

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

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History in the Making is an annual publication of the California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) Alpha Delta Nu Chapter of the Phi Alpha Theta National History Honor Society, and is sponsored by the History Department and the Instructionally Related Programs at CSUSB. Issues are published at the end of the spring semester of each academic year.

Phi Alpha Theta's mission is to promote the study of history through the encouragement of research, good teaching, publication and the exchange of learning and ideas among historians. The organization seeks to bring students, teachers and writers of history together for intellectual and social exchanges, which promote and assist historical research and publication by our members in a variety of ways.

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Original cover art, "The Sun is on the Ground," by Leah Mata-Fragua (2025), Copyright © 2025, photo by Lina Tejeda

California State University, San Bernardino Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that California State University, San Bernardino sits on the territory and ancestral land of the San Manuel band of Mission Indians (Yuhaaviatam). We recognize that every member of the California State University, San Bernardino community has benefitted and continues to benefit from the use and occupation of this land since the institution's founding in 1965.

Consistent with our values of community and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the university's relationship to Native peoples. By offering this Land Acknowledgement, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty and will work to hold California State university, San Bernardino more accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.

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Introduction

"It is the high privilege and sacred duty of those now living to educate their successors and fit them, by intelligence and virtue, for the inheritance which awaits them."

-James Garfield, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1881

Welcome to the nineteenth edition of California State University San Bernardino's student-run journal, *History in the Making*. Our editorial board consists of talented and passionate students who have selected the articles within this volume to help expand upon the field of history and cultivate engaging conversation. Through the well-researched contributions of our authors, this year's volume provides fresh perspectives and elevates historical inquiry. This year's journal comprises thirteen pieces, including six full-length articles, one short article, five reviews, and one in-memoriam piece. Some themes that will be read throughout the journal are fascism, eugenics, marginalized communities, and discussions on the affairs of the United States, at home and abroad.

This edition of the journal includes a special exhibit review on "Fire Kinship: Southern California Native Ecology and Art" by Lina Tejeda. The exhibit was displayed at the University of California Los Angeles from January 22, 2025, to April 12, 2026, and was organized by Lina Tejeda, CSUSB Alumni, and Dr. Daisy Ocampo Diaz, an Associate History Professor at CSUSB. The cover photo for this edition is an image from a Fire Kinship display, "The Sun is on the Ground" by Leah Mata-Fragua.

The opening article "An 'Ill-Regulated Woman': The Rhetoric of Gendered Power in the Late Republic," by Samantha Guichard, effectively argues that Cicero's Pro Caelio defense speech transformed Clodia Metelli into a symbol of moral and political

disorder in late Republican Rome. Drawing on Roman anxieties about gender roles, domestic order, and elite instability, he framed her as a dangerous, non-Roman figure. The author persuasively argues that Cicero used gendered rhetoric and appeals to *mos maiorum* (“customs of the ancestors”) to reinforce patriarchal authority and stabilize Roman identity during political crisis, revealing how Roman rhetoric relied on controlling and vilifying women.

Our second article, “Eugenic Ties with Nature” by Samuel Griffin, argues that eugenics was deeply connected to the history of the American West and ideas of white superiority. The author explains how nineteenth-century Americans viewed nature as something to conquer and control, especially during westward expansion and Manifest Destiny. People like John O’Sullivan and Frederick Jackson Turner portrayed the West as land meant for Anglo-Saxon Americans, while Indigenous peoples and other races were viewed as inferior. He connects these beliefs to the twentieth-century eugenics movement, which sought to bolster the white race through forced sterilization and racial control. He implicates eugenics activists, John Harvey Kellogg and Luther Burbank, to further solidify his argument that the manipulation of nature is correlated with the eugenics movement.

“The Impact of Technology on the Chinese Queer Community,” by Samantha Collasco, examines the history and modern struggles of China’s LGBTQ+ community, arguing that queer representation has been shaped by shifting cultural values, political ideology, and censorship. She discusses how ancient China often accepted same sex relationships, especially among elites, but Confucian ideals and later Western influence promoted heteronormative family structures and stigmatized homosexuality. The author explores how LGBTQ+ communities rely heavily on the internet for activism, education, and connection, despite government repression and surveillance.

“The Connection: American Influence on Nazi Racial Hygiene” is a collaboration between two student authors, Dylan O’Conner, and Elizabeth Vasquez. These authors explore the impact of America’s eugenics movement on the eventual Nazi Racial Hygiene campaign for racial purity. Starting from Francis Galton’s creation of eugenics to the variety of eugenic organizations in America, the authors effectively contribute to the ongoing historical debate on whether the Nazis’ racial hygiene movement was heavily influenced by the American eugenic movement. In addition, the authors incorporate analysis of specific German racial hygienists along with legal cases to efficiently sharpen their argument.

“The Soviet Dimension of Normalization: Motivations and Obstacles Involved in the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations,” by Andrea Dixon, examines the normalization of relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China in 1979 under President Jimmy Carter. She argues that shared concerns about Soviet power during the Cold War motivated both nations to cooperate despite decades of hostility and disagreements over Taiwan. Furthermore, the author analyzes how leaders like Carter, Deng Xiaoping, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Cyrus Vance viewed normalization as a way to promote stability, expand trade, and modernize China’s economy. Lastly, the author discusses debates over human rights, alliances, and foreign policy, concluding that normalization reshaped Cold War politics and improved relations between China and the United States.

The last article, “American Fascism: How Patrick Buchanan Paved the Way for Donald Trump,” by Hayden Cross, discusses the transnational influence of fascism on the United States during the interwar period, and how that influence has been reawakened and metastasized into the fascism of today. Through highlighting various aspects of the German American Bund, the Silver Legion, and the America First Committee during the interwar period, Cross argues that an American brand of fascism takes the form of a “chauvinist, white, Christian, populist movement” that seeks to

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obtain its “palingenesis via exclusionary aims.” Cross further argues that the final events of WWII did not destroy fascism but, instead, placed it in a sort of dormant state. The author’s main argument is that Patrick Buchanan is responsible for bringing fascism out of the interwar period and into the 21st century because he provided the blueprint that Donald Trump built upon. By bringing to light Buchanan’s story, the author attempts to clarify the “fascist through-lines” that exist within the Trump administration and the MAGA movement.

This year's journal provides an in memoriam, on Claudette Colvin by Luke Hunter. Claudette Colvin was a civil rights activist and recently passed away in January of 2026. The piece contains a background on Claudette Colvin’s life and her major contributions to the Civil Rights Movement that occurred in the United States during the mid to late twentieth century.

Our next section is titled *History in the Making*, which has a short article by a contributing author. In “Silencing Dissent?” Marlet Felix provides an overview and assessment of the student protest on the Israel-Palestine war, which took place nationwide, across various college campuses. Themes she touches on include the states’ and academic administrations’ role in the suppression of particular information, especially of pro-Palestine dissent.

The last section of this year’s *History in the Making* consists of three book reviews, a television series review, and a museum exhibit review. First, the book, *War and Colonization in the Early American Northeast*, reviewed by Tyler Daniel discusses American northeast warfare by retelling history through the lens of Native Americans, as opposed to the European lens. Next, Sviatoslav Kozlov reviews the book *Cold War on Five Continents* written by Alfred McCoy, a deep historical work that looks at the evolution of the Cold War and its continuation in the twenty-first century. Koslov’s analysis goes more in depth on the author’s background, Cold War historiography, covert operations, as well as discuss the

“new cold war.” The third book review on *Raising the Redwood Curtain: Labor Landscapes and Community Violence in a Pacific Littoral* written by Samuel Griffin, explores Michael Karp’s (CSUSB faculty) work on Indigenous genocide, anti-Asian expulsions, and the 1935 Lumber Strike, highlighting how settler colonialism reshaped labor, society, and the environment to maximize capitalistic gains in California’s redwood region.

The television streaming series review was written by Hayden Cross on the show *Death by Lightning* which tells the story of James Garfield and his assassination. Cross sheds light on some inaccuracies in the portrayal of Chester A. Arthur, and discusses how the show could have provided deeper insight into how Garfield championed federal reform and civil rights issues.

Lastly, the exhibit review was written by Lina Tejeda on “Fire Kinship: Southern California Native Ecology and Art,” at UCLA. Tejeda discusses how this exhibit has challenged misrepresentations of Indigenous communities. By working with various Southern California tribal groups and through cultural burns, Tejeda helps to counter the fear surrounding native stewardship of the land.

**Joanna Gonzalez
Samuel Griffin
Hayden Cross
Gustavo Alonso Chamu
Chief Editors**

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Acknowledgements

The editorial board would like to thank Dr. Jeremy Murray for his advice and guidance for all of the members of the *History in the Making* journal. His insights and stewardship has provided an environment that fosters professional growth, a passion for history, and the desire to create. It is within this type of milieu that this journal is able to achieve such a high standard. The editorial board would also like to thank Dr. Tiffany Jones for helping with the printing, and formatting process. Dr. Jones' experience has been an invaluable resource to the journal as she has provided the tools and direction necessary to allow the editorial team to bring this work of history to life. Furthermore, we would like to thank all of CSUSB's History faculty. Without their passion for teaching history, the students in this journal would not have built the foundation of skills that ultimately allowed this volume to come into existence.

A great thanks goes out to the student contributors and editors that have put into practice what their professors have taught them. Without their willingness to go that extra mile and chase their passions, *History in the Making* would itself become a thing of the past. Every volume of this journal owes a great debt of gratitude to the hard work of its editors and contributing authors who have turned what was once a singular work of history into a series that has now grown to be nineteen installments in length. Each and every one of the articles, reviews, and in-memoriam piece is born from their contributor's passion for history, and the editorial team could not be more grateful for the arduous work that they have put in.

Lastly, the *History in the Making* journal would not be possible without the History Department administrative support coordinator, Pamela Crosson, for the continuous support she has provided the journal for many years, and we celebrate her retirement this year. In addition, we would like to thank CSUSB's

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Printing Services Team who always go above and beyond to help facilitate our journal getting printed with expertise and sometimes on an expedited schedule! Brandon Hernandez and the team in the CSUSB Receiving and Mail Services Office have also been essential to the journal's successful production. History Department Interim Chair Professor Brian Janiske and Maria Malpica Rodriguez, administrative support coordinator in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, together ensured that crucial administrative processes were completed in a timely manner to allow for printing and shipping of the journal.

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Articles

An “Ill-Regulated Woman”: The Rhetoric of Gendered Power in the Late Republic

By Samantha Guichard

Abstract: Cicero’s attack on Clodia Metelli in Pro Caelio was not a personal animus but a carefully wrought composition of rhetoric that rendered her an ideological emblem of late-Republican instability, reaffirming male authority through the reprobation of a wealthy, autonomous woman. This is supported by demonstrating that Cicero deployed similar characterizations of women across his career; against Sassia in Pro Cluentio and through Chelidon in the In Verrem, establishing it as a structural technique rather than a one-off tactic, and that Roman anxieties about women’s independent wealth provided the cultural conditions that made such rhetoric persuasive. This study engages in close readings of three Ciceronian speeches interpreted through an intersectional feminist perspective. Chong, Kenty and Langlands helped shape the argument. Leen’s analysis of the domus provided the spatial framework which the Chelidon parallel builds on. Steel and Webb’s edited collection established the economic-historical foundation. Xinyue supported the literary parallel to Virgil’s Camilla.

While most Romans were enjoying the first day of *Ludi Megalenses* in 56 BCE, an assembly of men gathered for a more somber purpose.¹ Although most trials were suspended during

¹ *Ludi Megalenses* was a Roman festival that took place between April 4th and 10th which honored the Magna Mater. It was a public holiday featuring games,

holidays, a rising political figure, Marcus Caelius Rufus (88-48 BCE), was accused of violence and corruption. Such serious charges necessitated the exigent circumstances. Yet, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) began his defense of Caelius by establishing sympathy, civic solidarity, and a common enemy. By Cicero’s account, they were all victims of a blasphemous crime, his client included. The orator claimed “above all [Caelius] is being attacked by the wealth of a courtesan” whose “passions must be checked.”² Cicero redirected the jurors’ attention toward Clodia Metelli (95-45 BCE), a consul’s widow whose affluence and lust were the cause of their collective anguish. To convince the jury of their duty to acquit Caelius, Cicero set about reshaping her reputation and household into the central terrain on which Caelius’ character is judged. Cicero transforms Clodia into the oration’s primary target by drawing on familiar Roman anxieties about feminine excess, domestic disorder, and elite instability in the final decades of the Republic. The sheer intensity of this invective demands explanation: what cultural logics render such an attack persuasive, and how does Clodia become the pivot through which Cicero reasserts Roman moral authority?

This paper argues that Cicero’s portrayal of Clodia is a calculated edifice that converts her into an ideological symbol of late-Republican instability. By mobilizing gendered characterization, spatial metaphor, and the moral vocabulary of *mos maiorum*, Cicero frames Clodia as an anti-*matrona*.³ She is transformed into a monstrosity whose identity violates the boundaries of acceptable Roman femininity. Building on Caroline

performances and processions. Trials were suspended during such an occasion, but Caelius was charged in connection with quite serious crimes including the murder of Dio of Alexandria.

², *Pro Caelio* Cicero, *De Provinciis Consularibus, Pro Balbo*, trans. R. Gardner, Loeb Classical Library 447 (Harvard University Press, 1958), 1–2.

³ *Matrona*: “a respectable married woman.”; *Mos maiorum*: “the mores of Rome’s ancestors.” Unwritten code dictating Roman social norms, derived from ancient costumes. Cicero uses that to magnify Clodia’s violations and Caelius’ observance to tradition.

Chong's intersectional analysis, the paper shows how Cicero exploits the convergence of Clodia's elite status, sexuality, lineage, and political associations to mark her as fundamentally un-Roman. Through Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and feminist analysis, it demonstrates how Clodia is staged as performing failed femininity while Cicero simultaneously performs authoritative masculinity before an audience invested in ancestral values. In this way, *Pro Caelio* converts a legal defense into a cultural performance that reinscribes male authority and stabilizes Roman identity amidst the tumultuous late Republic.

