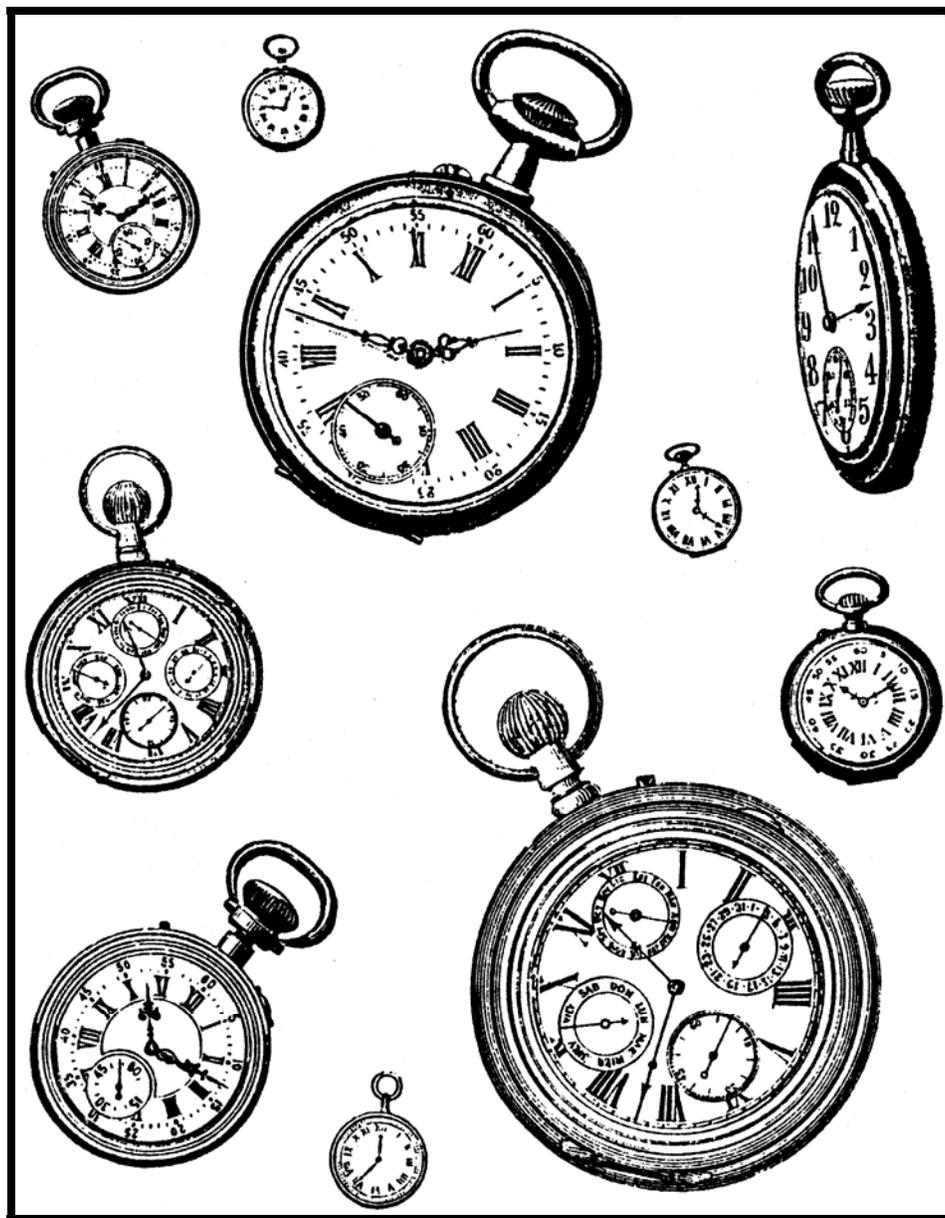


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# *The Chico Historian*

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## *Editor's Note*

Having no previous experience in the fields of publishing and editing, I must admit that I was somewhat surprised when I was approached by Dr. Judith Raftery, who offered me the opportunity of serving as editor of this year's edition of the *Chico Historian*. I accepted, not quite sure what to expect but nevertheless eager to test my mettle against... well, I wasn't sure. Needless to say, the experience has been educational if nothing else; hopefully you will find the contents of this year's edition to be equally so. Not only did I acquire valuable experience, but I learned a lot as well. As even the most casual student of history can tell you, the discipline of historical study is immeasurably vast in breadth as well as depth. As a result historians must confine themselves to relatively narrow fields of study if they hope to achieve any sense of historical understanding. Serving as editor of the *Chico Historian* has allowed me the privilege of being exposed to a diverse range of historical foci. Now you have the opportunity to enjoy that same privilege.

This publication would not have been possible without the assistance, guidance, participation, and support of numerous persons. Foremost among these are the many students who took the time and made the effort to submit papers to the *Chico Historian*. Both those students whose papers appear in this edition, as well as those that do not, have made a significant contribution to the academic life of not just the Department of History, but of the university as a whole. My sincere gratitude must be extended to assistant editor Frances Morrow, whose suggestions, support, and assistance proved indispensable throughout the entire editorial process. A hearty thank you also goes to the members of the editorial board, who helped to review submissions and offered valuable advice on how they may be improved. Acknowledgment must be given to Denyse and Laura Duhaime of Lasting Impressions with Panache of Georgetown, Massachusetts for granting permission to use their artwork for the cover of this edition. Faculty advisor Dr. Judith Raftery helped to keep things on track and answered my questions as well as recommending students who had produced promising work. Dr. Steven Lewis also directed me towards possible submissions, which are the lifeblood of any scholarly journal. Dr. Carl Peterson and his wife Mary have generously donated financial support for the *Chico Historian*. Finally, history department secretary Claudia Beaty helped to provide valuable assistance and answered my questions appertaining to the actual printing process. I tip my hat to you all. Thank you.

Patrick O'Connor

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## Red Eye for the Sainly Guy: the Stalinist Makeover of Alexander Nevsky

Misha Mazzini Griffith

“For the sake of truthfulness one can afford to defy the truth.”<sup>1</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, the most renowned filmmaker of the Soviet Union, used this Goethe quote to explain his use of myth in his creations. This paper will examine one of Eisenstein’s most famous films, “Alexander Nevsky,” to find what relevance a thirteenth century saint had in Stalinist Russia. Myth, purges, socialist realism, and fake ice all play crucial roles in the making of an epic film in the turbulent and terrible times under Joseph Stalin. The truth, however, will play a very minor part.

Film was the most amazing story-telling vehicle of the twentieth century. Beyond mere entertainment, it was a didactic medium, and nowhere more so than in the fledgling Soviet Union. In 1919 the People’s Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatoli Lunacharsky, was convinced of the power of film: “it constitutes, on the one hand, a visual clarion for the dissemination of ideas and, on the other hand, if we introduce elements of the refined, the poetic, the pathetic etc., it is capable of touching the emotions and thus becomes an apparatus of agitation.”<sup>2</sup> In its first ten years of existence, the USSR encouraged film-making as a way to educate the illiterate masses about Marxist theory. These films related the important events that led up to the Revolution, the October Revolution itself, and the struggles of creating a new socialist government. The “facts” of these events were often bent to conform to the prevailing Marxist-Leninist ideology. Modern historian Joseph Mali labeled these foundational narratives *historical myth*. “They become significant precisely in moments when common traditional meanings of life and history have become indeterminate, as in wars and revolutions, and their social utility is to sustain the structural tradition of society by some dramatic reactivation of its original motivations.”<sup>3</sup> The Soviets under Vladimir Lenin’s leadership created new myths to give new meaning and order to the Russian people. Lunacharsky encouraged making films about history but warned, “we must not be carried away by the full panoply of the past: we must concentrate only on moments that are important for agitation and propaganda.”<sup>4</sup> Four hundred and forty-five films were produced in the Soviet Union in the ten years after the October Revolution.<sup>5</sup> Both within and outside the Soviet Union many of these films were considered artistic and experimental masterpieces. After Lenin’s death this work continued under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, but with a very different style and philosophy.

Stalin created a new political paradigm advocating the end of Leninist international revolution in favor of Socialism in one country.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union would de-emphasize worldwide communism in favor of creating a socialist hegemony in Russia. Every aspect of life in the Soviet Union underwent profound changes, including forced collectivized farming and the government take-over of all industrial and commercial functions. The Party

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<sup>1</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Notes of a Film Director* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1959), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Anatoli Lunacharsky, “The Tasks of the State Cinema in the RSFSR,” *Kinematograf. Sbornik Statei* (Moscow, 1919), reprinted in *The Film Factory*, Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Mali, *Mythistory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Lunacharsky, 47.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 424.

<sup>6</sup> Theodore H. Von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? Why Gorbachëv?* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 144.

took control of all education, arts, and sciences in a system known as *Partiinost'*—"Party-mindedness." The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* defined *partiinost'* as:

Party spirit, or partisanship. In a world view, philosophy, social science, literature or art, the ideological tendency expressing the interests of particular classes or social groups and manifested both in the social orientation of scientific and artistic creativity and in the individual viewpoints of scientists, scholars, philosophers, writers and artists. In a broad sense, party spirit is a principle of human behavior and of the operation of organizations and institutions, as well as an instrument of political and ideological struggle.<sup>7</sup>

All literature, music, fine art, performing arts, film, and all the physical and natural sciences, and even history had to conform to the new Stalinist version of Leninist-Marxist theory. To explain how *partiinost'* was applied to the work of, for example, a historian, Samuel Oppenheim wrote that the process was three-fold. First, the individual historian must have a "personal adherence to the proletarian cause and its directing political party." Second, the historian must apply a Marxist approach to sources, giving him "certain *a priori* attitudes unavailable to the bourgeois historian." Third, "historical *partiinost'* is adherence to one *method*—historical materialism—over any other."<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, the Party dictated the prevailing ideology. This "top down" method of central control was not new in the Soviet Union, but it was applied much more ruthlessly under Stalin than under his predecessors.

For artists, the new aesthetic was called Socialist Realism. Oppenheim described the connection between *partiinost'* and Socialist Realism from the viewpoint of a writer: "the writer's *partiinost'* defines *where* he stands on social issues; realism is the *method* by which the writer expresses this orientation."<sup>9</sup> Andrei Zhdanov, a secretary of the Central Committee, defined Social Realism in 1934 as "the combination of lowly, everyday reality with the heights of heroic promise."<sup>10</sup> The intention was to glorify the common man. The result was frequently poems written about tractors. For those artists who did not follow the Socialist Realism dictum, their work was publicly scrutinized, held up to ridicule, and denounced by their peers. The more hopeless cases, along with many others accused of political unorthodoxy, were subjected to what is now known as The Great Purge of 1936-1938. The biggest of several Stalinist purges, some conservative estimates put the number of arrests during those two years at one and a half million people, with a conviction rate of 85 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

The new themes of Soviet life emphasized unity and strength. Stalin had Soviet history rewritten to emphasize the strong Tsars of the past, especially those who unified Russian territory such as Ivan the Terrible or those who modernized Russia as did Peter the Great.<sup>12</sup> Of course, Stalin came to be viewed as their worthy successor. Ostensibly this was all done to unify and bulwark the Soviet Union against invasion, but many historians accuse Stalin of building a personality cult around himself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Samuel A. Oppenheim, *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. Joseph Wieczynski, vol. 27, (1982), 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Oppenheim was paraphrasing the work of I. F. Volkov in this passage.

<sup>10</sup> James Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>11</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 589.

<sup>12</sup> Goodwin, 143, 160.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Von Laue, 158. See also Goodwin, 161.

Stalin knew of film's potent powers to entertain and to teach. He enjoyed watching films in the Kremlin basement, especially those that featured his part in the Revolution.<sup>14</sup> However, he was eager also to use film as a propaganda tool to reinforce his new policies. A 1935 conference of Soviet filmmakers established the film *Chapayev*, a fictional account of a Revolutionary hero, as the benchmark film of Socialist Realism for its positive depiction of Socialist heroes.<sup>15</sup> Rather than celebrating the victories of the masses, Stalinist films celebrated singular heroes. The studios dictated who made the films, the subjects of the films, and the plots of the films. Any deviation was subject to harsh penalties. History later showed that even though the secret police had built cases against certain filmmakers, Stalin never had a film director shot. But at the time, filmmakers saw friends and mentors in other artistic fields disappear. Because of political pressures, barely half of the movies filmed during this time were released. Many Soviet filmmakers at the time only could assume they were next.<sup>16</sup>

Sergei Eisenstein was one of the great silent filmmakers of the 1920's. His claim to fame was furthering the development of the editing technique known as the montage. "The expressive effect of cinema," wrote Eisenstein, "is the result of juxtapositions."<sup>17</sup> The most stunning example of this was the Odessa Steps sequence from "The Battleship Potemkin." Eisenstein crafted a violent sequence of mob hysteria when a platoon of Tsarist troops fired upon a crowd of observers. The faceless, orderly troops made an obvious juxtaposition to the unruly civilians trampling wounded children underfoot in their attempts to flee. At the climactic moment, a cannon from the Battleship Potemkin roared, and a sleeping stone lion appeared to wake up and roar in reply. Always experimenting with the audiences' emotional response to film, Eisenstein followed the Formalist precepts of Art as Device. Emphasizing form over content, he attempted to revive feelings in the audience through manipulating traditional storytelling techniques. Eisenstein labeled this disruptive and disquieting method of filmmaking "Kino Kulak"--literally 'Film Fist.' His first four films were remarkable experiments in Marxist theory, where groups were cast as protagonists and antagonists, rather than the more Western style of single characters in these roles.

It was obvious this highly experimental and unorthodox film maker would eventually run afoul of the Party and of Socialist Realism. Formalism, with its emphasis on structure, was contrary to Socialist Realism, with its emphasis on content. Eisenstein spent from 1929 to 1933 in Europe and the United States attempting to work on more western style productions. He had left the USSR as its most celebrated cinema artist, but he returned to a completely different paradigm. "Eisenstein," wrote Boris Shumyatsky, head of the film studio Soyuzkino, "could not ignore the fact that works in all fields of our Soviet art are becoming steadily clearer and politically more mature. That is why, on the eve of the production of 'Bezhin Meadow,' he declared his strong desire to work in a new way, to work in the style of socialist realism, and to renounce the serious creative errors he had made in the past."<sup>18</sup> His first film under the new Stalinist system, "Bezhin Meadow," was ridiculed and suppressed even before production was finished. The studio executives refused to assign him any more projects, and he was ordered to teach film theory at an art college. After a public confession of his political misunderstandings, the studios offered

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<sup>14</sup> Goodwin, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>17</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "Béla Forgets the Scissors," *Kino* 10 August 1926, reprinted in *The Film Factory*, 147.

<sup>18</sup> Boris Shumyatsky, "The Film *Bezhin Meadow*" *Pravda*, 19 March 1937, reprinted in *The Film Factory*, 379.

Eisenstein “Alexander Nevsky” in 1937.<sup>19</sup> Eisenstein knew this was his only chance to return to directing films, and perhaps even to save his own life.

Eisenstein, under constant supervision by several party handlers,<sup>20</sup> researched the life of Alexander Nevsky, and he left records of the historical works consulted.<sup>21</sup> First, there were the chronicles of the cities of Novgorod and Pskov, written during Nevsky’s life. These revealed Nevsky was a prince of the Rurik dynasty, the first princes of northwestern Russia. Born Alexander Yaroslavovich in 1220, he gained his nickname “Nevsky” after defeating a Swedish invasion on the Neva River in 1240. Two years later Nevsky defeated an invading Teutonic army on the Ice of Lake Chudskoye. A leader to the Russians, he was a vassal of the Mongol Horde and died in 1263 while returning from a pilgrimage to pay homage to the Khan.<sup>22</sup>

Another historical work Eisenstein consulted was a hagiography purportedly written by one of Nevsky’s followers about twenty years after Nevsky’s death. This tale was an embellishment of the earlier works and plays up the miraculous aspects of Nevsky’s life and victories. The Orthodox church near Vladimir proclaimed Nevsky a saint and a defender of the faith. This hagiography was meant to bolster that claim.<sup>23</sup>

Around 1540, the Metropolitan Makarii ordered the creation of a series of books that served as a major inspiration for Sergei Eisenstein. The hand painted “Illuminated Chronicles” covered Russian history from Adam and Eve to Ivan the Terrible. Forty-three of the one thousand four pages depicted Alexander Nevsky’s life. The “Illuminated Chronicles” were meant to show the gathering of the Russians and built the case for Ivan the Terrible taking the imperial mantle of Tsar.<sup>24</sup> Eisenstein followed much of the artistic qualities of the “Illuminated Chronicles” in his film version of Alexander Nevsky.

Eisenstein could copy the look of the earlier texts, but the character of Nevsky in those books was hardly an example of Bolshevik leadership. Since some of the legends of the thirteenth century battles were known in vague detail, the filmmaker was at once constrained and liberated to follow historic events. However, a straightforward retelling of just the historical facts would lack story appeal. The story had to be retold, inventing some way of making Medieval Russia meaningful to a Socialist audience. Terrance Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm, in their seminal book *The Invention of Tradition*, remarked:

Even revolutionary movements backed their innovations by references to a ‘people’s past’ (Saxons versus Normans, nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ against the Franks, Spartacus), to traditions of revolution (‘Auch das deutsche Volk hat seine revolutionäre Tradition’ as Engels claimed in the first words of his *Peasant War in Germany*) and to its own heroes and martyrs. ... The element of invention is particularly clear here, since the history which became part of the fund of knowledge of the ideology of nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function is to do so.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Goodwin, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>21</sup> Eisenstein, 36-40.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016-1471* Translated by Robert Mitchell and Nevill Forbes, (London: Camden Third Series, 1914), 52-64.

<sup>23</sup> Nikolay Rozov, *The Account of the Life and Martial Deeds of Grand Prince Alexander Nevsky in a Sixteenth-Century Illuminated Codex* (St. Petersburg: Aurora Art Publishers, 1992), 94.

<sup>24</sup> Rozov, 96-102.

<sup>25</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Terence Ranger and

Eisenstein's script kept certain historical events, while molding the characters and motifs to emphasize certain Bolshevik virtues. In this way Eisenstein's film can be referred to as historical myth through historian Joseph Mali's definition:

However legendary a myth may be, it does not signify fabrication or pure fiction, because it usually contains or refers to certain crucial issues in the history of the community, such as those that concern the common ancestry or territory of the community. These issues require and inspire historical myths because they pertain not only to such metaphysical mysteries as the ultimate origins and destinies of the community, but primarily to those practical verities in which the members of the community all believe and live.<sup>26</sup>

When a Soviet audience saw "Alexander Nevsky," they saw critical elements of their own national and cultural identity. They saw thirteenth century Russians, performing historic actions in familiar locations, speaking their language, all the while behaving like good socialists. Before this could happen, Eisenstein had to overcome various barriers built into the history of Alexander Nevsky.

One anti-Marxist hurdle Eisenstein had to overcome was Alexander Nevsky's royal lineage. Eisenstein cleverly showed Nevsky's leadership to be a function of meritocracy, not aristocracy. The film enters into the story of Nevsky after his victory against the Swedes. Thus Nevsky was acclaimed as a leader by virtue of deeds, not heritage. In the movie's opening sequence, a group of tow-headed fishermen on Lake Pereyasavl sing of their bravery in the battle on the Neva River in 1240. These men were Nevsky's personal retinue. A caravan of Tartar soldiers and their captured Russian slaves interrupt, and the Tartars insist on obeisance from the fishermen. A fight ensues and Nevsky stops the combatants with just his voice and commanding presence. The head of the caravan seeks Nevsky out, recalls his bravery, and offers Nevsky a generalship with the Mongol Horde. This was only one of several instances where Eisenstein made Nevsky a battle-tested and sought-after hero, not just a member of the Rurik clan. The martyrs of Pskov cry out for Nevsky to avenge them, and the people of Novgorod shout down the bourgeois rulers with their demands for Alexander.

Another aspect of Nevsky's tale Eisenstein confronted was the religious question. Nevsky had been considered holy since a few days after his death, and his icon was a common feature in many Russian Orthodox churches. Peter the Great ceremoniously laid to rest Nevsky's remains in the largest monastery complex in St. Petersburg. The holy relics served as the foundation for Peter's city, built near the sight of both Alexander's and Peter's victories over the Swedes in 1240 and 1703. However, Marxist doctrine was very clear about religion, and Lenin systematically attempted to excise over a thousand years of Orthodox worship from the Soviet Union. The Alexander Nevsky Monastery suffered the same fate as many other churches and monasteries under Socialism. The buildings were looted, desecrated, and turned into warehouses and offices. The Bolsheviks lined up and shot Metropolitan Veniamin and several of the Black Clergy (monks) against the walls of the cloister. Nevsky himself

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Eric J. Hobsbawm (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Mali, 4.

was disinterred, his three thousand pound solid silver sarcophagus sent to the Hermitage and his body placed in the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism, formerly known as the Kazan Cathedral.<sup>27</sup> For his film, Eisenstein answered his own rhetorical question: “Why was he a ‘saint’ then? Let us be clear about the meaning of the word. In those days the title was the *highest possible appreciation* of merits, such merits for which usual epithets like ‘brave,’ ‘dashing,’ and ‘wise’ were insufficient. ‘Saint!’ It is not a matter of the ecclesiastic meaning of the epithet, which clerics have exploited for ages.”<sup>28</sup> Eisenstein followed Lenin’s example and stole Nevsky from the church. The clergy were the exploiters, but in Eisenstein’s vision it is the German clergy who were the real villains.

The Teutonic Knights who invaded Russia in 1242 were a religious and military order that started as a medical unit from the earlier crusades to the Holy Land. According to William Urban, their invasion of Russia had more to do with the opportunities for expansion after Russia’s subjugation by the Tartar hordes than with the conversion of heretics.<sup>29</sup> In the “Illuminated Chronicles” Nevsky was shown reading scriptures and worshipping before and after each battle. Eisenstein turned this concept around and gave the Germans the role of religious fanatics. The Teutonic Knights in Eisenstein’s film brought with them a retinue of monks, clergy, and acolytes almost as large as the army itself. Catholic officials accompanied every action of the Teutons, no matter how violent. During the sack of Pskov, a cardinal gazed approvingly as the knights beat and murdered defenseless townspeople and tossed screaming babies onto bonfires. The cardinal’s headdress and gloves bore a reference to the Nazi swastika,<sup>30</sup> while the sign of the Latin cross was emblazoned on each knight, warrior, and horse’s barding. The Germans’ martyrdom of Russian innocents gave Nevsky ample and just cause to drive the invaders out of Rus.

Perhaps the most important rewrite Eisenstein gave to the history of Nevsky, in view of Bolshevik dogma, was the calling of the peasants to war. Unless trapped inside a besieged city, peasants during the Medieval Period usually did not participate in battles. The mounted noblemen, according to John Keegan, “discouraged the horseless from carrying arms, since they might thereby—particularly if they were the inhabitants of towns—defend or even claim rights to which the warriors did not concede their entitlement.”<sup>31</sup> Neither the Chronicles of Novgorod nor the writings of the Teutons mention peasants taking part in the Battle on the Ice. Yet Eisenstein portrayed Nevsky as refusing to fight the Germans without the help of the peasants. Here was the essence of *partiinost’*—the fulfillment of the alliance between the proletariat and the peasant under the hegemony of the proletariat. Stalin described this in his open letter to the journal *Proletarskaya Revolutsia* as a founding principle of the Bolshevik movement.<sup>32</sup> More importantly, to have denied the alliance was to have stated the anti-Stalinist position, and therefore risked being accused of traitorous activities.

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<sup>27</sup> Anon., “The Holy Trinity Alexander Nevsky Lavra,” n.d. , <[http://www.lavra.spb.ru/s\\_hist.html](http://www.lavra.spb.ru/s_hist.html)> (13 October 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Eisenstein, 40.

<sup>29</sup> William L. Urban, *The Baltic Crusade* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1975), 156, 164-65.

<sup>30</sup> The crossed keys of Saint Peter were embroidered on the back of the gloves and on the headdress. The teeth of one of the keys was twisted to make it look like a swastika.

<sup>31</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Random House, 1993), 293.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism” from *Problems of Leninism*, ( Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976), 566.

In addition to writing the script, Eisenstein reinforced his vision through his plans given to the production team<sup>33</sup> for production design and camera techniques. The design of Nevsky's home in Pereyaslavl emphasized the Varangian (Viking) heritage of the Rurik clan. The buildings were made of rough-hewn logs and the classic dragon prows of Viking longboats were visible in two separate scenes. There were very clear distinctions between the costumes of the Tartars, the Germans, and, of course, the Russians. However, the clothing was also differentiated between the homespun Varangian costumes of Nevsky's retinue and the more cosmopolitan clothing of the Novgorodians. The Russians were shown to be their own complex society, completely separate from the Europeans and the Asians, but diverse within their own borders.

Eisenstein commented in his writings that almost nothing was left of the city of Novgorod to warrant shooting there, so the thirteenth-century city had to be recreated for the film.<sup>34</sup> The Church of St. Sophia, the wooden streets, and the floating bridge were all recreated. The film's cinematographer, Eduard Tisse, composed most of the exterior shots with emphasis on the sky. However, many of the Novgorod exteriors were shot with a long lens, which had the effect of flattening the scene, making it look very much like the crowded, busy illustrations from the sixteenth century "Illuminated Chronicles." This effect was best illustrated in one shot which looked downhill from the market to the river. The actors moving on the street snake their way uphill around buildings. The river, even though it was downhill, appeared at the top of the frame. This puzzling effect echoed the lack of perspective found in medieval illustrations.

Another visually stunning series of scenes happened as heralds fanned out into the countryside to gather the peasants to fight. Accompanied by a rousing chorus singing Sergei Prokofiev's stirring anthem, "Arise you Russian People," a lone horseman appears on a hill covered with dark earth. From out of holes in the ground come the peasants, each with felt boots, sheepskin coats, and farm tools. Mother Russia was literally shown giving birth to as many men as was needed to save her. The peasants kept pouring out of holes, swinging axes, hayforks, or sharpened poles. They marched to Novgorod, without hesitation. If anything was meant to give Germans pause, the sight of a never ending line of Russians willing to die for Holy Mother Russia should have. Strong, earthy human masses were the visual image Eisenstein strove for in his depiction of the Russian fighting forces. The Russians were dressed mainly in chainmail and tall conical helmets. Even though they were clad in metal, the mass of soldiers had a dark, earthy quality that spoke of vitality and strength. While waiting for the enemy's charge on the shores of Lake Chudskoye, the Russian forces were a sea of pikes, moving slightly and seemingly impenetrable. Yet each face was a study in character, with a separate personality. Eisenstein portrayed his fellow Russians as real people, very strong and very determined.

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<sup>33</sup> Production designers were Isaac Shpinel and Nikolai Solovyov. The costumes were designed by K. Yeliseev.

<sup>34</sup> Yon Barna, *Eisenstein* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 210.

In contrast to the Russians, the Germans were cloaked entirely in white, and even their horses were covered in white barding.<sup>35</sup> Their helmets covered all facial features. In short, the Teutons were less than human and more like machines. The camera operators shot many of the scenes of the knights “undercranked,” a technique of running the film through the camera more slowly than normal. When that film was developed and projected at normal speeds, the Teutons moved faster than a human normally would. At times, they looked and moved like wind-up toys.

Eisenstein’s earlier films emphasized mass movement and the unity of the Bolsheviks fighting for Communist victory. “Nevsky” was completely different, as it was a character driven story. It is important now to turn the focus on those individuals. Keeping with the didactic quality of the film medium, the characters provided an opportunity to portray historic personages as model socialist prototypes. Nevsky has already been discussed as having the commanding presence and battle experience that made a leader desirable. Eisenstein added to that bravery, wisdom, and cleverness. At this point, Alexander Nevsky could be any generic hero. The film version of Nevsky had one additional quality that set him apart—adherence to proper Socialist dogma. He insisted on an alliance with the peasants, and dismissed the Novgorod Veche (bourgeois community leaders) as only interested in money. Nevsky fought strictly for the Rus.

Two characters, Buslai and Gavriilo, played pivotal roles in the eve of battle and on the ice. Each had very opposite character traits; Buslai was laughing, brave, and boastful, while Gavriilo was introspective, wise, and passionate. Eisenstein characterized them as different aspects of Nevsky’s personality: “Fire kept in check by wisdom.”<sup>36</sup> Here the director used the Hegelian dialectic to define Nevsky as a synthesis of his two trusted aides. Though neither one was given any official titles, it was established early that they were experienced warriors and had fought with Nevsky before. The early hagiography of Nevsky mentioned a Russian fighter on horseback named Gavriilo.<sup>37</sup> Buslai and Gavriilo each assumed command of a separate flank of the Russian troops and performed feats of superhuman strength, all the while encouraging their fellow fighters. Lacking bourgeois titular recognition, they portray all the earmarks of the over-achieving proletarian hero worker of Stalinist Russia, Alexei Stakhanov. Buslai and Gavriilo could rightly be titled “Stakhanovites.” James Goodwin pointed out that an “epithet frequently applied to the *stakhanovite* was *bogatyr*, the term for a mythical knight in medieval Russian epic that conveys the connotation of superhuman prowess.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The white cloaks and horses’ coverings made for faster production, as the same horses and men could play both Germans and Russians with just a quick costume change. The cowlings also eliminated the need to create suits of armor for all the participants and the horses. Aside from practical considerations, the white coverings duplicate the look of the mounted Klansmen in D. W. Griffith’s film “Birth of a Nation.” Eisenstein did not reveal if this was his intention.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Rozov, 98.

<sup>38</sup> Goodwin, 157.

In the West, the character of Ignat the Armorer would have been considered comic relief—a scrawny man with a scruffy beard who constantly spoke in trite folksy adages and told risqué stories. Beneath that light-hearted exterior, Eisenstein created the most pivotal character in the movie. Ignat was the model proletarian. He symbolized the backbone of the Bolshevik Revolution. An urbanite craftsman, the blacksmith was the Marxist prototype of the worker right at the means of production. When the cry went up to defend Mother Russia, Ignat was among the first to support it. More importantly, he threw open the doors of his shop and gave all of his stock away—an example of the Marxist dictum “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” It was Ignat’s risqué story of a rabbit violating a fox caught between two birch saplings that inspired Nevsky’s bold strategy that won the battle. And in a brief shot just before the battle, Ignat told Nevsky that the time was right for the counterattack. Just as the people needed Nevsky to lead them, Eisenstein showed us the proper socialist leader needed the skills and intelligence of the proletariat to succeed.

Even though the Teutonic Knights were the enemy, Eisenstein gave the role of the greatest evil to Tverdilo, the mayor of Pskov. Tverdilo conspired to give over his city to the Germans. He attained the epithet of the most loathsome person in Stalinist Russia—the wrecker. Wreckers were supposedly saboteurs in league with German and bourgeois elements. Every missed goal, every broken machine, and every failure within the Five Year Plans was blamed on wreckers. Those persons charged with wrecking received trials and were frequently shot.<sup>39</sup> At the end of the film, Tverdilo, harnessed as an ass and forced to pull the wounded into town, got his own public trial and was the only character sentenced to death by the crowd.

