public. Thus, both the actions of the municipal government and the views of the intellectuals in Guangzhou are good examples of the emerging feminism's limitations in China in the 1920s and 1930s.

With the occupation of Guangzhou by the Japanese Empire on October 21, 1938, the municipal government of Guangzhou lost control of the city and then shifted to other parts of the province and established a government in exile. Since then, a series of policies implemented in Guangzhou city no longer exists. Although the ROC regained control of Guangzhou in 1945, it faced urban reconstruction and civil war issues, and the municipal government had no more ability or money to focus on the abolition of prostitution. However, this abolition of the prostitution movement still provided some basis for future policies.

## Glossary

Here is a Chinese and English character comparison list of translations for the Mandarin and Cantonese pronunciations used in this article. These include names of famous parties and personalities, pseudonyms of authors of newspapers and journals, names of newspapers and journals, names of places in Guangzhou province, names of places in Guangzhou city, etc.

<b>Changtang Street</b>	長塘街
<b>Chen Duxiu</b>	陳獨秀
<b>Chen Jiongming</b>	陳炯明
<b>Chen Qiran</b>	陳其然
<b>Chentang</b>	陳塘
<b>Daheji</b>	大河基
<b>Daliang</b>	大良
<b>Dongdi</b>	東堤
<b>Dongshawei</b>	東沙尾
<i>Funü Zazhi</i>	《婦女雜誌》

<b>Guangdong</b>	廣東
<i>Guangdong Qunbao</i>	《廣東群報》
<b>Guangxi</b>	廣西
<b>Guangzhou</b>	廣州
<b>Guanyin Bridge</b>	觀音橋
<b>Huangsha</b>	黃沙
<b>Jinyutang</b>	金魚塘
<i>Lai Fu Bao</i>	《來復報》
<i>Laodong yu funü</i>	《勞動與婦女》
<b>Lü Dongbin Temple</b>	呂祖廟
<b>May Fourth Movement</b>	五四運動
<b>Nandi</b>	南堤
<b>Old Guangxi clique</b>	舊桂系

<b><i>Renyan Weekly Journal</i></b>	《人言周刊》
<b>Sam Hung-Tsz</b>	沈鴻慈（粵）
<b>Shen Hongci</b>	沈鴻慈（普）
<b><i>Shizhao Yuebao</i></b>	《時兆月報》
<b>Shunde</b>	順德
<b>Sun Ke</b>	孫科
<b>Tangyulan</b>	塘魚欄
<b>Tanka people</b>	蠶家人
<b><i>The Republican Daily News Canton</i></b>	《廣州民國日報》
<b>Xiangshan</b>	香山
<b>Xidi</b>	西堤
<b>Xiguan</b>	西關
<b>Xinhai Revolution</b>	辛亥革命