This paper applies an intersectional historical-rhetorical approach that foregrounds ideology. What survives of elite women's lives in the late Republic is overwhelmingly mediated through male-authored texts, a limitation that requires methodologies capable of reading against potentially hostile representation. Chong's model illuminates how Cicero layers gender, status, age, and alleged sexual misconduct to produce Clodia's deviance.⁴ Butler's theory of performativity clarifies how gender operates in the speech as a public act subject to judgment.⁵ Feminist theory examines Cicero's control over narrative space as an instrument for containing women's autonomy. These approaches are situated within Roman cultural norms through the concept of *mos maiorum*, as articulated by Joanna Kenty, which structured expectations for behavior and conferred societal legitimacy. Together, these frameworks allow *Pro Caelio* to be read as a site where gendered censure actively constructs Roman conceptions of virtue, identity, and the stability of the *res publica*.⁶

⁴ Caroline Chong, "Intersectionality in Ciceronian Invective," *The Classical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2022): 611-629, <https://www-cambridge-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/core/journals/classical-quarterly/article/intersectionality-in-ciceronian-invective/84AD77BE727392641B33DB9135B59CF4>.

⁵ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

⁶ Joanna Kenty, "Congenital Virtue: Mos Maiorum in Cicero's Orations," *The Classical Journal* 111, no. 4 (2016): 429-462,

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Scholarly engagement with Clodia and *Pro Caelio* has produced a wide and often conflicting body of research. Earlier studies, such as Marilyn B. Skinner’s biography of Clodia and Anne Leen’s analysis of the *domus* motif, emphasize that Clodia’s surviving image is shaped almost entirely by male representation and Cicero’s manipulation of gendered assumptions.⁷ More recent scholarship shifts from biography to ideology. Chong’s intersectional reading demonstrates how Cicero positions elite women as inherently destabilizing, while Rebecca Langlands shows how Roman sexual morality, especially *pudicitia*, functioned as a civic virtue with direct political consequences.⁸ Kenty’s work further clarifies how appeals to ancestral custom allowed orators to claim moral authority while casting figures like Clodia as threats to inherited order. This research builds on that

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5184/classicalj.111.4.0429>; *res publica*:

“commonwealth, the civic property and affairs of a given political community.” Romans believed in the strength of citizen engagement through military, social, and civic participation. Citizens constituted part of the whole and contributed to the greatness of the whole.

⁷ Anne Leen, “Clodia Oppugnatrix: The Domus Motif in Cicero’s *Pro Caelio*,” *The Classical Journal* 96, no. 2 (2000): 141-162,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3298121>; Marilyn B. Skinner, *Clodia Metelli: The Tribune’s Sister* (Oxford University Press, 2011); *domus*: “the house, a domestic space with gendered expectations and meaning.”

⁸ Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 364-365;

pudicitia: “a Roman virtue which concerned self-regulation, sexual restraint and modesty.” It separates good women from bad women. Good women are modest, chaste, submissive, and unassuming. When they are in public, good women display their *pudicitia* by shielding themselves from prying eyes. Their own eyes were lowered, so as not to invite sexual advances from strange men. Beginning with Roman foundational histories and myths, this concept is associated with women. Lucretia is a paragon of *pudicitia* and yet, her virtue is partly why the Etruscan Sextus Tarquinius rapes her. She avenges her *pudicitia* and the honor of her husband and father by committing suicide. This example is repeated in several influential Roman stories. Cicero and the all-male jury would be familiar with this concept and its importance within Roman history and culture. Clodia’s flagrant disregard for *pudicitia* read as emblems of growing societal disorder during the Republican period.

scholarship by arguing that Cicero's diatribe does more than malign an individual woman. It participates in a broader cultural system that constructs Roman identity through exclusion.

This oratorical strategy must be situated within the political and social crises of the late Roman Republic. By the mid-first century BCE, Rome was marked by recurrent civil violence, increased wealth disparity, and rampant corruption.⁹ A particularly salient point of contention was the increase in wealth held by women. Roman expansion into the east brought unprecedented resources into elite families, and the concurrent shift toward *sine manu* marriages allowed women to remain under their natal family's legal control rather than their husband's, keeping their property separate from marital estates.¹⁰ Women could legally lend money without oversight, and legislation such as the *lex Voconia* reveals ongoing attempts to regulate female inheritance even as families attempted to circumvent such restrictions. Elite women were expected to "enjoy wealth commensurate with their status," yet those who deployed that wealth independently risked censure.

⁹ Marsha McCoy, "The Politics of Prostitution: Clodia, Cicero, and Social Order in the Late Roman Republic," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 178-181, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csusb/reader.action?docID=3444746&ppg=188&c=UERG>; Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb, "Introduction," in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 2.

¹⁰ Harriet I. Flower, "Licinnia's Dowry and Property Rights," *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 86-87. *Sine manus*: "without her husband's legal control." Marriages were initially *manus* marriages and women came under the legal control of their husband. By the end of the second century BCE, women began remaining under the protection of their premarital families. This allowed women to keep more of their property separate from their husband. This does not include their dowry. Women like Terentia (Cicero's first wife) and Clodia owned and retained property that was not subject to their husband's authority. Cicero emphasizes the 'openness' of Clodia's home on the Palatine. As it was her home and she was lending money, I would argue she had occasion to have guests and visitors.

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Early customs could instrumentally employ the theme of female wealth to discredit certain women.¹¹ Cicero framed Clodia’s money lending to Caelius as evidence of sexual corruption. Cicero’s own financial dealings with the matron Caerellia involved similar arrangements. However, it was Atticus who worried about how Cicero’s borrowing from a woman appeared to others, not Cicero himself.¹² Traditional mechanisms of authority rooted in ancestry, moral reputation, and adherence to *mos maiorum* were increasingly strained by the rise of charismatic individuals, shifting economic realities, and the growing visibility of nontraditional forms of influence.¹³ In this context, moral discourse became a crucial arena for negotiating legitimacy. Accusations of sexual excess and domestic disorder offered a means of articulating anxieties about political instability in socially legible terms. Cicero’s attack on Clodia draws its persuasive force from this environment. Her alleged violations of feminine restraint stand in for general fears about the collapse of hierarchy, discipline, and inherited norms. By framing elite female autonomy as a symptom of communal disorder, Cicero positions himself as a defender of

¹¹ Bronwyn Hopwood, “A Series of Unfortunate Events Revisited,” in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 150; Kit Morrell, “Tutela mulierum in the Roman Republic,” in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 22. Lewis Webb “Female Visibility and Regulations in Republican Rome,” in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 75-77; Francesca Rohr Vio and Alessandra Valentini, “Roman Matrons’ Wealth between Politics and Clichés,” in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 151-162.

¹² Carolyn Tobin, “Sectrix proscriptionum: Women at the Proscriptions,” in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic*, ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 192; Cic. *Att.* 12.51.3; Cass. Dio 46.18.4; Steel and Webb, 8.

¹³ Appian, *B Civ.* 1.10.

traditional values at a moment when the Republic's moral and political foundations appeared increasingly precarious.¹⁴

The analysis now turns to the oratorical strategies Cicero uses as he constructs Clodia as a figure of moral and societal disorder. Central to this effort is her portrayal as an anti-*matrona*, an inversion of the ideals Romans associated with virtuous womanhood: restraint, domestic supervision, chastity, and deference. These ideals were publicly commemorated in exempla such as the *Laudatio Turiae*, which praised a matron's *pudicitia* and devotion to family.¹⁵ Clodia's own *gens* could boast of its own exemplary women including Quinta Claudia.¹⁶ Unlike the familial connections of Caelius, Clodia's ancestors are invoked only to shame her. Clodia was framed as a woman who threatened the *dignitas* of her own household; dishonoring her ancestors in the process.¹⁷ Cicero had refined this anti-*matrona* construction a

¹⁴ McCoy, "Politics of Prostitution," 183-84.

¹⁵ Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, Noel Lenski, and Richard J. A. Talbert, *A Brief History of ancient Rome* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 168-169.

¹⁶ Fantham, Elaine, Foley, Helene Peet, Kampen, Natalie Boymel, Pomeroy, Sarah B., and Shapiro, H.A., "Republican Rome I: From Marriage By Capture To Partnership in War-The Proud Women of Early Rome," in *Women in the Classical World*, (Oxford University Press, 1995), 215-216, accessed April 3, 2026. ProQuest Ebook Central.; *gens*: "a Roman citizen kinship group that claimed descent from a common ancestor." One's place in Roman society was intimately connected to familial connection during the Republican period. Ancestry was a source of pride for Romans. Clodia was a member of the Claudia *gens*, an old and distinguished line which had produced multiple officeholders, including consuls. Cicero invokes both the matron Quinta Claudia, whose chastity was vindicated when she received the Magna Mater in 204 BCE, and a Vestal of the Claudian line. This would be understood by the men participating at the trial.

¹⁷ Cic. *Cael.* 33-36;

dignitas: "high standing or rank in the community, and the all-important esteem due to the holder of it." One was expected to live up to one's standing or lose the marks of respect which accompanied it. As a member of a patrician family and a consul's widow, Clodia was a woman of rank. In his oration, Cicero

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decade earlier in the *Pro Cluentio*, where Sassia, the mother of his client Cluentius (c. 103 BCE-?), was also maligned. She was alleged to have conceived an “unholy passion” for her daughter’s husband and eventually married him. A disruption of familial hierarchy in precisely the terms Cicero later applies to Clodia: lust triumphing over modesty, depravity over scruple.¹⁸ Like Clodia, Sassia is cast as the concealed instigator of the prosecution, a woman whose uncontrolled desires generated the enmity that brought her son to trial.¹⁹ The characterization echoes Sallust’s portrait of Sempronia, who allegedly chased men rather than wait to be pursued and possessed a masculine audacity that situated her beyond the boundaries of acceptable femininity.²⁰ The parallel across all three figures is structural. When Roman authors needed to articulate anxieties about destabilized authority, they reached for the same archetype: the elite woman whose *luxuria* and sexual autonomy mark her as a threat to the social order she was expected to uphold. In his description of the bath house plot, Cicero refers to Clodia as a “commandress,” full of brashness that unsettles the boundary between feminine reserve and masculine aggression. He points to the audacity of Clodia’s supposed actions by remarking on their public nature. Advancing further, the claim she initiated the charges against Caelius.²¹ Cicero feminizes vice and masculinizes disorder, presenting Clodia as a figure whose behavior breaches the gendered limits that structure Roman social life. The charge implies not just immodesty but an illicit claim to public presence, speech, and influence domains conventionally

simultaneously strips her of *dignitas* and invokes the *dignitas* of her *gens* as it suits his purposes.

¹⁸ Cic. *Cluent.* 12–15.

¹⁹ Cic. *Cluent.* 1; McCoy, 178–79.

²⁰ Sal. *Cat.* 25.1–5, translated by JC Rolfe

Luxuria: “luxury, extravagance or lust.” Roman society held moderation in high regard. Excesses were discouraged. Elaborate displays of extravagance by women appear to have generated concern as demonstrated by the *lex Voconia*, *lex Oppia* and the Plautine comedy *Aulularia*.

²¹ Cic. *Cael.* 35–67.

reserved for men. In this way, Clodia becomes "...a woman of unrestrained sexual passion, who has transgressed her role as a Roman *matrona*," excluded from moral credibility.²²

This transposition is reinforced through strategies such as *praeteritio* and insinuation, drawing attention to Clodia's alleged offenses by conspicuously claiming to pass over them.²³ Cicero urges the jury to imagine Clodia's house as a space of moral permeability, open to illicit desire rather than governed by supervision and order.²⁴ A stark contrast from Livy's chaste portrait of Lucretia at home "...busily engaged upon her wool..." as befitting a proper *matrona*.²⁵ Langlands informs that this paragon of *pudicitia* was well known to Romans, and Clodia's departure from the ideal wife of the past proves exceptionally useful to the orator.²⁶ Cicero claims Clodia "...opens her house to all men's desires, and publicly leads the life of a courtesan..."²⁷ Cicero had deployed this same tactic fourteen years earlier in the *In Verrem*, where the courtesan Chelidon served a parallel function. During Verres' (c. 113 BCE-43 BCE) praetorship, Cicero claimed, legitimate petitioners found the houses of lawful magistrates empty while Chelidon's dwelling, also designated as the den of a harlot, was densely crowded with men seeking favorable rulings.²⁸ Honorable citizens were forced to degrade themselves by entering her house because Verres had effectively ceded his judicial authority to a woman who "controlled the civil law and all the private controversies of the nation."²⁹ The structural parallel is significant: in both orations, Cicero inverts the *domus* to

²² Chong, 625.

²³ Cic. *Cael.* 31–32. Cicero's conspicuous claim to pass over Clodia's alleged incest and her brother's conduct is a classic instance of *praeteritio*.

²⁴ Leen, 145.

²⁵ Liv. 1.57.

²⁶ Langlands, 80-81.

²⁷ Cic. *Cael.* 49.

²⁸ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.120.

²⁹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.136–37.

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demonstrate that male authority has been surrendered to a woman whose sexual status disqualifies her from legitimate influence. The *domus*, traditionally a foundation of state stability, becomes a metaphor for moral decay. Cicero's emphasis on the openness of Clodia's household is not incidental. Roman political thought routinely treated the household as a microcosm of the state, governed by hierarchy, discipline, and male authority. During Cicero's argument, he sets Clodia's home as Caelius' moral opposite. Hers is "a hostile, infamous, merciless, crime-stained, lust-stained house;" while his "is the home of innocence, of honour, of duty, of piety..."³⁰ This imagined domestic disorder functions as circumstantial evidence of societal irresponsibility, allowing Cicero to translate private behavior into a public threat.³¹ The insinuation does not require proof; it relies on the assumption that a woman incapable of maintaining household order is equally incapable of participating responsibly in the moral life of the Republic. As Leen has shown, this "...implied contrast between the cultural ideal of the virtuous *matrona* and the inflammatory portrait of Clodia left the jurors little to do except participate, whether consciously or not, in Cicero's construction of events."³²

Cicero's most vivid act of character creation appears in his comparison of Clodia to Medea. Euripides' play *Medea* concerns a foreign woman who punishes her husband by killing their children and his new bride. The allusion situates Clodia within a familiar narrative tradition in which sexually slighted women threaten social cohesion. Cicero branded Clodia "...Medea of the Palatine Hill..." a characterization that added weight to his attack. Like Sassia before her, Clodia is presented as calculating and vengeful. Her transgressions are deliberate, which renders them more threatening. Through this lens, he frames her wealth as a lack of

³⁰ Cic. *Cael.* 55.

³¹ Leen, 143.