The trial that culminated the film “Alexander Nevsky” decided the fates of the wrecker and of the German fighters. The knights were to be held for ransom, but the German retainers met a very different future. These soldiers, who fought on foot with minimal armor, were frequently played by smaller actors (children?) so that they looked physically smaller than the knights. Their helmets and costumes were markedly different than the knights’, but they were still portrayed as faceless automatons. At the trial, Nevsky and the crowd, judging that the retainers had been forced to fight for the Germans, freed the fighters and sent them back to their homes to spread the word about Russia’s victory. Replace the word “retainer” with “proletarian” and “knight” with “bourgeois” and it becomes easy to find Eisenstein’s message. The fighters represented the International Proletariat and the anticipated spread of Communism beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. The divisions of nationality were ideally not as strong as the bonds of class.

Only two women played important parts in Eisenstein’s film. One young lady, Olga, was part of a love triangle including Buslai and Gavrilo. Olga had no use for the bourgeois concept of love. In a nod toward the theme of meritocracy, Olga promised to marry the suitor who was the bravest in battle. Bearing a torch, she came looking for the men after the battle on a bloody field strewn with corpses, wolves, and ravens. Olga revived the two men and brought them back to the city for Nevsky to decide who gets to marry her. She was part of a utopian/messianic tradition of women in socialist iconography Eric Hobsbawm describes as “the image of the female as inspiration and symbol of the better world.”<sup>40</sup> She took no active part in the battle, but served as the prize

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<sup>39</sup> *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 44, (1987), 126.

<sup>40</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Man and Woman in Soviet Iconography,” *History Workshop*, 5 (1978), 135.

to drive the two men to even greater feats.

Another woman, Vasilisa, was a citizen of the sacked city of Pskov, and watched the Germans hang her father. She escaped to Novgorod, outfitted herself with armor, and fought in the main body of Nevsky's troops. Vasilisa was at first frightened, but under the encouragement of Buslai became a fierce warrior. In an unusual twist to the love triangle motif, Vasilisa was acclaimed the bravest fighter, and Buslai gave up his interest in Olga to marry Vasilisa. The woman warrior was an extreme contrast to the utopian/messianic character of Olga. Her singular involvement in the fight was both out of personal revenge and desire to save Mother Russia. Eisenstein had put women warriors in his earlier film, "October." However, they were a "death Battalion" guarding the Winter Palace under the orders of the White Russian government, and Eisenstein ridiculed them mercilessly.<sup>41</sup> Vasilisa, fighting because of great personal involvement and at a time when any sort of manpower was desperately needed, did not pose the risk of taking away a man's job. Therefore, she was accepted among the troops, at least for the duration of the battle.

Production on "Alexander Nevsky" was rushed. Eisenstein and his handlers started on the script in August of 1937. The prospective release was to be in November of 1938. This meant the pivotal thirty minute "Battle on the Ice" had to be filmed in the summer. The snowy landscape and especially the icy lake were crafted out of asphalt, chalk, and salt. Eisenstein characterized his dilemma as one of patriotism over aesthetics: "A magnificent symphony of ice brilliantly photographed by Eduard Tisse—next year—or the effective patriotic weapon of a finished film—now?"<sup>42</sup> The short post-production time meant Eisenstein would not have time to experiment with editing to get the complicated montage effect that was his trademark. However, Eisenstein's genius in the cutting room did manage to shine out through the battle sequences. The quick edits, combined with hand-held camera shots, crane shots, and multiple film speeds presage modern action films. The brilliant score by Sergei Prokofiev provided the tempos and pacing for Eisenstein's action. In this case, much of the music was written first and the images were added later, a technique Eisenstein adapted from Walt Disney.<sup>43</sup>

"Alexander Nevsky" was released on time to wide acclaim. The premier was held just a few months after Neville Chamberlain forged the Munich Pact with Adolph Hitler. Sergei Eisenstein was awarded the title Doctor of the Science of Art Studies and the Order of Lenin. "With the public, too," reported Eisenstein's biographer Yon Barna, "the film had enormous success, reflected in the besieging of stationary shops by children clamouring for paper clips to make suits of mail just like Nevsky's."<sup>44</sup> The filmmaker never denied he had made a film to agitate the masses and fuel their anger at the Germans. Eisenstein proclaimed "in this picture, we have approached the national and patriotic theme, which engages foremost minds not only in our country, but in the West as well. For the guardian of national dignity, of national pride, national independence and true patriotism throughout the world is first of all the Communist Party, is Communism [sic]."<sup>45</sup> The film quickly became a political liability and was pulled

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<sup>41</sup> For information on the Women's Battalion of Death, see Melissa K. Stockdale, "My Death for the Motherland is Happiness," *The American Historical Review*, 109:1 (2004), 78.

<sup>42</sup> Eisenstein, 41-2.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald Bergan, *Sergei Eisenstein: A Life in Conflict* (New York: Overlook Press, 1999), 198.

<sup>44</sup> Barna, 220-21.

<sup>45</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "My Subject is Patriotism," *International Literature*, (1939) No. 2, reprinted in *The Film Factory*, 398. Eisenstein originally wrote this article in English, so the grammatical errors were in the original.

from release in August of 1939 after the surprise signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. When Hitler mounted “Operation Barbarossa” in June of 1941 and three million German troops poured over the border, “Alexander Nevsky” was re-released, and became popular outside of the Soviet Union as well.<sup>46</sup>

Eisenstein’s “Alexander Nevsky” was his most simplistic, approachable work. In it he wove a limited narrative about a single hero and his greatest battle. Ronald Bergan, an Eisenstein biographer, characterized the film thusly: “If one were to imagine Eisenstein’s works as animated films in the manner of the best of Walt Disney, “Alexander Nevsky” would need the least modification.”<sup>47</sup> The director’s previous finished films-- “Strike,” “The Battleship Potemkin,” “October,” and “The General Line”-- had all addressed different aspects of the revolutionary upheavals within Russia and the spread of Bolshevism. They were made during a time of great experimentation, be it in filmmaking or ordering society. The stories Eisenstein portrayed in those films were from recent events, some of which the filmmaker himself was an eyewitness. In “Nevsky” Eisenstein attempted to portray outsiders threatening Russia in a time long past memory. The political climate surrounding this film was radically different than the climate under which he had made his other films. Eisenstein had to reconcile the “truth” of the facts already known about his subject with the “truthfulness” of the ideology of *partiinost*. The film “Alexander Nevsky” was not made to teach Soviet audiences about Russian medieval history. The film’s importance was to encourage national unity and the discipline to stand behind one great leader. Eisenstein turned the history of Saint Alexander Nevsky and his *bogatyr*s into the myth of Comrade Joseph Stalin and his *Stakhanovites*, fighting against German invaders. The thirteenth century characters were imbued with Stalinist virtues, so that the audience saw their own lives as extensions of what had passed before. Nevsky’s struggle against the Germans became their contemporary struggle. “Whether myth was defined as true or false, transcendental or elemental, virtuous or atrocious,” Joseph Mali reminds us, “the problem was not so much what myth is but rather what it does, why it still matters at all in this age of rationality and modernity.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bergan, 309.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>48</sup> Mali, 89.

## **Liberation Theology Clashes with the Vatican: Friar Leonardo Boff and Cardinal Ratzinger, the Latin American Church, and the European Church**

**Jeff Crawford**

With the death of Pope John Paul II, The Roman Catholic Church recently elected a new pope. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger now reigns from the Papal See in Rome as Benedict XVI. Ratzinger's predecessor, John Paul II, began his papacy focused on fighting communism in Europe; many wait to see what emphasis Benedict brings to his reign. True for John Paul and Benedict, the majority of Catholics reside in the developing world – primarily Latin America and Africa. Some argue that the European-centered Church hierarchy has a different awareness and mission than the Church that exists among the poverty-stricken developing peoples. The European Church – it is posited - is preoccupied with international power and politics while the Church of the developing world must focus on the day-to-day survival of its parishioners. Debate over the Church's role – and its theology - in the 1980s and 90s reveals much about Benedict's view on this dispute.

Liberation theologian and former Catholic priest, Leonardo Boff adamantly believes that two Churches – one concerned with the powerful, one concerned with the poor – exist within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Boff frequently published during the 1980s and 90s advocating the Church to adopt liberation theology. He proposed that the European Church re-orient its theology to one dedicated to social reorganization that alleviates poverty. Boff's writings underwent official Church scrutiny and censure. Eventually Boff felt compelled to leave the priesthood. Friar Boff's examination and censure was the responsibility of a specific organization within the Church: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This organization is obliged to insure unity, or purity, of Church doctrine and practice. During the papacy of John Paul II, when Boff was active, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was headed by one of Boff's university professors, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

The doctrinal confrontation between the cardinal and the friar is symbolic of Boff's perspective of two Churches; the cardinal is concerned with maintaining hierarchical position and the friar believes that his duty is to alleviate suffering. One is a Church of thought the other is a Church of action. A Belgian cardinal synthesized the differences. In 1984, Cardinal Daneels, Archbishop of Brussels, explained the situation after returning home from a trip to Brazil, "Liberation theology begins with a very acute, very profound sensitivity to poverty. We see this poverty everyday on television. It is another matter, however, to see it on the spot – to allow it to penetrate all five senses, to let ourselves be touched by the suffering of the poor, to feel their anguish."<sup>1</sup>

Genesio "Leonardo" Boff was born in 1938 in Brazil. Biographer Harvey Cox writes that Boff was destined to be a priest, "he never considered anything else very seriously." Boff was ordained a Franciscan in 1964. Boff's seminary education was mentored by two men who would be crucial players in his later censure. According to Cox, Boff was Father Bonaventura Kloppenburg's "favorite pupil" at the seminary in Petropolis, Brazil. Years later, Kloppenburg concluded that Boff's book, *Church: Charism and Power*, was heretical. Boff finished his

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<sup>1</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Dialogue to Confrontation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 11.

doctoral dissertation in Munich in 1971, under the direction of then professor Joseph Ratzinger. Boff's dissertation was "judged by his professors to be . . . brilliant and unusually promising." Parts of Boff's thesis were republished in *Church: Charism and Power*.<sup>2</sup> In addition to being a prolific theologian, Boff has been a college professor in Brazil and importantly, the editor of the Catholic-Portuguese language, publishing house, *Vozes* (Voices).

Two of Boff's brothers are also priests. His brother, Clodovis remains in the priesthood and co-authored many of Leonardo's books, though not *Church: Charism and Power*. Clodovis, obviously, shares Leonardo's faith in liberation theology.

Boff, a prolific theological writer for decades, is recognized as one of the strongest voices of liberation theology. He has published many strong criticisms of the Catholic Church, constantly calling for reform. Boff strongly believes that there are fundamental differences between the church in Latin America and its European hierarchy. Liberation theology is a glaring example of the differences between European and Latin American Catholicism. Though some historians argue that liberation theology dates back to before Bartolome de Las Casas, the modern version is generally dated to the 1950s in Latin America. Theologians such as Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez in Peru are among its leading proponents. Even though, as recently as 2003, Boff declared his unwavering love for the Catholic Church - he considers the Church essential to the salvation of humanity.

Harvey Cox provides an excellent summation of liberation theology. He begins with the watershed 1968 Medellin conference, where the bishops:

proclaimed that the church should exercise a preferential option for the poor. Liberation theology is an expression of this preference. It is an attempt to interpret the Bible and Christianity from the perspective of the poor. . . it is a *method*, and effort to look at the life and message of Jesus through the eyes of those who have normally been excluded or ignored. From this angle of vision, liberation theologians believe they can uncover and correct distortions that have crept into Christianity over the centuries because theology has been almost exclusively the province of the privileged social strata.<sup>3</sup>

Alfred T. Hennelly provides a history of liberation theology. He believes that the origins of liberation theology go "back to the time of the conquest." Hennelly repeats church historian Enrique Dussel's development of "Latin American theology." Dussel's history begins in November 1511 when a Dominican named Antonio de Montesinos "preached a powerful sermon attacking the oppressive rule of the Spaniards and presenting a passionate defense of the rights of the Amerindians. One of his listeners, Bartolome de las Casas, was so galvanized by these words that he was converted to the cause of the Amerindians and spent his entire life speaking and writing prodigiously on their behalf."<sup>4</sup>

From this start Dussel lists stages that are variously conservative or "moderately progressive." For Hennelly, the modern era of liberation theology began in the mid- to late 1950s. He lists three keys to the initiation of this phase:

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<sup>2</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity*, (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred T Hennelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), xvii. This book is a collection of primary documents. 'Maryknoll' is the familiar name of The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America.

(1) the formation of the basic ecclesial communities (called CEBs in both Spanish and Portuguese); (2) the development of the educational method known as conscientization [a poor equivalent to the original Portuguese word] by the Brazilian Paulo Freire; and (3) a growing awareness in the universities of the ideologies used by both state and church to legitimate injustice.<sup>5</sup>

For over a decade, Boff's writings elicited no reaction from the Vatican. However, his 1981 publication, originally in Portuguese, *Church: Charism and Power*, inspired official church investigation and punishment of Friar Boff. This collection of essays and speeches contains accusations of contemporary church abuse of power and neglect of its sacred mission. Boff's former theology professor, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, led the effort to censor Boff. Another prolific writer of theology, Ratzinger is prefect of the official church association charged with maintaining the orthodoxy of the faith. Ratzinger's organization has a familiar and notorious origin.

The Inquisition, a formal church organization, was historically responsible for investigating and punishing heretics. Through its trials, Joan of Arc was burned at the stake, Galileo was humiliated and condemned to house arrest, and Sor Juana was forced to recant certain writings as possibly heretical and was effectively silenced.

The Inquisition has undergone a few transformations since its inception in 1232. The contemporary organization charged with maintaining purity of the faith is called the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). While the CDF no longer utilizes the violence of the past, its goals are still the same. Evidence shows that Cardinal Ratzinger certainly understands his duty to fulfill its age-old mission.

Boff's acquaintance and biographer, Harvard Divinity School Professor, Harvey Cox, warns his readers not to simplify this conflict to a 'David versus Goliath' affair, but rather as two, historical, competing visions of the church and its mission. Cox portrays Ratzinger as representative of the contemplative, scholarly tradition of Thomas Aquinas, not a violent giant. St. Thomas' writings established "a complete theological system, [which] remains substantially the standard authority in the Roman Catholic Church. His only scholastic rival was Duns Scotus . . . who was followed by the Franciscans. Thereafter mediaeval theologians were divided into two schools . . . whose differences permeated almost every branch of doctrine."<sup>6</sup>

For Cox, Boff embodies the active traditions of St. Francis of Assisi - Boff belonged to the Franciscan order. Of course, St. Francis is famous for his renunciation of worldly goods, a vow of poverty, and concern for the disadvantaged.

The writings of Boff and Ratzinger certainly demonstrate the continuing of this historical debate within the church. Review of their competing visions clearly shows the Cardinal concerned with maintaining church primacy while Boff is revealed to believe that salvation cannot come without concern for the poor. Boff's assertion that there are fundamental differences between the Roman Catholic Church of Latin America and that of Europe is also confirmed. While controversy over liberation theology continues today, what is its impact on the church? Has the institutional church changed or has the gulf widened between the European and Third World churches?

Before answering these questions and exploring the events and interactions of these two men certain

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>6</sup> *The Barnes and Noble Encyclopedia*, 1990 ed., s.v. "Aquinas, Thomas."

concepts must be defined. How does the Catholic Church view itself and its mission? What is 'Liberation Theology' and how does it express the mission of the church? How do the church and liberation theologians approach the issues of poverty and oppression? This last question is central to our conflict.

Acts 2:4 describes the moment the apostles of Jesus "were filled with the Holy Spirit." This is the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church, "born at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit."<sup>7</sup> The term 'Church' designates all of the members of the Roman Catholic Church, clergy, and administrators. Salvation is provided through "communion ecclesiology . . . a new label used to describe an old but rather nebulous set of concepts":

The Trinity bonds together the three persons in one God; the body of Christ bonds together members of the church with God; the communion of saints bonds together those who have died in God's mercy with those now on earth.<sup>8</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger echoes the centrality of communion ecclesiology – an expression of the Church's universality and its role in salvation. The expression of that communion and that "the idea of the Church as the body of Christ was indissolubly linked with the idea of the Eucharist in which the Lord is bodily present and gives us his body as food. . . This ecclesiology of communion became the real core of Vatican II's teachings on the Church."<sup>9</sup> Again, the cardinal emphasizes the central and essential role of the Church connecting humanity with God.

The idea of "the Church as the body of Christ" is essential to understanding Catholicism. Cardinal Ratzinger, writing about the Second Vatican Council, uses this phrase and describes the church as the "image of the mystical body" and defines it as "the presence of Christ, the fact that we are contemporaneous with him, that he is contemporaneous with us. The source of its life is the fact that Christ is present in people's hearts: it is from there that he shapes the Church, and not the other way around."<sup>10</sup>

Ratzinger wrote this during the time of his clashes with Boff. Two points here are major sources of Ratzinger's objections with Boff. The church, including its hierarchy and organization, is one and the same with Christ and not open to critiques calling for reorganization and redirection. The implied infallibility is unmistakable. The last comment enforces the Vatican position that hermeneutics are determined in Rome, not Latin America. Boff was accused of violating these positions in *Church: Charism and Power*. Another point of disagreement between the friar and the cardinal was over the membership of the church. For Ratzinger "[the] community character of the Church also necessarily implies what may be termed its we-ness. It is not something somewhere: instead, we ourselves are the Church. Of course, nobody can say: 'I am the Church.' Everyone must and should say: 'We are the Church.'"<sup>11</sup> He emphasizes the communion of all Catholics in a statement undoubtedly intended for liberation

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<sup>7</sup> Dennis M Doyle, "Communion ecclesiology and the silencing of Boff," *America* 167 (1992): 140.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid..

<sup>9</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism & Politics*, (New York: Crossroads, 1988), 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 3, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

theologians. That the Catholic 'we' "is not a group that cuts itself off from others but a group that inserts itself into the entire community of all the members of Christ, living and dead. The Church . . . breaks down barriers – social and political barriers, but also the barrier between heaven and earth."<sup>12</sup>

Liberation theology claims its genesis precisely because the European Church perpetuates barriers, social and political and distances humanity from eternal salvation.

At the Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops held in Puebla, Mexico, January 27, – February 13, 1979, Pope John Paul II specified the role and nature of the church. His opening address, given January 28, 1979, advised strict adherence to Vatican based exegesis. The pope's address of the next day, delivered in the village of Cuilapan to the Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas, confirmed the church's "preferential option for the poor." These two church standards, Vatican authority and preference for the poor are conflicted in the running debate between Ratzinger and Boff – they adamantly disagree over which is the priority.

Part of the dispute between the Vatican and liberation theologians regarded the definition of 'liberation.' Time and again, papal authorities refocus the definition to liberation from sin. For Boff it also includes liberation from social and political oppression and the restoration of human dignity to all humans.

Returning to the mission of teaching the truth, John Paul cautioned the pastors of their duty; "watching over purity of doctrine, basic in building up the Christian community, is . . . the primary and irreplaceable duty of the pastor, of the teacher of faith – in conjunction with the proclamation of the gospel." The pope continued, "Sent out by the Lord, the church in turn sends out evangelizers to preach 'not themselves or their personal ideas, but a gospel that neither they nor the church owns as their own absolute property to dispose of as they see fit.'<sup>13</sup>

John Paul II quoted his predecessor saying, "it is a mistake to state that political, economic, and social liberation coincide with salvation in Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup> Again, the pope limits the definition of 'liberation' to salvation from sin.

To the Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas, John Paul reiterated a statement of Pope Paul VI, "with an even stronger emphasis in my voice . . . the present pope wishes to be 'in solidarity with your cause, which is the cause of the humble people, the poor people.'<sup>15</sup> His address finished with a strong admonition to the ruling elites:

To you, responsible officials of the people, power-holding classes who sometimes keep your lands unproductive when they conceal the food that so many families are doing without, the human conscience, the conscience of the peoples, the cry of the destitute, and above all the voice of God and the church join me in reiterating to you that it is not just, it is not human, it is not Christian to continue certain situations that are clearly unjust. You must implement real, effective measures [that alleviate human suffering].<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 225-26, 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

Boff and fellow theologians took heart from the pope's support for the poor. To the Indians John Paul said, "The church is on your side."<sup>17</sup>

Pope John Paul II's dichotomy of opinions has an additional perspective beyond a conflicted message to people like Boff. His statements hint at the evolution in church thought toward Latin America and historical precedent was his motivation for quoting Pope Paul IV.

The Puebla General Conference of Latin American Bishops was the third such event. The second conference held in 1968 in Medellin, Colombia, marked a watershed in official church positions. Paul IV's attendance was the first time a pope set foot in the New World. More importantly, the church "discovered the world of the poor" and it institutionalized "the experience and practices of a significant number of Catholics in every stratum of the church from peasants to archbishops." The Bishops created "pastoral plans for a continentwide [*sic*] preferential option for the poor."<sup>18</sup>

The Bishops recognized that Latin America, "in addition to being a geographical reality, is a community of peoples with its own history, with specific values and with similar problem . . . The continent harbors very different situations, but requires solidarity. Latin America must be one and many, rich in variety and strong in its unity."<sup>19</sup> Here is yet another, although earlier, example of the church's mixed message. While the church recognized the unique circumstance in Latin America, it limited action with the words, 'solidarity' and 'unity.' Certainly, Cardinal Ratzinger employed this last sentiment to censor Friar Boff. Still, in 1968, the friar must have taken great comfort from the tone of the Medellin conference documents.

The "Introduction to the Final Documents," produced by the Bishop's conference, is a reiteration of the age-old conflict regarding church philosophy that is at the center of the Ratzinger-Boff conflict. The contemplative style of St. Thomas Aquinas is insufficient for Latin America; it needs the active methods of St. Francis. The desperate situation for the great majority of its people requires it: "It is certainly not enough to reflect, to be more discerning, and to speak. Action is required. The present has not ceased to be the hour of the word, but it has already become, and with dramatic urgency, the time for action."<sup>20</sup>

Such events and statements do indeed demonstrate a sea change in the church but they also highlight the differences in its role in Europe and Latin America. Ratzinger and Boff were unable to overcome these differences while they both professed their unyielding love for the church and preference for the poor. As in any organization, disagreements are usually settled to the pleasure of the higher officer – this story follows that pattern. However, Boff was not without influence.

Understanding CEBs is essential to understanding the Ratzinger-Boff conflict. The existence of CEBs demonstrates a fundamental difference between the Latin American and European Catholic Church and they are a perceived threat to Vatican control of hermeneutics. Hennelly defines basic ecclesial communities as "small groups of Catholics, usually coordinated by lay leaders, who meet regularly for services of prayer, worship, and communal

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Hennelly, in *Liberation Theology*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 95.

reflection on both their religious and secular lives. They also stress sharing, communication, mutual assistance, and friendship, thus creating what they are proud to call real and active communities, in contrast to the passive, anonymous religious experience they had before the advent of CEBs.”<sup>21</sup> This definition recalls the historical church struggle between St. Thomas and St. Francis. The deeper problem for the Vatican is defining the proper nexus between religious and secular life and that definition goes to the heart of hermeneutics.

Hennelly describes how CEBs “by means of . . . ‘consciousness-raising’. . . intended to liberate them from socio-cultural enslavement by becoming aware of their own dignity and rights, aware, too, of the real causes of their oppression, and of the urgent need to become active agents of their own destiny in seeking avenues of change.”<sup>22</sup> Again, the issue becomes who controls this enlightening process, its inputs and outputs. Investigation into the real causes of oppression raises the seminal question about the church’s role in socio-cultural enslavement. Boff investigated and commented on this very question – the source of his conflict with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The bishop’s conference at Puebla endorsed CEBs. In their Final Document” on CEBs the bishops they list numerous, beneficial increases in the participation of laypersons in the church and community. They claim that the church is slowly but progressively “disociating [*sic*] itself from those who hold economic or political power.” The bishops evince “a new style of relationship between bishops and priests, and between them and their people.” They laud CEBs for creating “more personal interrelations, acceptance of God’s word, reexamination of one’s life, and reflection on reality in the light of the gospel. . . CEBs embody the church’s preferential love for the common people.” This document celebrates CEBs for reinvigorating the Latin American church.<sup>23</sup>

Friar Boff distills the essence of the historical church debate in light of CEBs, stating, “Theology is no longer simply an academic discipline to be engaged in by seminarians; it has become a tool for enlightenment and critical understanding used by the CEBs to reflect on their journey together as a Christian community.”<sup>24</sup> At the time of Boff’s 1984 publication of this statement he reported there to be 150,000 CEBs in Latin America. “In these groups,” Boff writes, “it is the people themselves who take responsibility for the key tasks of evangelization through newly evolving forms of ministry – always in communion with their pastors.”<sup>25</sup> Here Boff demonstrates that he is aware of the Vatican’s boundaries while expounding on the empowerment of the people.

Cardinal Ratzinger produced a similar expression and like Boff is conscious of limits and consequences. In his 1984 essay on liberation theology the cardinal comments “This theology does not pretend to construct a new treatise alongside the other that already exists . . . It is conceived, rather, as a new hermeneutic of the Christian faith,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 249-51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 434

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

which means it is a new form of understanding and a realization of Christianity in its totality. For this reason, it changes all the aspects of ecclesial life, ecclesial structures, liturgy, catechesis, and moral options.”<sup>26</sup>

While this quote may seem mild and benign, many of the cardinal’s essays on liberation theology negatively reference Marxism. This paper will not dwell long on the subject, but it does deserve mention. Like the definition of liberation - whether it is limited to freedom from sin or whether it includes secular freedom - the definition and inclusion of Marxism in liberation theology depends upon the speaker. Boff argues that Marxism is useful in understanding certain realities - he does not propose Marxism as the solution to Latin America’s problems - its use as a model assists in appreciating the position of the poor. Both Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger repeatedly warn that Marxism is by definition atheist and partisan, both antithetical to the church. The argument permeates the issue of CEBs. This seems difficult to seriously consider in religious based communities.

Dennis M. Doyle synthesizes the threat in his analysis of another Ratzinger document referring to CEBs. From Ratzinger’s perspective, Doyle writes:

Base communities, although they contain ‘ecclesial elements,’ cannot be called ‘church’ in the proper sense. This is because base communities do not belong in a full sense to the church’s essential constitution, which requires a global network of Eucharistic communities united through bishops. Base communities can potentially represent partisan concerns that might exclude people of different political persuasions. For Cardinal Ratzinger, ‘church’ in the full sense of the term would have to be open in principle . . . to both a Nicaraguan Contra and a Sandinista of good faith.<sup>27</sup>

The cardinal and the friar understand the uncertain nature and consequence posed by CEBs. Locally controlled exegesis can amount to Protestantism and nullify the crucial role of the church in salvation. The cardinal objects to a partisan church, where the friar believes that only those allied with the poor can be legitimate members. How did the friar’s objections escalate into confrontation with the cardinal?

Liberation theologians, including Leonardo Boff, published for decades without interference from Rome. Bishops and popes expressed solidarity with the poverty stricken masses. Some weight must be given to the leadership of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger. The historic challenges facing the church operating in both in the developed and underdeveloped worlds are additional factors that should be considered. Whereas Las Casas criticized Spanish governance for the plight of Indians, modern theologians have attacked political and economic systems for oppressing the masses. Leonardo Boff pointed his finger at the Roman Catholic Church.

As a Franciscan priest, Leonardo Boff’s view of Jesus was in communion with the poor, “a poor person, a laborer, who preferred the poor, surrounded himself with them, and identified with them. . . It is the boast of the poor, not the rich, that Jesus belonged to their social and economic class.” Boff continues, “Jesus preached the kingdom of God as *absolute, integral liberation* – spiritual, yes, but material as well (liberation from hunger, grief, contempt, and so on.)”<sup>28</sup>

Confrontation with poverty appears to be Boff’s overriding concern: “They are the hungry, they are the poor, they are exploited, and they die young. This is the reality confronting the theology of liberation. This leaves

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>27</sup> Dennis M Doyle, “Communion ecclesiology and the silencing of Boff,” *America* 12 (1992): 56.

<sup>28</sup> Boff and Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 26.

no one indifferent, of course, and this is why liberation theology stirs up so much debate, rejection, criticism, and enthusiasm.”<sup>29</sup>

Systems that deny basic needs, rights and dignity to huge populations are, for Boff, by definition not Christian. The classes of people that profit from the exploitation of the poor cannot be Christian. Knowing that people are desperately suffering while one prospers is antithetical to Christ’s example – Jesus suffered and died for the salvation of others – he did not live in luxury.

When Boff catalogues the systems that deny human rights and dignity he certainly includes the church. Boff blames greed for power. This is blatantly expressed in *Church: Charism and Power* and whether one considers the church to be good or bad, the church’s reaction is not surprising:

The one who represents Christ and his *exousia* must be a servant just as Jesus was. Without this, one is no different from a pagan tyrant. . . It is strange to see that the Church institution has developed into exactly that which Christ did not want it to be: from the will for power, hierarchies of teachers, doctors, fathers, fathers of fathers, and servants have all arisen.<sup>30</sup>

While this statement appears to be radical, Boff carefully reasoned his use of the words ‘charism’ and ‘power.’

Professor Cox explains that charism, in the original sense “simply means gift.” Boff uses it to refer to the different ‘gifts’ the Spirit of God gives to the people who constitute the church.” People so endowed are enabled to serve. For Boff, the ‘gift’ “has the exclusive purpose of helping its recipients to do God’s work in the world.”<sup>31</sup> People, classes of people, and institutions that oppress human beings cannot possess the ‘gift’- the conclusions about who is and who is not a Christian are obvious. Cardinal Ratzinger strongly objected to Boff’s portrayal of the institutional church. For Ratzinger, if the church was once ‘gifted’ Boff implies that the gift was misused.

Power, for Boff, comes to two forms: *exousia* and *potestas*. Harvey Cox explains Boff’s use of both words. The New Testament Greek word *exousia*, describes the power of Jesus used. It is the power of love. *Potestas* “is the kind of power that characterized imperial Roman officialdom . . . the power to dominate and rule.”<sup>32</sup>

Boff contrasts the two definitions: “the power of love is different in nature from the power of domination: it is fragile, vulnerable, conquering through its weakness and its capacity for giving and forgiveness. Jesus always demonstrated this *exousia* in his life.”<sup>33</sup> Cox writes that Boff believes that the church, upon its official acceptance in Rome by the Emperor Constantine, failed its historic chance to be an example of *exousia* instead of *potestas*:

instead of transforming the existing [Roman] order, [the church] merely adapted itself to it. . . Sadly, however, when the leaders of the empire joined the church, Boff asserts, ‘a paganization of Christianity took place, and not a Christianization of paganism.’ It could have gone the other way, but instead the church took on the empire’s institutions: its laws, its bureaucratic centralization, its ranks and titles. Even the terms . . . ‘diocese’ and ‘parish’ – were absorbed directly from the empire. Boff says this set the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>30</sup> Boff, Leonardo, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 51.

<sup>31</sup> Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff*, 47-48.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>33</sup> Boff, *Church: Charism and Power*, 59.

church 'on a path of power that continues today and that we must hasten to end.'<sup>34</sup>

Boff indicts the Church of Rome as being in error for the greater portion of two thousand years! It is easy to understand why the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith took issue with his book. Harder to understand, and not explored in this study, is how Boff so readily condemned the power of the church yet professes his undying love for the same institution.

As stated earlier, Father Bonventura Kloppenburg reviewed Boff's book in 1982 and declared it to be heretical. Boff, in response, sent a copy of his book and Kloppenburg's review to his old teacher, Cardinal Ratzinger, and asked for direction. The cardinal suggested that Boff reply to Kloppenburg and he did so. The matter seemed closed – it wasn't.