³² Leen, 151.

constantia and *pudicitia* for maximum effect.³³ Reading through Chong's interpretation of intersectionality, Clodia is connected to foreign *furor* and excess in addition to her shameless sexuality. During his argument, Cicero reminds the jury, "an unstable and angry wanton of a woman has forged this charge," not facts. She used her resources and wiles to corrupt Caelius, and when his affections waned, she used her connections and money to seek revenge for the perceived slight.³⁴ This allusion to the reversal of gender roles adds more layers to the breakdown of acceptable behavior.³⁵ These associations of eastern vice and impetuous women were certain to resonate with Cicero's jury of well-educated men. Kenty asserts that this kind of speech was particularly effective.³⁶ Cicero's strategy of impugning Clodia's character was perfectly acceptable, ensuring that the jury interprets her as a repudiation of Roman tradition itself.³⁷

Chong's intersectional model clarifies how Cicero heightens this effect by combining multiple identity markers. Clodia's patrician lineage renders her conduct more visible and

³³ Cic. *Cael.* 18; *Constantia*: "Roman virtue representing a duty to unwavering self-discipline, moral fortitude, and stability." The literary figure of Medea is associated with foreign feminine audacity, vengeance, and uncontrolled rage. In Euripides' *Medea*, she exacts revenge upon men who have wronged her and goes unpunished. Invoking this literary figure allows Cicero to connect Clodia's quarrel with Caelius with Medea in the minds of the jury. If they absolve Caelius, they avenge Roman social order and righteously punish the threat.

³⁴ Cic. *Cael.* 36, 55; *furor*: "impassioned anger and aggression." *Furor* was universally discouraged in Roman society and particularly unbecoming of a Roman woman. Much of Cicero's argument rests on Clodia as the guilty party. These literary depictions of powerful, willful women help Cicero depersonalize Clodia and separate her from what she is, a Roman woman.

³⁵ Bobby Xinyue, "Imperatrix and bellatrix: Cicero's Clodia and Vergil's Camilla," in *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*, ed. Domitilla Campanile, Filippo Carlà-Uhink, Margherita Facella. (Routledge, 2017), 166-168, <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/10.4324/9781315673844>.

³⁶ Kenty, 455.

³⁷ Skinner, 98-99.

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more threatening.³⁸ Her widowhood reduces male supervision; her alleged sexual autonomy marks her as transgressive; and her natal ties to Publius Clodius Pulcher (92-52 BCE) politicize her persona. By binding Clodia to a figure already coded as a political threat, Cicero produces an ideologically charged anti-*matrona* who embodies late-Republican anxieties about moral decline and destabilized hierarchy.³⁹ Her utility lies precisely in her deviation, which sharpens Cicero’s own performance of *virtus* and masculine guardianship.

This construction depends on the cultural competence of an all-male jury trained to read gendered behavior through the lenses of *pietas*, *auctoritas*, and ancestral practice.⁴⁰ Cicero expects his audience to respond less to evidence than to recognizable moral patterns. By presenting Caelius as a young man shaped by paternal oversight and destined for service to the *res publica*, Cicero anchors him within the moral fabric of Roman identity. He asserted that young men deserved a measure of indulgence. The jury was also reminded that many illustrious Romans had erred in their youth.⁴¹ Cicero repeatedly emphasizes Caelius’ relationship

³⁸ Chong, 623-24.

³⁹ Catherine Steel, “Name and Shame?: Invective against Clodius and Others in the Post-Exile Speeches” in *Cicero on the Attack: Invective and Subversion in the Orations and Beyond*, ed. Ingo Gildenhard, Byron Harries, Keith Hopwood, J.G.F. Powell, Robin Seager, Catherine Steel, Javier Uria, and Rogier L. van der Wal (Classical Press of Wales, 2007), 123-124, <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/10.2307/j.ctvvn8s.9>.

⁴⁰ *Auctoritas*: a form of social and moral authority, one’s prestige and influence in society; *pietas*: a cardinal virtue concerning duty, loyalty, and respect to the gods, family, and the state; *Virtus*: “manly courage, excellence or distinction as demonstrated in service to Rome.” This virtue was associated with valor, masculinity, character, and moral integrity. In Latin, *vir* means man. It is used to refer to males who have reached maturity. The virtues ascribed to *virtus* were aspirational for Roman men and not generally applied to women. In literary works, most feminine characters who embody these traits are subversive and serve as a foil for the triumph of true *virtus* by a male hero. Here, Clodia is the subversive imposter, and Cicero and the jury are the conquering hero performing valiant service to Rome by vindicating Caelius.

⁴¹ Cic. *Cael.* 39-43, 72-74.

to his father and himself, invoking a model of masculine development in which youthful excess is regulated by paternal authority and redirected toward public service. Cicero brushes off Caelius' connection to Catiline (c. 108–62 BCE) as a regrettable mistake, claiming a number of men including himself were fooled by him.⁴² Caelius' alleged misbehavior is dressed as a phase most men, Cicero and the jurors themselves, experienced that will fade with maturity.⁴³ The contrast with Clodia is deliberate. Where Caelius is depicted as integrated within networks of familial supervision, Clodia is characterized as operating beyond any legitimate form of control.⁴⁴ The rhetorical effect is to render Caelius intelligible as a future citizen while casting Clodia as a figure whose autonomy itself constitutes a danger. Clodia's persona is designed to trigger anxieties about gender disorder and hierarchical instability. The strategy relies on the jury's familiarity with examples such as Lucretia and Verginia, and with figures like the aforementioned Sempronia. These narrative models taught Romans that women who exceeded prescribed roles threatened the state.⁴⁵

At this stage, Clodia ceases to function as a historical individual and becomes an embodiment of anxieties about Roman survival. This ideological function finds a literary parallel in Virgil's epic *The Aeneid*.⁴⁶ The Volscian princess Camilla possesses traditionally masculine virtues yet lacks *pietas*, which legitimizes Aeneas' authority. Again, the image of the chaste weaver is disrupted by a woman more suited to military command.⁴⁷ Her virginity and dedication to her homeland are insufficient to save her as she traverses the boundaries of

⁴² Cic. *Cael.* 14.

⁴³ Cic. *Cael.* 28.

⁴⁴ Cic. *Cael.* 33-35, 72-77.

⁴⁵ Sal. *Cat.* 25.1-5.

⁴⁶ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (Penguin Classics, 2006).

⁴⁷ Verg. *Aen.* 7.803-817.

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acceptable femininity.⁴⁸ Her *furor*, lust for purple, and gold attract an immodest amount of attention, unlike Andromache who bears her womanly burdens with restraint. Camilla's death is narratively required to restore gendered balance and secure Rome's future.⁴⁹ Cicero's stylistic logic operates similarly. Clodia's wealth and autonomy cannot be assimilated into his vision of a stable Republic and must therefore be neutralized through moral annihilation. Both figures are eliminated so that male authority may reassert itself.

The courtroom becomes a stage on which Roman identity is enacted. Cicero's self-presentation and his portrayal of Caelius perform alignment with the moral order that the jury is meant to recognize and reward. Clodia's constructed deviance provides the necessary contrast, allowing Caelius' manly devotion to the public to appear secure.⁵⁰ Through humor, theatricality, and insinuation, Cicero converts the trial into a reaffirmation of patriarchal order. Elite male authority can be restored through the containment of an elite woman whose autonomy unsettles normative categories.⁵¹ Medea of the Greek tragedy went unpunished for her crimes. Surely a jury of Roman men would not allow Medea of the Palatine to act with such impunity.

Collectively, this analysis demonstrates that Cicero's portrayal of Clodia in *Pro Caelio* is not incidental to forensic strategy but constitutive of the speech's persuasive force. By constructing Clodia as a threat to moral coherence, Cicero secures his own authority, elevates Caelius, and reinscribes the gendered boundaries that underwrite Roman public life. The success of the defense depends on allying the jury with Caelius' plight by vilifying Clodia. In closing, Cicero implores the jury to rescue

⁴⁸ Verg. *Aen.* 7.561-566; Xinyue, 169.

⁴⁹ Verg. *Aen.* 3.298-335; 11.768-782; 11.648-663.

⁵⁰ Kenty, 454.

⁵¹ Kenty, 452; For anxiety surrounding women insinuating themselves into judicial proceedings and other public affairs, see: Christiane Kunst, "Mucia Tertia: Resources of Matronage," in *Women, Wealth and Power in the Roman Republic* ed. Catherine Steel and Lewis Webb (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 217-219, 228-229.

Caelius lest he be “sacrificed to her lust; let it not be thought that this same woman...has succeeded...in crushing a most honorable young man.” He appeals to their collective authority and sentiment to save Caelius. For his father and for Rome. The orator’s closing remarks recall his opening statements: “...it is you above all, gentlemen, who will reap the rich and lasting fruits of all his exertions and labours.”⁵²

In this context, *Pro Caelio* reveals the extent to which Roman identity in the late Republic depended on the regulation of gender and the symbolic containment of elite women. Cicero’s elocution masks the Republic’s structural reliance on feminine agency; genealogical, social, and financial, by reframing that agency as a liability that must be controlled. The comparison with figures such as Camilla and the structural parallels with Cicero’s earlier treatments of Sassia in the *Pro Cluentio* and Chelidon in the *In Verrem* underscore that this logic was not confined to a single courtroom or a single target. Across his career, Cicero returned to the same rhetorical architecture: the transgressive woman whose open *domus*, unregulated wealth, or sexual autonomy could be mobilized to reassert the authority of the men she had supposedly displaced. Across Roman literature and historiography, women are elevated when their actions serve collective stability and neutralized when their autonomy frustrates inherited hierarchies. Cicero’s vitriolic erasure of Clodia participates in a widespread cultural mechanism through which Roman authors stabilized masculine authority during periods of political strain. This examination hopes to inspire critical engagement with Roman rhetorical tradition and its afterlives. Cicero’s brilliance lies not only in stylistic mastery but in his ability to mobilize cultural assumptions about gender as instruments of persuasion. Recognizing how *Pro Caelio* stabilizes patriarchal power complicates long-standing celebrations of Roman civic virtue and highlights the ideological work embedded in foundational political texts.

⁵² Cic. *Cael.* 78-80.

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Author Bio

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Eugenics Ties with Nature

By Samuel Griffin

Abstract: While Eugenics and the American West have been thoroughly studied, the connection which highlights the continuous pattern of white supremacist ideals between the two has not been examined sufficiently. Drawing on writings from Frederick Jackson Turner, John O'Sullivan, and research by Douglas Sackman. This article articulates how the 19th-century American viewed nature as something to conquer, and those who did not share this view were deemed inferior. Additionally, this work analyzes Alexandra Minna Stern's Eugenic Nation alongside Luther Burbank's and Dr. John Kellogg's personal writings to highlight California's support and participation in eugenics. By analyzing Burbank's and Kellogg's writings, the author points out distinct quotes to show that the push for eugenics was also about conquering nature in order to "protect" white supremacy. Beyond enhancing understanding of vital topics in history, such as eugenics and the American West, this research is important because it identifies the systematic beliefs America held from the 19th century into the 20th century on eugenics. Understanding this connection is necessary to avoid further atrocities that may come from the systematic belief that Anglo-Americans are a superior race.

Eugenics needs to be recognized as a large part of Western American History. For instance, at one point, California performed twenty thousand sterilizations, one-third of the total performed in

the United States.¹ Although reports show California performed mass involuntary sterilizations, eugenics is still seen as an afterthought, one of America's dark secrets hidden in the back of a closet. Nevertheless, eugenics is a morbid part of American history and gives historians a deeper look into the construction of the American West. The creation of America's western frontier is deeply ingrained with the power struggle between nature and white Anglo-Saxon Americans. The manipulation and exploitation of nature in the 19th century brings into question who can and cannot use nature to bolster their societal position. While scholars have separately dissected the ideas of nature and eugenics in the United States, very few have made connections between the two. This essay connects the power dynamic between nature and white Americans from the 19th century to the Eugenics Crusade in the 20th century. Using an environmental lens and approach, this essay analyzes the ideas of conquest and exploitation, all with the end goal of race superiority. Americans' goal of conquest over nature foreshadows the views on better breeding and highlights how eugenics came to fruition. Their perspective of nature was used as a justification for a variety of hostile actions in the American West, specifically the race betterment project and eugenics.

Nineteenth-century Americans saw nature as something to conquer and control. As early as 1845, John O'Sullivan, who coined Manifest Destiny, said, "The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses."² O'Sullivan made this remark in the footsteps of the war with Mexico when the prospect of obtaining a large amount of land

¹Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (University of California Press, 2016), 6.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt19631sw.9>.

²John O'Sullivan, "John O'Sullivan Declares America's Manifest Destiny," in *The American Yawp Reader*, <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/manifest-destiny/john-osullivan-declares-americas-manifest-destiny-1845/>.

in the West was a popular opinion in America. His words highlighted the American West being centered around conquering, or mastering, nature and capitalizing off the land for the benefit of Anglo-Saxon Americans. Historian Mark Reisler argued the following: “To some Anglos, the Spanish conquest clearly demonstrated the inferiority of Mexican Indians. A stronger race would not have been defeated, nor would it have allowed itself to fall into a state of peonage.”³ Beginning in the 19th century, the conquest of Western land exhibited the growing disparity in how Anglo Americans viewed themselves compared to other races. Consequently, conquering nature through the conquest of Western North America is directly correlated to Racial nationalism. This concept has been explained by Historian Douglas Sackman as, “the belief that the United States was the divinely allotted domain where whites could live up to their potential, which they thought was greater than that of any other race.”⁴ O’Sullivan’s argument for Manifest Destiny is justified through racial nationalism and created the foundational belief that Anglo Americans are superior.



Figure 1. American Progress⁵

³Mark Reisler, “Always the Laborer, Never the Citizen: Anglo Perceptions of the Mexican Immigrant during the 1920s,” *Pacific Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1976): 238, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3638496>.

⁴Douglas Sackman, “Nature and Conquest,” in *A Companion to California History*, edited by William Deverell, and David Igler (John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2008), 177-178.

⁵George A. Croft, *American Progress*, 1873, chromolithograph, 37.6 x 49 cm, *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97507547/>.