Retired Professor from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, and *Christian Century* editor Robert McAfee Brown ably explains the course of events. Cardinal Ratzinger sent a six-page letter to Boff in May 1984, "detailing charges against him and summoning him to Rome for an accounting. Ratzinger charged Boff with distorting old doctrines by reinterpreting them in new contexts." Ratzinger asked Boff if he was inspired by faith or principles of ideology. Brown itemized three of Ratzinger's complaints:

He first accused Boff of suggesting that Jesus did not determine the specific form and structure of the church, thus implying that other models besides the Roman Catholic one might be consistent with the gospel. A second charge was that he is cavalier about dogma and revelation. Boff responded by acknowledging that dogma is needed to protect against heresy, but not in the same way in all times and places. . . Ratzinger feared that such a doctrine of the Spirit would legitimate the theological whim of the moment. Finally, Boff is charged with being unnecessarily polemic and disrespectful in his comments on the church's abuse of power.<sup>35</sup>

Cardinal Ratzinger's statements are not easily interpreted. He writes in an extremely indirect form. His letter addressed to Leonardo Boff refers to the friar in the third person. His criticisms are equally oblique yet intense in meaning. On *Church: Charism and Power* the cardinal writes, "a profound misunderstanding of the Catholic faith on the church of God in the world is developed and made explicit."<sup>36</sup> Ratzinger's condemnation is mildly expressed while maintaining powerful implication. Ratzinger's various letters and essays reviewed for this paper are outlined, contain subtitles, numbered points of discussion. Arguments are patiently and carefully constructed. His writing lacks the excitement of Boff's without belying its authority. The cardinal knows that he represents an institution two thousand years old. It has withstood a myriad of challenges. He and the church have time – time and power.

The "Notification Sent to Fr. Leonardo Boff regarding Errors in His Book, *Church: Charism and Power*," March 11, 1985, challenged Boff on points of doctrine, institutional structure, the exercise of sacred power, dogma and revelations, and the prophetic role of the church. His usual condemnations of Marxist influences are absent from this letter. On the point regarding the church's prophetic role, Ratzinger wrote "that, to be legitimate,

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<sup>34</sup> Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, "Leonardo Boff: Theologian for All Christians," *The Christian Century* 103, no. 22: 3, 615.

<sup>36</sup> Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 428.

prophetic denunciation in the church must always remain at the service of the church itself. Not only must it accept the hierarchy and the institutions, but it must also cooperate positively in the consolidation of the church's internal communion."<sup>37</sup> The cardinal coolly and creatively states that criticism can only be constructive, never challenging to authority. He refuses to recognize and engage Boff's positions. The conclusion to Ratzinger's letter to Boff he states that his letter will be published. It reads: "In making the above publicly known, the congregation also feels obliged to declare that the options of L. Boff analyzed here endanger the sound doctrine of the faith, which this Congregation has the task of promoting and safeguarding."<sup>38</sup> No longer is Boff engaged in a theological debate over the direction of the church. Whether intended or not, Boff managed to make himself the focal point of the wrath of the Vatican. Although he may stand for the poor, Rome will not stand for direct challenges to its authority. Another letter from Ratzinger to Boff, dated May 15, 1984, invited Boff to Rome for a "conversation." Boff did not shy from the challenge either.

To prepare for his "conversation," Boff compiled a sixty-page document defending his book. He met with Cardinal Ratzinger on September 7, 1984 (Apparently unbeknownst to the cardinal, September 7 is Brazilian Independence Day.) His defense was published a month later.

In regard to the church's preferential option for the poor, Boff writes, "the church has no concrete political or economic strategy; it simply calls for greater participation by the people in national decision making."<sup>39</sup> The friar scoffs at the Vatican's aversion to Marxism, writing that "the real problem is not the use of Marxist analysis to decipher the mechanisms that generate poverty; it is resistance to the transformation of society so that the people can have more life. Those who seek this transformation are defamed as Marxists or as perverters of the Christian faith. What these critics do not want is the freedom of the people, progress toward more worthy forms of social organization, and social and political participation."<sup>40</sup>

Boff recounts the specifics of his meeting with representatives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a short tract entitled "Summons to Rome." He contends that his conversation with the cardinal were fraternal and constructive. Still, Boff realizes on the paradox of the situation: "A summons by the highest doctrinal office of the Roman Catholic Church is no commonplace event in the life . . . of a theologian of the "periphery," whose theology is produced in conditions so unlike those of the great metropolitan centers of reflection."<sup>41</sup> Of the meeting itself, Boff provides a positive perspective. His opinion is flush with the future in contrast to Ratzinger's fortification behind entrenched, institutional power:

the event and the discussion that was held meant that a genuine process of evangelization was under way, not so much via ecclesiastical channels, but via the secular channels of the media. The later understood perfectly well what the real question was: commitment to the poor, to the profound societal changes that are so necessary, and to the liberation of the oppressed. This is the frontiers of the churches. . . Thus it signifies a universal political change.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 432, 434.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>42</sup> Boff and Boff, *Liberation Theology*, 88, 90.

Upon his return to Brazil, Boff considered his visit to Rome to have been inconvenient but worthwhile. The media had informed millions world-wide of the church's preferential option for the poor. Boff prepared to resume his work, though the Vatican did not consider the matter closed. Next came the March 1985 publication of Ratzinger's previously cited Notification of Errors to Fr. Boff. Cox states that "Boff's response to the Notification was in keeping with this publicly stated position of the Vatican that no punishment or sanction was involved and that the Notification was a move to open up a frustrated dialogue." Boff wrote from Brazil that he was pleased with process, that the Vatican had not labeled his book heretical. Cox quotes Boff, "I prefer to walk with the church than to walk alone with my theology."<sup>43</sup> Again Boff falsely assumed that the Notification and his submission to it was the end of the matter. Two months later, on May 9, 1985, Friar Boff received another letter from Cardinal Ratzinger, imposing an unspecified period of obedient silence.<sup>44</sup> The authority of Rome won in the short term.

For the next 11 months Boff "was not permitted to speak publicly, write or edit." However, Boff maintained the support of the Brazilian National Conferences of Bishops – many who met with the pope at Easter 1986 to discuss "the controversy over liberation theology." The editors at *The Christian Century* imply that the Brazilian Bishops convinced the pope to lift the ban yet they quote Boff who believes that, "Rome heard and responded to all the appeals that came from the grass roots and broad sectors of the hierarchy."<sup>45</sup>

Boff immediately resumed publishing and speaking – and challenging the Roman Catholic Church. His battles with the church did not end. Eventually, in May 1991, the Vatican issued a directive that Boff submit everything he writes for prior review, refrain from teaching theology, and resign his position as editor at *Vozes*. In response Boff resigned from the priesthood in June 1992. Instead of his conciliatory remark after his silencing, Boff stated, "Recently, virtually all of my rights of free communication within the church were withdrawn. I consider abusive and against canonical rights the demands of prior censorship on all of my writings."<sup>46</sup>

Although no longer a priest, Leonardo Boff remains a Catholic. In June 1996, he was interviewed by Ellwood Wayne of the *New Internationalist*, "I may have left the priesthood, but I have not left the faith. I am still a theologian and an active member of a Christian community in Brazil." Boff also continues his paradox of loving an institution that he criticizes: "In many ways I am more estranged now than ever from the institutional Catholic Church. What I've found as a layperson and a professor confirms this feeling. The sense of grace and holiness outside the Church actually seems much greater."<sup>47</sup>

Free from pastoral duties, Boff speaks out unimpeded on issues that affect the world's poorest citizens. From the journal, *Index on Censorship*, Boff writes that liberation theology faces a new challenge – "galloping and intransigent globalisation [*sic*]."<sup>48</sup> He contends that liberation theology no longer make headlines because of indifference by the church hierarchy, not the vitality of its adherents. Certainly, leaving the Franciscans did not

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<sup>43</sup> Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff*, 103.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-05.

<sup>45</sup> "Ban Lifted," *The Christian Century* 103 (1986): 383.

<sup>46</sup> "Boff Punished Again," *The Christian Century* 108 (1991): 586, and "Boff Resigns," *The Christian Century* 109, (1992): 709.

<sup>47</sup> Ellwood Wayne, "Leonardo Boff," *New Internationalist*, no. 280 (1996).

<sup>48</sup> Leonardo Boff, "The Global Challenge," *Index on Censorship* 28, no. 1 (1999): 126-130.

change or hinder the work of Leonard Boff. He continues today his prolific writing and teaching in Brazil.

What about the cardinal, now reigning as pope? During a February 27, 2000, speech, Cardinal Ratzinger commented on Boff, his theology, and their controversy. “At a distance of 15 years, it is clearer than it perhaps was then that it was not so much a matter of a single theological author, but of a vision of the church which circulates with different variations and which is still very current today.”<sup>49</sup> The cardinal neither declares victory, nor admits defeat, he just bides his time.

This analysis of liberation theology, Leonardo Boff, and his conflict with the Catholic Church does not pretend to be comprehensive. Numerous aspects of Boff, liberation theology, and church doctrine remain unexamined. Hopefully, this paper does shed light on an important modern day dynamic within the Roman Catholic Church. Leonardo Boff and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger provide excellent vehicles for illustrating this dynamic and historic struggle.

The church’s centuries-long debate between the followers of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis of Assisi is reflected and continued in the persons of Boff and Ratzinger. The Aquinas model of the contemplative and systematic church dominates the thinking and writings of Cardinal Ratzinger. The familiar figure of St. Francis, associate and minister for the poor is the example Boff follows. Boff, like St. Francis, views Jesus as a man associated and concerned for the poor. All humans, in Ratzinger’s theology, have access to Jesus without a singular focus on the poverty stricken.

This dichotomy is reflected in the opposite realities of Europe and Latin America. First world Europe where the church is headquartered has few first-hand views of poverty and oppression. The pastors of Latin America see a never-ending mass of the underprivileged. The European centers, as Boff remarked, have the luxury of contemplation. The burgeoning slums of Latin America cry out for action. Still both are part of the mystical body of Christ.

Cardinal Ratzinger maintains that both rich and poor are worthy of the grace of God. Boff believes that it is un-Christian to prosper while others knowingly suffer. Both men acknowledge the church’s “preferential option for the poor” but sharply disagree over a plan and implementation.

A major source of disagreement between the cardinal and the friar arose out of definitions of words. For the pope and the cardinal ‘liberation’ is limited to meaning freedom from mortal sin and communion with God. Boff’s definition extends to liberation from suffering and oppression in here and now. The anti-communism of European-based Catholicism creates grave problems over the use of Marxist concepts. Marxism, for Boff, provides useful models that assist in a vision of the world from the vantage of the poor. The Vatican authorities caution that, by its very nature, Marxism denies the existence of God. Additionally, Marx assumes class conflict creating partisan opinions. Both are antithetical to Ratzinger’s concept of the church. Boff and his followers certainly never denied the veracity of God and they consider the unconcerned rich to be not living a Christian morality and therefore, denying the grace of God.

The cardinal admits that the liberation theology view of the church would revolutionize the current

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<sup>49</sup> “Cardinal Says Boff’s Ideas Still Alive 15 Years After Silencing,” *America* 182 (2000): 4.

institution. He and the church allow for criticism as long as it is constructive. Still, comparing the words of Boff and Ratzinger demonstrate that their concerns flow from the church's mission and use of power.

Boff's use of the words *exousia* and *potestas* is an excellent method of illustrating the differences between his and the cardinal's view of the church. The friar contends that the church committed an historic error when it chose the power of domination and rule over the power of love. Boff convincingly contrasts Jesus' power of love against the church's tyrannical use of power akin to any secular ruler. Ratzinger deemed this criticism to be anything but constructive and such statements are the specific source of the Vatican's conflict with Friar Boff.

Overriding all of these issues is the control of hermeneutics and exegesis. These words refer to determining the meaning of sacred meaning. Ratzinger clings to the historic tradition of institutional church power. Boff lives and believes that the power belongs in the hands of both the hierarchy and the laypeople. Again this position worries the cardinal. Purity of faith is his charge. For Ratzinger, Boff's position would result in ever-changing dogma of the moment. Boff finds the change necessary to empower the poor. Ratzinger fears that the results would be Protestantism – the institutional church would not be needed.

This study poses many questions toward the future of Latin America and the Catholic Church. In churches as different as Latin America's and Europe's can there be unity of meaning? Do poor people have the same theology as the affluent? As the third world population grows and the developing world's diminishes, must the church change to address the change in needs? Hopefully, this study of Friar Boff and Cardinal Ratzinger provides a framework for continuing analysis of these developments.

# 1950's Film: Non-conformity in an Era of Conformity

Drew Traulsen

## Introduction: To Conform or Not to Conform, That was the Question

Ask any American historian what life was like in the United States during the nineteen fifties and, nine times out of ten, some derivation of the following statement is sure to follow: It was a decade of homogeneity and conformity characterized by a baby boom, nuclear paranoia, conservatism, consumerism and mass consumption. This is a logical response from any professional scholar because, at this point in the historiography of that decade, little new information seems possible. Yet, for the amateur historian just now delving into that era, an important question still remains: From where does this blanket, almost generic response stem? In other words, what academic research are scholars using to make their assertion about conformity? To find the answer one must look no further than some of the psychological studies and popular fiction works of the decade.

The first of the two major sociological studies of conformity in the post-World War II decade was David Reisman's best selling work, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). It was a detailed analysis on the nature of peer pressure and its affects on people within American society.<sup>1</sup> Reisman concluded that America was changing from a society of production to a society of consumption. Within this shift, Americans were moving away from being a people who acted individually on impulses implanted by their elders, a situation Reisman called "inner-directed," to a people who reacted to the expectations and preferences of others, or "other-directed."<sup>2</sup> This situation was reinforced by mass media and an over sensitivity to the forces of peer pressure.<sup>3</sup> Sociologist William H. White's later analysis was not dissimilar.

Whyte's best selling study, *The Organization Man* (1956), argued that the bureaucracies of big business stifled creativity and individuality.<sup>4</sup> Whyte observed that a major shift in American ideology was taking place within large corporations as bureaucrats, CEO's, managers and employees were extolling the virtue and value of conformity while scorning the free thinker.<sup>5</sup> Building on Reisman's previous analysis, Whyte concluded his work by taking his study of the organization man into the suburban bedroom communities that had developed afterworld War II. He maintained that once away from their employer's constant pressure to conform, it was the suburbanite man who assumed the role of neighborhood manager and, "...organizes the committees, runs the schools, selects the ministers, fights the developers, makes the speeches, and sets the styles."<sup>6</sup> In essence, organization man at home was not dissimilar to organization man at work and although many wished to maintain their individuality at home, most mirrored the lifestyles and beliefs of their neighbors.

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<sup>1</sup> David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2001), Chapter 3, Sections 1 & 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Chapter 3 & 4 Section III.

<sup>4</sup> William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2002), Chapter 15 & Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 267.

Social scientists were not the only ones to question what was going on. As early as the late nineteen forties, authors and playwrights began tackling issues that would come to dominate the following decade. For example, Arthur Miller's Broadway play, *Death Of A Salesman* (1949), railed against both capitalist success as the basis of social approval and the disillusionment that conformity caused in many Americans. Miller's main character, Willy Loman, had grown up with visions of attainable success, status and wealth and had passed these ideas onto his sons only to be disillusioned by his, and his son's, inability to achieve them. In the second act, Biff, Willy's oldest son and the one he had singled out for success laments, "Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be...when all I want is out there waiting for the minute I say I know who I am...Why can't I do that?"<sup>7</sup> Perhaps Miller's thematic elements helped spur the investigations of both Reisman and Whyte. Biff's confusion over and search for identity in an era of seemingly homogeneous social characteristics falls well within the parameters of both Reisman and Whyte's analyses.

Similarly, Sloan Wilson's best selling novel, *The Man In The Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), pits its main character, Tom Rath, against the pressures of monetary and material success. Wilson took a critical look at American life in the fifties and the pressures people felt to fit in. As Wilson stated in his afterword, Tom's main problem "...was that he felt the world was driving him to become a workaholic in order to succeed at business enough to support his family."<sup>8</sup> Wilson dramatized this when Tom, after discussing the merits of working in a profession that you enjoy rather than working for monetary gain, angrily quipped, "The Hell with that...We might as well admit that what we want is a big house and a new car and trips to Florida in the winter, and plenty of life insurance...a man with three children has no damn right to say that money doesn't matter."<sup>9</sup> Obviously, Wilson was trying to describe the pressures many Americans felt to attain success, status and wealth and how it ultimately led them to conform.

As if the social sciences and popular literature were not enough, the American literary underground was weighing in as well. Members of the Beat Generation, a small subculture of fringe writers and poets, led a nonconformist uprising that questioned the homogeneity of the decade. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg published a number of critical commentaries about the America of the fifties. One of Ginsberg's most famous poems, *America* (1956), pointed to the disillusionment caused by the rampant conformity in American society. In it he concluded, "America I've given you all and now I'm nothing...I'm sick of your insane demands...America stop pushing I know what I'm doing...It occurs to me that I am America."<sup>10</sup> Clearly his intention was to show that even the individualist had a place in the fabric of nineteen fifties America.

Another Beat notable was writer and poet Jack Kerouac. His most famous work, *On The Road* (1957), was the tale of disillusioned friends who travel the United States on a quest for self-knowledge and experience. The most striking aspect of *On the Road* is the characters' incessant wanderlust and reluctance to join the rat race. This becomes apparent in the following interaction that takes place between two of Kerouac's main characters, Sal and Dean:

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin Books: New York, 1998), 105.

<sup>8</sup> Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Four Walls/Eight Windows: New York & London, 2002), 277.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (City Lights Books: San Francisco, 1956), 39-43.

Dean: "Sal, we gotta go and never stop going till we get there."

Sal: "Where we going, man?"

Dean: "I don't know but we gotta go."<sup>11</sup>

Kerouac was also weary of the growing conformity of the suburbs. In his second novel, *The Dharma Bums* (1958), he described suburbia as "rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing at the same time."<sup>12</sup> Taken together, both Ginsberg and Kerouac's various works seemed to call for self-examination and a return to individuality on the part of American society.

Regardless of the criticism though, conformity seemed, for better or worse, to be ingrained in American thought and character. As history has been written, the nineteen fifties have most frequently been recorded as the decade of "The Homogenized Society."<sup>13</sup> This seems inconceivable considering the well-read attacks on conformity that came out of academe, popular literature and the Beat subculture. Even stranger is the fact that, upon careful analysis, many popular Hollywood films of the era were questioning conformity as well. Whether dramas, science fiction or horror films, comedies, westerns or youth orientated films, many movies made during the fifties were critical of the homogeneous aspects of American life.

The following study is an attempt to critically analyze several popular films from the nineteen fifties and assess how they address issues of conformity. The purpose of this study is not to prove that the fifties weren't a decade of homogeneity, but rather to show how, along with the works of sociologists, fiction writers and poets, films can be interpreted as containing non-conformist elements that countered popular notions. The films chosen for this study cover a wide range of genres. Titles include: *High Noon* (United Artists), *The Wild One* (Columbia), *Niagara* (Fox), *Pickup on South Street* (Fox), *Shane* (Paramount), *Salt of the Earth* (Independent Productions Corporation), *Blackboard Jungle* (MGM), *The Seven Year Itch* (Fox), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Allied Artists), *Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Fox), *Bus Stop* (Fox), *Paths of Glory* (United Artists), and *Some Like It Hot* (United Artists).

### **The Non-conformist: "Inner-Directed" versus "Other-Directed"**

As stated previously, sociologists had made careful observations and analyses of conformity within American society in the post-World War II decade. Reisman concluded that Americans were shifting away from being an "inner-directed" people who maintained a strong sense of individualism to being an "other-directed" people who were sensitive to the will and preferences of others.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, many films made during the nineteen fifties tended to address this shift and attempted to tackle this clash between "inner" and "other" direction. Regardless of genre, many films seemed to confront issues of conformity and present characters that maintained non-conformist beliefs.

A striking example of this clash between "inner" and "other" direction is found in the 1952 western, *High Noon*. As the film opens, Marshall Will Kane is set to retire but learns of the impending return of a notorious

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<sup>11</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (Viking Penguin Incorporated: New York, 1957), 196.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (Viking Penguin Incorporated: New York, 1958), 39.

<sup>13</sup> William Leuchtenburg, *A Troubled Feast: America Since 1945* (Little, Brown and Company: Boston/Toronto, 1979), 69.

<sup>14</sup> David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 2001), Chapter 1.

gunslinger, Frank Miller, who is bent on killing him. Rather than follow the townspeople's "other" directed advice and flee, Kane makes the "inner" directed decision to stay and face the threat. Although he implores the townspeople for help, no one comes to his aid. After vanquishing his foe, Kane is disgusted with the townspeople and throws his badge into the dirt before leaving town. In the end, Kane would rather remove himself from such a society than live within it.

Another western with a similar situation is the 1953 film, *Shane*. Shane is a gunslinger who decides to hang up his six-shooter and become a homesteader. As the story unfolds, Shane is slowly drawn back to his outlaw roots and must abandon the homesteader way of life. In essence then, Shane attempts to give up his "inner" direction and conform to the normal or "other" directed society. Unable to completely abandon his past, Shane reluctantly returns to his roots and must leave the homesteader way of life. In this case, the non-conformist seemingly cannot operate within the larger society and ultimately removes himself from it.

Westerns were not the only genre to tackle issues of conformity. In the 1953 crime drama *Pickup on South Street*, a pickpocket named Skip McCoy unknowingly heists a microfilm destined for communist Russia. Fingering, held, and questioned by the FBI, McCoy refuses to cooperate. Although the FBI begs for McCoy's aid on the grounds that it is his civic and patriotic duty ("other" direction), McCoy maintains his "inner" direction and refuses. As the film concludes, McCoy has been persuaded by a lover to return the microfilm and leave town before his life is ruined by the conspiracy.

Yet another film genre that addressed issues of "inner direction" was the youth oriented movie. The 1953 film, *The Wild One*, is the story of a motorcycle gang that terrorizes a small California town. The gang's leader, Johnny, is an "inner" directed rebel without a cause who falls in love with a local girl, Kathie. In a strange, seemingly "other" directed move, Johnny comes to the aid of the girl when she is menaced by his own gang. Unable to rid themselves of the gang, the "other" directed townspeople launch an assault that results in an old man's death. Johnny is caught, blamed and ultimately vindicated of the murder. Mirroring many of the previously mentioned films, Johnny is told to leave town and never return. Once again the non-conformist is tolerated as long as he removes himself from society.

While serious dramas make up most of the films in this analysis, they are not the only genre to present non-conformist ideas. Comedies, such as 1955's *The Seven Year Itch*, presented the "inner" versus "other" situation as well. In this film Richard Sherman, a young advertising executive, must spend the summer alone while his family is away in the country. During this hiatus from marital and familial obligation, the majority of "summer bachelors" acknowledge and engage in extramarital affairs (a form of "other" direction). Sherman, although he tries to maintain his marital loyalty, is quickly seduced by "The Girl" who lives upstairs. Interestingly though, as the interaction between himself and "The Girl" becomes heated, Sherman embraces his "inner" direction by not going along with his peer group. Instead he flees to the country to be with his wife and son. His flight represents the non-conformist removing himself from society at large.

The final film chosen for this analysis was the 1956 science fiction movie, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

As the film opens, Dr. Miles Binnel has returned to his small town to find that many citizens are not themselves. He concludes that a strange, evidently contagious, neurosis is causing an epidemic of mass hysteria amongst the townspeople. He soon finds that some form of alien plant is cloning people while they sleep, turning them into emotionless copies of their previous selves. As Binnel attempts to bring in the police he quickly realizes that he is the only one left who is not affected. Fearing a world where everyone is the same (“other” directed), Binnel refuses to sleep. In an attempt to maintain his “inner” direction he flees, being pursued by the “other” directed mob of alien clones.

As noted in each of these synopses, the non-conformist was ultimately faced with a decision: Should he follow his “inner” directed path and maintain his individuality or conform to the “other” directed pressure of society? In each case the “inner” directed path was ultimately chosen. Although each of the characters made the decision to maintain their individuality and not conform to the larger society, their individual acts of non-conformity are powerful statements given the sociological studies that found conformity to be a dominant force in nineteen fifties America. The fact that each of these characters played central roles in their respective films is also significant. Considering such characters and situations were even tolerated and allowed into popular film points to the fact that it wasn’t just sociologists, fiction writers and poets who were questioning the status quo, but film and film makers were criticizing conformity as well.

### **Man versus “The Organization”**

In 1956, Sociologist William H. Whyte published the best selling study, *The Organization Man*. In it he argued that the bureaucracies of big business stifled creativity and individuality.<sup>15</sup> In the large corporations, management was pushing the need for conformity while downplaying individual expression.<sup>16</sup> Whyte’s analyses pits the organization man against the will to maintain individuality and the pressure to compete and be accepted. Two films in this analysis are perfectly suited to dramatize this situation.

The most obvious film to tackle the plight of the organization man was the screen adaptation of Sloan Wilson’s 1956 novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. The film tells the story of Tom Rath, a junior executive, husband, father and suburbanite caught between the pressures of organization life and his will to maintain his honesty and individuality. As Rath slowly moves up the ladder at work, driven by his wife’s need for material advancement, he quickly surmises the extent to which other aspiring executives have abandoned their integrity for the sake of the corporation. At one point Rath voices concern over not being able to discern whom at work are honest or not. He is reluctant to follow suit and slowly decides to follow his own path of honesty and integrity. This choice gains him instant recognition from his boss, Mr. Hopkins.

As Rath becomes closer to his boss he observes the negative effects that sacrificing everything for the sake of the corporation has had upon Hopkins. Hopkins was so dedicated to the organization that he rarely had time to spend with his wife and children. Although Hopkins had achieved material and monetary success, his choice of work over family has destroyed his relationships with both his wife and daughter. Realizing the potentially

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<sup>15</sup> William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2002), Chapter 15 & Appendix.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

devastating affect his job might have on his family, Rath decides not to conform to the pressures of the organization. Although his new direction quickly brings Rath closer to Hopkins and a better chance of advancement, he ultimately chooses to forsake the possibility of promotion and cutback on work to spend more time with his family.

A similar situation, although with a very different setting, was presented in the 1957 film, *Paths of Glory*. Set during World War I, *Paths of Glory* is the story of Colonel Dax, a French officer who has been given an impossible mission. Upon the failure of that mission, the top leadership decides to set an example by executing three men from Dax's command for cowardice. Dax asks and is allowed to represent the condemned men at trial. In the process, he refuses to follow orders and draws into question the top leadership's motives and actions. Although unable to save the lives of his men, Dax is offered a promotion. Disgusted, Dax refuses to join the leadership and, in the end, maintains his individualist stance and returns to the front with his men.

As stated previously, Colonel Dax had become increasingly disgusted with the top leadership's motives and actions. It would seem that the military organization was not dissimilar to the corporate organization of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Junior officers were expected to follow orders without question regardless of how futile or dangerous they may have seemed. The junior officer who followed his own path could be, as happens with Dax, singled out for considerable punishment. Conversely, junior officers who went along with the established order could rise in the ranks of leadership. Much like the Rath character from *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Dax sees the bankruptcy of the power structure and decides to buck the system by not conforming to the will of the military leadership.

It would seem that both *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and *Paths of Glory* would have been extremely controversial films for their day. They tended to fly in the face of the conformity that was so ingrained in American business culture and each offered a non-conformist view. Once again, the fact that each of these characters played central roles in their respective films is also significant. That both Tom Rath and Colonel Dax chose to follow their own course, forsaking the life of the organization man, seems just as powerful today as it must have been in the nineteen fifties. More than anything else, these films point to the fact that conformity was possibly beginning to lose its grip on American society.

### **The Woman's Place: Gender Non-conformity**

In both film and mass media during the nineteen fifties, women were typically homemakers or employees dominated by the control of men. This notion of woman as dependent was bolstered by the popular media of the day. *Life*, for example, ran a feature special on women in American society which concluded that a woman's role was one of housewife, home manager, mother, hostess and useful civic worker.<sup>17</sup> Other popular periodicals, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Redbook*, and *McCall's*, frequently ran stories that portrayed housewives as heroines. In her sweeping analysis of Cold War Era family structure, Elaine Tyler May noted that 67% of all women polled saw their husband's most important role as that of "breadwinner".<sup>18</sup> May also found that independent or successful career

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<sup>17</sup> Ralph Crane, "The American Woman," *Life*, 24 December 1956.

<sup>18</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 88.

women were viewed as selfish and that female ambition was often associated with sexual promiscuity.<sup>19</sup> Given such notions one might assume that films of the nineteen fifties would compliment or further such notions. Many of them did. What is most striking though, in terms of gender conformity, are the instances where films countered these gender stereotypes.

No other actress stands as the antithesis of female gender conformity in the nineteen fifties more than Marilyn Monroe. In almost every film in which she appeared her role was that of the independent, the faithless wife, the adulterer, the drifter, or the bachelorette. In the 1953 dramatic thriller *Niagara*, for example, Marilyn plays Rose Loomis, an unhappily married, faithless woman who undertakes a scheme to murder her husband. This is striking considering the other key female role, Polly Cutler. Polly is the happily wedded wife of an aspiring businessman who seems content with her “place” in both the relationship and society. Rose’s scheme, not to mention her trashy dress and wandering eye make her the perfect example of a non-conformist female film character.

A second Monroe film is the 1955 comedy, *The Seven Year Itch*. Known only as “The Girl,” she plays a twenty-two year old upstairs neighbor to a married man whose family is on vacation for the summer. Although she knows the man is married, she nonetheless attempts to seduce him with little or no evidence of guilt for her actions. In the end, the man is able to overcome his attraction to her and flees to meet his wife and child in the country. Again, this portrayal is anything but conforming to the popular female roles of the day.

In the 1956 dramatic comedy *Bus Stop*, Monroe plays an unscrupulous, yet naïve, cocktail waitress named Cherie who has become the desire of a young rodeo contestant. The film is filled with instances where female characters are treated harshly or disrespectfully. Cherie admits that she has lived a wicked life full of quite a few boyfriends, yet refuses to feel less about herself in spite of it. Although it progresses slowly, Cherie has to assert herself as a woman who does not appreciate her pursuer’s advances. In the end she only agrees to her pursuers advances when he promises to treat her with respect. A powerful female idea given the popular notions on gender and the well-established sexism found within the film.

The last of the Monroe films is the comedy *Some Like It Hot*, released in 1959. Set in prohibition era Chicago, the film tells the story of two men who pose as women to infiltrate an all girl jazz band. Monroe plays Sugar Kane Kowalczyk, an alcoholic ukulele player on the run from her upper class upbringing. She is single and looking for romance based not on the prearranged moneyed connections of her family, but on true love instead. Although comical, Sugar’s independent drive to find exactly what she is looking for without worrying about her family’s opinions or feelings is another strong example of female non-conformity in film.

Marilyn Monroe was not the only actress to portray a strong female character that tended to counter traditional gender roles. In the 1952 film, *High Noon*, Katy Jurado plays a character named Helen Ramirez. Interestingly, Ramirez is the town matriarch who owns the saloon, hotel, general store and several other small businesses. The film goes as far as showing her conduct large money real estate transactions with community members. She was a single woman who had had relationships with both the film’s protagonist and antagonist, not to mention the current deputy sheriff. She exudes a respectful power over several male characters and is treated with

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 176.

reciprocal respect. Her character is a far cry from the homemaker who lets the men in her life call the shots. The depiction of Helen Ramirez is anything but conforming to the popular notions of gender roles present in the nineteen fifties.