Eugenics Ties with Nature

Americans saw conquering the Western frontier as an advancement in American culture and, as Frederick Jackson Turner said, “the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life.”⁶ The consequence of winning the wilderness consisted of exploitation of natural land and committing mass genocide of the Indigenous population. Turner, a nineteenth-century historian, shared the same feelings that many American citizens had at the time regarding “winning a wilderness.” His use of the word “wilderness” depicted a deeper meaning of what the West consisted of. Turner believed the West was free land, ripe for the taking. There was no acknowledgment of the Indigenous people who already occupied the land, largely because the Native people were viewed as lesser than the Anglo Americans. In Turner’s words, “It begins with the Indian and the hunter; it goes on to tell of the disintegration of savagery by the entrance of the trader, the pathfinder of civilization.”⁷ First, he described the relationship between the American settlers and Indians as “the Indian and the hunter.” His description highlights the perception of the native population as something hunted, rather than equal human beings. The American citizens in the nineteenth century felt justified in their inhumane actions because of the dynamic they created between the indigenous population and themselves; the hunter versus the hunted. The question is why did they feel justified in making such a distinction between two humans? Similar to the justification of the Eugenic Crusade, Americans believed they held the right to use nature as a power to bolster the white race.

⁶Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (American Historical Association: 1893).

⁷ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier.”



Figure 2. Photo of Frederick Jackson Turner⁸

The push for a Eugenics movement was partially justified by government officials as a response to the influx of disease that Americans were facing. Alexandra Minna Stern, one of the lead historians of medicine, argued in *Eugenic Nation* that the use of tropical medicine during the construction of the Panama Canal shaped the belief that Americans held a resilient race makeup.”⁹ First, in San Francisco during the year 1908, there was a push to eradicate rats and other disease-filled rodents that could harm American citizens through fumigation and other harmful actions.¹⁰

⁸Photo of Frederick Jackson Turner, 1 photographic print, *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Library of Congress*, Washington D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018654855/>.

⁹Alexandra Minna Stern, “Race Betterment and Tropical Medicine in Imperial San Francisco,” In *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (University of California Press, 2016), 41-42.

¹⁰Stern, “Race Betterment and Tropical Medicine,” 36.

Although “cleansing the environment” of disease had been the idea behind killing the rats, a racist definition of hygiene began to develop from prior racial justifications for westward expansion. Americans believed one’s ability to fight off disease was based on race. In reality, a person’s environment largely determines the possibility of catching a disease. Initially, White Americans believed people of color could fight off diseases better than others; this view most likely served as justification for providing subpar living conditions. For this reason, “homes of West Indian workers were not systematically screened, standing water was often left untouched in their neighborhoods, and treatment for other, equally deadly diseases, such as pneumonia or dysentery, was given only haphazardly.”¹¹ Consequently, reports came out that “the white worker and his family were indeed faring extremely well; otherwise, for the vast black majority, the picture was alarming.”¹² In the end, Americans attributed their health to race makeup and amplified the idea of one race being better than another, further supporting the eugenics movement.

Although the idea of eugenics was justified as a response to disease, it quickly turned into programs, laws, and regulations that encouraged mass sterilizations of the “unfit.” First, in 1912, Reverend W.T. Sumner refused to marry couples who did not obtain a medical certificate proving they were both mentally and physically healthy. This was followed by U.S. states creating eugenic marriage laws restricting people deemed feeble-minded or moronic from being married.¹³ As previously stated, White Americans believed they were healthier than other races because of their racial makeup; consequently, they discouraged the idea of encouraging mixed race marriages. Kenneth Ludmerer referenced the influential work, *The Passing of the Great Race*, which

¹¹Stern, “Race Betterment and Tropical Medicine,” 42.

¹²Stern, “Race Betterment and Tropical Medicine,” 42.

¹³Calum MacKellar and Christopher Bechtel, eds. “The History of Eugenics.” In *The Ethics of the New Eugenics*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2014), 15–34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qew9j.7>.

asserted, “American blood was incompatible with foreign blood, that any mixing between the two would destroy the quality of the country’s native stock.”¹⁴ Marriage laws that barred people from getting married were instituted to stop the destruction of “the quality of the country’s native stock.” Eugenacists believed the influx of immigrants in America would result in the extinction of the pure, Anglo race. Harry H. Laughlin, a widely known eugenicist, argued, “If the time ever comes when men with a small fraction of colored blood can readily find mates among white women, the gates would be thrown open to a final radical race mixture of the whole population.”¹⁵ One of the ways Laughlin believed he could stop the “radical race mixture” was by sterilizing minorities, so they could not reproduce with anyone. To him, a mixture of people with “superior blood” having children with “inferiors” would lead to the decay of a great civilization.¹⁶

Encouraged by Laughlin’s ideology, states would shortly begin to implement these practices into law. The first law allowing forced sterilization was the 1907 Compulsory Sterilization Law of Indiana. This law granted medical officials the right to perform a sterilization operation if the people were criminals, idiots, rapists, and imbeciles. By 1927, around twenty-four states had created similar laws, and by 1935, California had performed 4,636 sterilizations and castrations. Additionally, in the infamous 1927 U.S. Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*, the court told Carrie Buck that Virginia had the right to forced sterilization because she was deemed “a threat to the genetic stability of society.”¹⁷ The ruling led to decades of involuntary sterilizations, which would become known as the Eugenic Crusade. In the early twentieth century, California had become the cradle for eugenic ideas. The work of

¹⁴Kenneth M. Ludmerer, “Genetics, Eugenics, and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 46, no. 1 (1972): 59–81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44447480>.

¹⁵Reisler, “Always the Laborer,” 244, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3638496>.

¹⁶Reisler, “Always the Laborer,” 244–245, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3638496>.

¹⁷MacKellar, “The History of Eugenics,” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qcw9j.7>.

the Human Betterment Foundation in Pasadena and the Second National Conference on Race Betterment in San Francisco would elevate forced sterilization to a standard practice across America by the end of the century.

The Human Betterment Foundation was created to further bolster the eugenics movement. E. S. Gosney, president of the HBF, argued, "In every state it has been found desirable to have a compulsory feature of the law and a number of the states which began with a purely voluntary and permissive law have later altered their statutes to introduce a compulsory provision."¹⁸ Gosney believed that compulsory sterilizations were "desirable" in situations when they could not count on the patient to make a "responsible" decision.¹⁹ However, in many situations, patients would be coerced into signing consent papers they did not understand, lied to pertaining medical conditions, or would be sterilized without their permission if they were deemed "unfit."²⁰ Gosney proudly remarked that California followed Indiana by adopting a sterilization law in 1909 and constantly supported Paul Popenoe and Roswell M. Johnson who were authors of *Applied Eugenics*, at the American Institute of Family Relations in Los Angeles. The *Los Angeles Times*, specifically the writer Fred Hogue, consistently defended eugenics through the column titled "Social Eugenics."²¹ Hogue was a supporter of the HBF and Gosney, along with the American Eugenics Society. He frequently visited the meetings held at the Los Angeles Public Library and reiterated their messages in his column. Hogue believed so strongly in eugenics, he even applauded Germany's movement to

¹⁸E. S. Gosney, "Eugenic Sterilization," *Scientific American* 151, no. 1 (1934):

19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24968556>.

¹⁹Gosney, "Eugenic Sterilization," 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24968556>.

²⁰Myla Vicenti Carpio, "The Lost Generation: American Indian Women and Sterilization Abuse," *Social Justice* 31, no. 4 (98) (2004): 42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768273>.

²¹Alexandra Minna Stern, "Instituting Eugenics in California," In *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, (University of California Press, 2016), 82.

sterilize the unfit.²² Although California was, and still is, very progressive, it does not take away from the state's role in advancing and normalizing eugenics.

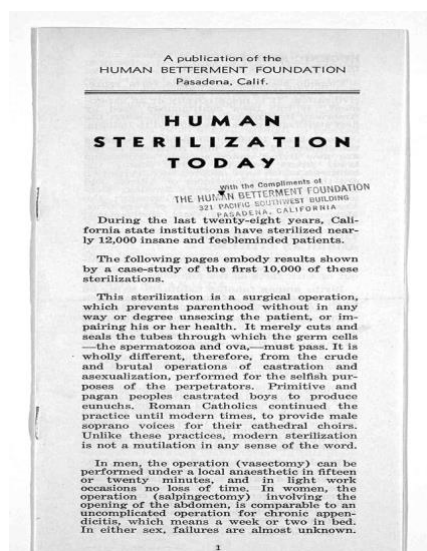


Figure 3. Human Betterment Foundation pamphlet²³

The Race Betterment Foundation held the Second National Conference on Race Betterment to provide support and clarity for the eugenics movement in the early 20th century. In the SNCRB, two prominent figures in eugenics history gave a talk to bolster the idea of eugenics: Luther Burbank and Dr. John Kellogg. Specifically, Kellogg felt that if the public could understand why there was a need for eugenics, there would be less backlash. John Harvey Kellogg was known for his dry breakfast cereals, but he was much more than that. A self-proclaimed physician, Kellogg gave many educational talks on the importance of hygiene, diet,

²²Stern, "Instituting Eugenics in California," 82.

²³Human Betterment Foundation pamphlet, 1938, book, 10 x 24 cm, Pasadena, *Rare Book and Special Divisions Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington*, <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020783595>.

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and other scientific topics about humans. Most importantly, Kellogg played a key part in the Eugenics Crusade by speaking at conferences and advocating for the sterilization of the weak and lesser humans. Kellogg said,

We are actually building up an aristocracy of lunatics, idiots, paupers and criminals. These unfit people have reached proportions of a vast multitude: 500,000 lunatics, 80,000 criminals, 100,000 paupers, 90,000 idiots, 90,000 epileptics, at an expense of one hundred million dollars a year, and this mighty host of mental and moral cripples is increasingly due to unrestricted marriage and other degenerative influences at a more rapid rate than the sounder part of the population so that they are bound in time to constitute the majority unless some check is put upon the increase.²⁴

He believed the “unfit” were a burden to society, costing millions of dollars to the government, and the answer was to stop the possibility of the “unfit” from reproducing. Luther Burbank was widely known for his expertise in plant modification through breeding. His fascination with plants correlated to, what he believed to be, the potential for a greater human race. Burbank argued,

Physical perfection contests embracing all ages should be inaugurated in every community. Medals should be awarded to the winners in each grade. By means of lectures, moving pictures, and other means, the public must be educated to an appreciation of the importance of periodical medical examinations for the purpose of

²⁴*Associated Press*, “The Wizard of Santa Rosa Talks on Race Betterment: Luther Burbank Declares Constant Selection of Best Only Way: Health Registry Urged: Dr. Kellogg Believes Years of Training Would Show People Justice of Plan,” *Volume 45*, 146, (Visalia Morning Delta, 1915).

discovering the beginnings of nervous and other disorders.²⁵

At face value, Burbank and Kellogg's response can be attributed to their desire for a healthier America. However, a healthier America to them is one where whites prevail among other races due to their "resilient racial makeup."²⁶



Figure 4. Banquet in honor of R. Victor C. Vaughan, president American Medical Association, during Conference on Race Betterment²⁷

Eugenics sought the goal of mastering nature to justify and enforce white superiority. During the Second National Conference on Race Betterment, Kellogg said, "A eugenics registry would be the beginning of a new and glorified human race which sometime, far down in the future will have so mastered the forces of nature that disease and degeneracy will have been eliminated."²⁸ Kellogg,

²⁵Associated Press, "The Wizard of Santa Rosa Talks on Race Betterment," 146.

²⁶Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 41.

²⁷Banquet in honor of R. Victor C. Vaughan, president American Medical Association, during Conference on Race Betterment, January 1914, image, 1,450 × 860, Battle Creek, Michigan, <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsoffir14nati/page/n21/mode/2up>.

²⁸"All Tenets of Faith Eugenics Upheld: Future of Race Discussed by Experts in Congress Held at Oakland: Trend for Betterment: Luther Burbank and Dr.

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like many other white Americans, argued a eugenics registry would help “master the forces of nature.” Anglo Americans from the 19th and 20th centuries believed that being white meant they were better than other races. Furthermore, conquering and capitalizing off nature was inherently correlated to white superiority.

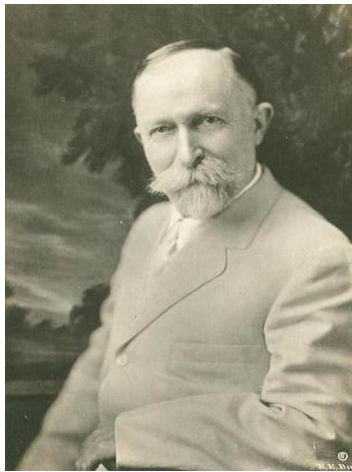


Figure 5. Portrait of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg²⁹

Correspondingly, nature was treated as an extension of God’s gift meant to help Anglo-Saxon Americans achieve white supremacy. John Harvey Kellogg wrote, “What we call ‘nature’ is simply the picture of divine activity which we see spread out about us in the universe. God is not behind nature nor above nature; he is in nature, —nature is the visible expression of his power.”³⁰ Kellogg’s manipulation of nature through eugenics emphasizes the

Kellogg Talk About Aristocratic Lunatics,” *Volume 43*, 194, (Morning Press, 1915).

²⁹F. E. Doty, Portrait of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, 1915, Black and White postcard, The Willard Library, Battle Creek, <http://dspace.willardlibrary.org/xmlui/handle/123456789/9371?show=full>.

³⁰John Kellogg, *The Living Temple*, (Good Health Publishing Company, 1903), 40.

persistent strive towards a superior white race. A common phrase amongst Eugenicists, including Kellogg, is the “superior race” or the future race, which is achieved through eugenics. Kellogg’s words in “Relation of Public Health to Race Degeneracy,” help explain who he felt was a part of the future race, or superior race. Kellogg said,

For example, among native-born New England wives the average number of children is only 2.7, while foreign-born wives living in the same communities have an average of 4.4 children. In the decrease of the birth-rate and the increase of incompetent mothers, we are face to face with a race disease which must inevitably end in what Mr. Roosevelt termed ‘race suicide,’ and is unmistakable evidence of race degeneracy.³¹

Kellogg described incompetent mothers as being “foreign-born wives.” His words help articulate the meaning behind creating the “finest human race ever known.”³² Kellogg was not the only one contributing to the 19th century eugenics movement, Luther Burbank followed suit in his push for a superior white race through the integration of botany.

³¹John Kellogg, “Relation of Public Health to Race Degeneracy,” (American Public Health Association, 1913), 655.

³²Luther Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, (The Century Company, 1907), 11.

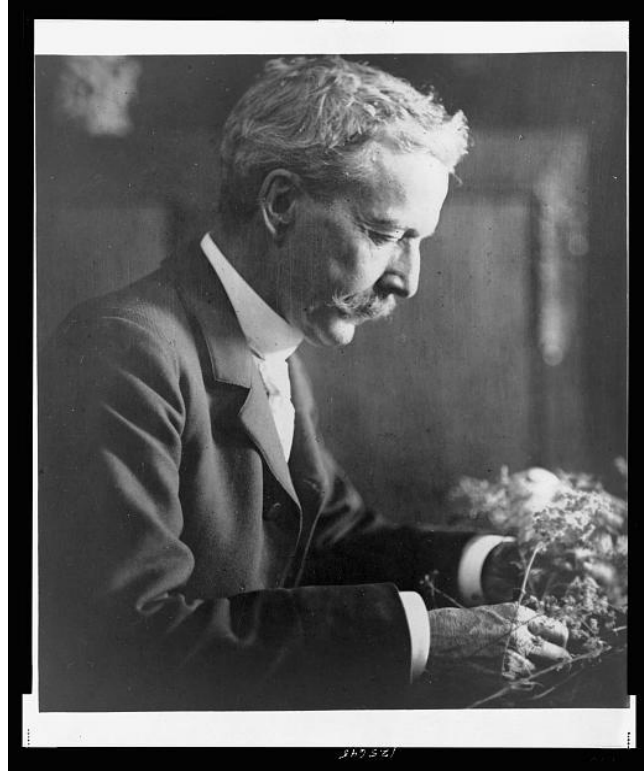


Figure 6. Photograph of Luther Burbank examining a botanical specimen³³

As a dedicated botanist and horticulturist, Burbank insisted that plants and humans were more similar than one would presume. He went to the lengths of saying, “It is natural that we should associate flowers and children, as they are so much alike in many respects, and they should in some points be treated very much alike.”³⁴ Burbank’s belief that plants and children are alike makes it abundantly clear why he felt eugenics was a rational

³³Photograph of Luther Burbank examining a botanical specimen, taken between 1900 and 1926, 1 photographic print, *Miscellaneous Items in High Demand Collection*, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00649531/>.

³⁴Luther Burbank, “Flowers and Children”, *Volume 63*, 5 (*The Journal of Education*, 1906).

answer to “race degeneracy.” In fact, Burbank noted, “I have the advantage, somewhat, in my laboratory of plants—I can select the best ones and kill off the rest.”³⁵ His inhumane views of eugenics are portrayed through the connections between plants and children. In Burbank’s book, *The Training of a Human Plant*, he dove deeper into the connection between the power of nature and eugenics. He provided deeper reasoning for eugenics, arguing that it would create the finest race the world has ever known. The book starts by referencing the “grandest opportunity ever presented” to create the singular best race out of the “vast mingling of races brought here by immigration.”³⁶ Burbank distinctly talked about a singular race amongst various races, which emphasized his goal to revitalize the white race through eugenics. His hatred of other races became glaring after stating, “We are more crossed than any other nation in the history of the world, and here we meet the same results that are always seen in a much crossed race of plants: all the worst as well as all the best qualities of each are brought out in their fullest intensities.”³⁷ The reason minorities suffered from eugenics and the white population did not is because people, like Burbank, believed the worst qualities laid within the minority races in America.

Like Kellogg, Luther Burbank made a distinct connection between nature and eugenics. After explaining his purpose for eugenics, Burbank stated, “All that has been done for plants and flowers by crossing, nature has already accomplished for the American people. By the crossings of types, strength has in one instance been secured: in another, intellectuality; in still another, moral force.”³⁸ Kellogg believed that nature was an expression of God’s power, so when Burbank talked about what nature accomplished for the American people, he was referencing what

³⁵Luther Burbank, “Train Children as I do the Plants,” *Volume* 68, 1 (The Journal of Education, 1908).

³⁶Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 5.

³⁷Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 11.

³⁸Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 12.

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God's power did for America and what God's power, or nature, can do through eugenics. Burbank continued writing, "When nature has already done its duty, and the crossing leaves a product which in the rough displays the best human attributes, all that is left to be done falls to selective environment."³⁹ Burbank believed a child's environment was directly correlated to the child's characteristics as they grew older. He believed that no power, not even God's expression of power through nature, could prevent a child from becoming "wild" if they were left in a poor environment for too long.⁴⁰ Burbank argued that "Put a boy born of gentle white parents among Indians and he will grow up like an Indian."⁴¹ The distinction between "gentle white parents" and "Indians" accentuated his goal of white superiority in America. At the end of the book, Burbank declared, "The man or the woman who moves the earth, who is master rather than the victim of fate, has strong feelings in hand—a vigilant engineer at the throttle."⁴² Burbank and Kellogg believed the key to being the "master" and not the "victim of fate" was to control or manipulate nature. Their words coincide with racial nationalism, which echoes the idea that the power of nature and eugenics was one of many attempts to achieve white superiority.

In conclusion, eugenics is interwoven with many dark parts of American History. Luther Burbank and John Kellogg shared their explanation for eugenics, which is filled with racist ideas of white superiority and mastering the forces of nature. Additionally, mastering nature for the creation of a white America is seen throughout the Eugenics Crusade and can be traced back to the beginning of American Westward expansion. To Kellogg, Burbank, and other nineteenth-century Americans, nature was an expression of God's power and was divinely slotted for whites only. The same divine intervention used to justify Manifest

³⁹Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 13.

⁴⁰Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 62.

⁴¹Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 68.

⁴²Burbank, *The Training of a Human Plant*, 94-95.

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Destiny was used to warrant the pro Anglo rhetoric used in the eugenics movement in the early 20th century. The systemic belief in white superiority, which weaponized nature, was used as justification for the eugenics movement and led to the involuntary sterilization of tens of thousands of people.

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Author Bio

Samuel Griffin is graduating from California State University, San Bernardino, in the Fall of 2026 with a Bachelor of Arts in History. He plans to pursue a PhD in History and continue publishing as much as possible. Samuel comes from a family of teachers and hopes to follow in their footsteps by sharing his love of history with future students. His research is deeply influenced by his upbringing in Southern California. Samuel focuses on the creation of an American identity through Westward expansion and how it correlates with systemic beliefs built in the 19th century. Additionally, Samuel is intrigued with the History of Science, specifically eugenics, and its connection to the American West. He believes in the power of learning History to further inform and continually progress society. Most importantly, he would like to thank everyone who supported him throughout his undergraduate years. His family and professors who always believed in his ability to publish. He especially wants to thank Professor Mark Reynolds for his constant encouragement and guidance throughout the years, as well as Dr. Jeremy Murray for believing in his ability to publish and lead. Finally, none of this would have been possible without his father and mother inspiring him to pursue education and always do his best.



The Impact of Technology on the Chinese Queer Community

By Samantha Collasco

Abstract: This project's aim is to analyze the various ways in which the internet has influenced the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. The Chinese government has created an immense censorship over the community and any accompanying terms, therefore leading to their discrimination and marginalization within Chinese society. How has queer representation changed in China since the decriminalization of homosexuality? How has the internet affected the public perception of the LGBTQ+ community? What role does censorship play in the shaping of public perception of queer identities? How has westernization and globalization affected the attitudes towards queer identities? This work engages with the existing scholarship in the fields of queer studies and modern Chinese history in order to examine the way that online culture influences public perceptions of queer identities while also serving as a crucial resource to the community. This piece will use sources that examine popular media portrayals of queer relationships, government censorship policies, and cultural analysis of online communities. One major aspect of this research will be on popular queer-coded media such as danmei (boys' love) that has managed to evade the government censor yet encourages hypersexualization of homosexual relationships, therefore influencing public perception of queerness. This author seeks to understand how the queer community navigates a culture where they feel it prudent to hide their identities while simultaneously finding a sense of community through the internet. Through the exploration of the LGBTQ+ internet communities, the intent of this research is to contribute to a broader understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences within contemporary Chinese society.

In the expanse of human history, there has been a minority of people occasionally hidden in the shadows or on the outskirts of society, which found joy in the expression of gender and sexuality. Queer people have been a crucial part of the human narrative but every era and culture celebrated this community differently. Throughout Chinese history, the portrayal of queer people has greatly evolved due to the influence of cultural values, political ideologies, and media censorship. Ancient Chinese literature has demonstrated the historical acceptance of same-sex relationships, especially amongst the aristocracy, which only changed when traditionalism became a priority. With the rise of Confucianism and codes of morality, heterosexual family life and rigid gender roles were preferred by society, therefore leading to a suppression of queer identities. This was only further influenced with the spread of Westernization, with conservative Christian ideologies heavily influencing Chinese society and their perspective on the LGBTQ+ community. This gradual shift into conservatism heavily influenced contemporary Chinese policy and media regulations, with any topic of homosexuality becoming taboo and thereby becoming classified as ‘hooliganism.’ It was not until 1997 that homosexuality was officially legalized in China and by 2001, it was removed from the list of mental illnesses. This legalization and destigmatization were steps towards societal acceptance but there remains an increasingly strict censorship law that has continued to restrict all discussion and symbolization of LGBTQ+ identities. This has resulted in the erasure or altering of queer representations in media to fit approved narratives, excessively relying on a form of queer coding to avoid explicit depictions of same-sex romance. Because of this imposed taboo, queer individuals have become hypersexualized in alternative media, reinforcing stereotypes of their sexualities and genders while ignoring the everyday realities of queer relationships. Queer representation in China today is tightly controlled due to the difficulties of navigating around censorship and social attitudes, thus forcing the community to turn to other forms of expression. Virtual spaces are now needed to connect with people within the

LGBTQ+ community, as well as to educate, and engage in activism through sites such as *WeChat*, *Weibo*, and queer specialized forums. The internet has created access to worldwide queer discourse and networks, which allow individuals to explore their identity in a way that is prohibited in mainstream Chinese media. Western media has also had a profound influence on the Chinese queer population, specifically via the internet with which the younger generations can engage with global activism and identity politics. While Western visibility provides language and frameworks for discussing sexuality, it is not necessarily compatible with Chinese politics and culture. The online use for such needs can unfortunately be dangerous because government crackdowns typically target LGBTQ+ content, shutting down forums and restricting discussions that include censored content. The internet has played a central role in the evolution of the Chinese LGBTQ+ community by providing access to information, activism, and Western influence while simultaneously being censored and controlled by the state.

Historical Context

Homosexuality has existed in China for centuries but the way different queer identities have been perceived, regulated, and expressed have changed tremendously over time. Ancient Chinese literature and historical records extensively document same-sex relationships through artwork, stories, and legal documents. Despite the long history of queer individuals with China, modern policies and social attitudes have shifted to reflect political ideology and evolving social norms. During the Imperial Era, homosexual relationships between men were often documented amongst the elite, specifically within the imperial courts and literary circles.¹ It was not uncommon for men to bed each other,

¹ Martin W. Huang, "Male-Male Sexual Bonding and Male Friendship in Late Imperial China." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 2 (2013): 312. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24616673>.

and it was well known within elite circles. For example, there is a famous story of Emperor Ai of Han and his love Dong Xian that demonstrates a period when homosexuality was not seen as inherently immoral.² This story is extremely important to the perspective of queer individuals because it does not just depict homosexual relationships as inherently sexual, but as something tender and romantic, as well. It is known as *the Passion of the Cut Sleeve*, where the Emperor preferred to cut his sleeve off instead of disturbing his napping lover when he had to extract himself from their bed.³ The historian Bret Hinsch describes that the emperors within the Han dynasty were openly bisexual and they each had a male favorite that was listed in the Records of the Grand Historian and the Book of Han.⁴ However, with the development and popularity of Confucianism, familial duty and continuation of lineage became an expected societal value, therefore contributing to the expectation that individuals need to marry to produce heirs.⁵ This expectation of marriage solely for lineage purposes meant same-sex relationships were no longer socially acceptable. In an academic journal article about the modern gay movement in China, the author explains that “Confucianism’s deprecation is rooted in the assumption that gay sexual practices will stand in the way of achieving the ideal Confucian personality...In the light of these differences, Western society appears to have historically pursued a much more severe persecution of homosexuals than China. It was not until the Qing dynasty...that sodomy became a crime under the law.”⁶ With the fall of Imperial China and the rise of Communist rule in 1949, LGBTQ+ identities became more heavily scrutinized as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) viewed homosexuality as a

² Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (University of California Press, 1992), 44.

³ Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 53.

⁴ Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, 35.

⁵ Jin Cao and Xinlei Lu, “A Preliminary Exploration of the Gay Movement in Mainland China: Legacy, Transition, Opportunity, and the New Media.” *Signs* 39, no. 4 (2014): 840. <https://doi.org/10.1086/675538>.

⁶ Cao, “A Preliminary Exploration,” 841.

remnant of Western corruption. This is explained in the article, *Culture/Community/Race: Chinese Gay Men and the Politics of Identity*, “cultural alienation was compounded through exposure to Chinese nationalist discourses of cultural authenticity, to arguments that homosexuality was a Western/White practice alien to Chinese ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’...signifying Western corruption and cultural imperialism.”⁷ Many aspects of Western queer identities became ostracized and were seen as corrupt, something that is slowly changing as exposure to international social media allows the younger generations to become more influenced via Western trends. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, homosexual relationships were harshly suppressed and queer people faced major persecution due to the reinforcement of heteronormative family structures. Jack Kapac explains the complexities of this on the queer identity within Chinese communities:

A major source for the hostility to homosexuality in these discourses of identity is seemingly its perceived threat to the stability of "the family"...the preservation of the family is "ardently protected" as a survival strategy by oppressed peoples. My Chinese informants frequently evoked the centrality of marriage and the family as a Chinese or Asian value which differentiated them culturally from Western/White gay men. In such discourses of difference/identity, reified "Asian" values were opposed to "Western" values and perceptions of culturally specific problems for Chinese gay men were articulated. Families were often perceived as being of less significance for White gay men and this presumed, more rootless individualism facilitated the adoption of a gay social identity.⁸

⁷ Jack Kapac, “Culture/Community/Race: Chinese Gay Men and the Politics of Identity.” *Anthropologica* 40, no. 2 (1998): 172.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/25605895>.

⁸ Kapac, “Culture/Community/Race,” 173.

By assigning the ideology behind Western ideology to the community, the government effectively demonized the community as a whole and created an anti-West bias against them. Homosexual relationships were suppressed as part of a campaign to enforce traditional gender roles that aligned with the Community Party ideals, thereby labeling queer people as morally degenerate. These people were condemned to public humiliation, forced labor, imprisonment, and even violence just for being gay in a society that left little room for gender or sexual diversity. Because of this suppression and persecution, queer identities were not just erased from society but were also criminalized, forcing many of those within the community to live in secret.