The last example of a female character that did not conform to popular stereotypes is found in the 1954 film, *The Salt of the Earth*. Rosaura Revueltas plays Esperanza Quintero, the wife of a striking New Mexico miner. She stays home with the kids and has her husband's dinner ready when he gets home. Slowly Esperanza begins to exert more power as the strikers are told the picket line must end. She and several other wives take up the picket line in spite of their husband's commands that they should not. Esperanza is arrested and imprisoned and her husband has to fill her familial role. Upon her release, Esperanza has gained a whole new respect from her husband who has had to experience the hardships of her daily life. She continues her agitation at the picket line and the miners eventually win. Esperanza's stance dramatizes the notion that women embody more than domestic power and must occasionally stand up for their beliefs. Esperanza refuses to conform to the roles that both her husband and society have placed on her.

Obviously, the conclusions outlined in May's study prove that women believed they had a well-established place within both the traditional family structure and society. These roles had been reinforced through popular media as well as the majority of television shows and films of the era. Unfortunately, that place was typically in some kind of domestic capacity. Strangely though, if you critically examine films from the nineteen fifties, an obvious trend seems to appear. Women were often portrayed as strong willed, intelligent and independent individuals capable of charting their own course without the aid or opinions of men. Once again this might point to several different conclusions. First, it might be inferred that these films were never meant to propel women out of their subjugated role in American society. Conversely though, perhaps these depictions were meant as harbingers of changing times. Maybe these films point to the fact that gender conformity was beginning to lose its grip on American society.

### **“Whites Only”: Racial Non-conformity**

Much like women, people of color have been consistently discriminated against and stereotyped in both everyday life and through popular media throughout the United States' history. African-Americans, for example, have been routinely depicted on film as the idiotic buffoon, the comic relief, the tragic mulatto, the violent sociopath, or the sexually aggressive predator.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Mexican-Americans have been depicted as the lazy peasant, the bandito, the harlot, the buffoon, the Latin lover, or the dark lady.<sup>21</sup> Rarely have these two minority groups been accurately portrayed or shown in realistic terms, especially in film. Most films made during the nineteen fifties tended to further stereotype racial minorities.

Most interesting though, are the several fifties era films that did not conform to such portrayals and countered these racist ideas.

The first of these films was 1952's *High Noon*. As stated previously, one of the film's central characters was a female Mexican-American named Helen Ramirez. Unlike the dominant portrayals of Mexicans in film,

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<sup>20</sup> Catherine and John Silk, *Racism and Anti-racism in American Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press: Manchester & New York, 1990), 122-125.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Ramirez-Berg, *Latino Images in Film* (University of Austin Press: Austin, 2002), 66.

Ramirez is shown as a strong, independent character that embodies many characteristics typically delegated only to white men. Not only is she the town matriarch and romantically connected with two main characters, she is also a competent businesswoman. Her portrayal is a far cry from the stereotypical harlot or dark lady, which had been the routine depictions reserved for people of Mexican ancestry. This fact alone is a strong act of non-conformity for an era when film tended to further gender and racial stereotypes.

Another example of strong Mexican-American character is found in 1954's, *The Salt of the Earth*. Consisting of a predominantly novice cast drawn from the New Mexico area, *The Salt of the Earth* contains a wide variety of strong leading and supporting roles. Central to the story are Esperanza Quintero and her husband Ramon. The Quintero family is depicted as hard working, religious, and embodying the hopes and aspirations of the American Dream. In the face of extreme racial and labor discrimination, the Quinteros display a strong sense of truth, justice and equality, and refuse to be persecuted while standing up for their human and civil rights. The fact that such a film was even made, given the racial notions prevalent during the nineteen fifties, is significant. These strong Mexican-American portrayals, coupled with the prevalence of the Spanish language found within the film, are anything but conforming to popular notions of the era.

The last film in this analysis that contains non-conforming racial roles is 1955's, *Blackboard Jungle*. *Blackboard Jungle* is the story of a new teacher at a multi-ethnic, inner-city high school that is overrun by juvenile delinquency. Central to the plot is a white teacher, Rick Dardier, and an African-American student, Gregory Miller. Early in the storyline, Dardier calls on the other teachers to provide fair treatment regardless of race or ethnicity and appoints Miller to the position of class leader-- possibly a first for an African-American in film. Another important event, which counters racial stereotypes, is the fact that Miller's character is never around when any type of violence occurs. As a matter of fact, in the film's dramatic and violent climax, it is Miller who ultimately saves the life of his white teacher. Unlike the typical portrayals of African-Americans, Miller is honest, hard working and independent. These traits, coupled with his actions throughout the film, significantly counter film roles historically reserved for African-Americans.

Few would disagree with the fact that people of color have been discriminated against and stereotyped by both the dominant society and through the popular media. The nineteen fifties were no exception. Most films made during the nineteen fifties tended to further stereotypical depictions of racial minorities. The persistent inclusion of racist ideas in films that reached a wide audience only tended to exacerbate the problems of racism and discrimination. What is interesting though is the fact that there are significant examples of films from the fifties that tended to counter the prevalent discrimination of the period. Whether intended or not, such depictions stand as nothing short of non-conformist in the face of overwhelming racism.

## **Conclusion**

Conformity during the nineteen fifties was ingrained in American thought and character: the era had been called the "Age of Conformity" by more than one contemporary critic.<sup>22</sup> Considering the attacks leveled by

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<sup>22</sup> Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity," *Partisan Review*, Volume XXI/Number 4, 1954, 7.

academe, popular literature and the Beat subculture, it seems almost inconceivable that conformity was able to take such strong roots. Nonetheless, conformity seemed destined to become an American way of life. As has been shown though, films from the fifties often had significant non-conformist elements imbedded within their storylines. Whether dramas, science fiction or horror films, comedies, westerns or youth orientated films, many movies made during the fifties were critical of the homogeneity of American life.

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was not to prove that the fifties weren't a decade of homogeneity, but rather to show how, along with the sociologists, writers and poets of that era, the films can also be interpreted as containing non-conformist elements that countered popular ideas. Films from the era not only presented strong individualist characters that went against majority opinions, but often included characters that tended to counter popular gender and racial stereotypes as well. Taken together, such non-conformist depictions can be interpreted in several different ways.

Perhaps the non-conformist elements often found in these films were an unintentional fluke that were not meant to stand as critical social commentary. This is a distinct possibility. Films and stories that center on characters and themes which only promote or toe a conformist line would make for dull viewing. Maybe the filmmakers were simply trying to present a compelling story. But what if such acts and situations of non-conformity had been deliberately placed? When interpreted in this way, these films and their creators become subversive. These films then become a social commentary that can only lead to one conclusion – that film and filmmakers were also critical of the power conformity held over the American people and were purposely injecting both weak and blatant non-conformist elements into their films. The jury is still out as to whether popular culture can directly influence public thought and action. Nonetheless, the fact that such non-conformist ideas and representations were present in the films of an era known for its homogeneity should offer a strong indication that conformity was, at the very least, a source of question for a wide swath of the American public.

## **Alcibiades: Patriot, Traitor and Athens' Last hope**

**Robert Brunelle**

Born in 451 B.C.E., Alcibiades of Athens was by age thirty, one of the greatest generals Hellas (Greece) had ever seen. Morally questionable and supremely self confident he became the single most controversial and important Athenian figure during the last fifteen years or so of the Peloponnesian War. In the course of this tragically epic conflict fought between Athens and its allies and Sparta and its allies, Alcibiades was a wildcard, the tides of war ebbing and flowing about him. There was a "quality in him which was beyond the normal," testified to by the shifting but always remarkable nature of his life.<sup>1</sup>

At age thirty he was elected one of Athens' ten generals. Five years later saw him with an Athenian death sentence on his head. Soon thereafter he became an advisor to Sparta. His advice brought calamity to Athens when the Spartan generals following it helped defeat the Athenian forces in Sicily, and set up a permanent military base at Decelea, a scant 13 miles from the Athens itself! However, by 410 B.C.E. Alcibiades had reconciled with the Athenians, saved Athens from a disastrous civil war and led their military to great victories. He achieved this last greatness, only to be shunned once again by the Athenians and their generals, finally to see his people defeated in 404 B.C.E.

The ancient Greek writers Thucydides and Plutarch, as the two prime sources on Alcibiades, present a convoluted picture of the man, sometimes in agreement, sometimes at odds. Thucydides was an aristocratic Athenian born around 460 B.C.E.. Failing in his task as an Athenian general to defend the Athenian colony of Amphipolis from Spartan forces he was exiled from Athens in 424 B.C.E. His writings are the most detailed surviving account of the Peloponnesian War. Plutarch was born around 45 C.E. During his lifetime Hellas was no longer a great military power, but under the control of the Roman Empire. Plutarch was a staunch Platonic philosopher and in his midlife became a priest of Apollo's at Delphi. Plutarch wrote both moral treatises and biographies of famous men.

The Alcibiades Thucydides portrayed was young, but intelligent and determined. From around the year 420 B.C.E. onwards, at a mere thirty years of age, he was Athens' best hope for winning the Peloponnesian War. However, Alcibiades did not view peace achieved through a treaty a viable option. For example, when Sparta desired a truce in the year 420 B.C.E. Alcibiades ruined the peace talks by manipulating both the Spartan ambassadors, and the Athenian Assembly, into mutual anger and frustration.<sup>2</sup> By portraying the Spartans as insincere and alienating them from both Nicias and his arguments for peace, and the Athenian Assembly Alcibiades hoped to gain an Athenian alliance with Argos and usurp Nicias as the Athenian to whom the Spartans brought their issues.<sup>3</sup> Although he indeed achieved his primary end one may wonder why the Spartans ever trusted him again after such trickery.

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<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, revised ed. (Penguin: New York, 1972), 418.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 376-377.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

Thucydides emphasized the political nature of Alcibiades over the personal. He affirmed Alcibiades was primarily trying to regain the political clout with Sparta that used to be his family's purview in the days before his grandfather gave up the post.<sup>4</sup> Plutarch, on the other hand, stated that it was "sheer jealousy" of Nicias' brokered peace that induced Alcibiades to trick the Spartans, Nicias, and the Athenian Assembly.<sup>5</sup> Plutarch argued Alcibiades was already the "resident consul" for Spartans in Athens.<sup>6</sup> Plutarch was born around 45 C.E., over four hundred years after Alcibiades' death. So without strong corroborative evidence for either author's interpretation, as a contemporary of Alcibiades, Thucydides' opinion might be the better one to go with. Nonetheless, from Plutarch's perspective, it was personal as much as it was a political maneuver by Alcibiades. Plutarch wrote that Alcibiades' motives were extensions of his jealousy of the admiration his rival Nicias received not only from his fellow Athenians, but from the enemy Spartans as well.

Thucydides did mention Alcibiades' personal moral failings. However, morality took second place to political efficiency. Thucydides lamented that it would have benefited the Athenian citizenry to have ignored Alcibiades' disagreeable personal life. Athens needed Alcibiades for his undeniable military benefit to the state.<sup>7</sup> At this point in his history Thucydides mentioned the eventual ruin of Athens due to its citizens' failure to fully utilize Alcibiades' military abilities. The historian was using hindsight to draw a moral lesson from the eventual collapse of Athenian power.<sup>8</sup> But, it must be noted that in 415 B.C.E. Athens was far from defeated. It becomes evident that although the historian had lived through the war, at least some of his writing had been revised as a result of latter musings. Although it is only speculation, it is worth wondering if Thucydides' original interpretation of Alcibiades and his actions might have been a little different from the most likely revised version that we have today.

This thought can be broadened to Alcibiades' speeches as given by Thucydides.<sup>9</sup> The question is, how much are the speeches actually what was said, and how much are they Thucydides' interpretation of the general meaning of what Alcibiades said? It is interesting that Thucydides admitted that at times he wrote down speeches not verbatim, but rather as "was called for by each situation" in order that his history might last indefinitely and be understood in the future.<sup>10</sup> It is suspicious at the least that on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, the failure of which was blamed on Alcibiades, Thucydides recorded Alcibiades as defending his seemingly selfish actions by proclaiming that often those deemed "unpopular" while they live are seen as national heroes by latter generations.<sup>11</sup> A pompous speech such as this was in keeping with Alcibiades' character, but the words could just as easily be Thucydides' interpretation of the general nature of Alcibiades' speech. Alcibiades was already notorious among the Athenians by 416 B.C.E., before the launching of the Sicilian Expedition. But, at the time of the speech, it is likely few Athenians could have conceived the drama of betrayal and potential redemption Alcibiades and the Athenian people would bring to each other.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, *The Rise and Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert, (Penguin: New York, 1960), 256.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>7</sup> Thucydides, 419.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 419-420.

For Thucydides, even when Alcibiades seemed to betray his homeland, it was only because he had first been betrayed by the Athenian *demos*, the adult male citizens of Athens. After being sentenced to death by Athens on the charge of impiety Alcibiades fled to the Spartans. He told the Spartans he would help them not because he hated Athens, but because he had been betrayed and wrongfully condemned by his fellow Athenians.<sup>12</sup> From this point of view Alcibiades seems to have followed a strong sense of self-patriotism, effectively equating the good of Athens with the good of himself. When many Athenians grew jealous of Alcibiades' economic successes and military exploits he argued that his personal glory benefited not only himself, but also brought recognition and prestige to all Athenians.<sup>13</sup> Although it is hard to prove, Thucydides own exile conceivably could have softened any criticism he might have had for Alcibiades' seeming betrayal of his homeland. In 424 B.C.E. Thucydides was exiled from Athens for failing as a general to successfully defend the Athenian colony of Amphipolis from the Spartan general Brasidas. Consequently Thucydides was unable to return to his homeland for twenty years.

As an exile, Alcibiades' adaptations to the Spartan, and eventually even Persian customs and military aspirations were only skin deep. Like a chameleon he could change his outer self at will, but always he was Athenian at heart. That is why he continuously worked toward returning to Athens' good graces. The Thucydidean Alcibiades can actually be described as Athens' greatest patriot as he was willing to bring the malevolent and immoral state that Athens had become to the brink of destruction in order that his *polis* might regain its former glory.<sup>14</sup>

The Persians, as mortal enemies of Greece, were always keen to take advantage of the Greek's internal quarrels. In the later years of the war Alcibiades certainly gave good advice to the Persian *satrap* Tissaphernes, but not good enough to ensure the destruction of Athens.<sup>15</sup> With the chaos caused Athens by the oligarchic coup of 411 B.C.E. it is highly probable that if Alcibiades had fully committed himself to the Persian military cause Athens would have inevitably fallen. Thucydides concluded that Alcibiades knew his only chance of recall from exile would be if the Athenians had no other choice but to enlist his help to save themselves.<sup>16</sup>

While both Thucydides and Plutarch concur that Alcibiades was a social and political "chameleon", the context each used was different. Plutarch employed a primarily moral framework. Thus, after Alcibiades escape to Sparta, Plutarch emphasized Alcibiades' seduction and impregnation of king Agis' wife as the main reason for Alcibiades eventual falling out with the Spartans.<sup>17</sup> Thucydides placed Alcibiades' adaptations in a political and military strategic framework. For Thucydides, the fallout between Alcibiades and the Spartans was the natural result of political machinations on both sides. For example, after the Spartans suffered a defeat at Miletus Alcibiades' political and military schemes became suspect enough for the Spartans to sentence him to death.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, in the arena of morality, both Thucydides and Plutarch concurred that ultimately Alcibiades was far more ethical than the *demos*. The *demos* was willing to do anything to destroy a perceived enemy. Alcibiades was

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 564.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 564.

<sup>17</sup> Plutarch, 267.

<sup>18</sup> Thucydides, 562.

not. By controlling the “mob” during the oligarchic coup of 411 Alcibiades saved Athens from internal self-destruction.<sup>19</sup> Plutarch couched the issue in moral terms. As a great leader Alcibiades resisted the “blind fury” of the people and refused to propagate a self-destructive civil war.<sup>20</sup> The will of the *demos* was fickle however, and the Athenians’ haughty disregard for the man who had proven his abilities again and again proved their undoing at the hands of the Spartan general Lysander. During a 405 B.C.E. naval battle near Aegospotami (on the Dardanelles coastline of modern Turkey) Athenian generals not only ignored Alcibiades’ excellent advice, but also so alienated him that he refused to bring in his own Thracian infantry and cavalry to attack the Spartan encampment.<sup>21</sup> By 404 B.C.E. Lysander had reduced Athens’ navy to cinders and captured their capital city.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas Plutarch portrayed Alcibiades as a bundle of emotions and desires, Thucydides perceived him as fairly moderate and steady in his actions. One important difference between the two historians’ depictions of Alcibiades was his relation to the warrior-philosopher Socrates. Thucydides did not even mention Socrates in connection with Alcibiades. Although it is a guess, one might wonder if writing as a contemporary of the Peloponnesian War Thucydides might have seem fit to avoid the very controversial and inflammatory topic of Socrates and sophists. Sophists would teach such skills as logic and rhetoric for pay, and often questioned traditional Athenian values and traditions.

Perhaps Thucydides felt the topic irrelevant to his war narrative. In truth the topic of sophists had a great deal to do with the war in some Athenian's eyes. There were many aristocratic Athenians who blamed Athens' failures during the Peloponnesian War on a moral decay brought on by the sophists’ teachings. Many aristocratic Athenian Greeks saw sophist trickery, individualism and questioning of traditional ethics and morality as antithesis to dedication to the *polis*, the community, and traditional religion. Aristophanes' comic play *The Clouds* was a prime example of the anger many Athenians felt towards the sophists and Socrates; the latter was executed in 399 B.C.E., via a cup of poisonous hemlock juice, on charges of impiety and corruption of the youth.

Alcibiades as depicted by Plutarch was sunk up to his neck in this social and religious controversy of the day. Plutarch respected Socrates and wrote Alcibiades was brought under the wing of Socrates who had a "divine dispensation to watch over and rescue the young."<sup>23</sup> Although it is debatable how much of a negative influence Socrates had on his society, the philosopher was a major part of Alcibiades’ formative years. Furthermore, there were those Athenians who lumped Socrates together with the sometimes arguably negative influence of other sophists.

Plutarch, however, felt Alcibiades’ renown was due in no small part to Socrates’ friendship and guidance.<sup>24</sup> Ian Scott-Kilvert asserted that Plutarch meant his story of Alcibiades to serve as a warning to his present readers.<sup>25</sup> While referring to Alcibiades, Plutarch made the point that no matter what one’s station or fortune in life logical

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 588.

<sup>20</sup> Plutarch, 271.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 9.

philosophy could easily point out one's faults.<sup>26</sup> Plutarch was something of a Platonic philosopher himself and thus friendly to Socrates' ways.<sup>27</sup>

Plutarch's own philosophy certainly colored his interpretation of Alcibiades' life. Plutarch's *Greek Lives* were not only biographies of important people, but also lessons on how to, and how not to, live one's life. According to Plutarch it took the philosopher Socrates to temper Alcibiades' "lawless self-indulgence" and hedonism.<sup>28</sup> The Alcibiades Plutarch depicted was innately virtuous but needed Socrates' wisdom if he were to survive his own limitations. When Alcibiades moved away from Socrates teachings, that was when he failed. For example, Plutarch asserted that Socrates strongly believed "little good" would result from the Sicilian Expedition.<sup>29</sup> However, Alcibiades remained the most vocal proponent for the ill-fated expedition.

The didactic nature of Plutarch's writing most likely influenced what aspects of Alcibiades' career he chose to highlight. By way of illustration, there is a strong warning in Plutarch's writings on Alcibiades about the danger of achieving too much greatness. This was the prime reason behind Alcibiades' demise, Plutarch cautioned.<sup>30</sup> By building himself up to a mythic status any failure however small on Alcibiades' part would be seen by the Athenians as actually a failure of his own "will."<sup>31</sup> When Alcibiades set out to conquer Chios and the Ionian coast, the Athenians did not take into account the general's lack of money compared to his Persian funded Spartan adversaries.<sup>32</sup> A retreat to search for funds and food for his men was simply interpreted as a failure of Alcibiades' will to succeed.

Alcibiades was indeed blamed by the Athenian citizenry for what was likely the most disastrous Athenian military venture of the entire Peloponnesian War, the Sicilian Expedition. Lasting from 415 to 413 B.C.E., the expedition was an attempt to gain control of the island of Sicily by conquering the city of Syracuse. To be fair, it should be noted that Alcibiades was only one of three generals, the other two being Nicias and Lamachus, who collectively commanded the expedition. Still, as Plutarch and Thucydides argued, Alcibiades was largely responsible for launching the Sicilian Expedition. Plutarch gave Alcibiades' primary motivation as an imperialistic desire to use Sicily as a base to extend the Athenian empire as far away as North Africa and Italy.<sup>33</sup> Alcibiades' outlook was that without constant expansion Athenian power would weaken and eventually wither away.

Nonetheless, Plutarch remarked Alcibiades constituted Athens' last military hope. In 405 B.C.E. the Spartans captured or destroyed 200 ships of Athens' 208 ship naval force sent to fight Spartan forces under Lysander. Plutarch commented that if the Athenian generals had listened to Alcibiades' strategy and accepted his offer to use his own mercenary Thracian forces on their behalf there was a chance the Athenians could have won the battle instead of suffering ultimate disaster.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 283.

Indeed, judging from Plutarch's testimony, Alcibiades seemed naturally warlike. In 416 B.C.E. the Greek island of Melos revolted against Athenian control, and consequently suffered a severe Athenian reprisal after being forced to submit via starvation due to an Athenian blockade. The author admitted that the subsequent execution of all Melian males and the enslavement of the women and children was a collective Athenian Assembly decision.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, he still laid a great part of the blame for the devastation of Melos' population on Alcibiades' influence on, and support of, the Assembly's decision.<sup>36</sup> Thucydides was far less inclined to attribute state decisions to the personal morality of Alcibiades. In his brief account of the final retributive action the historian did not mention Alcibiades as a major reason for the devastation of the Melians.<sup>37</sup> Instead his "Melian Dialogue" emphasized the collective responsibility of the imperialistic Athenian relationship to Melos.<sup>38</sup>

Both Thucydides and Plutarch adopted themes, which run like connecting threads through their respective writings. These themes impact upon how they chose to depict Alcibiades. Religious piety is one such theme of Plutarch's. Plutarch had become a priest himself at one point in his life, so it can be safely assumed that as a pious man he felt religious matters important.<sup>39</sup> Plutarch related how Alcibiades was sentenced to death for his perceived role in the mutilation of the *hermai* and desecration of the Eleusinian mysteries. *Hermai* were marble figures of the god Hermes set up around Athenian doorways in order to bring divine protection to the inhabitants. The Eleusinian mysteries were extremely sacred pan-Hellenic religious rites centered on the local Athenian district of Eleusis. Impiety was a serious offense in the Greek world, where such acts could bring divine disaster down upon the entire populace. The biographer himself felt the charges against Alcibiades were bogus and attributed them to the machinations of Alcibiades' enemies.<sup>40</sup>

Although it is partially conjecture, it does seem plausible that Plutarch's piousness influenced his decision to emphasize the basic piety of Alcibiades. Plutarch included in the negative side of Alcibiades character drunkenness, debauchery, insolence and opulence, but never did he label the man impious. In his biography of Alcibiades Plutarch found it important to tell of Alcibiades' religious exoneration over the charges previously arrayed against him. The religious procession Alcibiades led from Athens to Eleusis in 408 B.C.E., despite a dangerous Spartan military presence, facilitated a new Athenian belief in Alcibiades as a virtual high priest and true Eleusinian initiate.<sup>41</sup>

Fear is one important theme that factored into the political and military history Thucydides wrote. He in fact asserted Spartan fear of growing Athenian power was the root cause of the entire war.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it was partially for a fear of dictatorship that the democratically rooted Athenian citizenry turned on Alcibiades.<sup>43</sup> Thucydides went so far as to suggest that the death sentence Alcibiades received was not just for religious transgressions, but due to the fear of many aristocratic Athenians that Alcibiades was going to undercut their own

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Thucydides, 408.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>42</sup> Thucydides, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 419.

control over the *demos*. Whenever a single man gained great influence and power Athenians immediately broke into a cold sweat over the mere idea of a dictatorship. Alcibiades himself feared the Spartan diplomats would convince the Athenian Assembly that an alliance with Argos was a bad idea, so he deceived Spartans and Athenians alike.<sup>44</sup> When he was not really in a position of authority, preying on the fears of others became a tool of manipulation for Alcibiades. Thucydides argued that Alcibiades maneuvered the mutual fears of both the Persian governor Tissaphernes and the Athenians to hold both in check.<sup>45</sup>

As previously mentioned Thucydides' detailed speeches he attributed to Alcibiades are where Alcibiades made his arguments to various audiences. Arguments and ideologies were a focus of analysis for Thucydides. Conversely, Plutarch tended to quickly summarize events and proceed to tell his audience what he thought was important to note.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in Plutarch we learn that Alcibiades succeeded in promoting the Sicilian expedition but the arguments for and against the venture were left out.<sup>47</sup> For Plutarch, "public opinion" wavered on the issue of Alcibiades due to the unpredictability of his basic moral fiber.<sup>48</sup> Thucydides perceived Alcibiades' actions as fundamentally derivative of a lust for power and wealth. For Alcibiades, conquest of Sicily would directly translate into riches and fame. The "wealth" and "honour" Alcibiades desired were necessary to maintain his status within the public eye.<sup>49</sup> Yet, he cleverly showed the Athenians how they could become "rulers of all Hellas" through defeat of Syracuse and the acquisition of Sicily.<sup>50</sup> Conversely, Alcibiades' archrival Nicias argued for caution lest the Athenians overextend their empire and its military, economic and diplomatic resources.<sup>51</sup> The Athenian public sided with Alcibiades' arguments and the expedition was launched. As usual, Thucydides tended to paint a broad picture of political and military machinations while Plutarch focused more on the inner man.

Both authors recognized the complex interplay between politics and personal character that resulted in Alcibiades' actions, but often differed on what aspect of Alcibiades they chose to emphasize over the other. For Thucydides, the Athenians caused their own downfall by failing to utilize the military genius of Alcibiades. The classicist M.I Finley noted that Thucydides was the eternal aristocratic pessimist.<sup>52</sup> With this in mind one wonders who was really commenting when Thucydides recounted a speech in which Alcibiades labeled democracy as essentially "absurd."<sup>53</sup> Thucydides himself felt little love for the Athenian *demos*. Alcibiades certainly was elitist, but was supportive of the ideal of Periclean democracy. This was a government where the people were as Alcibiades said "most great and most free."<sup>54</sup> The qualifying word of "most" speaks volumes here. As Finley stated Thucydides felt some were more qualified for leadership than others.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 586.

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch, 260.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>49</sup> Thucydides, 418.

<sup>50</sup> Thucydides, 422.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 31.

Thucydides undeniably recognized Alcibiades' political and military failures. Nonetheless, Alcibiades was according to Thucydides more qualified to lead Athens than the average mob of citizens. Alcibiades himself had no problem with impressing the self-styled superior nature of his thoughts and policies upon other people. One of Alcibiades' arguments that he was the best choice for command of the Sicilian Expedition was that, due to his own wealth and personal authority, he had entered more chariots in the Olympic games than any other person; and consequently he had won first, second and fourth places.<sup>56</sup>

However, despite his elitist proclivities, Thucydides' Alcibiades was politically complex. Despite his personal self-glorification he respected the benefits of democracy. Arguing for the Sicilian expedition Alcibiades stated that there was great power in combining the resources of all types of people from the inferior to the superior.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, leaders of the Athenian oligarchic coup of 411 B.C.E. felt Alcibiades was not an oligarch at heart. The oligarchic Council of Four Hundred decided not to recall exiles that would have greatly bolstered the oligarch's forces because they were afraid Alcibiades would use his political and military clout to simply go dictator on them, or reinstate a democracy.<sup>58</sup> Oligarchy was that type of political organization that was the dire enemy of any democratically inclined Athenian.

Alcibiades was such a powerful figure that, for better or worse, he affected even creative works of entertainment composed while he was alive. The great comic playwright Aristophanes is the prime example of this interplay between creative writing and socio-political reality. A contemporary of the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes filled his plays with all sorts of comments, both veiled and direct, on the problems brought about by the war. It has been argued that Aristophanes' play *The Birds* was an allegory which represented his thoughts on Athenian politics and the Sicilian expedition.<sup>59</sup> Considering that the Peloponnesian War had cost the aristocratic writer and his family a great deal it would indeed be a surprise if his plays written during the war years did not echo his frustration. He and his wealthy aristocratic family suffered immense material losses and personal anguish due to the course of the conflict.<sup>60</sup>

The main character in Aristophanes' play is a fellow by the name of Pisthetairos. Likely composed in the year 414 B.C.E., *The Birds* was performed at a time when Alcibiades undoubtedly was on many Athenians' minds.<sup>61</sup> In several important ways the character Pisthetairos was quite similar to Alcibiades. Alcibiades' legal problems are certainly mirrored in Pisthetairos' discussion with an informer concerning condemning people "*in absentia*."<sup>62</sup> The Athenians had tried and condemned Alcibiades *in absentia* while he was helping conduct the Sicilian Expedition.

If the birds of Aristophanes' can be construed as Athenians, it appears that the characters were as easily influenced by Pisthetairos as were actual Athenians by Alcibiades. At first the birds glowered suspiciously at

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 578.

<sup>59</sup> Aristophanes, *Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Clouds, The Birds, Lysistrata, The Frogs*, trans. William Arrowsmith, Richmond Lattimore, and Douglass Parker, (Meridian, 1994), 173

<sup>60</sup> Finley Hooper, *Greek Realities: Life and Thought in Ancient Greece*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 292.

<sup>61</sup> Aristophanes, 178.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 292.

Pisthetairos.<sup>63</sup> In no time at all though Pisthetairos had the birds fully convinced of his wisdom.<sup>64</sup> As Alcibiades' felt an impulse to lead the Athenians to military conquests, so did Pisthetairos. In fact Pisthetairos suggested the birds found a new homeland of Cloudcuckooland and battle the very gods for dominion. He even threatened to destroy the king of the gods.<sup>65</sup> As Alcibiades spoiled peace talks between Athens and Sparta so did Pisthetairos attempt to wreck any chance of peace with the gods.

Pisthetairos desired the "divine supremacy" that he could have only if he defeated Zeus.<sup>66</sup> Pisthetairos advocated annihilating the birds' enemies through "Melian famine".<sup>67</sup> If Aristophanes truly was parodying Alcibiades, Plutarch's blame of Alcibiades for the Melian annihilation might have more truth to it than one might at first think. After all, Aristophanes was contemporary with the events of the Peloponnesian War.

However, there arises a glaring dissimilarity between the sagas of Alcibiades and Pisthetairos. Alcibiades was ultimately unsuccessful in trying to assert Athenian supremacy over the Spartans. Pisthetairos on the other hand was eventually successful in forcing the gods to bow to his demands. He gained the bride who bore the keys to the treasures comprising Zeus' ultimate supremacy.<sup>68</sup> A second major difference between Pisthetairos and Alcibiades is also readily apparent. William Arrowsmith noted Pisthetairos sought in Cloudcuckooland an escape from the *polupragmosune* that gripped Athens.<sup>69</sup> *Polupragmosune* was energy, daring, curiosity, and it was also meddlesomeness, discontent and restless instability.<sup>70</sup> From these qualities arose the power, disorder and corruption of Athenian imperialism. Alcibiades was *polupragmosune* incarnate. Conversely, a life filled with "soft and easy leisure" was at first desired by Pisthetairos.<sup>71</sup> Alcibiades never advocated a life of peace. In neither Thucydides nor Plutarch's account did Alcibiades ever desire release from his restless and meddling ways. Nonetheless, the similarity remained that no matter where they found themselves both Alcibiades and Pisthetairos eventually focused their efforts on glory through conquest. For Aristophanes, to continue a heedlessly destructive real-life war policy instead of striving for the catharsis of peace was just as irrational as the wild tale of Pisthetairos' war against the gods.

No matter what one's opinion of Alcibiades, and most opinions can find some sort of evidence for their support, it is inescapable that Alcibiades was one of the most important and controversial people of his time. Whether he was labeled patriot or traitor, brilliant general or foolish warmonger, Alcibiades' importance remains. It is telling that in Aristophanes' play *The Frogs* the god Pluto's final question to Aeschylus and Euripides in order to decide who was the best poet is, "Alcibiades...what shall we do with him?"<sup>72</sup> Produced in 405 B.C.E., *The Frogs* won first prize in the great poetry contest at Lenaia. It can be argued that a mere year before the defeat of Athens Aristophanes and his audience felt the dilemma of Alcibiades as one of the most crucial of the day.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 227-228.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 201, 319.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 316-317.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 175-176.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 577.

## **To Be a Man at War: The Emotional Regimes of World War I Era Britain and Germany**

**Molly Meyer**

Seeking adventure and glory, a chance to join the ranks of men who have defended one's nation, avoiding school, responsibility and reality; the reasons which compel young men to go to war are almost as old as war itself. And often, they are just as complicated. When reading a war memoir, how does one know what is real, what is fiction, what is experience and what is cultural conditioning? To read them accurately, the reader must know when and why the memoir was written. To understand the emotional reactions described within, one also has to take into account the cultural and national background of the author. By looking at two well-known memoirs of the First World War, Ernst Jünger's *The Storm of Steel* and Robert Graves' *Good-bye to all That*, it is possible to compare not only the individual men and their experiences, but the emotional regimes of their respective nations; Germany and Great Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The war began in earnest, as both Graves and Jünger were getting ready to leave secondary school. Rather than go to university or get a job at home, which could help the cause, both young men joined up. According to Elliot Neaman in *A Dubious Past*, Jünger was a daydreamer with a taste for adventure.<sup>2</sup> Before he even finished high school, Jünger searched for adventure by running away from home and joining the French Foreign Legion; an escapade that ended in disaster.<sup>3</sup> When war broke out, he left high school and joined the German Army. War, and the certainty of adventure which accompanied it, was not to be missed.

Graves was a little more reserved in his enthusiasm. In his autobiography, Graves tells the reader that his primary motivation for joining the Army was to delay his entrance into Oxford University for at least, he hoped, another year.<sup>4</sup> This claim, according to Graves' biographer Martin Seymour-Smith, should be treated with some skepticism. When Graves wrote the memoir in 1929, he was doing so in order to make enough money to move to Mallorca. According to Seymour-Smith, Graves wrote *Good-bye to all That* as a rejection of a former self whom he hated.<sup>5</sup> As such, Graves is loath to show his eager, youthful self in all his former naiveté. So, while it is no doubt true that avoiding Oxford was a factor in Graves' joining the army, it is also true that he felt a sense of loyalty to England and wanted to fight for her.<sup>6</sup>

Just as Graves' intent in writing his memoir affected the emotions and drives that he chose to include, so too were Jünger's choices affected. Also writing in 1929, in a world which was increasingly disgusted by the Great War, Jünger wanted to glorify war. In the preface to the English edition, Jünger wrote, "time only strengthens my

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<sup>1</sup> The term emotional regime refers to both the variety of emotions that a culture deems acceptable and the ways in which these emotions may be appropriately displayed. See William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Elliot Y. Neaman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Neaman, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Graves, *Good-bye to all That* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and his Work* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 191.

<sup>6</sup> Graves, 69.

conviction that it was a good and strenuous life, and that war, for all its destructiveness, was an incomparable schooling of the heart.”<sup>7</sup> Jünger writes that he is glad to have an opportunity to express his admiration for the British soldiers against whom the German Army fought. With these sentiments in mind, we can understand more readily his use of flowery and heroic language in his memoir. Rather than describe the smell of the war in a factual way, “the trenches stank with a gas-blood-lyditte-latrine smell,” as Graves did, Jünger chose language which romanticized even the smell of decay, “what was a man’s life in this wilderness whose vapour was laden with the stench of thousands upon thousands of decaying bodies?”<sup>8</sup> His language choice, in terms of tone, is that which is appropriate for an adventure novel. In many respects, his memoir seems like just that, an adventure novel.

This romanticization and glorification through language is not echoed in *Good-bye to All That*. As mentioned before, one purpose Graves had in writing his autobiography was to make money. With this in mind, he deliberately wrote what Paul Fussel describes in his introduction to the revised edition, as a formulaic novel-like memoir in which he mixed elements, like traveling and exciting battles, which he felt made books popular.<sup>9</sup> As such, his memoir is intentionally full of a variety of untruths for both readability and poetic effect. Of truthfulness in a memoir of the Great War, Graves himself said, “the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench-warfare are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities.”<sup>10</sup>

Given the differences in both intent and choice of language, it is understandable that Jünger comes across as much more emotional than Graves. For example, when writing about their eagerness to go to the front and fight, Graves simply says, “I wanted to be abroad fighting.”<sup>11</sup> Jünger on the other hand, wrote, “the war was our dream of greatness, power, and glory. It was man’s work, a duel on fields whose flowers would be stained with blood. There is no lovelier death in the world.”<sup>12</sup> This difference in emotional style, however, cannot be wholly attributed to personal choice. Here, there is a strong component of cultural conditioning present. This cultural conditioning can be seen not only in individuals like Graves and Jünger, but in the innumerable anecdotes concerning passionate Germans and reserved British.

These stereotypes can be partially explained by Modris Eksteins’ *Rites of Spring*. In *Rites of Spring*, Eksteins argues that at the turn of the twentieth century Germany was the principal modern nation while Great Britain was the major conservative nation. As such, Germany was seeking to change the world while Great Britain was seeking to preserve it.<sup>13</sup> Given this theory, cultural expectations of emotional behavior can be more readily understood. While Germans were seeking a new way of being, and thus allowing much more emotional freedom, the British were seeking to preserve the way of life which they had created, and thus maintained an expectation of

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst Jünger, *The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-troop Officer on the Western Front* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1996), xii.

<sup>8</sup> Graves, 158., Jünger, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Fussel, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). Quoted in Paul Fussel, “Introduction,” *Good-Bye to All That* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), viii.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Paul Fussel, “Introduction,” *Good-Bye to All That* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), vi.

<sup>11</sup> Graves, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Jünger, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 119.

reserve. According to Eksteins, the difference in the respective nations emotional regimes is most readily apparent in the types of artistic expression that were allowable.<sup>14</sup>

Now that we know the differences in intent, language and culture between Graves and Jünger, we can begin to effectively compare their emotional reactions to similar situations. Because both men belonged to the upper-middle class, they entered military service as officers. More than just being officers, both men joined regiments with long, distinguished histories; the Royal Welch Fusiliers for Graves and the 73<sup>rd</sup> Hanoverian Fusiliers for Jünger. As such, recruits were indoctrinated with regimental history and pride during training. To the point that, in the case of Graves, “the men had learned far more about Minden, Albuhera and Waterloo, and the battle of the Pyramids, than they had about fighting on the other fronts, or the official causes of the War”.<sup>15</sup>

In a turn typical of their respective styles, Graves conveys his pride at being part of his particular regiment by simply saying how lucky he felt to have chosen it.<sup>16</sup> Jünger, on the other hand, expresses his pride through the poetic vision of rows of helmets shining in the night with the reflected light of enemy rockets, “I saw the gleam of helmet after helmet, bayonet after bayonet, and I was filled with pride at commanding this handful of men that might very likely be pounded into the earth but could not be conquered”.<sup>17</sup>

This type of statement is typical of Jünger whose regimental pride is entwined with his pride in being an officer. Both Jünger and Graves subscribe to the idea that one should not hate one’s enemies; rather one should hate the actions of one’s enemies only. This is a typically British idea which is tied up with the ideals of chivalry and maintaining a sporting attitude; Jünger seems to subscribe to it because of his class, not his culture. However, he takes it one step further than the average British soldiers. Jünger judged his worth as an officer by the worth of his opponents.<sup>18</sup> He took pride not only in his own actions as an officer, but also in the courage and gallantry of those against whom he was pitted.

Graves is not quite so effusive in either his praise of the opposition or his delight in being an officer. The only mention he makes specifically about his pride in being an officer comes directly after he is informed that he can join the army as an officer; he seems to be most proud of the fact that he is becoming an officer in a highly distinguished regiment.<sup>19</sup> Graves’ pride in being an officer can be discerned through the way in which he conducted himself during the war. Both Graves and Jünger are similar in that they were known for their bravery. But where Jünger seemed to always have been ready to lay his life on the line for his men or his country, Graves’ description of his own bravery makes it seem as though he was motivated by much less lofty feelings.

According to Graves, much of what he did that is regarded as bravery was done for spite of senior officers or in the hopes of getting a ‘cushy one’, a wound which would send him home without getting him killed. Finding that young officers were only respected if they were courageous, Graves began patrolling No Man’s Land nightly. His motivation, however, was not just to gain the respect of his superior officers, “I had cannily worked it out like

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in Britain, poets like Rupert Brooke who wrote innocent and pastoral poetry dominated whereas in Germany the expressionist work of poets like Alfred Lichtenstein were dominant.

<sup>15</sup> Graves, 90.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Jünger, 101.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Graves, 88.

this. My best way of lasting through to the end of the War would be to get wounded. The best time to get wounded would be at night in the open, with rifle-fire more or less unaimed and my whole body exposed”.<sup>20</sup>

This should not suggest that Graves was not courageous on the battlefield, for he does have that reputation.<sup>21</sup> But, he also had the good sense to be frightened before a battle. While Graves never turned tail and ran during a fight, he did require, on occasion, a little Dutch courage. Before one big offensive, Graves described himself as having a dry mouth, eyes out of focus and legs that quaked beneath him. To steady himself he drank about half a pint of rum.<sup>22</sup> For Graves, the imbibing was a departure from his normal teetotaling ways.

Many soldiers, Jünger included, bolstered their courage by having a drink before going into battle. In Jünger’s case, it was cherry brandy, which he then carried into battle in his canteen. While Jünger was probably, on occasion, afraid during a battle, the emotions that overwhelmingly come through in *The Storm of Steel* are rage and excitement. As much as he tries to cling to his ideals of respecting his enemy and hating only their actions, as the war went on rage became an integral part of the reason that he was fighting. Before a battle he, “was boiling with a fury now utterly inconceivable to me. The overpowering desire to kill winged my feet. Rage squeezed bitter tears from my eyes”.<sup>23</sup> It is here again that we find, perhaps, a cultural difference between Jünger and the British. As much as he tries to maintain an objective attitude about the war, sometimes he is just unable. He loses his cool, the reserved attitude which he cultivated, and lets his passion rule.

There are some cases in which both German and British soldiers reacted similarly. For instance, as the war dragged on, the men fighting began to lose their ability to be horrified by war. The best example of this is the change in attitude towards corpses from when a soldier reached the front to after he had been there a while. Jünger describes the horror that he felt the first time he came across corpses that had been left to decay, “We looked at all these dead with dislocated limbs, distorted faces, and the hideous colours of decay, as though we walked in a dream through a garden full of strange plants, and we could not realize at first what we had all around us”.<sup>24</sup> While Graves never expressed any overt horror at the unfamiliar sight of dead bodies, his relation of having to move bloated, decayed corpses from out of No Man’s Land, gives the reader a sense of both his horror and his disgust.<sup>25</sup>

As the war continued, and fresh recruit turned into ‘old soldier’, reactions to death changed. Death became the normal order of things; it was hard to get too excited about it. Graves expressed this by saying that he found, “no horror in the continual experience of death”.<sup>26</sup> But, however normal death became to a soldier, some types never lost their ability to horrify. In the trenches, getting shot in the head was all too likely if one did not keep low enough. When Graves comes across a case like this he realizes, “one can disregard a dead man. But even a miner can’t make a joke that sounds like a joke over a man who takes three hours to die, after the top part of his head has been taken off by a bullet fired at twenty yards’ range”.<sup>27</sup> Though truly gruesome deaths, like the one mentioned above, never

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<sup>20</sup> Graves, 131.

<sup>21</sup> Fussel, “Introduction,” *Good-bye to All That*, vi.

<sup>22</sup> Graves, 157.

<sup>23</sup> Jünger, 255.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Graves, 163.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

really lost their ability to horrify even the most hardened soldier, it was the loss of a truly close friend that retained its ability to floor a man. Both Jünger and Graves lost a close friend after they had been at the front for a few years. Graves described himself as feeling, “empty and lost,” as a result of his friend’s death.<sup>28</sup> Jünger too was deeply affected by the news of the death of his friend, he was unable to believe that someone with whom he had been so close had, “met his end from a senseless piece of lead”.<sup>29</sup> The news, he said, “finished me”.<sup>30</sup>

This romantic notion that Jünger could survive all of the horrors of the war except the loss of a close friend is not accurate. Like so many men who fought in World War I, Jünger succumbed to shell-shock. On more than one occasion, Jünger lost control of his emotions during battle and either ran away or broke down and cried. On one such occasion, Jünger became lost while leading his men through a series of unfamiliar trenches during a big offensive, stunned by the loss of so many of his men and the loyalty of those few who remained, Jünger, “threw myself on the ground and broke into convulsive sobs, while the men stood gloomily around me”.<sup>31</sup>

Graves too would eventually succumb to shell-shock, but it would not be until after the war. While at the front, Graves wondered, with no small measure of horror, what his breakdown would look like when it occurred. He wrote, “I had never yet lost my head and turned tail through fright, and knew that I never would. Nor would the break-down come as insanity; I did not have it in me. It would be a general nervous collapse, with tears and twitchings and dirtied trousers”.<sup>32</sup> This fear of total nervous collapse, of being unable to control his own emotions seems typically British. In a culture where one is supposed to maintain a stiff upper lip through everything, a weeping man who loses control of his bowels is unacceptable. Graves’s fear, however, might not be wholly cultural. When the war ended and Graves succumbed to shell-shock, this is the form it took. His confessed fears could simply be poetic foreshadowing.

Seen through the eyes of two men with wholly different cultural backgrounds and motivations for conveying their experiences, the same war can seem very different. By exploring the emotional regimes of their respective countries, we are able to understand, at least in part, why and how this difference came to be. Because Germans were more willing to accept new forms of expression than the British were, Jünger was able to write a much more openly emotional recollection of the war. Conversely, despite the fact that he was writing as a rejection of the past, Graves was culturally required to stay within a much more narrow scope of emotional expression.

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<sup>28</sup> Graves, 197.

<sup>29</sup> Jünger, 234.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>32</sup> Graves, 198.

## Race Relations and White Supremacy

Sean Kennedy

The study of race relations and the development of institutionalized segregation in the United States explicate the tragic paradox of American history. For the purposes of this paper, it is useful to evoke sociologist William Isaac Thomas' theory of the "definition of the situation," which suggested, "When people define a situation as real, it is real in its consequences." The theory's utility offers a framework for understanding the development of American racism. White America defined the racial inferiority of blacks as early as the seventeenth century, thus the oppression and social degradation of blacks was its consequence. It was not until the end of the Civil War that African Americans had the first significant opportunity to redefine race beliefs. This paper will examine the historical debate surrounding the potentiality of self-determination for African Americans in the South leading up to the establishment of Jim Crow.

African Americans fundamentally challenged their social, economic, and political position in the late nineteenth century. Although blacks transformed their situation from servitude to empowerment, they were doing so, fatefully, within the confines of the dominant culture of white supremacy. White people had no reason to change the primary definition of black inferiority; in fact, during Reconstruction and Redemption many whites seemed to have more reason to hold on to their racist sensibilities.

It is fitting to understand the plight of African Americans during Reconstruction by considering the social determinants for their original state of slavery in colonial America. No historian better described and analyzed the development of slavery than Edmund Morgan. Morgan in *American Slavery, American Freedom* skillfully examines the origins of slavery and the detrimental legacy of American racism. Additionally, Ronald Takaki contributes to the discussion of foundational American racism by looking at the white family vision that Virginia promises.

The development of slavery and the racist values that it fostered have posed critical questions for historians studying the advance of Jim Crow. The historian who first posited of the "strange" development of Jim Crow, C. Vann Woodward, believed segregation developed after Reconstruction, and argued Jim Crow laws were irregular and unique in southern race relations. Historian Joel Williamson examines the aggregate of Southern psychology to demonstrate the ferocity of white supremacy during the attempt to redefine the situation of blacks. Historian Glenda Gilmore reconstructs a history of hope and vision in her book *Gender and Jim Crow*. According to Gilmore, gender roles influenced the agency of black and whites living in North Carolina. Leon Litwack thoroughly analyzes the entrenched structure of white supremacy, in his book *Trouble in Mind*, and is skeptical of the many interpretations of possibility for African Americans empowerment in late nineteenth century America. Observed together, these historians represent the theoretical base of what Studs Terkel describes as "the American obsession": the pervasive reality of animosity and resentment between whites and blacks in America.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Studs Terkel, *Race: How Blacks & Whites Think & Feel About The American Obsession* (New York: The New Press, 1992), 1.

As Morgan makes clear, the obsession began at the foundation of American history. Morgan presents a refreshingly candid argument that the rise of freedom in America was "produced mainly by slave labor," inferring poignant questions about how economics implicates the meaning of "freedom."<sup>2</sup> Morgan contributes to the historical conversation by investigating class in the development of slavery. The foundation of American slavery, Morgan contends, derived from England preceding American colonization. He points out that England's poor were not free, and, from the standpoint of the rich, they were required to work. However, the gentry's mandate for the poor was problematic because the labor-pool outstripped available employment. As England began the venture of colonizing the Americas, he explains, England's nobility and the Virginia Company had a "persistent vision" for the Virginian colony, which promised a transforming environment for the idle-poor of England. Nevertheless, as Morgan describes, it was not long before wealthy immigrants populating Virginia emulated their English counterparts' insatiable desire to become and stay rich off the labor of their servants. Morgan demonstrates the situation of the poor immigrants of Virginia, caught in indentured servitude laid the groundwork for "a system of labor that treated men as things".<sup>3</sup>

Both Morgan and Historian Ronald Takaki speculate that the demise of white indentured servitude and the adoption of slavery were not pre-determined. A critical point of Morgan's argument is that Virginia "drifted" toward slavery with no "apparent consciousness of the social stability to be gained thereby."<sup>4</sup> He argues, "That slave labor ... was actually not as advantageous as indentured labor."<sup>5</sup> He reasons that the high mortality rate among immigrants in early colonial Virginia prevented the economic viability to purchase a slave over a servant. Only when mortality rates stabilized did it become feasible for large planters to purchase slaves.

Takaki adds an interesting observation that counters Morgan's theory for the "unthinking decision" of slavery. Takaki, who agrees with Morgan on most points, believes it was a reluctant, yet conscious decision of Virginian legislatures. Takaki explains that the purpose of Virginia was to settle it with white English families and introducing a foreign population would only corrode Englishmen's vision for Virginia. However, he points out, the English not only imported racism but also a hierarchical class structure. Takaki suggests that it is significant that the number of black slaves increased dramatically immediately following Bacon's Rebellion. He explains that Virginia's elite planters feared "the giddy multitude" of ex-servants more than that of blacks and even Indians. Takaki contends, to ease their anxieties, the colonial government passed legislation following the rebellion to encourage planters to purchase black slaves rather than employ white servants.<sup>6</sup>

When American planters "switched" to black slavery from white servants, the foundation of racism was set. As Takaki describes, "Black was made to signify slave."<sup>7</sup> Morgan demonstrates such a signifier raised the status of poor whites. Obscuring class lines with race lines allowed for the perception that what was good for upper class

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<sup>2</sup> Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York: Bay Back Books, 1993), 63-67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

whites was good for lower class whites. Poor whites could see “their big neighbor not as an extortionist but as a powerful protector of their common interests.”<sup>8</sup> Morgan believes that black slavery allowed the “small (white) man” to not only prosper, “but also to acquire social, psychological, and political advantages that turned the thrust of exploitation away from them and aligned them with the exploiters.”<sup>9</sup> As the minor white planters’ economic position improved, Morgan claims, “He was also enjoying the benefits of a shift in social and political attitudes that coincided with the rise of slavery.”<sup>10</sup> The principal consequence of the Civil War was the emancipation of four million African Americans whose previous enslavement gave credence to the definition of freedom for millions of lesser whites. The confounding and critical question for all southerners, both white and black, is how would newly freed African Americans live in America with a changing and expanding definition of American freedom?

C. Vann Woodward, in his book *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, argued in 1955 and again in 1966, that whites’ vision for race relations was not monolithic. He demonstrates that a segment of the white-southern population was not in accord with the necessity for blacks to be “segregated and needlessly humiliated by a thousand daily reminders of their subordination.”<sup>11</sup> He points out that there were three alternative philosophies of race relations open to the South before Jim Crow, and that “all of these alternative philosophies rejected the doctrine of extreme racism.”<sup>12</sup> The liberals who envisioned a racially harmonious society expressed the first of these alternatives. They were the smallest and obviously least influential of the options. The second of these ideologies were the conservatives who were a throw back to the patriarchal slave system. Their primary purpose, with the abolishment of slavery, was to preserve a stable hierarchy with rich whites on top. Above all, the conservatives valued law and order, and, for them, either uplifting or antagonizing their black subordinates provided the potentiality for chaos. Conservatives’ vision for blacks was to keep them in their subordinated place. The last philosophy, according to Woodward, was that of the radicals who attempted to reach an understanding with the African Americans through Republican leadership in seeking a “pragmatic alliance of mutual political convenience.”<sup>13</sup>

What Woodward thought most peculiar about Jim Crow was the importation of segregation from the North. He reminds the reader that although African Americans were free in the North, northerners were just as “dedicated to the doctrine of white supremacy and Negro inferiority.”<sup>14</sup> Referring to Leon Litwack’s *North of Slavery*, he quotes a description of northern segregation:

Negroes found themselves systematically separated from whites. They were either excluded from railway cars, omnibuses, stage couches, and steamboats or assigned to special ‘Jim Crow’ sections; they sat when permitted, in secluded and remote corners of theaters and lectures hall...Moreover, they were often educated in segregated hospitals, and buried in segregated cemeteries.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Morgan, 366.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>11</sup> C Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 37-48.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 19.

Woodward provides ample examples of northerners stunned at witnessing the intimacy and social interaction of southern whites and blacks. He quotes the prolific Alexis de Tocqueville who was “amazed” of the racism he encountered in the North. Tocqueville took note of an American irony where the “prejudice of race appears to be stronger in the states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists; and nowhere is it so intolerant as in those states where servitude has never been known.”<sup>16</sup>

At issue for Woodward is the perception that Jim Crow was a predetermined and natural outcome following the abolition of slavery. He points out that Joel Williamson unfairly extended his narrow study of African Americans in South Carolina to the entire South. He counters Williamson’s claim that “emancipation precipitated an immediate and revolutionary separation of races.” He disagrees with Williamson by pointing out that “South Carolina may have been exceptional in some respects. But in most parts of the South, including South Carolina, race relations during Reconstruction could not have crystallized or stabilized nor to have become what they later became.”<sup>17</sup>

Woodward argues what ultimately led to Jim Crow was a relaxation of countervailing forces against the “extreme racists.” He contends that, although, all the “elements of fear, jealousy, proscription, hatred, and fanaticism had long been present” northern liberalism, southern radicals, and the southern conservative kept “extreme racism” at bay. Woodward contends that the crux for the relaxation of racist restraints for the northerner leadership was the imperialistic enterprise of the Spanish-Cuban-American War. The victorious results of the war brought eight million dark skinned people under the authority of the United States. Such geo-political circumstance brought academia and journalists together in the venture to legitimate imperial control of “inferior races.”<sup>18</sup>

The internal restraints to extreme racisms dissipated, Woodward explains, due to the downturn in the economy in the late 1880s and 1890s. The “economic, political, and social frustrations had pyramided to a climax of social tensions,” and there had to be a “scapegoat.”<sup>19</sup> He contends that African Americans were objectified by frustrated poor whites suffering under economic uncertainty. As a result, African Americans’ political protectors found alliances with blacks problematic. Further, white supremacy became a political tool to bind the South together as a political block against the economic aggression of the North.<sup>20</sup> Woodward argues that once upper class whites quit restraining their lower class counterparts, terrorism and the political disempowerment of African Americans became institutionalized. In sum, Woodward argues that the “strange career” of Jim Crow was conceived under conditions of imperialism and economic crisis, and as a result, it was then, and only then, that the defined situation of African Americans’ subjection with cruel oppression, intimidation, and terror occurred.

Agreeing with Woodward, Glenda Gilmore argues, “That violence and legal codification of segregation in the late 1890s represented cataclysmic ruptures in the fabric of black civil rights... If historians later took Jim Crow’s career to be strange, African Americans at the time found it to be unbelievable.”<sup>21</sup> Her book, *Gender and*

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 77-83.

<sup>21</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1996), 8.

*Jim Crow* looks thoroughly into the racially progressive momentum of post-Reconstruction as an era of hope and vision. She analyzes the effect of “place” on both whites and blacks in North Carolina and the South in general. The opportunities afforded to and taken advantage of by African Americans not only irritated whites but created problems for the definition of black inferiority. Gilmore, examining the gains and rise of a black middle class, asks, “How could whites maintain the idea that African Americans... were lowly due to laziness if some African Americans worked hard enough to purchase carriages?”<sup>22</sup>

Her book in large measure is the study of southern black agency that worked diligently to transform the cultural definition of white supremacy and black inferiority. In the case of African American women, Gilmore demonstrates how the activity of educated African Americans provided positive change and great potential for the people living in North Carolina. Such educated women sought to uplift their race in an effort to improve living standards for their families, to open up opportunities for their sex of both races, and to change white attitudes toward African Americans.<sup>23</sup> She depicts the life of writer and North Carolina resident Sarah Dudley Petty and reveals that her activism as a “feminist” and as an African American was in contrast to white women because black women were responding not just to patriarchy but to racial oppression as well. The charge of all African Americans, who wished to create an environment where they could exist in a peaceful and productive world, was to uphold high standards of morality, social etiquette, and education.

Gilmore illustrates that the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a great agent for change. This organization provided North Carolina’s black women “their best hope for building strong communities and securing interracial cooperation.”<sup>24</sup> The WCTU became a point of mutuality for both whites and blacks to improve community and gender equality. When black men voted, white women welcomed and sought out the activism of black women. Political circumstance for both groups of women afforded a glimmer of hope that racial equality was possible. However, Gilmore points out that Sarah Petty in her writings, argued more for civil and political rights over social equality.<sup>25</sup>

Like Woodward, Gilmore analyzes the effect of the economy in the 1890s in the South. The extent of her study is distinctive, however, as she demonstrates the downturn of the economy shaped whites’ gender construction. As hard times hit the North Carolina agrarian economy, a reconsideration of racial parity was in quick demand and Gilmore reveals that the New White Men effectively created a social norm where it was no longer a demonstration of strength to have sex with a black woman but a sign of weakness. New White Men now expected white women, across class boundaries, to be wholesome and chaste in order to maintain racial purity.<sup>26</sup>

In turn, white women began to hold the New White Men culpable for the previous generation that allowed for racial miscegenation transgressions. Such feminine pressure as expressed by the Waddell women, Gilmore argues, inspired the once ineffectual Alfred Waddell to lead the Wilmington Slaughter and take the office of mayor

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-72.

of Wilmington.<sup>27</sup> Her emphasis on social influences of gender construction affords an effective analysis of the vibrancy of agency within the seemingly impregnable shadow of structure.

Joel Williamson's *A Rage for Order* agrees with part of Woodward's core thesis that African Americans were "firmly included" in Southern society before Emancipation, but departs from Woodward when he argues that immediately after Emancipation the process began to effectively exclude them.<sup>28</sup> The "inclusion" of African Americans, Williamson describes, was due to their enslavement during the Industrial Revolution. Their "place" in society was prescribed in paternalism. Racism and slavery had yet to become nuptial, Williamson argues, until the Nat Turner insurrection of 1831. Williamson's commanding prose captures the prompt transformation the White-southern culture encountered, in the wake of the bloody insurrection, as a "great river disrupted by some giant earthquake, it poured out over the land in a rushing search for a new bottom, a new place to flow smoothly in the natural order of things."<sup>29</sup> White Southerners' definition would necessitate an "organic society" where everyone understood where they were in relation to one another. Williamson stresses that the South borrowed Victorian ideals that arranged firmly imposed parameters on every role within southern culture designed to keep "Sambo" in his place. This organic structure seemed ideal for white southern culture until the demise of slavery. Following the Civil War, the challenge for White southern culture was to regain a semblance of its Utopian past as defined by whites.<sup>30</sup>

The historic crossroads between Reconstruction and Redemption is the core of Williamson's book as he describes the three "mentalities" that vied to rebuild the southern culture and maintain definition in the midst of racial chaos: Liberals, Conservatives, and Radicals. The Liberals, like Woodward's Liberals, were optimistic in their vision to create a society where African Americans empowered and integrated could reach their highest potential. The Conservatives took on the paternal role and sought to save "Sambo" by putting him back in his proper place. The Radicals were the most pessimistic of the group who feared the "regression" of Sambo. The generation of blacks born after slavery was fast becoming young adults by Redemption. According to white southern social pathology, this generation of blacks "never felt the civilizing effects of slavery" and regression ultimately meant black men would rape white women.<sup>31</sup>

Like the majority of historians, Williamson is interested in the effect the depression of the 1890s had on the South. During the depression, Williamson argues, the radicals took charge. The writer is adept at formulating a visceral expression of "psychohistory" as he interlaces how the "recession of the late 1880s and the depression of the 1890s produced psychological effects"<sup>32</sup> on white men. He points out that although men were economically disempowered to support their families, they were still able to find ways to empower themselves by protecting their women. Williamson suggests that the terror campaign against the African Americans in the 1890s was the bellwether for the state of the economy in 1892 as the number of lynchings peaked in that dismal year. As violence

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 111-113.

<sup>28</sup> Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford Press, 1986), 281.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 82.

bled into a scourge of disruptive riots, and the need for stability found more importance, the Conservatives took back control of the South building upon the Radicals' political conquests of isolating blacks from society.

Woodward, Gilmore, and, to a much lesser degree, Williamson all imply that a bi-racial society had some potential. Leon Litwack, in his book *Trouble in Mind*, however, unabashedly argues, "...any experiment in biracial democracy was bound to be perilous."<sup>33</sup> Although some whites and most blacks aspired for a racially harmonious, dignified society, the definition of black inferiority had too long of history and was woven excessively tight in the social fabric of white culture. As Litwack contends, the attempt to redefine the plight of African Americans was gravely problematic, as the "New South into which a new generation of African Americans would be born had clearly drawn racial boundaries and modes of behavior based on centuries of enforced custom and thought."<sup>34</sup> The situation that Morgan analyzed in which African Americans found themselves trapped would surely take more than generation to ameliorate.