A major turning point in Chinese queer policy came in 1997 when homosexuality was officially decriminalized. Homosexuality had been defined and categorized under “hooliganism” in the country’s criminal code, allowing for vaguely defined laws.⁹ These laws were used to target queer individuals, resulting in police harassment and criminal charges. It is described as “a catchall paragraph designed to give police great leeway for immediate action against whomever they deemed criminal. The campaign was mainly directed against rape, prostitution, and drug trafficking but the police also used the paragraph to justify the raiding of cruising areas and the routine harassment of homosexuals”¹⁰ Despite the decriminalization marking a tremendous step forward for better treatment and equal rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, it did not equate to legal protection or social acceptance. Many people continued to live in secrecy and fear rejection from society and their families. In 2001, the Chinese Society of Psychiatry removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders, finally allowing queer people the freedom to

⁹ Ulises Moreno-Tabarez et al., “Queer Politics in China: A Conversation with ‘Western’ Activists Working in Beijing.” *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 1, no. 3 (2014): 113. <https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.1.3.0109>.

¹⁰ Moreno-Tabarez, “Queer Politics in China,” 113.

explore their sexuality without fear of forced institutionalization. Previously, same-sex attraction had been classified as a mental illness, leading to forced treatments such as conversion therapy or gender re-conditioning.¹¹ This decision was a major shift in the scientific understanding of sexual orientation and helped reduce institutional discrimination within the medical field. Unfortunately, conversion therapy continues to be a concern in China because of a lack of legal enforcement against the practice and “public hospitals and private clinics in China continue to offer so-called ‘conversion therapy,’ based on the false assumption that homosexuality is a disorder that needs.”¹² With societal disillusion of the community, many families will force their loved ones to an involuntary commitment to undergo damaging pseudoscience that has been proven to do more harm than good.¹³ Despite major legal and medical advancements for the community, however, there are many setbacks for the community that continue to affect their public perception. One of the most notable was the discontinuation of Shanghai Pride in 2020, which was the longest running and most prominent LGBTQ+ event within mainland China.¹⁴ Shanghai Pride was a rare public platform that offered queer visibility and community building, something most of China continues to struggle with. The abrupt shutdown was reportedly due to pressure from authorities, reflecting the tightening restrictions on queer activism under the current administration.¹⁵ Organizers explained, “they no longer felt safe under intensifying

¹¹ Jonathan Tchong, “‘Have You Considered Your Parents’ Happiness?’” *Human Rights Watch*, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/16/have-you-considered-your-parents-happiness/conversion-therapy-against-lgbt-people>.

¹² Tchong, “‘Have You Considered Your Parents’ Happiness?’”

¹³ Moreno-Tabarez, “Queer Politics in China,” 113.

¹⁴ Steven Jiang, “‘End of the Rainbow’: Shanghai Pride Shuts down amid Shrinking Space for China’s LGBTQ Community.” *CNN*. August 14, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/14/asia/shanghai-pride-shutdown-intl-hnk>.

¹⁵ Jiang, “End of the Rainbow.”

harassment and threats from authorities.”¹⁶ Since the closure of Shanghai Pride, other LGBTQ+ organizations within China have faced shutdowns, with various university queer groups being shut down and online spaces being heavily censored and monitored. Shanghai pride was also heavily influenced by Western pride festivals and had become a major tourist attraction for the international gay community to celebrate, putting Shanghai on the list of safe travel destinations for LGBTQ+ travelers. This shutdown of such an influential event has created a major setback in societal awareness and acceptance of the community, demonstrating the government’s iron fist with censorship of anything they deem inappropriate.

Although China made major strides in the decriminalization and medical recognition of same-sex attraction, legal protections for the LGBTQ+ community and queer individuals are extremely limited. Same-sex marriage is not recognized, discrimination laws do not include sexual orientation, and public advocacy is extremely restricted. There continues to be ongoing tension between progress and repression for and of the community, demonstrating how fragile the status of queer rights are in contemporary China, “[the government] hinders development of comprehensive sexual education, it engenders continued censorship of LGBT-related audiovisual and other (cultural) productions, and it does not offer any (rights) protections for LGBT people, among other hindrances. As such, forms of stigma and discrimination against LGBT communities are allowed to fester continuously.”¹⁷ Speaking strictly of sexual orientation, China appears to be moving backward in their ideology, rejecting any aspect of the queer community and utilizing heavy censors to restrict homosexuality from mainstream media.

¹⁶ Darius Longarino, “How a Crackdown Transformed LGBTQ Activism in China.” *ChinaFile*. September 26, 2024. <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/how-crackdown-transformed-lgbtq-activism-china>.

¹⁷ Moreno-Tabarez, “Queer Politics in China,” 116.

The Internet and Access to LGBTQ+ Information

Queer representation in China has remained under censorship law, limiting the ability of the public to discuss LGBTQ+ identity. This censor restricts major media outlets from discussing or even acknowledging homosexuality, especially from a positive perspective. Despite having to navigate the strict censorship, internet communities and underground forums have become vital safe spaces for queer individuals searching for community, knowledge, and activism. The Chinese censorship law deems LGBTQ+ content inappropriate or illegal and usually categorizes it under vague moral and political guidelines.¹⁸ By remaining vague in their description of the censor, the law is given much more leeway in deciding what constitutes LGBTQ+ content, therefore allowing them to heavily control what is allowed to be broadcast. The Cyberspace Administration of China tightly controls content and the National Radio and Television Administration “continue to label it (homosexuality) a perversion, banning the presentation or representation of abnormal sexual relationships or acts, including incest, homosexuality, sexual perversion, sexual predation, sexual abuse, and sexual violence.”¹⁹ The government contends that the regulations are meant to protect traditional values and the youth but, in reality, they are resulting in the erasure of queer narratives from mainstream media. By claiming they are protecting the youth, they are ultimately harming the entire country in their lack of education and exposure to diverse relationships. This is because, by being allowed to see diversity within relationships and character types, people are able to identify themselves within them and can normalize their own conflicting feelings and identities. Without exposure to various forms of characters and relationships, however, people learn to suppress these feelings because they are

¹⁸ Moreno-Tabarez, “Queer Politics in China,” 113.

¹⁹ Megan Walsh, “Pushing Boundaries: Alternative Comics, Boys’ Love, and Ethnic Borderlands.” In *The Subplot: What China Is Reading and Why It Matters* (Columbia Global Reports, 2022), 76.

considered abnormal and wrong compared to those they model after in the media.

Both domestic and foreign media including topics of and surrounding the LGBTQ+ community have been subjected to censorship. Queer representation is severely limited in Chinese television and film, either erasing queer subtext or the character altogether, never allowing the potential queerness of a character make it past the storyboard. Foreign media is also affected, with films like *Bohemian Rhapsody* having important scenes regarding the sexuality of the protagonist removed and *Call Me by Your Name* was banned altogether for the explicit homosexual relationship that was crucial to the plot. Many instances of film and television being completely changed, erased, or just not shown in China due to homosexual undertones or obviously queer characters have been observed with an increasing amount over the past few decades. This censorship is not inherently limited to film and television; however, it also largely affects the internet and social media. In 2017, Weibo launched a “Clean-Up Campaign,” an initiative aimed at removing content deemed inappropriate, which included LGBTQ+ discussions.²⁰ There was major backlash that led to partial reversal and backpedaling of the company, but the incident emphasized how social media platforms help enforce state policies by censoring queer voices. Millions of users reposted a hashtag #IAmGay in solidarity, turning into a virtual form of protest. Weibo partially reversed its policy, even though it is a government-aligned platform, demonstrating the way public pressure can be turned into collective online resistance and activism to demand change.

Despite the persisting censorship, LGBTQ+ individuals in China had found creative ways to maintain their presence online and avoid censorship. Coded language, euphemism, and metaphorical storytelling are employed by many within the

²⁰ Steven Jiang, “Rare Win for China’s LGBT Community after Censorship U-Turn by Sina Weibo.” *CNN*. April 16, 2018.
<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/16/asia/china-sina-weibo-lgbt-censorship-intl>.

community to speak of queer issues without triggering the censor.²¹ Queer media enthusiasts have created subtitled versions or distribute unedited content privately through forums or encrypted messaging apps resulting in the rise of online resources that have played a major role in bypassing the censor. Newer forms of online communication also serve as grassroots tools of resistance, such as digital art, memes, and even fanfiction. These allow the younger generation of queer creators to build affirming safe spaces for one another in an online community, creating a lifeline for young people navigating their identities in isolation. Early forums and blogs such as Danlan, which was China's first major LGBTQ+ website, initially provided a space for community discussion, health education, and advocacy. Weibo is an important social media platform that users can connect on and discuss topics with, but netizens must remain cautious in their phrasing to avoid content removal. The most critical aspect of circumventing the censor is for queer youth's health and welfare. Because China's educational system in general does not deal with LGBTQ+ issues, online sites have become the go-to source for sharing information on HIV/AIDS prevention, mental health, and gender identity. Foreign sources or hidden communities are where many queer youths turn to in order to find accurate and validating information. The popularity of the internet has driven a surge of online communities and resources, "Since the mid-1990s, China has seen an explosive growth in Internet use, and the Internet has profoundly transformed people's cultural lives and social communication. By the end of 2010, China had more than 457 million Internet users, including 303 million who go online via cell phones."²² With the ever-growing number of internet users within China, the access to information is becoming harder to monitor and censor. It has also changed the way the younger generations

²¹ Walsh, "Pushing Boundaries," 75.

²² Shuyu Kong, "The 'Affective Alliance': 'Undercover', Internet Media Fandom, and the Sociality of Cultural Consumption in Post-socialist China." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 24, no. 1 (2012): 3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42940442>.

respond to the queer community as an exposure to Western media through the internet has influenced their algorithms. The new generation of queer youth in China react to advocacy and activism differently than previous generations may have due to the influence of the internet on their own perspective. Students make up the largest group of internet users, leading to a dramatic shift in their perspective of community.²³ Despite the risks that are associated with censorship and surveillance, online activism has become essential for the Chinese LGBTQ+ community to build activism and advocate for change. Coded language, such as the use of emojis or indirect references, are often utilized to evade censorship algorithms.

Lack of queer representation in the mass media has had heavy consequences on public opinion. While large cities have become increasingly open-minded, such as in Beijing and Shanghai, rural areas are still very conservative. Media censorship not only restricts representation but also affects public opinion by reinforcing stigmas and biases. For the LGBTQ+ community, such challenges influence their daily lives, and many of them create coping mechanisms in an attempt to adapt to societal and legal restrictions. For example, some queer people enter fake marriages, usually between gay men and lesbian women, so that they can meet family and societal demands without altering their true identities.²⁴ Despite strict government monitoring, activists use social media as an organizing tool to raise awareness, protest, and start online campaigns for LGBTQ+ rights. As a matter of fact, it has been observed that “Chinese LGBT activism has grown significantly in recent years - facilitated by Internet based networking.”²⁵ Unfortunately, due to the fear of government

²³ Kong, “The ‘Affective Alliance,’” 3.

²⁴ Kate Strong, “Why Gay Men and Lesbian Women in China Are Marrying Each Other.” *Columbia Political Review*. June 3, 2022. <https://www.cpreview.org/articles/2022/6/why-gay-men-and-lesbian-women-in-china-are-marrying-each-other>.

²⁵ Timothy Hildebrandt, “Same-Sex Marriage in China? The Strategic Promulgation of a Progressive Policy and Its Impact on LGBT Activism.”

intervention, most of these efforts are underground and will usually remain anonymous for safety purposes. Beyond the internet in the real world, however, queer communities have created safe zones such as LGBTQ+ friendly bars and clubs. These spaces have not only provided social support but also avenues of activism and resistance, “Co-existing with an identification with a global gay ‘peoplehood’ is the simultaneous process of asserting localized, culturally specific forms of identity,...this is expressed by [the] desire to assert a specifically Asian gay identity in contrast to Western constructs and meanings.”²⁶ Through forging human connections in real life beyond the screen, people are able to truly define their own identities and what it means to be queer in the context of their own culture, instead of being influenced by Western ideologies or social media. The internet not only gives a space to marginalized voices as well as a community to those who seek a sense of identity and belonging but also nurtures the resilience of the queer community under authoritarian conditions.

Hypersexualization

While visibility is limited by censorship, queer identities are simultaneously hypersexualized in the media. This duality leads to stereotypes, increased discrimination, and harassment. LGBTQ+ people tend to experience discrimination in the workplace, rejection by their families, and legal vulnerability. In addition, the fetishization of queer identities, particularly on the internet, makes them stereotypes and not complex and diverse individuals. In online spaces, explicit content is both extensively consumed and intensively censored and the same applies to queer relationships as well. Rather than being shown as complex characters, queer identities are generally reduced to fetishized stereotypes for the viewing of certain groups, such as the “homeroetic romance

Review of International Studies 37, no. 3 (2011): 1315.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23025422>.

²⁶ Kapac, “Culture/Community/Race,” 169.

[being] one of the most popular and potentially dangerous genres of online fiction in China.”²⁷ This is especially true for *danmei*, a genre of homosexual male romance, which has been widely popular even under censorship crackdowns.²⁸ *Danmei* was created through inspiration from the Japanese Boys’ Love genre and has become a strong outlet for queer fiction in China. Despite its queer themes, it is not authored and consumed by the LGBTQ+ community but heterosexual women.²⁹ While *danmei* exposes heteronormative audiences to queer relationships, it also sustains stereotypical and unrealistic portrayals of queer life. Many *danmei* works revolve around idealized and hyper-romanticized depictions of male relationships without showing the difficulties LGBTQ+ individuals face in real life. The success of *danmei* has had a paradoxical impact: it has opened up a space for queer relationships to be discussed in a heavily censored media environment, but it has also led to increased commodification and perversion of LGBTQ+ identities. Government authorities have countered the genre’s popularity with accelerated censorship, banning certain works and restricting media channels that distribute them. There has also been brutal punishments for the female authors of these works, with the women being imprisoned for upward of ten years just for writing explicit intercourse scenes between two men.³⁰ Despite these challenges, however, *danmei* persists among digital communities that mobilize core fan bases and spread these stories there, even using tactics to circumvent censorship. Regardless of the issues surrounding *danmei* and boys’ love, the fanbase has risen drastically within the past two decades. These fans have openly condemned the regulations surrounding homosexuality censorship and are some of the biggest advocates

²⁷ Walsh, “Pushing Boundaries,” 74.