Litwack does give considerable examination of African American's motivation and accomplishments to become educated and self-sustaining after Emancipation. Nevertheless, an educated African American defied the white constructed definition of African Americans. Above all, Litwack maintains, that once blacks actualized their newly acquired rights, prescribed by northern Republican radicals, it would only be a matter of time for whites to put them back in their defined "place". Litwack states that the Fifteenth Amendment, "violated the overriding assumption of Negro inferiority and threatened whites by inflating black ambitions."<sup>35</sup>

Litwack explores the many anxieties of whites who were fearful that an educated black population would "develop the same instincts, the same interests, and the same ambitions" as whites.<sup>36</sup> The educated black was an affront to the sensibility of the whites, Litwack maintains; and whites worried that the enterprise of educating blacks would be, in fact, detrimental to the lives of African Americans. For Southern whites education, like the ownership of land, "spoiled the Negro as a laborer, developed in him wants that could never be satisfied and expectations that could never be realized."<sup>37</sup> Litwack reminds the reader that the southern system depended on an uneducated second-class citizenry. He quotes a prominent lawyer from Montgomery, Alabama, who was gravely concerned that there would be no one left to do the "dirty work" if the "Negro" was educated. The lawyer clearly defined the southern situation when he stated: "In this country the white man won't; the Negro must. There's got to be a mudsill somewhere. If you educate the Negroes they won't stay where they belong, and you must consider them as a race, because if you let a few rise it makes the other discontented."<sup>38</sup> Litwack quotes, as emblematic of southern white thought, a Professor Bennet Puryear, who argued that the educated black was "a manifest (of) absurdity."<sup>39</sup> The superstructure of the South openly preserved the Sambo definition of African Americans.

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<sup>33</sup>Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1998), xiii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

In contrast to Woodward, Litwack states, “racial segregation was hardly a new phenomenon” after emancipation. He points out that before emancipation there was no need to articulate legal segregation. Although Jim Crow did not manifest itself immediately after emancipation an “informal code of exclusion and discrimination” was in effect.<sup>40</sup> Litwack states that the determination of blacks to redefine and improve their situation “revolved largely around efforts to secure accommodations that equaled those afforded to whites.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, Litwack is claiming, that the agency of African Americans, that Gilmore eloquently writes about, was due to de facto discrimination and segregation; African Americans fought for inclusion and dignity because they were denied such things in the South during Reconstruction. Litwack argues “what made the laws increasingly urgent was the refusal of blacks to keep to their place.”<sup>42</sup>

Further, Litwack insists that the “strange career” of legal segregation was due, in large part, to the emergence of industrialization in the South beginning in the 1890s. The emblematic efficiency of capitalism rooted in its use of cheap labor did not bode well for the mind-set of white southern men. Capitalists in the North moving into the South at first employed the same population they employed in their Northern textile factories, mainly, white women and non-white men. With the long held sexual fears of white men about relations between white women and black men, the tendencies of capitalism to employ efficient and cheap labor that would have white women and black men in close proximity to each other had to be legally restricted.<sup>43</sup>

Litwack reminds us that segregation and discrimination were not the only means to isolate blacks. Ostensibly in response to Woodward, Litwack in his chapter “Hellhounds,” contends that the entire southern white population was determined to violently remind African Americans about their primary defined place. Litwack illustrates that “drawn from all classes in southern society, from ‘rednecks’ to the ‘best people,’ lynchers came together in an impressive show of racial and community solidarity.”<sup>44</sup> From white laborers, to white professionals, to white government officials, the South, Litwack thoroughly demonstrates, were in full accord to the necessity of violently putting African Americans back in their place. The peculiar absence of “better people” participating in terrorizing African Americans, in the immediate days of emancipation, was because it took a generation for most African Americans to redefine their place following emancipation.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the various disagreements of these prominent historians, they are all in accord that African Americans following the Civil War were resolute for self-determination. Although white supremacy appeared to be firmly in place, “a growing uneasiness and restlessness continued to grip the black South.”<sup>46</sup> African Americans, as history has shown, have always refused to accept their defined situation and the consequences that followed it. Nevertheless, tragically, a large portion of white society has also refused to relinquish the primary definition of black inferiority. It is indeed appropriate to conclude this paper with a disturbing study conducted by the University of Chicago to illustrate the pervasiveness legacy of white supremacy in America and the insistence to maintain the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 322.

definition of black inferiority: “Fifty-three percent of non-blacks believe that African Americans are less intelligent than whites, 51 percent believe they are less patriotic; 56 percent believe they are more violence prone; 62 percent believe they’re more likely to ‘prefer to live on welfare’ and less likely to ‘prefer to be self supporting.’”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Terkel, 1.

## Scott's Tragic Antarctic Expedition: Historians Debate South Pole Explorers' Demise

Sandeep Batra

In November 1911, Captain Robert Falcon Scott set out from New Zealand with four men, attempting to be the first to reach the South Pole. For overland transportation, Scott relied mainly on Siberian ponies and two motorized sledges. The support teams traveled as far as the Polar Plateau with sledge dogs. After the ponies and motorized sledges failed them, Capt. Scott, Lt. H. R. Bowers, Capt. L.E.G. Oates, E. Wilson and P.O. Evans hauled their own sledges for the remaining 150 miles to the Pole. On January 17, 1912, Scott and his four companions finally reached the South Pole—only to discover that Roald Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer, had already claimed that honor thirty-three days earlier. Enervated and distressed, Scott's team started the homeward journey, encountering horrific weather conditions along the way. Apparently suffering from head trauma, Evans lost consciousness and died. Unable to continue walking on his frostbitten feet, Oates deliberately crawled out to his death into a snowstorm. Scott, Wilson, and Bowers continued their march until they were confronted by a fearsome blizzard. Trapped just eleven miles short of their next depot, the trio soon ran out of food and fuel. Judging from their last diary entries on March 29, 1912, the three pioneers seem to have died of starvation and exposure. The exact causes behind the calamity have been debated by historians ever since. This paper examines the theories of three historians—Diana Preston, Susan Solomon, and Roland Huntford—to show how their respective monographs explain the deaths of Scott's Polar party.

The vast, unknown expanse of Antarctica has long fascinated explorers from around the world. In his second circumnavigation of the world in 1773, Captain James Cook sailed further south than anyone had ever done—reaching 71 degrees, 10 minutes South latitude. Between 1773 and 1775, Cook crossed the Antarctic Circle four times, searching for *Terra Australis Incognita*—the unknown Southern land. When his final attempt of 1775 was in vain, Cook unwittingly posed a challenge to explorers worldwide, declaring: “No man will ever venture farther than I have done, and that the lands which may lie to the south will never be explored.”<sup>1</sup>

The shores of the Antarctic remained elusive and were not even sighted until 1820. In 1840, James Clark Ross broke through the encircling pack ice—reaching the shoreline near the pole.<sup>2</sup> During the following decades, whalers and sealers began exploiting the natural resources of the surrounding Antarctic Islands. Exploration of the mainland, however, did not seriously begin until the Sixth International Geographic Congress initiated the “Heroic Age of Arctic Exploration” in 1895. Reaching for the new, tempting prize of Antarctica, national expeditions were soon organized by Britain, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

A British naval officer named Robert Falcon Scott led the first serious attempt to reach the South Pole. As commander of the *Discovery* expedition (1902-03) to Antarctica, Scott had already reached 82°17' south, about 460

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Rice, “Captain James Cook's Return to the South Seas,” *Fathom*; available from <http://www.fathom.com/feature/60924>; Internet, accessed 10 February 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Diana Preston, *A First Rate Tragedy: Robert Falcon Scott and the Race to the South Pole* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998), 10-14.

miles from the Pole. Beset with food deprivation and dog-sled complications, he had to curtail his first voyage. Nonetheless, upon his return to England in 1904, Scott was promoted to Captain for his scientific achievements and competent leadership.<sup>3</sup>

In 1909, Scott received news that Shackleton had discovered the Beardmore Glacier and reached within 97 miles of the Pole. Inspired and challenged, Scott started planning for his second journey to the Antarctic. In June 1910, Captain Scott embarked on a “scientific expedition” to study the Ross Sea area, with the intrinsic motive of reaching the southernmost tip of the world.<sup>4</sup>

By 1905 the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, having completed navigation of the Northwest Passage, had his eyes on the North Pole. Upon learning that Robert E. Peary was also preparing to reach the Arctic by 1909, Amundsen turned his attention southward instead. This put him in direct competition with Captain Scott, who had already embarked for the South Pole. Fearing that a public admission of his new plans would undermine financial support from Nansen<sup>5</sup> and other investors, Amundsen did not reveal his true objective until his ship left Norway.

On June 15, 1910, Captain Scott’s *Terra Nova*, a former whaling ship, set sail from Cardiff—heading for the Cape. After arriving in Melbourne, Scott received a telegram from Amundsen stating that he was heading south for the Antarctic on the *Fram*. Disturbed and perplexed, Scott now realized that he was in a race with the Norwegian to reach the South Pole.

On October 27, the *Terra Nova* arrived in New Zealand, where the ship’s stores were rearranged and its instruments checked. On November 29, the ship set sail from New Zealand—carrying thirty-three dogs, nineteen ponies, three motorized sledges, and sixty-five men.<sup>6</sup> On January 5, the ship anchored to the ice at Cape Evans, where they set up winter quarters for twenty-five men. Wilson, Bowers, and Cherry-Garrard took a side trip to Cape Crozier to observe the emperor penguin rookery, and Scott accomplished a lot of scientific work during the winter.

With the arrival of summer, Scott commenced his final journey to the Pole. On November 3, 1911, Scott and his four loyal companions left their base camp at Hut Point for the last time. Following Shackleton’s route of 1909, they traveled with support parties,<sup>7</sup> dogs and ponies. The distance from the base camp at Hut Point to the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 81-84.

<sup>4</sup> Roland Huntford, *The Last Place on Earth: Scott and Amundsen’s Race to the South Pole* (New York: The Modern Library, 1991), 219-224.

<sup>5</sup> Huntford, 211-213. Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, an outdoorsman and young scientist, had successfully crossed the Greenland Plateau. He was instrumental in designing a custom ship, *The Fram*, as well as financing the Polar adventures of Roald Amundsen.

<sup>6</sup> Many other tasks were involved in the preparation: Still in their crates, the three motorized sledges were lashed to the deck. Oates insisted on carrying forty-five tons of fodder for the ponies and five tons of dog food. Stalls were built for nineteen ponies, while the thirty-nine dogs were chained to stanchions and bolts. Scott managed to squeeze 405 tons of coal into the bunkers and main hold, 25 tons in the fore-hold, and 30 additional tons on the upper deck. The ice-house contained three tons of ice, 162 carcasses of mutton, three of beef, and cases of kidneys and sweetbreads. The ship also carried an acetylene plant, the wooden huts, clothing, and provisions for a shore party of 25—leaving hardly any room for the 65 men. See *Robert Falcon Scott (1868-1912): The Terra Nova Expedition 1910-13*; available from [http://oae\\_99.tripod.com/text%20files/scott\\_2.htm](http://oae_99.tripod.com/text%20files/scott_2.htm); Internet; accessed 18 February 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Huntford, 347-349. Ten men departed from Cape Evans in detachments: Scott, Wilson, Oates, Bowers, Atkinson, Cherry-Garrard, Edgar Evans, Wright, Keohane and Crean. Each man was accompanied by a pony and a sledge. Following them with the dogs were Dimitri and Meares. All other members of the party remained at Cape Evans to conduct further research and exploration in Victoria Land.

South Pole was approximately 883 statute miles. With the assistance of tractors, ponies, and dogs, the Polar party had to cover the treacherous round trip of 1,766 statute miles primarily by foot marches—utilizing skis where the terrain would allow.<sup>8</sup>

The motor sledges rapidly broke down and were abandoned. Fighting below-zero temperatures and constant snowfalls, the team reached One Ton Camp on the fifteenth day. Roughly every seventy miles, a supply depot was constructed to provide one week's worth of food and fuel for the returning explorers. As the ponies floundered and sank to their bellies in soft snow, they were shot and deposited as meat for the return party.

On December 5, a ferocious blizzard dumped large amounts of snow, soaking the tents and the sleeping bags. The dejected men waited in the “Slough of Despond”<sup>9</sup> until the weather conditions were more favorable. On December 10, the party began to ascend Beardmore Glacier with three man-hauled sledges. Soon, they began dreaming about food, indicating that they were under-nourished.<sup>10</sup>

The last two weeks of December brought milder conditions, enabling the team to make rapid progress. Having marched for fifteen miles on Christmas Day, they celebrated with a luxurious lunch of biscuits, raisins, butter, and chocolate. For dinner, the main course was a “spectacular hoosh”<sup>11</sup> made of pemmican, horsemeat, onion and curry powder, and biscuit crumbs. In addition, they relished a pannikin of cocoa, plum pudding, caramels, and crystallized ginger.

By December 31, seven men had been ordered back to the base. Scott continued on the odyssey with a small team of four men: Dr. Wilson, Captain Oates, Lieutenant Bowers and Petty Officer Evans. On January 4, 1912, the last support party returned with their dogs. During the strenuous journey, Scott's party had to cope with blizzards and very frigid temperatures. On January 6, they crossed the 88° 23' South latitude—the point of Shackleton's furthest south.

The next ten days were grueling, and the team made very slow marches of six or seven miles a day. The uneven snow made hauling very tiresome, and it took eleven days to cover the next 97 miles. At the edge of starvation, Scott's team finally reached the South Pole on January 17, 1912. Exhausted by their 81-day trek, the tenacious men were dismayed to find a Norwegian flag with a note from Amundsen stating that his team had already reached the Pole on December 14.

Despite the prevailing weather conditions, the return journey began well and the five pioneers made good progress. Soon, however, the burden of man-hauling led the feeble men to exhaustion. Frostbite was beginning to set in, with Evans and Oates being the most severely afflicted. As their food supplies began dwindling, early stages of scurvy and exposure to the unrelenting elements began to take their toll. Having suffered a concussion during a fall

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<sup>8</sup> Intended for measuring distance on land, a *statute mile* is equivalent to 5,280 feet. A *nautical mile*—used to measure distance at sea—corresponds to one minute of latitude and equals 1.15 statute miles or about 6,076 feet.

<sup>9</sup> Preston, 168.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 174, 189.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 174. *Hoosh* is a thick meat soup prepared by simmering pemmican with melted snow. It is often eaten with butter-laden sledging biscuits. *Pemmican* is a mixture of pounded dried beef (or a mixture of meats) with beef fat, somewhat resembling the texture of beef jerky. Pemmican can remain edible for years and is highly nutritious.

into a crevasse, Evans succumbed to a brain injury on February 17.<sup>12</sup> Unable to cope with his frostbitten feet, Oates intentionally walked to his death into a raging blizzard.

Unbeknown to Scott, the team at One Ton Depot camp was preparing to leave, having waited a week for the return of his party. Wilson, Bowers, and Scott struggled on for about ten miles, only to face another formidable blizzard that lasted for nine days. Enfeebled, depressed, and malnourished, the trio was running out of essential provisions. Confined to their tents by the treacherous snowstorm, they were unable to proceed. Only eleven miles from the One Ton Depot, they awaited their deaths with fortitude. Scott's last diary entry of March 29, 1912 contained his poignant quote: "Had we lived I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale."<sup>13</sup>

On November 12, 1912, searchers found the tent with the frozen bodies of Wilson, Scott, and Bowers.<sup>14</sup> Valuable geological specimens from the Beardmore Glacier were also recovered, which the team had refused to abandon even though their progress may have been hampered. The discoverers erected a snow cairn headed by a cross in tribute to the lost explorers. Later, a memorial was put up on Observation Hill at Hut Point with the words "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield."<sup>15</sup>

Since the ill-fated expedition, historians have expounded their own theories of reasons behind the calamity that beset the Polar party. The *physical* causes for each explorer's death, such as malnutrition, frostbite, and exposure, are relatively simple to ascertain. However, it is the *underlying* causes that primarily interest historians and are still debated over nine decades later.

On the surface, it appears that Scott and his fellow explorers succumbed to scurvy,<sup>16</sup> aided and abetted by injuries, exposure to blizzards and extreme cold, malnutrition, and a dearth of fuel. However, some of the latent factors include the choice of ponies over dogs, the tiresome chore of man-hauling, inadequate protective gear, and the impulsive addition of one man to the Polar party. Several historians, including Huntford, attribute this tragedy to Scott's hasty preparation, faulty decision-making, lack of clear objectives, excessive sentimentality, and squandering of valuable time and energy. Other monographs suggest that Scott was willing to sacrifice his life for the cause of scientific advancement and the noble pursuit of Polar exploration.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A *crevasse* is a crack in the surface of a glacier or ice shelf. Often covered with snow, a crevasse can be difficult to see.

<sup>13</sup> Preston, 205.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Solomon, *The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 259-262.

<sup>15</sup> Research Collections Team, Royal Naval Museum Library, *Robert Falcon Scott Factsheet*; available from [http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/library/research\\_collections.htm](http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/library/research_collections.htm); Internet; accessed 08 March 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Some historians carefully point out that it was not overt scurvy that caused their deaths. Rather, the men were so weakened by the inadequate diet and early stages of scurvy that they were more sensitive to cold, grew slower in making and breaking camp, were unable to handle longer marches or stick to planned time-table. In the end, they were trapped by the raging blizzard only eleven miles from the One Ton Depot. See Elspeth Huxley, *Scott of the Antarctic* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1978), 268.

<sup>17</sup> Huntford, 526-527.

***A First Rate Tragedy: Robert Falcon Scott and the Race to the South Pole.* By Diana Preston, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998. pp. 288)**

In her monograph, *A First Rate Tragedy*, Diana Preston examines Scott's second expedition to the South Pole from a balanced perspective. Attempting to reconstruct the events leading up to the calamity, she is not too hasty to condemn Scott for his failings. She reminds us that Scott was not perfect; he had weaknesses and shortcomings like any other human being.

In the first four chapters, Preston relates the early phases of the Polar exploration and Scott's childhood experiences. She then lays the foundation of Scott's career as a naval officer and his experience on the *Discovery* trek. After recognizing the accomplishments of early Polar explorers, she follows Scott's return to family life as he gets married. Chapter 9 details the rekindling of Scott's ambition to be the first to reach the South Pole, while the next chapter finds Amundsen secretly planning to head south as well. The next four chapters relate the heroic efforts of Scott's party to finally reach the South Pole, only to be disappointed upon realizing that Amundsen had beaten them. In chapters 14 through 17, Preston chronicles the harsh conditions and tragedies that befell the returning explorers. Toward the end of her book, Preston investigates the causes behind the calamity and summarizes her findings.

According to Preston, a multitude of complex factors were involved. To identify the relevant causes, one should begin with Scott's preparation for the expedition. Ignoring the advice of experts, Scott chose ponies over dogs, simply because of Shackleton's poor experience with dogs. For the selection of ponies, he overlooked the horse-expert on his staff, namely Oates, relying instead on Cecil Meares. In general, ponies were unsuitable for the harsh Antarctic terrain and often sank up to their bellies in soft snow. Furthermore, they did not tolerate the extreme cold, and ice sheets formed on their bodies from perspiration. The white ponies selected by Meares were especially frail, and many had to be shot when they could no longer pull the sledges.

Lacking faith in a single mode of transport, Scott chose to hedge his bets by taking motorized sledges, ponies, and some dogs. One by one, however, they all failed him—leaving him only with human power. Already emaciated and distressed, the bold pioneers had to man-haul the sledges over 150 miles to the Pole, dragging over 200 pounds per person. While Scott may have considered it the “noble” way of Polar conquest, his contemporaries regarded man-hauling as an outmoded and irrational means of transport, especially in the frigid and harrowing Antarctic.<sup>18</sup>

The laborious task of man-hauling was physically demanding and required adequate amounts of rations in a timely manner. Despite meticulous planning, the party of five often went without sufficient food and teetered on the brink of malnutrition. The supply depots were spaced too far apart and could not adequately supply their needs. Scott's *Summit ration* provided only 400 additional calories a day as compared to his *Barrier ration*.<sup>19</sup> While this may have been adequate for Amundsen who was dog-driving, it was certainly scanty for Scott and his fellows who

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<sup>18</sup> Preston, 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-219. Composition of Scott's diet: For the first 36 days to Beardmore Glacier, the *Barrier Ration* provided roughly 4,200 calories per day. For the onward journey from the Glacier, his *Summit Ration* supplied about 4,600 calories, consisting of 210 grams of fat, 257 grams of protein, and 417 grams of carbohydrate.

were man-hauling. Since the diet was lacking fresh vegetables or citrus fruits, the only source of Vitamin C was pony meat. Consequently, the men exhibited symptoms of an early form of scurvy, which made them more susceptible to cold and weakened their constitutions.<sup>20</sup>

An expedition such as Scott's requires a physically fit and mentally alert leader who can provide timely guidance and make effective decisions. Several incidents suggest that Scott's sentimentality often got the best of him. When Oates suggested that the ponies be driven as far as practicable and then shot for food, Scott's distress was quite evident. Scott could not bear to torment animals, stating: "I'm not going to defy my feelings for the sake of a few days march."<sup>21</sup>

Preston also questions Scott's ability to make rational decisions under stress. After crossing Shackleton's furthest point south on January 6, 1912, Scott seemed to be preoccupied with the difficult terrain. Since the sastrugi<sup>22</sup> were barbed with sharp crystals, the idea of skiing across them was a chancy proposition. After hastily abandoning the skis, Scott realized that the sastrugi soon disappeared. The explorers backtracked for one mile to fetch their skis, wasting precious time and energy. While Preston is aware of Scott's eccentricities and flawed decision-making, she does not cite these as primary causes behind the calamity.

Considered individually, none of the above factors may have necessarily endangered the lives of Robert Falcon Scott or his companions. Working concomitantly, however, they significantly tilted the odds against the safe return of Scott's team. According to Preston, Scott had been engrossed from the very beginning with Sir Ernest Shackleton's expedition of 1907-09. Without making dedicated efforts to learn first-hand about Shackleton's experiences, Scott attempted to emulate his techniques and strategies, while failing to learn from the lessons of his "furthest south" journey.<sup>23</sup> Based on incomplete information, Scott drew illogical corollaries and made hasty decisions, which had foreboding consequences.

When presenting her conclusions, Preston seems inclined to restore Scott to a well-deserved position of honor in the annals of history. By quoting Cherry-Garrard's observation that "the whole business simply bristles with ifs,"<sup>24</sup> she implies that Scott's destiny was uncertain and no historical analysis can firmly establish the factors that led to the five pioneers' demise. While this notion may be somewhat true, the reader will undoubtedly recognize the validity of common threads than run through the notable historical accounts of the unpropitious *Terra Nova*.

***The Coldest March: Scott's Fatal Antarctic Expedition.* By Susan Solomon, (New York: The Modern Library, 1991. pp. 416)**

In her thoughtful presentation of Scott's second Antarctic expedition, Solomon has endeavored to share the story from the perspective of Scott and his fellow explorers. Unlike Preston, who occasionally glosses over Scott's failings, Solomon has attempted to remain detached and let the historical facts lead the reader to logical deductions.

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<sup>20</sup> Huntford, 492-493.

<sup>21</sup> Preston, 142.

<sup>22</sup> *Sastrugi* are irregular ridges of snow, usually less than one foot deep, that lie parallel to the direction of the wind. Since sastrugi can be quite soft or as hard as ice, traveling across them can be cumbersome and treacherous.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-218.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

Using a variety of archival photographs and numerous figures, she has brought to life an expedition that took place nearly a century ago.

From Solomon's perspective, the party of five perished due to scurvy, dehydration, emaciation, injuries, and inclement weather. Other contributing factors include the choice of ponies over dogs, the impulsive decision to add a fifth man to the Polar party, and a failure to learn from the lessons of the *Discovery* expedition. Furthermore, the dauntless pioneers had volunteered to carry scientific specimens aboard their sledges, which required an additional effort of dragging through the snow. However, Solomon contends that no combination of these factors would have caused the deaths of Scott and his companions, had it not been for the unusually cold temperatures on the Barrier.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than sticking to one proven method of transportation, Scott had carried motor sledges, ponies, as well as dogs on his journey. His decision to man-haul on the final leg of the Polar odyssey had grave consequences. Scott's party was forced to man-haul only after the motor sledges failed and the ponies had been shot. Dragging the heavy sledges over the unstable icy surface, his faithful partners endangered their health and well-being. When investigating Scott's choice of transportation, Solomon found that his initial delight with motorized sledges was short-lived. Although a trial run on ski slopes suggested that the sledges were a great success—carrying “1,900 pounds easily over soft snow,” they proved to be a failure on the Polar trek.<sup>26</sup>

When picking his final team, Scott did not make up his mind until the last support party turned back 150 miles from the Pole. At the last moment, he added a fifth man—Henry Bowers—to his man-hauling Polar party of Dr. Wilson, Petty Officer Edgar Evans and Captain Lawrence Oates. This impetuous decision created significant difficulties in managing the limited rations and fuel. Furthermore, the additional person in the tent led to claustrophobic conditions, placing additional stress on the explorers.

In November 1912, when the rescue party discovered the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers, they also retrieved 35 pounds of rocks and geological specimens. Historians have often questioned whether these artifacts are symbolic of their dedication to the advancement of science or a testimony to their foolishness. The additional toil of dragging heavy specimens over long distances may have been the final straw that broke the camel's back. However, Solomon contends that the weight of the rocks was a small fraction of the total load carried on the sledges and no more than “a drop in a bucket.”<sup>27</sup>

Solomon also recognizes the importance of thorough preparation. During the *Discovery* expedition of 1902-03, Scott had experienced a mysterious evaporation of paraffin from sealed cans. Although he replaced the cork stoppers with leather washers, he did not ascertain whether this remedy was adequate. Amundsen, on the other hand, had ordered his men to re-solder and reinforce the cans, thereby minimizing further problems. While Solomon tacitly agrees that “victory awaits him who has everything in order,”<sup>28</sup> she does not accept it as the only explanation.

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<sup>25</sup> Solomon, 270-285, 293-298.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-272.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

In her well-documented book, Solomon acknowledges that a multitude of factors may have contributed to the fate of Scott and his men. However, she maintains that the abnormal weather was the critical blow that shattered the Polar party's odds of survival. Since the men were already emaciated, injured, and depressed, they were in no position to face formidable weather conditions. Had they not encountered extremely frigid temperatures on the icy Barrier, they may have been able to successfully conquer all other ailments and return to Hut Point alive and well. According to Solomon, her scientific data on the anomalous temperatures of the Barrier are corroborated by the personal diaries of Scott and his fellow explorers.

***The Last Place on Earth: Scott and Amundsen's Race to the South Pole.* By Roland Huntford, (New York: The Modern Library, 1991. 640 pp.)**

Compared to the other two books, Roland Huntford's *The Last Place on Earth* is more detailed and comprehensive. Since many of his sources were originally written in Scandinavian languages, Huntford has chosen not to include a comprehensive bibliography. Although this omission makes it more difficult to assess the authenticity of his sources, it is not a major drawback for the average reader. Without sacrificing accuracy, this book uses plain language and leads the reader through the triumphs and tragedies of both expeditions.

Huntford is interested not only in the Polar race between Scott and Amundsen, but also in the development of their careers as explorers. Part One of his dual biography examines their childhood ambitions and early accomplishments, which would prepare them for the bold expedition to the South Pole. In Part Two, Huntford interweaves the saga of Scott's *Terra Nova* with Amundsen's *Fram* and their competition to reach the Pole first. His well-organized and captivating tale of the two parallel voyages reads almost like a mystery novel.

Although we are primarily interested in factors that doomed Scott's party, it is instructive to compare Scott's approach with that of Amundsen. Since Amundsen was successful in beating Scott to the pole, a careful examination of his techniques helps uncover Scott's blunders and weaknesses. According to Huntford, the primary factors that endangered Scott's expedition include the insufficient diet, poor placement of depots, the choice of ponies over dogs, and the needless squandering of energy through man-hauling.

Great insight can be obtained simply by examining the ways in which Scott and Amundsen planned and organized their respective journeys. Amundsen had been preparing since childhood for strenuous activities, such as attempting to cross the Hardangervidda.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, Scott spent his youth living a civilized British lifestyle, passing as a cadet into the Royal Navy at age thirteen. Rather than personal ambition, it was Scott's desire for promotion through the naval ranks that impelled him toward Polar exploration.

Next, Huntford analyzes the two rivals' approaches to selecting and outfitting a ship suitable for the expedition. Amundsen spent considerable time in planning his route and researching the necessary equipment. After acquiring *Fram*, he re-rigged the ship as a top schooner, enabling it to be handled by a crew of only six men. He took a chance by replacing the ship's steam propulsion system with an unproven diesel engine. Fortunately, this

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<sup>29</sup> Huntford, 35-37. The *Hardangervidda* is a plateau in Norway's high mountain ranges where Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen prepared for their polar expeditions. Being untamed and treeless, the plateau is especially formidable in winter when it resembles the Polar landscape.

technology proved to be very successful in navigating the ice pack.<sup>30</sup> Scott's *Terra Nova*, on the other hand, was a large whaling ship that burned great quantities of coal and required several men simply to stoke the furnace.

Huntford also cites numerous other measures taken by Amundsen to ensure a safe and healthy adventure. For the trek over the Barrier, Amundsen acquired custom skis which were a hybrid between the jumping and the cross-country styles. To minimize the risk of snow-blindness, he ordered goggles patterned after Dr. Frederick Cook's design. In addition to developing tents with a sewn-in groundsheet, Amundsen pioneered a revolutionary sledge design that allowed access to its contents without the need to remove the entire case from the sledge. To protect against frostbite, Amundsen drew from his experience with the Eskimos, selecting the warm, caribou-fur anorak<sup>31</sup> that covered a large portion of the face.

Furthermore, Amundsen took great care in selecting and managing his dogs, having learned the proper techniques from the Inuit people during his exploration of the Arctic. After obtaining the finest hand-selected North Greenland dogs, Amundsen picked Sverre Hassel, a capable dog driver, to lead his team of dogs.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Scott never took dogs seriously and used them for only part of the journey to the Pole.

To provide superior protection against the elements, Amundsen wanted a permanent-style dwelling. He assigned Stubberud<sup>33</sup> the task of building a hut that could resist a harsh climate, and yet be easy to transport and assemble. When the *Framheim* was completed, it was "a large, robust structure, with separate kitchen furnished with a table, eleven bunks and a linoleum floor, clearly designed for prolonged habitation."<sup>34</sup>

Unlike Amundsen's meticulous preparation for the journey, Scott's expedition was pieced together very hastily in less than nine months. Scott spent much of his time behind a desk, rather than evaluating and testing products to ensure that they would perform under the extreme conditions of Antarctica. In fact, much of his equipment was "bought over the counter, or made to the obsolescent patterns from *Discovery* or before."<sup>35</sup>

Scott took very few precautions in preparing the *Terra Nova*. His ship was loaded without any serious thought to practicality. For instance, the ponies were housed directly above the dining area and pony waste occasionally leaked onto the men. The *Terra Nova* was also overloaded with equipment, animals and provisions, causing it to ride low in the water. In addition, Scott failed to address a faulty bilge pump, resulting in a near sinking of his ship.

Scott's choice in clothing followed the typical naval style, consisting of canvas blouses that restricted circulation and separate hats which left the face exposed. While the Netsilik design was known to be superior, Scott chose not to use it because he considered Eskimos to be "uncivilized." This inferior choice in clothing would rob Scott and his men of valuable energy—impeding their daily progress and seriously compromising their health.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>31</sup> An *anorak* is a warm, waterproof jacket made of animal fur, usually with an attached hood. It is traditionally worn by the Netsilik Eskimos of Greenland.

<sup>32</sup> Huntford, 245-248.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 253, 323. Jorgen Stubberud was a master carpenter who had already worked on remodeling Amundsen's residence. For the Polar expeditions, he built a portable observation hut that was roomy, sturdy, insulated, and fairly comfortable.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 256.

When choosing the mode of transportation, Scott settled for a combination of motor sledges, ponies, and man-hauling. While motor sledges with their caterpillar tracks seemed well adapted for Polar conditions, they were still experimental. During test trials, an axle broke after only fifteen minutes of operation, challenging its supposed reliability for the upcoming Polar trek.<sup>36</sup>

Since Shackleton had experienced misfortune with dogs on his “furthest south” journey,<sup>37</sup> Scott insisted on taking a greater number of ponies. Nansen was finally able to convince Scott to take a team of dogs as well. For a rather difficult part of the trek, Scott chose the inferior and obsolete method of man-hauling, believing it to be the only ‘true and glorious’ method of transport.<sup>38</sup>

Upon reaching Antarctica, the initial concern was the proper placement of depots to facilitate a safe return of the exploring parties in the following year. Between the Glacier and 80 degrees South, Scott laid down two depots separated by nearly 120 miles. Amundsen, thinking more practically, placed seven regularly-spaced depots, each roughly sixty miles apart. While Scott’s method of marking his depots—sometimes with a single flag—was pathetic, Amundsen chose to mark his depots with up to *sixty* pennants, each indicating the direction and distance to the depot.<sup>39</sup>

Having completed the depot-laying journeys, Amundsen returned to *Framheim* and began working on improvements, such as redesigning the ski boots, lightening the sledges, building new tents, and improving the sledgemeter.<sup>40</sup> Scott, on the other hand, chose to do little methodical preparation, instead focusing on scientific research.

When the race for the pole finally commenced, Amundsen was definitely at a considerable advantage. His depots were located easily, his dogs were surviving well, and he had plenty of food. Scott appeared to struggle from the very onset and his motor sledges broke down. The ponies were not adapted for the harsh environment of Antarctica, and their small feet caused them to break through the crust of the snow. Unlike dogs that simply pant, ponies perspire through their hide, causing the sweat to build up on their bodies as sheets of ice. When making camp at night, the men had to laboriously build snow walls to block the wind and cover the animals to protect them from

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>37</sup> Preston, 215-216. When Shackleton, Wilson, and Scott ventured toward the South Pole in the 1902-03 *Discovery* expedition, all the dogs eventually perished. Rather than investigating the real causes behind the dogs’ demise (including spoiled and insufficient dog food, and improper dog-handling procedures), both Scott and Shackleton erroneously concluded that dogs were simply not as well-suited for the Antarctic as ponies were.

<sup>38</sup> Scott’s idealistic notions of necessary suffering are reflected in his diaries: “In my mind no journey ever made with dogs can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised when a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers, and difficulties with their own unaided efforts, and by days and weeks of hard physical labour succeed in solving some problem of the great unknown. Surely in this case the conquest is more nobly and splendidly won.” See *Robert Falcon Scott (1868-1912): The Terra Nova Expedition 1910-13*; available from [http://oae\\_99.tripod.com/text%20files/scott\\_2.htm](http://oae_99.tripod.com/text%20files/scott_2.htm); Internet; accessed 18 February 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Huntford, 337-341, 446.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 463. During prior expeditions, both Amundsen and Scott had experienced navigation difficulties due to fine drift snow clogging the sledgemeter. While Amundsen assigned Chef Lindstrom the task of making the instrument snow-proof, Scott failed to remedy the problem.

freezing to death.<sup>41</sup> Dogs, on the other hand, do not require such coddling, since their thick fur allows them to burrow into the snow and stay warm.

After the failure of motor sledges and exhaustion of dogs and ponies, Scott's party had to resort to man-hauling. Scott drove his team to exhaustion day after day, while Amundsen was able to rest after completing a quarter of a degree of latitude for the day. As the journey progressed, Amundsen and his men remained in relatively good health. In fact, they had a surplus of food on their return trip and actually gained weight.<sup>42</sup> Scott's men, on the other hand, were frostbitten, terribly malnourished, and gravely injured. Even during arduous man-hauling, Scott's partners chose to pick up rocks and geological samples, which they carried on their sledge. Consequently, Amundsen made it back to *Framheim* in excellent health and good spirits, while Scott and his men died from starvation and exposure just a few miles from the nearest depot.<sup>43</sup>

In a nutshell, Huntford argues that the tragic deaths of Scott and his four companions resulted from poor and lackadaisical preparation. Specifically, the scanty and irregular diet, insufficient protection against the elements, inappropriate mode of transport, and the colossal burden of man-hauling played a major role. Suffering from frostbite, scurvy, and malnutrition, the five men could not be expected to survive in the harsh conditions of the Antarctic. In addition, Scott's irrational behavior and poor decision-making also contributed to the disaster.

Choosing a single book from these three monographs that best explains the causes of Scott's Antarctic mishap is not an easy task. All three authors have done an admirable job in examining this historical debate from their unique perspectives. For her extensive research and a balanced approach in *A First Rate Tragedy*, Diana Preston has earned a deserving commendation. Aiming to uncover the primary reasons for Scott's demise, she has sought out the notable historical accounts<sup>44</sup> of his journey and searched through volumes of unpublished records. Being well aware of the need for a multiplicity of sources, she has consulted original diaries along with other primary sources, including the Kennet Family Papers.

While carefully including the diaries and manuscripts contemporary with the tragic expedition, Preston has not neglected the more recent books.<sup>45</sup> Synthesizing a variety of viewpoints, she has constructed a cohesive monograph, useful to amateurs and professionals alike. While integrating the arguments into her own work, Preston is careful not to let her personal feelings taint the final presentation. She has attempted to remain objective and let the historical facts point to the major plausible explanations. Her decision to use fewer direct quotations and cite only the non-obvious sources has resulted in a scholarly work that is cogent and easier to follow.

The primary drawback of Preston's approach is her implicit desire to exonerate Scott for his foibles, as evidenced by her quote from Cherry-Garrard: "The point is not that that they ultimately failed but that they so very

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 486-491.

<sup>43</sup> Solomon, 242-246.

<sup>44</sup> Among the classic accounts of Scott's second expedition to the South Pole are Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (London: Constable, 1922; Picador, 1994) and Admiral Edward R.G.R. Evans, *South with Scott* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1921).

<sup>45</sup> Among the more recent monographs are Roland Huntford, *Scott and Amundsen* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993) and Sir Clements Markham and Clive Holland (ed.), *Antarctic Obsession: A Personal Narrative of the Origins of the British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901-1904* (Norfolk, U.K.: Erskine Press, 1991).

nearly succeeded.”<sup>46</sup> She is hoping to re-instill in her readers the romantic ideal of Scott as a pioneering hero who accomplished the noble goal of reaching the South Pole, in spite of overwhelming odds against him.

While it is admirable of Preston to attempt to transport readers back nearly a century ago and analyze the journey in its original context, it does not justify overlooking the obvious flaws in Scott’s personality and planning skills.<sup>47</sup> As documented by many historians, Scott failed to properly address two fundamental problems encountered earlier in the *Discovery* expedition. Against the advice of experts, he decided to take more ponies rather than dogs, forgetting that the ponies were ill suited for the harsher terrain and very cold temperatures found closer to the Pole. Unlike Amundsen, Scott did not instruct his team to design hermetically sealed containers to prevent evaporation of paraffin.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of its shortcomings, Preston’s monograph is a highly readable and well-organized account of the historic expedition. If this were the only book available on the topic, it would be enough to provide a succinct and cogent explanation of Scott’s journey to the pole. While academicians would find a thorough analysis of the reasons behind the *Terra Nova* calamity, a layperson would find an intriguing and readable account of the triumphs and tragedies of his expedition.

In *The Coldest March*, Susan Solomon has conducted painstaking research into climatic data that might shed light upon the demise of Scott’s party. Examining the weather charts compiled from scientific observations of nearly two decades, she concludes that the polar party was struck down by exceptionally frigid weather.

While sifting through the various factors that may have contributed to the calamity, she places an undue emphasis on weather. Since Solomon is a climatologist by profession, her interest in weather-related phenomena is only natural. She is mainly interested in the hypothesis that temperatures below normal on the Barrier prevented the explorers from proceeding with their return trek. Although she cites supporting evidence to validate this assertion, she appears to underplay other relevant causes, such as poor decision-making, insufficient diet, widely-spaced depots, poor choice of transport, and the excessive burden of man-hauling to the Pole.<sup>49</sup>

The argument that Scott’s party was trapped by extremely frigid temperatures on the Barrier is not a new one, and virtually every monograph written since the ominous voyage has mentioned it as a contributing factor. But Solomon seems to imply that had Scott not been trapped by the fearsome blizzard, he might have lived to tell about it. However, as pointed out by other historians such as Huntford, this notion may be far-fetched. Even if Bowers, Wilson, and Scott had managed to reach One Ton Depot, it is very unlikely that they would have regained enough strength to survive the onward trek of nearly 160 miles to Hut Point.

After careful consideration, *The Last Place on Earth* by Roland Huntford emerges as the monograph that best reveals the causes underlying the tragedy. Not only does he address the primary causes such as inadequate diet, poor placement of depots, and excessive physical toil, but he also ventures into defects of Scott’s personality. In addition, his candid juxtaposition of Scott’s and Amundsen’s journeys is very insightful and makes for a gripping

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<sup>46</sup> Preston, 228.

<sup>47</sup> A few historians seem to agree with Scott’s claim that “the causes of the disaster are not due to faulty planning.” See Elspeth Huxley, *Scott of the Antarctic* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1978), 267.

<sup>48</sup> Preston, 220. Also see Solomon, 276-278.

<sup>49</sup> Huntford, 498-502.

read. Judging from Huntford's Scandinavian background, readers may be tempted to infer that Huntford's account is biased in favor of Roald Amundsen. While in some respects Huntford may be slanted toward the Norwegian, there is no evidence to suggest that his analysis of Scott's expedition is unfair or inaccurate.

In *The Pursuit of History*,<sup>50</sup> John Tosh reminds historians that primary sources, although invaluable, can be muddled, biased, or inaccurate. For these reasons, Huntford has sought out numerous primary sources in Scandinavian languages. This gives him an edge over contemporary historians such as Solomon and Preston, who delved exclusively in English-language manuscripts or readily available translations. Due to its multiplicity and variety of sources, Huntford's analysis of the two expeditions appears to be more thorough and accurate.

For over nine decades, historians and scholars have debated why Scott and his companions never made it back alive. While many of these explications seem compelling and plausible, none of them has yet succeeded in settling the argument. After examining the evidence presented by Preston, Solomon, and Huntford, the reader will hopefully have achieved a firmer grasp of this issue. While the debate over the reasons behind this historical tragedy is likely to continue, Huntford has achieved a remarkably thorough and complete exposition of the underlying causes. Through this lucid analysis, correlated with historical facts, the reader is bound to find new perspectives and insights into Robert Falcon Scott and his ill-fated journey to the South Pole.

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<sup>50</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, Revised 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Longman, 2002).

## Stalin: An Historiographical Interpretation

Trevor Haagenson

Each generation of historians has not only the ability, but also the obligation, to readdress the past. With the perspective that time enables, they may be able to correct some of the mistakes made by their predecessors. They also can include new information from newly available sources to enrich the previous interpretations. These contributions yield impressive new understanding to the historical record of events around the world.

Never before have historians had an opportunity like that presented by the collapse of the Soviet Union. For more than seven decades the Soviet government cloaked its past in a deep shroud of secrecy. This meant that academic work produced on Soviet history fell into one of a few limited categories. The first included those works that were approved, published and circulated by the Communist leadership for the purpose of Marxist-Leninist political education within the Soviet Union. These works, while based on history, were often unscrupulous in distorting truth and telling outright lies to promote the leaderships' agenda. The Soviet leadership and even middle level bureaucrats felt that their hold on power was always tenuous. They worried that the truth would undermine their authority. The second type includes firsthand accounts of events that the leadership had suppressed. These works chronicled events such as the Great Purges. They could not be published in the Soviet Union but were widely read in the West. The third type includes scholarship by western historians who did research within the USSR using the limited archives open to scholars.

With the relaxation of repression and censorship since 1985 two new types of works have become available. The first, published between the relaxation of censorship in 1985 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, were often first person accounts or journalistic inquiries. These works greatly increased the information available within the Soviet Union and were important in confirming many of the analyses that had been published for many years in the West. Another type appeared after the archives began to open in 1991. These works often used detailed research with a focus on documents and primary source material. Each category offers a different approach. The different categories also offer a wide range of perspectives. The reduction of censorship and increased access to archives has elicited an extensive outpouring of scholarship.

There is no topic in Soviet history more important or controversial than Joseph Stalin. He played the single largest role in Soviet history. Stalin was the unchallenged dictator of the Soviet Union from 1929 until his death in 1953. He was personally, if not solely, responsible for the devastation caused by forced collectivization, rapid industrialization, the Great Purges and World War II. Conversely, Stalin was the great leader who created "socialism in one country,"<sup>1</sup> electrification, industrialization, and impressive victory in the "Great Patriotic War."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Socialism in One Country was Stalin's major intellectual contribution to the industrialization debate. It involved a focus on developing Soviet self-sufficiency and a trend away from the goals of world revolution. David MacKenzie and Michael W. Curran, *A History of Russia, the Soviet Union, and Beyond*, (Belmont, CA: West/Wadsworth Company, 1999), 447.

<sup>2</sup> The Great Patriotic War is what Soviets call World War II. Kate Transchel, Unpublished Lecture Notes from her class "History of the Soviet Union," (California State University, Chico, Spring 2004), Lecture 13.

This contradiction between Stalin as a murderer and Stalin as a great leader has contributed to his diverse treatment by historians. Stalin was also influential in developing the system, discussed above, which aimed at distorting Soviet history. Any historiographical study of Stalin should be able to find sources of the widest variety. However, to address all of the vast scholarship that has been produced on Stalin would be overwhelming.

Different historians view Stalin's influence and impact in very different ways. This study will address how each historian discussed herein treats the interaction between structure and agency. Since this is a key theme of historiographical works on "great men," and Stalin is one of the most important, it is not surprising that this subject has been addressed before. In 1996 Philip Pomper wrote "Historians and Individual Agency" for the journal *History and Theory*.<sup>3</sup> In the article Pomper addresses how historians working with Hitler and Stalin as subject material are forced to make an assessment of the role of structure and agency.

In this piece Pomper relied on the research of W. H. Dray. "According to Dray's paradigms of causation, in order to be causes of events, individuals' actions must force an actual change in the normal course of events, that is, they must be *effective*."<sup>4</sup> Dray goes on to claim that the individual must *intend* that change occur and they must be *willful*, that is unconstrained and not reacting to conditions which force a specific action.<sup>5</sup> Agency is at work if these three conditions are met. He compares this to a fourth possible condition in which historical conditions themselves are sufficient to cause an event. "The fourth paradigm suggests structural causes of such magnitude that they stifle the freedom of individual actors."<sup>6</sup> This paper is informed by these definitions of agency and structure to understand the historiographical biases of the historians discussed below. The structure versus agency debate serves as an easily understandable way to analyze the different views each historian has of Stalin. It also explains how each historian places Stalin into historical context.

This study focuses on four books about Stalin from four of the different categories above and addresses the different biases of the authors and how those biases are reflected in their work. Since each work was produced in a different context, it will be important to understand the intended purpose of the author. It is also important to discuss the differences in source material used by the different authors and how they treat that material.

The first book discussed is a biography by Leon Trotsky titled, simply, *Stalin*. Trotsky presents a researched account, focusing on Stalin's early life; Trotsky's memory and his personal interactions with Stalin generously supplement his research. The second biography, by the American historian Robert Tucker, was published at the height of the Cold War. Titled, *Stalin as Revolutionary: 1879-1929*, it focuses on Stalin's transformation from a seminary student to a socialist revolutionary to unchallenged leader of the Soviet Union. The third book, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, is billed by the publisher as the first *glasnost* biography. It was researched and written over a 30-year period by Dmitri Volkogonov, then head of the Soviet Institute of Military History. As a

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Pomper, "Historians and Individual Agency", *History and Theory* 35, no. 3 (Oct., 1996): 281-308.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 284. In his footnotes Pomper explains that his explanation of structure and agency come from W. H. Dray, "Concepts of Causation" in A. J. P. Taylor's account of the "Origins of the Second World War," in *History and Theory* 17 (1978): 149-174.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

high-ranking political officer Volkogonov had access to archives that were only opened to outside scholars after 1991. The final book was published in 1999, titled *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1923-1939*, it was produced by American historian J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, director of the Moscow archive RTsKhIDNI. This book is a compilation of previously secret documents that help to explain the developments leading up to the Great Purges. These works offer an eclectic sampling of the vast quantity of scholarship that has been produced about Stalin.

***Stalin*. By Leon Trotsky. Translated by Charles Malamuth. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941.)**

According to Robert Tucker, Trotsky's biography of Stalin is an attempt to come to grips with the fact that Stalin became leader of the Soviet Union while Trotsky was living life in exile.<sup>7</sup> This purpose comes across in the condescending and bitter treatment of Stalin in Trotsky's book. The book is organized explicitly as a counterpoint to the biographical information produced by, what Trotsky calls, "the gigantic factory of lies which was organized by the Kremlin under the leadership of Stalin."<sup>8</sup>

In one example of Trotsky's effort to rebut the "official" histories produced by Stalin, Trotsky discusses the respective roles played by Trotsky and Stalin during the Revolution. Trotsky quotes successive statements by Stalin that show how Stalin went from viewing Trotsky, in 1918, as principally responsible for the success of the revolution to, in 1922, just "one part of the comrades."<sup>9</sup> Trotsky goes on to reference the 1938 'History' of the Party in which Trotsky is represented "as a rabid opponent of the October Revolution, which had already been conducted by Stalin."<sup>10</sup> These lines come at the end of a multiple page section devoted to showing that "nowhere in the documents or memoirs does one find any mention of Stalin's participation in the October Revolution."<sup>11</sup> This is just one example of the narrow one-sided view presented by Trotsky. His reference to the lies created by the official biographers helps to explain why he is compelled to correct them. More recent biographers have supported most of the role Trotsky claims for himself during the Revolution. They have also found evidence that Trotsky does not mention that claims a role for Stalin as well. Thus, Trotsky's biography is organized in refutation of the official histories and biographies produced by Stalinist historians.

Devoting a majority of the book to explaining Stalin's life before the Revolution of 1917, Trotsky ends with Stalin's assumption of power in 1928.<sup>12</sup> In the first chapters he writes: "in describing the life and development of Stalin during the period when nothing, or almost nothing, was known about him, the author (i.e., Trotsky) has

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<sup>7</sup> Tucker, 423.

<sup>8</sup> Trotsky, xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., iix.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., xi.

concerned himself with a thoroughgoing analysis of isolated facts and details and the testimony of witnesses.”<sup>13</sup>

Trotsky makes extensive use of memoirs by people who had contact with Stalin as a young man. One example is “*Stalin und die Tragodie Georgiens*.”<sup>14</sup> Trotsky tells the reader that the author, Joseph Iremashvili, knew Stalin as a young man but he gives no other information about the source. Often he gives only the name of someone to whom a quotation about Stalin’s early life is attributed. These vague references, combined with the lack of any citation information, mean that even “facts” and “details” are unsubstantiated. This leaves the reader with only the word of the author regarding the authenticity of his research.

In fact, Trotsky recommends that the reader take his word for the accuracy of his sources. Trotsky claims that he knows of not a single reference to any incorrect use of source material by him. He writes: “I venture to think that this fact alone is sufficient guarantee of authenticity for the foreign reader.”<sup>15</sup> It is thus from page one that the reader receives hints that this is not the most scholarly of texts. Trotsky’s questionable claims to scholarly authenticity aside, this book can be read as a valuable primary source and first-person account by someone who had extensive interaction with Stalin. Thus, with an understanding of Trotsky’s biases an attempt can be made to understand how Trotsky viewed Stalin.

Trotsky remained an ardent Marxist until his death. The Marxist view of history is similar to the structuralism discussed above by Pomper and Dray. Marx believed that history follows an inevitable progression that would end in utopian socialism. For Trotsky, who supported this conception of history, a figure such as Stalin is difficult to explain. Marxism cannot explain how one man could develop so much power and have such extensive influence. As can be expected, Trotsky tries to limit Stalin’s agency and situate him within the structure of the Party and the bureaucracy. By limiting Stalin’s agency Trotsky is able to reconcile the phenomenon of Stalin with a Marxist view of history.

Near the end of the introduction Trotsky explains his basic view of Stalin, describing how Stalin was able to assume power, “not with the aid of personal qualities, but with the aid of an impersonal machine. And it was not he who created the machine but the machine that created him.”<sup>16</sup> Trotsky explains how Lenin created the machine with ideas and contact with the masses and how Stalin emerged out of it to usurp power. This is what Philip Pomper calls “depersonalizing.”<sup>17</sup> Stalin is presented as only part of a group or, in this case, the product of a political machine.

Trotsky relates a conversation he had with another Party member in 1924 in which he foresaw Stalin’s rise to power. The other man had called Stalin a “mediocrity, a colorless nonentity.” Trotsky answered “Mediocrity, yes; nonentity, no. The dialectics of history have already hooked him and will raise him up. He is needed by all of them – by the bureaucrats, by the *nepmen*, the *kulaks*, the upstarts, the sneaks...He will not hesitate to use them and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>17</sup> Pomper, 286.

to move against the party.”<sup>18</sup> Trotsky goes on to claim that if history continues to go on automatically, then “Stalin will just as automatically become dictator.”<sup>19</sup> Trotsky’s goal throughout this book seems to remove as much of Stalin’s agency as possible. Trotsky presents Stalin as being swept into power by external forces. This fits well with both Trotsky’s ego and his Marxist understanding of historical processes.

Trotsky primarily uses two methods to achieve the above-mentioned ends. The first is to exaggerate every minor shred of evidence that reflects negatively on Stalin. One of Stalin’s most important literary achievements was “Marxism and the National Problem.”<sup>20</sup> Trotsky claims that it was “wholly inspired by Lenin.”<sup>21</sup> Trotsky quotes Lenin’s wife Krupskaya’s memoirs. She wrote: “Ilyich [Lenin] talked a lot with Stalin about the national problem...”<sup>22</sup> Trotsky goes on to say that “talked a lot with Stalin” means “[Lenin] gave [Stalin] the key ideas, shed light on all their aspects, explained misconceptions, suggested the literature, looked over the first drafts and made corrections.”<sup>23</sup> Krupskaya remembers that Lenin coached Stalin extensively but Trotsky would have his reader believe that Lenin wrote the piece himself. It seems unlikely that if Stalin was as incompetent as Trotsky claims that Lenin would have let Stalin write the paper. The fact that Lenin assisted in developing Stalin’s article on the national problem is exaggerated to imply Stalin’s complete lack of intellectual capacity.

The second method Trotsky uses to reduce Stalin’s agency is to down play all of Stalin’s positive actions. A good example is Trotsky’s portrayal of the vow of poverty Stalin took as a young revolutionary. Stalin was remembered to have lived a particularly ascetic lifestyle. Trotsky claims that the vow of poverty was taken, “without any ado by all young people who went into the revolutionary underground.”<sup>24</sup> Trotsky further claims the vow of poverty was easy for Stalin to accept since he had not been accustomed to material comforts as a child. The early revolutionaries were dedicated individuals but Trotsky dismisses Stalin’s dedication without providing any real evidence.

Trotsky’s also interjects unsubstantiated claims into the middle of rational to diminish Stalin’s importance. This can be seen in the example above where Trotsky claims that since Lenin “talked a lot with Stalin” it meant Lenin *gave* Stalin ideas. Another instance is in regards to the exact date when Stalin joined the Bolshevik faction. According to Trotsky, an official biography makes the unsubstantiated claim that he joined the Bolshevik faction while sitting in prison in 1903. Trotsky admits that all three members of the Caucasian delegation joined the majority faction but that since “anticipation was never [Stalin’s] strong suit”<sup>25</sup> it was unlikely that he could have understood the difference between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks and decided to join the later. This kind of assertion is typical of the unsubstantiated assertions that Trotsky randomly includes. The fact that Trotsky knew Stalin personally and may have been aware that “anticipation was not his strong suit” does not justify Trotsky using

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<sup>18</sup> Trotsky, 393.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 42.

that knowledge to explain an event that occurred years before they met. Trotsky's claim is equally as unsubstantiated as the official biographer's claims about Stalin that Trotsky is attempting to rebut.

Trotsky's biography of Stalin follows a pattern that is easy to discern based on present day knowledge of the author and his relationship with Stalin. Trotsky was a Marxist and thus one of his primary goals in his book was to reconcile the phenomenon of Stalin, the powerful dictator, with a Marxist progression of history. Trotsky subscribes to a tightly structuralist view. Trotsky also possessed a strong, personal antipathy for Stalin. This helps to explain the extensive lengths to which he goes discredit Stalin's achievements and denigrate his character. Additionally, Trotsky was extremely arrogant. This can, at least partially, explain his bitterness that Stalin, the colorless nonentity of mediocrity was dictator of one of the largest empires in history and he, Trotsky, was forced to live in exile.

***Stalin as Revolutionary: 1879-1929.* By Robert Tucker. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973.)**

Robert Tucker is an American scholar who published *Stalin as Revolutionary* in 1971 at the height of the Cold War. During the late 1960s and early 1970s the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev sought a policy of détente, which involved an attempt to improve relations with the West. This was tempered, however, with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. After the invasion the Soviet Union increased efforts to create economic arrangements with Europe including West Germany. Some of these attempts undercut U. S. efforts to weaken Soviet control over Eastern Europe. Also during this period Brezhnev continued to increase military spending.<sup>26</sup> Tucker was writing at a time of great uncertainty in Soviet-American relations. It was also a time of heightened interest about the Soviet Union within the United States. This helps to explain Tucker's book.

Tucker was not a Marxist, as Trotsky was, but he did have first hand experience of life in Stalin's Russia. From 1945 to 1953 Tucker lived in Moscow as a member of the U.S. Embassy.<sup>27</sup> His experience living under what must have seemed like the immense power of Stalin offers a partial explanation for his decision to write a style of biography that he acknowledges falling into the category of "psychohistory."<sup>28</sup> Yet, his attempt at psychohistory is not as narrowly focused on Stalin as it would at first seem. Tucker claims that his goal is to examine the interaction between personality and "the social milieu and political situation which alone made it possible for the personal factor to become important."<sup>29</sup> Thus, Tucker attempts to address the interaction of structure and agency by creating a balance between the two.<sup>30</sup>

Tucker follows a chronology beginning with Stalin's early childhood continuing through his assumption of power in 1929. This book is only the first half of a two part series. Like Trotsky's biography of Stalin, Tucker devotes an inordinate portion of the book to Stalin's early development. This section is devoted extensively to how the events and ideas that Stalin was exposed to during his youth shaped his personality.

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<sup>26</sup> MacKenzie, 575-576.

<sup>27</sup> Tucker, book jacket.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, xvi.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Tucker, 300-301. Pomper recognizes this same balance in *Stalin in Power*.

As the subtitle, *A Study in History and Personality* suggests, Tucker devotes a significant portion of the manuscript to a discussion of Stalin's personality. In one example, Tucker explains how the development of Stalin's mind through seminary training made the dialectic materialism of Marxism particularly appealing. This was due to the fact that both religion and dialectic materialism heavily focus on dogma. Tucker goes on to explain how Marx's theory of continuous class struggle was appealing to Stalin who, as a child, had idealized nationalist warrior-heroes.<sup>31</sup> Having "an affinity for extremism," Stalin was in "his spiritual element" as a Bolshevik.<sup>32</sup> Later in the book Tucker explains: "What impelled [Stalin] to take the offensive against Trotsky was, it seems, a powerful animosity against a man who, by virtue of the role he was playing in the Revolution, was spoiling [Stalin's] own life-scenario."<sup>33</sup>

Tucker clearly makes Stalin's personality a central focus of the book by using evidence and well-cited examples. In doing so he endows Stalin with significantly more agency than did Trotsky. Yet Tucker makes it clear that structure also played a role in Stalin's development and rise to power.

In "Historians and Individual Agency" Philip Pomper discusses the sequel to *Stalin as Revolutionary*. That second book titled, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution From Above, 1929-1941*, traces Stalin through the turbulent years of forced collectivization and the Great Terror.<sup>34</sup> Pomper makes an extensive analysis of Tucker's treatment of structure and agency. Many of his conclusions are applicable to *Stalin as Revolutionary*.

According to Pomper, Tucker's Stalin was a combination of agency and structure. Pomper gives an example from Tucker's analysis of the Great Purges. "For Tucker, the Great Purges owed their massive character to Stalin's manipulations and the interaction of structures and agents at every level of the party-state regime."<sup>35</sup> This can be seen in similar examples from *Stalin as Revolutionary*. In an explanation of events in July of 1917 Tucker presents a description that shows his attempt to balance structure and agency. He writes that while the primary leaders were in hiding or in jail "Stalin was one of the lesser figures whom events propelled to the fore in Bolshevik affairs."<sup>36</sup> This is clearly structuralism at work. A few lines further down Tucker writes, "however he had earned this role by becoming in the interim an amanuensis of Lenin and one who could be counted upon to represent the absent leader's views."<sup>37</sup> This statement clearly endows Stalin with agency: He had, through his own *agency* placed himself in a position where *structure* could propel him upward.

Pomper believes that Tucker's balanced treatment of structure and agency presents an especially plausible explanation for the phenomenon of Stalin. Tucker emphasizes Stalin's personality traits but he fits them into the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>34</sup> Pomper, 301. Pomper includes *Stalin in Power* in his historiographical comparison between Stalin and Hitler. While he addresses a different book many of his conclusions are relevant to the current discussion. It is thus inevitable that the current analysis will bear striking resemblance to Pomper's analysis of *Stalin in Power*. Pomper's research is especially pertinent in the realm of the structure versus agency debate.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>36</sup> Tucker, 173.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

events of Soviet history in way in which one explains the other. Stalin's actions are grounded in his environment and he in turn impacts the environment around him.

Tucker, like any biographer of an influential person, tries to synthesize Stalin down to his most essential characteristics. Trotsky called Stalin "the outstanding mediocrity of the party." This fit well with his attempt to place Stalin within a system of rigid structuralism. Tucker attempts increase Stalin's agency while still placing him within a structure. Tucker calls Stalin a "master politician."<sup>38</sup> He goes on to state that his non-charismatic style of leadership offered the "cautious optimism about domestic prospects, combined with fear of any international complications which might endanger the Soviet regime and interrupt internal development."<sup>39</sup> Tucker claims that the program presented by Stalin had appeal to the rest of the leadership. Thus Stalin's unique program was appealing for structural reasons and he was appealing as a leader because of certain personality traits that endowed him with agency. It is thus in keeping with his psychohistorical goals that Tucker offers a "sociological" explanation for Stalin gaining power instead of Trotsky.<sup>40</sup> Tucker presents Stalin as a master politician who was able to provide something that people desired.