²⁸ Jin Feng, “‘Addicted to Beauty’: Consuming and Producing Web-Based Chinese ‘Danmei’ Fiction at Jinjiang.” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 21, no. 2 (2009): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41491008>.

²⁹ Feng, “‘Addicted to Beauty,’” 3.

³⁰ Walsh, “Pushing Boundaries,” 78.

for the community.³¹ It has also allowed for “the shift from a stigmatized label imposed on gay men to a trendy practice—a practice not unlike the concept of “bromance”—for young straight men to explore newly created homosocial space.”³² While it allows for some level of representation within a restrictive environment, it also distorts and commodifies queer experiences, reinforcing barriers that queer individuals continue to fight against. The hypersexualization of queer identities in Chinese popular culture presents both opportunities and challenges but nevertheless it allows for further discussion and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community.

Western Influence

The influence of Western LGBTQ+ discourses on China’s queer citizens is complex, simultaneously marked by inspiration and tension. For however much exposure to Western media, activism, and terminology has created new possibilities for queerness to be imagined and lived, cultural and political differences guarantee such influences are not always in sync with the local culture. The Chinese government also actively censors Western LGBTQ+ media, presenting it as inappropriate for Chinese society. Despite these challenges, the globalization of queer discourse has allowed Chinese LGBTQ+ individuals to access representation and resources, shaping what queerness looks like in modern China. The Western media has played a major role in the construction of queer visibility in China, both as a source of representation and as the target of censorship. Films like *Call Me by Your Name*, featuring a

³¹ Katrien Jacobs and Han Hau Lai, “‘Send Them to Mars!’: Boys Love Erotica and Civil Rights in Hong Kong.” In *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2022), 69-70.

³² Wei Wei, “Straight Men, Gay Buddies: The Chinese BL Boom and Its Impact on Male Homosociality.” In *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2022), 56.

same-sex romance, were banned outright,³³ and films such as *Bohemian Rhapsody* had LGBTQ+ content edited out.³⁴ Even children's TV shows have been censored, including *Steven Universe*, which featured the first same-sex kiss in an animated children's show in the United States but had those scenes removed when introduced into Chinese media. The censorship of these works is indicative of the Chinese government's unease with explicit queer representation, especially when it is foreign. Even when the character itself is not inherently sexual nor has a sexual on-screen relationship, they maintain their censor of any aspect of its queer identity. Other than film and television, however, Western LGBTQ+ discourse has also introduced new terminologies and identity models to the Chinese queer community. Terms and concepts such as 'coming out,' which were created in the context of Western queer activism, have been borrowed but do not necessarily apply in Chinese cultural contexts.³⁵ Chinese personal identity is more likely to be implicated in social and familial harmony and less with personal self-expression, making Western concepts of queer visibility and pride less directly applicable. Western gender identities such as nonbinary or transgender identities have become identifiable within some Chinese queer communities, yet their adoption is always filtered through local cultural and linguistic conditions. Much of the Chinese queer community seems to be in a similar state to the American community from the late 20th century, from the violence and harassment, forced institutionalization, and even engaging in fake heterosexual marriages to appease families.

³³ Tiara Salvabilla, "China: Oscar-Winning LGBT Movie Banned," *Asia Media International*. April 22, 2018. <https://asiamedia.lmu.edu/2018/04/19/china-oscar-winning-lgbt-movie-banned/>.

³⁴ Eduardo Baptista, "Six LGBT Moments Cut from 'Bohemian Rhapsody' in China." *CNN*. March 25, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/25/asia/bohemian-rhapsody-censorship-china-intl>.

³⁵ Moreno-Tabarez, "Queer Politics in China," 120.

The differences between Western and Chinese LGBTQ+ activism expose distinct strategies of visibility, resistance, and identity. Western LGBTQ+ movements, particularly in the United States and Europe, have been generally concerned with direct confrontation, public pride marches, and courtroom battles for rights such as marriage equality. Chinese LGBTQ+ activism, on the other hand, has a more gradualist approach, emphasizing low-key advocacy, personal privacy, and non-confrontational tactics.³⁶ The Chinese approach has been shaped by the political climate and restrictions on their society, emphasizing the importance of behind-the-scenes engagement. Privacy and discretion are more highly valued within China, especially to protect the individuals in an environment and society that may still view them negatively. LGBTQ+ identities in Western countries are associated with a culture of openness, with pride parades and vocal self-expression being at the heart of the movement. In China, however, privacy matters most, and many queer individuals consider it more valuable to be able to live privately and in safety with their lover rather than under public scrutiny. This is partially due to the collectivist nature of Chinese culture, with familial unity generally being more highly valued than personal identity.³⁷ While chosen families are equally critical to LGBTQ+ individuals in Western nations, especially those disowned by their biological families, family acceptance remains a major concern for those in China. Even though the progress towards acceptance is slow and constantly teetering, the cautious form of activism within China has helped create a resilient and creative queer community.

The Chinese government has frequently framed gay rights as a “Western” ideal, therefore justifying their intentions to restrict queer representation. The Chinese authorities argue that “homosexual behavior was seen as a sign of capitalist tendencies that merited severe punishment... many Chinese people, including some with higher education, regarded homosexuality as a capitalist

³⁶ Cao, “A Preliminary Exploration,” 844.

³⁷ Cao, “A Preliminary Exploration,” 844.

contamination that had been imported from Western society after China launched its policies of opening and reform.”³⁸ LGBTQ+ activism has been viewed as an ideologically imported threat that is being used to threaten and challenge Chinese values and social stability. This perspective reinforces the idea that queerness is foreign but also provides a justification for more rigorous censorship of LGBTQ+ content, especially those from Western sources. Through the control of how queerness is portrayed, the government has continued to reiterate their stance that LGBTQ+ identities are not a natural part of Chinese culture; rather a corrupt influence from the West. Western activism is usually seen as a challenge to government authority because it focuses on protests and legal battles, therefore leading to an increase in surveillance and repression of domestic and foreign LGBTQ+ advocacy movements. Despite the Chinese queer community taking alternative methods to their community, the authorities continue to use the Western perspective as the example for the queer community to demonize it.

Future Challenges

Future queer representation in Chinese media remains unclear amidst tight government censorship and changing cultural dynamics. While past decades have seen some periods of higher visibility, current trends suggest a tightening of controls. The Chinese government has been actively censoring queer content in films, television, and online streaming services, referring to it as “abnormal sexual relationships” in accordance with conservative social policies.³⁹ For instance, images of homosexual relationships are usually censored or edited out of local and foreign media before they are distributed throughout China. However, despite these challenges, Chinese filmmakers and content creators continue to find new ways of portraying queer lives. Subtle coding,

³⁸ Cao, “A Preliminary Exploration,” 842.

³⁹ Walsh, “Pushing Boundaries,” 76.

metaphorical storytelling, and independent film festivals allow alternative spaces for representation. Alternative methods of coding characters and relationships allow for underlying representation, something the Western queer community has been doing since the invention of Hollywood and the similarly discriminating restrictions of the Hays Code. Foreign streaming sites have also allowed Chinese audiences to view LGBTQ+ content that would otherwise be censored domestically, allowing for greater introduction to Western queer communities and identities. Going forward, the tension between censorship and creative resistance will likely define the future path of queer media representation in China. Queer activism within China has consistently faced government oppression and heightened surveillance. While LGBTQ+ organizations previously relied on in-person meetings, pride events, and university organizations, state repression has pushed most of these activist groups to shut down. Despite these challenges, alternative forms of organization have begun emerging. Digital activism, informal network mobilization, and transnational coalition building have allowed LGBTQ+ activists to continue to engage in their work in more discreet ways. The use of cultural events, such as art exhibitions and independent film screenings, provide a platform through which to speak about LGBTQ+ issues in a way that can be framed and characterized as cultural as opposed to explicitly political. Queer activists' capacity for adaptability will continue to be important in finding a balance between increased state oversight and community and activism maintenance. With further censorship of Chinese media, queer individuals will likely be outsourcing their information, which will lead to a further influence of Western ideologies on the Chinese queer community. Finding the balance between the Chinese collectivist and private form of activism and the Western ideals for activism and queer community will be a major shift in the future of the Chinese LGBTQ+ community. Likely, there will be a greater difference between generational queers demonstrating the effect that technology and social media will have on the younger generations.

Conclusion

The future of LGBTQ+ representation in China is complex and evolving, shaped by government policies, digital technology, legal battles, and shifting social attitudes. While censorship and surveillance pose continuing significant challenges, new media and creative resistance offer potential for visibility and activism. The broader implications of such advances extend beyond media representation, affecting the daily life and rights of queer individuals in China. The resilience of queer communities, as well as global discourse and generational shifts in attitude, could gradually make way for greater acceptance and legal recognition. There have always been queer people in history, but they have been pushed to the margins of documentation, their relationships and identities hidden by modern attitudes and biases. Shifts in dominant ideologies led to a gradual suppression of these queer identities, despite the evidence of historical acceptance. With the rise of Confucian values, Chinese society prioritized heteronormative family struggles, something that was only further stigmatized by Western influences and ideologies. Modern Chinese policy and media continue to discriminate and erase queer identities, despite the decriminalization and medical attempts at destigmatization. Depictions of same-sex relationships and queer identities are heavily censored, frequently reduced to stereotypes or hypersexualized portrayals, while foreign media is either removed or changed entirely to prevent any queer influence. Faced with extensive limitations, the LGBTQ+ community in China has turned to virtual spaces to connect and educate one another. Major platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and queer specific forums allow users to engage in international discussions, explore their identity, and build a community, despite the strict government restrictions and crackdowns. Despite drawing inspiration from the Western gay pride community, the Chinese community has aligned them with their own socio-political ideals. The influence of technology in such a society has created a major gap between generations,

allowing the newer generation of Chinese queer youth to connect more deeply with Western ideals due to social media. The online community has created many ways to circumnavigate the censor and algorithm, allowing them to connect with one another in a safe online space. In a society where queer visibility and public expression is heavily policed and censored, the internet has become not only a tool but a lifeline for China's queer community to assert their existence, share their stories, and imagine futures they may have never thought possible.

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Samantha Collaso is a recent graduate of California State University, San Bernardino, where she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Public History. Her research interest is in LGBTQ+ history with an emphasis on the influence of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s United States. After she earns her master's degree, Samantha plans to pursue a career as a museum curator so she can help make diverse aspects of history more accessible to the public. Diversity and inclusivity are extremely important to Samantha, especially in the tumultuous times we find ourselves in. She believes that now, more than ever, we must hold onto our history lest we forget how we got to where we are today. Samantha would like to thank her editor, Marlet Felix, who was a huge help in the writing process, and Dr. Murray for encouraging her to submit it to the paper. She would also like to thank her partner, Jupiter, for always being an inspiration and for always supporting her in everything she chooses to do.



History In the Making

The Connection: American Influence on Nazi Racial Hygiene

By Dylan O'Connor and Elizabeth Vazquez

Abstract: This paper analyzes the American eugenics movement's significant role in shaping Nazi policies, by providing institutional models, ideological inspiration, scientific justification, and legal frameworks that the Third Reich expanded on to pursue its racial purification goals. First, this article traces how the eugenic movement developed from Francis Galton's theories to fully established organizations and independent groups such as the Eugenics Record Office and the American Eugenics Society. The paper further examines figures like Charles B. Davenport and Harry Laughlin, who influenced American sterilization laws and immigration restrictions, as well as Ernst Rubin, Eugen Fischer, and Fitz Lenz German, racial hygienists who drew on American examples of eugenics while adapting it to a more authoritarian state. Using scholarly works by Stefan Kuhl, Robert Proctor, Henry Freidlander, Garland Allen, and others, alongside legal cases and primary sources such as Mein Kampf, this paper engages the ongoing historiographical debate over whether Nazi eugenics was uniquely German or developed through a transnational exchange.

Eugenics is a pseudoscience that has significantly influenced Western countries and cultures in recent history. It is a harmful science that has taken many forms and can still be seen in contemporary times. Initially, the eugenics movement gained legislative and medical acceptance in nations like the United States and Germany. Connections and links between the United States and Nazi Germany, regarding eugenics, has been a subject of study and research in recent scholarship. The eugenic movements in both

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nations had similar developments, but also vast differences for Nazi Germany is an example of eugenics extremism. While the Nazis popularized sterilization and euthanasia of certain “races,” as well as classify eugenics as a science, there is a deep-rooted history of eugenics that predates the Nazi party and World War II. Eugenics was a newly popular science in the early 20th century that became an international sensation. Even though eugenics, along with the idea of racial superiority and racial hygiene, played a vital role in creating the Nazi ideology, the Nazis were not the inventors or even the greatest advocates of eugenics. For instance, in the early 1900s, the United States played a significant role in the popularity of the movement. American scientists were known worldwide for further advancing this “new science.” Overall, this paper argues that the earlier American eugenics movement profoundly influenced Nazi policies by providing institutional models, ideological inspiration, scientific justification, and legal frameworks that the Third Reich later expanded to pursue racial purity in Germany.

The science of eugenics became popular in the 19th century, following Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. However, it was Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton, a British polymath, who coined the term eugenics. Galton believed that intelligence and intellectual abilities were passed on from generation to generation.¹ He was one of the first scientists to argue that intelligence was a scientific concept and therefore could be improved through engineering. It was Galton’s research on the heritability of intelligence that sparked discussion of how the intelligence of large groups of people could be improved through selective breeding. According to those who study it, the science of eugenics has two sides, positive and negative. Positive eugenics promote desirable

¹ Jakob Tanner, “Eugenics Before 1945,” *Journal of Modern European History / Zeitschrift Für Moderne Europäische Geschichte / Revue D’histoire Européenne Contemporaine* 10–10, no. 4 (2012): 462, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26266044>.

births, while negative eugenics discourage undesirable births.² Galton's purpose for eugenics falls into the positive category: selective breeding among people believed to have higher intelligence. Discussions of eugenics began in England in the late 19th century and spread to other countries. By the early 20th century, most industrialized countries had organizations dedicated to improving the biological quality of their populations.³ They attempted to achieve this goal with interventions in the education, legal, and medical fields. The United States and Germany had organizations to support the idea of "racial improvement." American eugenics and Nazi eugenics focused on sterilizing the "feeble-minded" while also promoting racial ideology that white Anglo-Saxons were the superior race.