Tucker presents a version of Stalin endowed with significant agency but who is assisted in his rise to power by structures all around him. According to Tucker, Stalin's role as a master politician influenced all of his interpersonal relations making it the key to his personality and his place in history.

***Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy.* By Dmitri Volkogonov. Translated by Harold Shukman. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991)**

*Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* was published in 1989 at the height of *glasnost*. Since the early years of Stalin's reign the Soviet government had an extensive system of censorship and intellectual control. Everything spoken, printed, published, painted, filmed, or performed had to conform to one overriding ideology. The Soviet people had no room for dissent. The Soviet people had also been taught a distorted version of their history. In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev, the young and progressive first party secretary, initiated a program of *glasnost*. Literally meaning "openness" it encouraged honesty in news reporting. It also encouraged artistic freedom and provided the first opportunity for dissent in many years. Gorbachev encouraged the press "to fill in the blank spots" in Soviet history."<sup>41</sup> This was meant to be an extension of the de-Stalinization that had been initiated by Khrushchev. Journalists, playwrights, novelists, and poets were the first to take advantage of the new freedom to revise Soviet history. In 1987 Gorbachev encouraged professional historians to take advantage of *glasnost*.

One of these historians was Dmitri Volkogonov. Volkogonov had been a colonel general and head of the Soviet Institute of Military History. He had risen through the military ranks, but as a trained historian he had become open-minded during the "thaw" of the Khrushchev years. Since the 1950s Volkogonov had been collecting information for an accurate portrayal of Stalin. It was not until 1989 that his project of 30 could come to fruition.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> MacKenzie, 608.

<sup>42</sup> Volkogonov, xii.

By the 1980s Volkogonov had become disenchanted with communism. He believed that the problems facing the Soviet Union in 1989 were largely attributable to a move away from democracy and freedom: From a failure to protect the ideal of collective leadership that Volkogonov claims Lenin was attempting to create.<sup>43</sup> Volkogonov clearly has a bias against the distortion of communism toward totalitarianism which he blames on Stalin. This desire to explain the distortion motivated him to write the book.

Volkogonov was also motivated to write *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* by his belief, garnered from personal experience, that those who do not understand the past may be doomed to repeat it.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the book is in part a warning to the Soviet people to learn and understand the history that had been withheld from them for so long. It is also a well-documented study of Stalinism by a professional historian. During *glasnost* Volkogonov had read numerous accounts by journalists and novelists that attempted to correct the lies of the past, but he felt these were inadequate.<sup>45</sup> According to the book's translator and editor Harold Shukman, Volkogonov was guided by conscience.<sup>46</sup>

Volkogonov's book is extensively researched and referenced. As a high ranking political officer Volkogonov had access to many of the important archives that were closed to both western and Soviet scholars until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. He references documents and materials from the Central Party Archives, the USSR Supreme Court Archives, Various military archives including the Army Archives and the General Staff Archives.<sup>47</sup> He also studied the NKVD archives and Stalin's personal library where he was able to study the notes Stalin had written in the margins of his books.<sup>48</sup>

The book is organized much differently than either Trotsky's or Tucker's. While they focus extensively on Stalin as a young man, Volkogonov begins his narrative in 1917. He devotes only a ten-page chapter to Stalin's development before 1917. These ten pages cover a period of 37 years.<sup>49</sup> Another twelve-page chapter is devoted to "Stalin's Mind" that mostly discusses his interaction with other people.<sup>50</sup> The manuscript is broken into short chapters that, while placed in chronological order, are thematic in nature. The major difference between this book and the two previous books is that this is not a biography. Rather, it is the history of the Soviet Union under Stalin. While Volkogonov grants Stalin significant powers of agency and he highlights Stalin's life and actions in great detail, Stalin is not explicitly the subject of this book. The subject could best be described as an explanation of Stalin's role in the creation of Stalinism.

While Volkogonov had been a communist almost his entire life, the proclamation that he had renounced his earlier views is firmly supported by his treatment of agency and structure. Volkogonov does not subscribe to a Marxist view of history. He endows Stalin and all the other "actors" with powerful agency. If Trotsky's Stalin was

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., xxvi, 580-581.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 581.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 225-236.

swept along by events, then Volkogonov's Stalin is a major factor in deciding the outcome of history. In each chapter Volkogonov explains how the actions of individual players caused particular outcomes.

The chapter about forced collectivization provides insight into Volkogonov's view of agency. Volkogonov places the original plans for collectivization in the context of the Fifteenth Party Congress.<sup>51</sup> In doing so he affirms the collective agency of that group. He then explains how Stalin took the initiative to "ratchet up the tempo of industrialization and collectivization."<sup>52</sup> The existence of Stalin's signature on documents circulated within peasant villages gives documentary evidence of his agency. Stalin was again provided with agency when he had a document drawn up that defined the *kulaks*, or "rich" peasants, who needed to be "dekulakized."<sup>53</sup> Volkogonov continues with a description of the "wave of commissioners" that descended on the villages. They acted "resolutely" in forcing collectivization.<sup>54</sup>

Volkogonov was able to show considerable agency because of his access to the archives. The evidence therein provided what Philip Pomper calls the "smoking gun" for Stalin's involvement in the Great Purges.<sup>55</sup> Volkogonov cites numerous examples of documents with Stalin's signature that make him responsible for atrocities.<sup>56</sup> As can be seen from the explanation of collectivization Volkogonov used this "smoking gun" to endow Stalin and others with agency and, in turn, responsibility for the excesses of collectivization.

While Volkogonov emphasizes agency he occasionally notes the importance of structure in Stalin's rise to power. He claims that Stalin's unsophisticated arguments were often better received by the party than were the more cogent arguments made by other leaders such as Trotsky, Zinoviev, or Kamenev.<sup>57</sup> This was due to some innate characteristic of the party membership rather than the agency of Stalin. This is mostly a qualifying example. Volkogonov clearly viewed agency as ascendant over structure.

There are three noteworthy characteristics of Volkogonov's Stalin. The first, discussed above, is that Stalin was one of many important people endowed with agency. The second is that Stalin was, what Volkogonov calls, an "actor."<sup>58</sup> Volkogonov writes that Stalin *acted* the part of "the modest leader, the fighter for the purity of party ideals, and later the leader and father of the people...But more than anything Stalin tried to play the part of the dedicated pupil and comrade-in-arms of the great Lenin."<sup>59</sup> Stalin's acting gradually brought him the popularity of the party and the country.<sup>60</sup> Volkogonov bases his claim that Stalin was acting in evidence that Stalin often said things he did not believe. Volkogonov relates one instance where, in relation to trumped up charges of conspiracy, Stalin made a note that it was "nonsense."<sup>61</sup> In another example from the explanation of collectivization Stalin said

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>55</sup> Pomper, 304.

<sup>56</sup> One example is a letter from Stalin to the local NKVD authorities justifying the use of "physical coercion" against any persons who resisted interrogation. Volkogonov, 300.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., xxvi.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., xxi.

one thing while doing another. He stated that the kulaks must be conquered by economic means alone. In practice Stalin pursued aggressive forced collectivization.<sup>62</sup> His consummate skill was in reconciling the difference between his word and his actions in a way that satisfied the Party and the public.

The third noteworthy trait deals with Volkogonov's interpretation of "Stalin's mind."<sup>63</sup> Volkogonov makes the statement that Trotsky's description of Stalin as "'an outstanding mediocrity' has been widely accepted as accurate."<sup>64</sup> He arranges this chapter as a direct refutation to Trotsky's assertion. Volkogonov claims, in an argument similar to Tucker, that Stalin had intellectual powers that made him useful to Lenin and in turn assisted in his rise to power.

Volkogonov portrays Stalin as endowed with considerable agency. As such, Stalin bears direct responsibility for the effects of collectivization, the purges, and the excessive human cost of the Second World War. Volkogonov claims that any positive achievements of the system were not because of Stalin but in spite of him. Stalin can be blamed for the formation of a "monstrous abscess of illegality."<sup>65</sup> Volkogonov believes that more could have been achieved had more democratic methods been applied. Stalin undermined what Volkogonov believed to be the developing democratic tendencies of the Revolution and in turn Stalin's triumph became a tragedy for the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup>

***The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1923-1939.* By J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov. Translated by Benjamin Sher. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999)**

*The Road to Terror* was published in 1999. The primary author J. Arch Getty published a similar book in 1985 titled *Origins of the Great Purges*. *The Road to Terror* is, in large part, an attempt to bring the older piece up-to-date and to take into account the wealth of archival sources that have become available since the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>67</sup> Getty, with the assistance of Oleg Naumov, the deputy director of the Moscow archive RTsKhIDNI, has made extensive use of archived documents to develop an analysis that challenges the idea that the Great Purges were the organized and systematic work of Stalin.

Getty's book is organized chronologically. It is broken into two main sections. The first titled "Closing Ranks" explains "the road to terror."<sup>68</sup> The second section, "The Terror,"<sup>69</sup> explains the unfolding of the Great Purges from 1936 to 1938. Each section is further broken down into chapters that are organized thematically. These chapters are then placed in chronological order.<sup>70</sup> Each chapter begins with an explanation of the historical background. It is followed with a series of documents copied from the Soviet archives. The vast majority of the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 225. "Stalin's Mind" is the title of one of Volkogonov's chapters.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>66</sup> Volkogonov, xxiv.

<sup>67</sup> Getty, xii.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 33-246.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 247-568.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., iix.

book is made up of primary source documents. This organization assists the author in presenting the atmosphere surrounding the terror as tumultuous.

By presenting the situation as chaotic Getty removes some of the agency of the key figures, such as Stalin, and increases the emphasis on middle level institutions, such as the NKVD.<sup>71</sup> This trend, as well as the trend to produce chaos by way of the book's organization, is exemplified by looking at the chapter titled "The Storm of 1937: The Party Commits Suicide."<sup>72</sup> In organizational terms the chapter is made up of documents that, while related, were never intended to flow together in any kind of narrative way. The organization creates an awkwardness that increases the perception of a chaotic situation just as Getty claims in the introduction.<sup>73</sup> The documents chosen also assist in downplaying Stalin's role and increasing the role of, what Revisionists call, the periphery.<sup>74</sup> Many of the documents are memorandums between NKVD officials. They make no mention of Stalin and have little to do with major decisions.<sup>75</sup> Getty also relates examples of bureaucratic confusion that created a chaotic situation. He explains that as late as 1936 "Trotskyism," the crime of being supportive of Trotsky or Trotsky's ideas, did not have a clear or uniform definition.<sup>76</sup> Getty uses organization, and anecdotes of disorganization to present the chaotic nature of the situation, thus reducing the agency of Stalin and other Party leaders.

Getty uses another of the devices noted by Pomper to reduce the agency of individuals. He does what Pomper calls "narrowing the picture."<sup>77</sup> By focusing on one event, such as the Great Purges, Getty removes Stalin's actions from the larger historical context. By presenting minimal background information on Stalin, and other people involved, Getty situates the Purges within a vacuum. This means that the thoughts or actions of these people at another time cannot be used to explain the events under discussion. In one example Getty fails to discuss the details of Stalin's relationship to Trotsky, by doing so he represents the crime of "Trotskyism" in an historical vacuum.<sup>78</sup> For the reader this removes the possibility of drawing the conclusion that "Trotskyism" was a crime because of a personal issue between Stalin and Trotsky.

Getty's archival research presents Stalin and the center as working within a chaotic situation that was beyond their direct control. Getty acknowledges that Stalin's guilt was never in question but he takes that fact as a starting point for explaining the involvement of the periphery.<sup>79</sup> Getty's revisionist assessment of the purges uses

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<sup>71</sup> Pomper, 295. Pomper addresses Getty's earlier book *Origins of the Great Purges*. In all but a few minor respects his analysis of Getty's presentation of structure and agency applies to *The Road to Terror*. The one difference that I encountered between Getty's views according to Pomper and his analysis in *Road to terror* relates to his characterization of Stalin. According to Pomper Getty characterizes Stalin much like Trotsky as the personification of the bureaucracy. In the introduction to *Road to Terror* Getty claims to have developed a greater appreciation for Stalin's agency as a politician. Thus he is driven by an intrinsic desire for power. xii.

<sup>72</sup> Getty, 420-490.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>74</sup> Pomper, 297. The core – periphery is a model used by political scientists to explain the interaction between central figures and larger groups. In this case Stalin and the central party leadership represent the core and the NKVD and other middle level bureaucracies represent the periphery.

<sup>75</sup> Getty, 420-490.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>77</sup> Pomper, 288.

<sup>78</sup> Getty, 272.

<sup>79</sup> Pomper, 295.

documents that disperse blame and agency to a wide-range of middle level institutions. In doing so, Getty removes much of Stalin's agency.

### **Conclusion**

The four historians addressed in this paper each looked at Stalin in a different way. Trotsky wrote a biography mostly in the first person. He provided an important primary source that has served as the starting point for later research. Robert Tucker wrote a psychohistory that focused on Stalin's personality. Volkogonov wrote a history of the development of Stalinism. As such, Volkogonov related the developments in history to the actions of Stalin. J. Arch Getty focused on the Great Purge. He addressed Stalin's role and situated Stalin within the context of that event.

Each historian drew different conclusions about Stalin. Trotsky coined the well-known phrase that Stalin was the exceptional mediocrity. This serves as a baseline for the interpretations of the other historians. Tucker analyzed Stalin's rise to power and characterized Stalin as foremost an adroit politician. Volkogonov refuted Trotsky's claim of Stalin's mediocrity and instead claimed for him significant intellectual powers. He also claimed, in an argument similar to Tucker, that it was aspects of Stalin's personality that allowed him to appeal to an important sector of the Party. Coming nearly full circle, Getty characterized Stalin in a manner more akin to Trotsky than the other two scholars. This study has shown that greater access to documentation did little to create a uniform analysis of Stalin as a person.

This analysis has shown, as did Philip Pomper's,<sup>80</sup> that there are many different ways to treat structure and agency. The conclusions of each historian were often based on their personal biases. Trotsky subscribed to a Marxist progression of history and in turn sought to fit Stalin into a rigid structure denying him nearly all agency. He also engendered a deep personal antipathy toward Stalin and thus removed Stalin's agency as a way to explain Stalin's ascendancy and his demise. On the other side of the spectrum Dmitri Volkogonov, with his newfound democratic ideal, endowed Stalin with considerable agency. If Stalin used individual agency to undermine democratic ideals in the 1930s there is no reason, according to Volkogonov, that individual and collective agency could not be used to restore freedom in the 1990s. Somewhere between Trotsky and Volkogonov are Tucker and Getty. Tucker attempted, with consummate skill, to fit Stalin into a world where both agency and structure are active. On the other hand, Getty believed the structure to be chaotic and the agency to be lacking thus creating, not an upward progression of history, but rather a random wandering that was completely uncontrolled. These different treatments of agency, which follow no natural order based on date of publication or archival evidence available, demonstrate that historians continue to have substantial room for interpretation and debate.

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<sup>80</sup> Pomper, 303.

***America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. By Thomas J. McCormick. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. Pp. 291.)**

Since WWII America has voraciously pursued an aggressive foreign policy aimed at world domination. To be more specific, in the last half of the twentieth century American policymakers and the various imperial executives embarked on a global crusade to dominate the international capitalist system. Thomas McCormick details the story of America's quest for global dominance in *America's Half-Century*. Using the *world-system* as his analytical superstructure, McCormick thoroughly details American foreign policy during the last half of the twentieth century. McCormick convincingly argues that America's insatiable desire to wear the costly mantle of world *hegemon* has led America down a path of inescapable demise. Finally, the establishment of a foreign policy elite and an imperial presidency ensured the durability of America's ascendancy to the hegemonic throne.

Originally written in 1989 and revised in 1995, *America's Half-Century* offers a venerable analytical basis for the study of U.S. foreign relations since WWII. McCormick has an extensive background in American diplomatic history in general and Asian American relations in particular. The world-system that McCormick uses rests on a few global assumptions. For instance, within the world-system there is always a center or pole to the system a dominant city that acts as the coordinating point and clearing house of international capital. From the end of WWII until the present America has assumed the core position within the world-system. Inside the world-system there are three major leagues for the global participants. First, there are the *Core* countries (First World) that own the high-tech, high-profit enterprises. Secondly, there are the *periphery* (Third World) countries that specialize in the primary production of agricultural commodities and raw materials or as McCormick calls them the "hewers of wood and carriers of water" Lastly there is the *semiperiphery* (Second World) which performs the intermediate functions of transport, local capital mobilization, and less complex and less profitable forms of manufacturing.

Within the world-system America not only participates in the core league but also simultaneously serves as the global *hegemon*. McCormick explains that, in the context of the world-system, hegemony means that one nation possesses such unrivaled supremacy, such predominate influence in economic power, military might, and political ideological leadership, that no other power or combination of powers can prevail against it. Central to McCormick's hegemony theory is economic and military supremacy. Both of these hegemonic requirements have been a staple of American foreign policy since American entry into World War II. Another central component of hegemony, and one that America has enthusiastically embraced, is the notion of the global *hegemon* serving as the global policeman.

The role of America as a global policeman has come under recent criticism from the world community. In light of the recent war with Iraq and the subsequent international squabbling over American intentions in the Middle East, *America's Half-Century* has raised some serious questions as to the hegemonic ambitions of American foreign policy. First, if the American invasion of Iraq was predicated on the assimilation of Iraq into the American dominated world-system, than the legitimacy of "liberating" Iraqi citizens loses credibility. Secondly, America's global policing effort, what the Bush administration has deemed "disarming Saddam", appears to be less of a

policing action and more of a coercive adjustment of the world market.

As mentioned earlier, recent events in the Middle East suggest that America, despite the end of the Cold War, is still striving to retain her position as world *hegemon*. Transforming dictatorial Iraq into a free democratic *capitalistic* Iraq will ensure that America has free open access to Iraqi black gold. More importantly, a democratic Iraq firmly established within the world-system will help to add a certain degree of stability to an unstable Middle East. Stability is essential to sustaining global prosperity within the world-system. McCormick concludes that, American postwar leaders concluded that global prosperity depended in part on a hegemonic America maintaining global law and order. To put it another way, America's hegemonic position is strengthened by the forced induction of Iraq into the world-system.

McCormick explains, as the world's dominant economic power the *hegemon* has the most to gain from a free world market. Again the Iraqi example serves to validate McCormick's argument. A democratic Iraq established under aegis of America will ensure Iraq's place in the world-system. Furthermore, American stands to gain the most from a democratic Iraq. American actions in Iraq suggest that America is experiencing hegemonic trauma due to the gradual decline of hegemony. Realizing the imminent defeat of American hegemony, America has embarked on an imperialistic campaign to secure what is left of the raw materials in the rich periphery.

In striving to achieve hegemonic status the *hegemon* plants the seeds of its own destruction. First, the *hegemon* must constantly dispatch military force to secure the overseas investments (Iraqi oil fields) which eventually leads to ever increasing military costs. The insatiable need to act as world policeman only exacerbates the problem. As McCormick says, the end result is that the government readily hands out government subsidies to the defense industry and diverts much needed investment away from the civilian sector of the economy and into military production. Unable to adequately supply the civilian sector of the economy will eventually lead to social unrest and an economy dependent on military production. Neglecting the public needs and establishing a martial economy will eventually prove overwhelming for the *hegemon*. Lastly America's role as world policeman and dominant arms dealer will compel the *hegemon* to become a rentier nation. American capital will trickle into foreign markets and America will become dependent on foreign capital for revenue.

One weakness of *America's Half-Century* is that McCormick has a tendency to interpret the Cold War exclusively through economic lenses. For instance, McCormick argues that "it was never the destruction of Germany per se that was the American war aim; it was the prevention of any one power from dominating Europe and limiting American access to it. No doubt FDR had his eye on the future economic potential of rebuilding Europe along American capitalistic guidelines. However, it remains difficult to envision FDR wholly engulfed in economic fortune telling of post-war Europe while Americans were dying on the battlefield. The fact is FDR's primary concern was achieving total military victory in Europe. Only after victory was a predictable outcome did FDR begin to contemplate post-war situations in Europe. Furthermore, it was the neophyte anti-communist presidency of Harry Truman that stoked the kindling of the Cold War and firmly established concrete economic spheres of influence in post-war Europe.

When it was originally published in 1989 *America's Half-Century* may not have appeared overly farsighted. However with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Islamic radicalism, McCormick's work has gained new importance. September 11 2001 inaugurated a massive transformation of American foreign policy. With a global threat to American security located within the Arab world American policymakers have been given a "blank check" to combat the ubiquitous threat of international terrorism. Using the blank check American policymakers can embark on a last gasp crusade to propel America back into the ephemeral throne of global hegemony.

Increased military spending and a seemingly limitless supply of raw materials, mainly the oil rich plains of the Middle East, has given American policymakers incentive to rekindle the hegemonic fire that burned so vibrantly in the 50's. However, this new drive for hegemony has disastrous consequences. With a world community at odds with American hegemonic hubris and an increasing fragmentation of the world market into regional trading alliances, it seems unlikely that America will have the same European support once enjoyed during the predictable Cold War. If America fails to retain her friendships with the other core powers, most notably Germany and France, it may accelerate America's decent from world hegemony.

**Brian Kiunke**

***Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century.* By Hal Rothman. (New York: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 323)**

In *Neon Metropolis*, University of Nevada economic historian Hal Rothman attempts to explain one of America's most important symbols of post-modern decadence. His case study of Las Vegas places this icon within the context of urban development and American culture.

Rothman hypothesizes that Las Vegas is emblematic of the future of urban America. In the neo-Victorian 1950's "Sin City" offered a release for internalized frustrations. Today it is, with the possible exception of Bangkok, the only city in the world devoted to selling experience. Las Vegas offers a model of the future to society where self-indulgence is not only accepted, but expected, and entertainment has become culture. Rothman further describes a place with the nation's fastest growing population, where working class people own homes and the union is one of the strongest forces in the valley. He writes of people creating community, not in the geographic manner of mythical suburbia, but among "neighbors" of similar interests. Rothman demythologizes Las Vegas. True, there are gangsters and corrupt politicians, but there are many more home-owning housekeepers and suburbanites sitting in traffic. Rothman successfully tells the story of Las Vegas. He also alludes to the disturbing power of its model in creating a new urban America.

Rothman's analysis of each issue is presented with a different twist. This style, while sometimes difficult to follow, has a powerful impact. He presents clear, direct critiques of cultural trends such as self-indulgence, consumption of experience and privatization of public space. His criticism of other issues is caged in an irony of

impressive complexity. In his explanation of the city's unique tax structure, its uncharacteristically well unionized labor force and its abnormally low cost of home ownership, Rothman exposes no overt problems. Yet, his rose colored prose allude to his doubt in the prospect of continued prosperity.

Rothman's descriptions of development, power politics and especially traffic congestion are well informed and insightful. His discussions concerning communities of affinity, environmental politics and race relations are brilliant. In his chapter, "The Tortoise and the Air," Rothman offers a tongue-in-cheek affirmation of the belief in human ingenuity to subdue nature with technological solutions that "even the enviros can go along with" (233). Rothman presents the Latino community from an uneducated, white, middle-class perspective. The irony, while not readily apparent, is ingenious. His failure to address social ills makes them even more glaring.

The book does have minor organizational problems. The chapters have excessive overlap. This becomes especially tiresome in the countless and redundant explanations of casino development. Many of the anecdotes help to provide irony but do little to support the narrative. The color photographs are cliché; a city map would have been more useful. Its absence makes it difficult to follow the complex description of highway construction. Rothman chooses to explore the boundaries of narrative historical writing. He develops an ironic critique that brilliantly subverts his message of Las Vegas as the model of postmodern progress.

**Trevor Haagenson**

***Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1919-1945.* By Jerry Davila. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003. Pp. 292.)**

Brazil entered the twentieth century with serious social problems that became obstacles to its modernization. At the core of these problems was the inability to break from a rural culture in order to evolve into an industrialized and urbanized society. Slavery was crucial to the economy and organized power structures, as well as to the life-style and identity of the oligarchy; moreover, slavery gave Brazil a legacy of race diversity that was viewed as a handicap in its struggle toward modernity. Although abolition occurred in 1888, the customs, values, hierarchies, and perception of race that slavery instilled prevailed. The engrained racial belief systems continued to influence and often dictate the decisions of scientists, doctors, educators and policy makers well into the twentieth century. In his book, *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917-1945*, Jerry Davila traces the racial ideas that influenced intellectuals from the 1920s through the 1940s, who in turn modeled a public school system in the image of the racial hierarchy that existed in Brazil since its colonization. Many of these intellectuals set out to "redeem" and reform Brazil from what they saw as an illiterate, dark-skinned, unwashed mass, into what they believed could be an organized, productive, healthy, white society. The belief that race determined social "degeneracy" was reinforced by the scientific ideas from Europe and the United States.

Davila begins his multi-layered book by introducing the reader to two symbolic events: one concerned a debate over a statue of the "Brazilian man" in 1938, the other involved a controversy sparked by a private school's

denial of a wealthy girl who was of indigenous decent in 1944. The connection between these two events can be understood by what Davila reveals as the mutual reinforcement of “metanarratives.” Essentially, metanarratives are engrained ideas (like that of race, class, or nation), which naturally reinforce and build on each other. The Brazilian national identity was initially formed by the racial discourse of the elite that resulted in racial social policies; thereby, maintaining the cultural positioning of illiterate, non-white, poverty-stricken Brazilians. Davila, a professor of History at the University of North Carolina, points out the fact that public schools in Brazil offer a rare opportunity for the analysis of documented interaction between races. Metanarratives are intrinsically elusive, yet Davila is successful at tracking and analyzing elite beliefs about race and nationalism through public and private archives, newspaper and journal publications, and popular literature during the interwar period.

The first half of the twentieth century marked a time when radical and innovative ideas in science were being embraced with an almost religious fervor in many parts of the world. Cutting edge scientific concepts, such as eugenics, were eagerly applied to the grandiose ideas of many intellectuals and political leaders in the midst of the two World Wars. Within this climate of flourishing ideas, Brazil was in search of a particular national identity that could organize and mobilize the population despite its diversity. The elite vision of Brazil’s future, from customs to skin color, was overwhelmingly European. By the 1930s, the belief that a “Brazilian race” could be created through “soft” eugenics began to be applied experimentally to school systems in the name of science and nationalism. Davila’s analysis of the transformation of the “ideal Brazilian” as it metamorphosed from a vision into social policies, reveals the power and control that was wielded through the school system in the attempt to perfect the “Brazilian race.” Many of these policies were applied to the expanded school systems of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo when the Federal Ministry of Education and Health was created under Getulio Vargas (1945-1950). Unfortunately, instead of enfolding the masses into the national blanket, these model schools merely reinforced the racial segregation that characterized Brazilian society on every level.

One of the most important points of Davila’s study is that a shift in the meaning of race took place in Brazil between 1930 and 1940, which resulted in the belief that culture and poverty was the true cause of “degeneracy,” not race. Because this shift made race and class interchangeable (since poor Brazilians were almost inevitably nonwhite) it allowed for an elastic definition of race. The Brazilian concept of “blackness” and “whiteness” signified poverty and affluence respectively. Thus, the once unattainable status of White could be extended to the masses through better health and education. It was through this attempt to create a social melting pot that a Brazilian “eugenic nationalism” was born. Social engineering seemed to offer the potential answer to Brazil’s modernizing problems. However, as Davila points out, it became impossible to galvanize a national identity and segregate the population simultaneously. Such was the inherent problem that Brazil’s school system reflected through the public/private, rich/poor, and black/white dichotomies that continue to exist in the education system today.

Davila’s heavily researched book is valuable to Latin American studies because it provides a much-needed analysis of race relations in Brazil during the Vargas era. His book is also a valuable for understanding the ways that nationalism was communicated to the popular classes through public schools, as in Mexico and Argentina. Davila

ends his book with an appropriate parallel between eugenics in Brazil during the first half of the twentieth century and an article concerning modern genetics and the surviving notion of a “Brazilian race,” published in 2000 by the magazine *Veja*. This “enduring fascination with race” has interfered with Brazilians’ search to locate an authentic national identity that is not based on ethnic division. A deeply rooted racial hierarchy has remained virtually undisturbed even though Brazil has experienced drastic changes. Brazilians have adjusted to everything from monarchy to federal republic; from autonomous states to centralization; and from a simple slave-based society to a complex multi-cultural nation. Yet through it all, as Davila concludes, the legacy of racism remains.

**Frances Morrow**

***Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt.* By Christine Heyrman. (New York: Knopff, 1997. Pp. 336.)**

This monograph, examines the relationship between evangelical Protestantism and southern culture. This brilliant analysis points to the glaring irony of the South -- that although evangelical Protestantism began as a belief system antithetical to the southern, family-centered, patriarchal, slave holding paradigm, it emerged as a defining characteristic of the region. According to Heyrman, contrary to the contemporary southern situation, pre-revolutionary evangelical Protestantism began as an unwanted presence in southern society. She points to evangelicalism’s perceived threat to traditional southern cultural beliefs as the primary reason for its cold reception in the region. And while slavery was certainly one major point of contention between evangelicals and southerners, it was not the only one, or even the most important. Heyrman makes her case through the explication of a process in which evangelicals were forced to compromise and assimilate to entrenched southern culture while southerners were simultaneously transformed as well. Implicit in Heyrman’s conception of mutual assimilation was that evangelicals had to do more of the changing. However, Heyrman does not make clear why this was the case.

Heyrman’s impressive ability to find precisely the right words to articulate complex points illustrates not only her command of the English language, but also a rare talent to present confusing cultural abstractions in a readable and compelling manner. However, the real strength of Heyrman’s work is the nexus between her cultural analysis and the documents that support these conclusions. The voluminous research to support her nuanced conclusions is more than persuasive. It is impressive. This is how cultural or religious history should be done. Heyrman utilizes an impressive array of documents, namely preacher memoirs and diaries that seem to capture the cultural context of the era. One possible weakness in this methodology, however, is the proposition that what is written in these accounts captures the entire cultural climate of such a diverse South.

Chapters one through three explain the cultural differences between the two groups. Heyrman argues that the most important and defining characteristics of southern culture was its patriarchal structure. She masterfully illustrates how both Baptist and Methodist values both subverted and opposed this structure dominated by white males. Moreover, “Southern whites recognized in evangelicalism a stark alternative to the region’s traditional culture based on conviviality and competition.” Thus evangelicalism’s harsh criticism of non-believers and its

exclusionary atmosphere were thought to undermine the unity of families, communities, and the existing power structure. Evangelical preaching and the behavior of converts disturbed the status quo in a way that was uncomfortable for the majority of southerners. Heyrman persuasively presents the cultural differences that inspired the tenuous and volatile relationship between late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century evangelicals and southerners. Furthermore, chapters four and five illustrate the clear shift in both attitude and behavior of evangelical preachers and converts. However, she fails to show how, or necessarily why, evangelicals compromised their spiritual beliefs that were once so powerful as to drive many to madness. Her case for assimilation is clear. But her conclusion that evangelicals simply brushed aside their beliefs in an effort to assimilate to southern patriarchal culture is inadequate.

Heyrman has written an important book that contributes significantly to an understanding of one of the paradoxes of southern history. This is a rare historian whose ability to balance scholarly and colorful prose, sharp wit, and in-depth research results in what should be labeled art. Although it is far from definitive, her careful analysis and masterful interpretation of her voluminous research yields a work that brings clarity to terms such as patriarchy, honor, masculinity, and piety. Heyrman has not only defined these terms in a southern context, she has given us tremendous insight into a complicated culture.

**Jay Berkowitz**

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