Eugenic ideology claimed that national strength depended on building the "fit" population while limiting the "unfit." Adolf Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*: "This preservation is tied to the iron law of necessity and the right of victory of the best and the strongest."⁴ He meant the strongest races must prevail. Hitler and eugenicists saw those deemed inferior as threats to the "superior race." The Anglo-Saxon or Nordic race, central to eugenicists in Germany and the U.S., was considered superior; Eastern, Southern Europeans, Jewish people, and Africans were placed lower in the hierarchy. Preserving the "superior race" required active eugenics and legislation. Racial hygienists believed eugenics would reduce "inferior" populations and increase the "fit," strengthening the nation. This idea prevailed in the U.S., as Henry Freidlander noted: "In the United States, Social Darwinism was used to justify unbridled economic competition and the 'survival of the fittest' as

² Karl Kessler, "Physicians and the Nazi Euthanasia Program," journal-article, *International Journal of Mental Health* 36, no. 1 (season-01 2007): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41345197>.

³ Kessler, "Physicians and the Nazi Euthanasia Program," 5.

⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf: Complete and Unabridged, Fully Annotated*, 1925, 316–17.

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a law of nature.”⁵ This mindset shaped the American eugenics movement and the belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Examining the American context reveals how eugenics ideology took institutional form in the United States. The nation had organizations such as the American Breeders Association (ABA), the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), the American Eugenics Society (AES), and the Race Betterment Foundation (RBF), all of which played a crucial role in the American eugenics movement.⁶ The ERO became the United States’ most influential eugenics organization, founded in 1909 in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. The ERO specialized in heredity studies and was created with two purposes in mind: (1) to undertake research into human heredity, and (2) to educate the public about the importance of preserving America’s racial standards.⁷ The ERO cataloged thousands of individuals and their different traits. This data was subjective, often inaccurate, and prejudiced.⁸ The director of the ERO was Charles B. Davenport, who was one of the leading eugenicists in the United States. Davenport was responsible for overseeing and initiating much of the research on eugenics and sterilization. This was centered on George Mendel’s theory of genetic inheritance, which represented an important advance on Galton’s theory.⁹ Much of Davenport’s work revealed the belief held by eugenicists in the power of “scientific” observation to explain and solve complex social problems.

⁵ Henry Freidlander and Donald Niewyk, “The Opening Act of Nazi Genocide,” in *The Holocaust*, 4th ed., 2011, 38–55.

⁶ Anne Maxwell, “Building a Healthy Nation: Eugenics Images in The United States, 1890-1935,” essay, in *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics, 1870-1940* (Liverpool University Press, 2010), 108–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.4116440.11?seq=1>.

⁷ Maxwell, “Building a Healthy Nation,” 111.

⁸ Susan Ciancio, “Harry H. Laughlin: A Short Biography of a Eugenicist,” *Human Life International*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.hli.org/resources/harry-laughlin/>.

⁹ Maxwell, “Building a Healthy Nation,” 112.

The eugenics movement not only reached those in the interest of research and science, but, thanks to the AES, its message also spread into public spaces of education and politics. The AES was composed of a mix of scientists and public advocates of eugenic health. It grew out of the committee formed at the second Eugenics Congress, held in New York City and sponsored by the ERO.¹⁰ People from Europe, the United States, and Central and South America attended to discuss many topics, including those of Harry H. Laughlin, who was one of the founders, as well as Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of the Great Race*, and Professor Harry Crampton.¹¹ The AES's activities throughout the 1920s and 1930s included a journal, *Eugenics: A Journal of Racial Betterment* (1928-1931), and the organization of health exhibits at local state fairs.¹² The activities of these American eugenic organizations and their founders began to pique interest worldwide in eugenics. Charles B. Davenport, one of the American eugenicists who helped popularize eugenic practices in the United States, studied under Galton and explained that "One often sees in mulattos an ambition and push combined with intellectual inadequacy which makes the unhappy hybrid dissatisfied with his lot of nuisances to others. To sum up, then, miscegenation commonly spells disharmony – disharmony with the environment. A hybridized people are a badly put-together people and dissatisfied, restless, ineffective people."¹³ Davenport was of the belief that when "fit" people procreated with "unfit" people, the general well-being of the population went down, meaning the average person in the population would eventually become "unfit." He studied the idea of selective breeding under Galton and took these teachings to the United States, allocating

¹⁰ Maxwell, "Building a Healthy Nation," 142.

¹¹ Maxwell, "Building a Healthy Nation," 142.

¹² Maxwell, "Building a Healthy Nation," 142.

¹³ Garland E. Allen, "The Misuse of the Biological Hierarchies: The American Eugenics Movement, 1900-1940," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 5, 1983, 113, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23328344>.

funding from the Carnegie Institute to create the Station for Experimental Evolution located in New York in 1904. The purpose of the Station was research in genetics and evolution. In 1910, he opened a second research center next door, the ERO, headed by Harry H. Laughlin.¹⁴

Laughlin had vast influence on policies regarding immigration restrictions and compulsory sterilization of the “unfit,” as those were his primary interests in eugenics. During his time in the ERO, he authored many articles on advocating for eugenic policies, including sterilization, segregation, inter-racial marriage, and immigration restrictions.¹⁵ In 1922, he wrote *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States*, which established him as a leading eugenics expert. The book gives extensive data on sterilization practices and legal precedents. It includes a model sterilization law and encourages states to adapt. Laughlin states that “the most worthless one-tenth of our present population would be eliminated within two generations.”¹⁶ After the release of the book, more than 30 states had adopted sterilization laws. Indiana was the first state to pass a compulsory sterilization law, sometime after California became the third state to implement such laws. Not only did Laughlin, along with Madison Grant, influence sterilization laws, but also immigration restrictions. Grant was also the chairman of the Eugenics Committee. In addition, Laughlin was known for his global connections and for spreading his eugenic research abroad.

Grant influenced immigration restrictions in *The Passing of the Great Race*, published in 1916. He raised the alarm that “Nordic” white Americans were threatened with imminent extinction because of immigration of the peasant class from Central and Southern Europe, and the brown and black hordes

¹⁴Allen, “The Misuse of the Biological Hierarchies,” 110–111.

¹⁵ Susan Ciancio, “Harry H. Laughlin: A Short Biography of a Eugenicist,” *Human Life International*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.hli.org/resources/harry-laughlin/>.

¹⁶ Harry H Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922).

within their midst.¹⁷ He offered his views on immigrants in the Second Eugenics Congress. During this conference, groups from Southern and Eastern Europe were labeled as inferior, which led to a campaign to restrict immigration coming from those places resulting in the passing of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. Laughlin testified in favor of this Act and played a key role in its passage. The Act imposed quotas that severely limit immigration from those deemed unfit.¹⁸ The same year, the state of Virginia passed a sterilization law designed around Laughlin's legislation model. One of the first landmark cases involved a request to sterilize an 18-year-old named Carrie Buck. Her case made it to the Supreme Court in *Buck v. Bell County*, where the court decided that the sterilization of mental defectives is in the best interests of the commonwealth.¹⁹ The impact American eugenicists and their organizations had on the development of eugenic science in Germany in the early 19th century is meaningful and prevalent, as seen in their own eugenic programs and organizations.

In Germany, while there were programs for exterminating unwanted populations, there were also programs made to boost the numbers of the "Aryan" population. For example, the program of Lebensborn created by Heinrich Himmler in 1935, was also established in the same year the Nuremberg laws outlawed intermarriage with Jews. The Schutzstaffel (SS) took charge of this program that became deeply embedded with by Nazi racial

¹⁷ Jim Wheeler, "Madison Grant and the Dark Side of the Conservation Movement," *The Public Historian* 45, no. 3 (2023), <https://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article/45/3/75/196885/Madison-Grant-and-theDark-Side-of-the>.

¹⁸ Henry Friedlander, "The Opening Act of Nazi Genocide," in *The Holocaust*, 4th ed. (Cengage Learning, 2011), 38–55. 42. <https://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article/45/3/75/196885/Madison-Grant-and-theDark-Side-of-the>.

¹⁹ "Buck v. Bell, 274 US 200 - Supreme Court 1927, accessed April 21, 2025, https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=1700304772805702914&=q=buck+v+bell&=hl=en&=as_sdt=803.

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ideology and theories of eugenics.²⁰ The program was put into place with the hope of combating the declining “Aryan” population. The program began by encouraging SS men to have large families but also discourage unmarried-pregnant “Aryan” women from seeking abortions.²¹ There was extensive testing performed to make sure that the SS men and the women were a part of the “Aryan” race. The program provided homes for unmarried mothers to have their children, as well as financial support and adoption services. The program was later exploited during World War II as SS men were encouraged to impregnate foreign women in German-occupied territories.²² The program also began to involve the kidnapping of thousands of foreign children because they had German ancestry or they simply had the “appropriate racial features.”²³ The desire to create a “master race” involved the elimination of the undesirables and an attempt to expand the “Aryan” population, driven by Nazi eugenic theories and institutions modeled on the American blueprint.

German eugenicists had, with the support of the Americans, what they believed to be an increased understanding of eugenics and how to improve racial hygiene. However, what they did not have at the beginning of the 20th century was the same kind of funding. Not until 1926, when an official of the Rockefeller Foundation toured German eugenics labs. This resulted in support and funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, which founded the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Eugenics, and Human Heredity.²⁴ This aid rarely wavered, even after the Nazi’s took control of Germany, the funding did not stop. The research conducted at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute would shape eugenic

²⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Lebensborn Program,” accessed April 20, 2025, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lebensborn-program>.

²¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Lebensborn Program.”

²² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Lebensborn Program.”

²³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Lebensborn Program.”

²⁴ Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 20.

and racial hygiene policy in Germany for the coming decades. Due to the funding and support that eugenicists and racial hygienists in Germany received, the research surpassed even that of the United States. Dr. Joseph DeJarnette, who testified in the Carrie Buck case, exclaimed that the “Germans are beating us at our own game.”²⁵ The growth of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute had American eugenicists applauding its practices, as they had laid the foundation for what the Institute was studying and putting into practice in the first place. However, the United States was still praised for the groundwork it had laid, to such an extent that in 1936, Henry H. Laughlin went to Heidelberg to receive an honorary doctorate, thereby demonstrating an important relationship with the United States.²⁶ Even though the U.S. made groundbreaking progress, the Germans sought to take the practices even further. Believing that they had the ability, along with the governmental structure, which would allow for eugenics and racial hygiene practices to achieve what they believed to be their full potential. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was one of the ways and places where this occurred; it was also home to influential eugenicists who helped create Nazi racial policy, including Ernst Rudin and Eugen Fischer.

Ernst Rudin was a German psychiatrist and racial hygienist who was one of the founders of the eugenics and racial hygiene movement in Germany in the early 20th century.²⁷ In 1910, Rudin developed a friendship with Charles Benedict Davenport. Their relationship progressed during the First International Eugenics Congress in 1912, where they were both participants. Rudin’s connections with the United States were deep; he published a multitude of papers on hereditary mental defects in the United

²⁵ Robert Wald Sussman, “Eugenics and the Nazis: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea,” in *The Myth of Race* (Harvard University Press, n.d.), 109, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qdt73.8>.

²⁶ Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis* (Harvard University Press, 1986), 98.

²⁷ Jay Joseph and Norbert A. Wetzel, “Ernst Rüdin: Hitler’s Racial Hygiene Mastermind,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 46–46, no. 1 (2013): 1–30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42628760>.

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States in the 1920s. Furthermore, Rudin was also the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry in 1926; that same year, he began collecting family profiles of people in Germany.²⁸ Rudin followed similar procedures to those being conducted at the Eugenic Records Office in New York because he, along with Davenport, believed that mental disabilities held by “unfit” or “feeble-minded” people were passed down through family lineage.²⁹ Rudin’s connections with the United States and Davenport continued; Davenport even recommended him to succeed him as President of the International Federation of Eugenics Organizations. Creating a strong connection between the person who became one of Hitler’s most influential eugenicists and the United States.³⁰ Rudin was an incredibly influential eugenicist during the early to mid-20th century, “The German law is based on thirty years of research in psychiatric genealogy which was undertaken under the leadership of Dr. Ernst Rudin at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Psychiatric Research in Munich”.³¹ The research was conducted by Ernst, with the help of the United States and Davenport, played a large role in Nazi racial hygiene policy and legislation. For example, “On July 14, 1933... the Nazi government passed the law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, or sterilization law, according to which an individual could be sterilized if, in the opinion of a genetic health court, he or she suffered from any of several ‘genetic’ influences”.³² Rudin was one of the racial hygienists who helped write this law, and adopted American sterilization laws. Due to the collaboration of eugenicists and racial hygienists from the United States and Germany, their beliefs coincided with their eugenic

²⁸ Sussman, “Eugenics and the Nazis: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea,” 112–13.

²⁹ Joseph and Wetzel, “Ernst Rüdin: Hitler’s Racial Hygiene Mastermind,” 9.

³⁰ Sussman, “Eugenics and the Nazis: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea,” 114.

³¹ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 50.

³² Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 96.

policy. Rudin demonstrated through his influence in Nazi racial policy and legislation just how close the relationship between the United States and Germany was regarding eugenic and racial hygienic beliefs. The German-American ties in eugenics continued to grow during the early half of the twentieth century, mainly due to the beliefs both countries held about the practice.

Another influential eugenicist from the Kaiser Institute was Eugen Fischer, a genetics professor and co-author of *Foundations of Human Heredity Teaching and Racial Hygiene*. Fischer was the head of the Kaiser Institute's Department of Anthropology and also had a close relationship with Davenport.³³ Their relationship, like Rudin's, grew after the First International Eugenics Congress in 1912, so much so that, "In 1929, Davenport asked Fischer to assume the chairmanship of the committee, and together they sent out a worldwide questionnaire to identify not only cross-race individuals but all peoples of 'color.' Fischer modified this study to become a German national 'anthropological survey,' which became his tool for identifying undesirable populations." One year after Davenport and Fischer conducted the initial study, the Rockefeller Foundation provided a five-year grant to support it.³⁴ This study, with some modifications, led to the Nazi regime being able to identify people they deemed "unfit," such as the Jewish population and mentally handicapped individuals. If it had not been for the shared beliefs in eugenics and collaboration, racial hygiene legislation in Nazi Germany would have looked different. Furthermore, Erwin Baur was an influential eugenicist in Germany and, along with Fritz Lenz and Eugen Fischer, co-author of *Foundations of Human Heredity Teaching and Racial Hygiene*. This text, written by Baur, Fischer, and Lenz, was among the most important works on eugenics in Germany. Adolf Hitler, after reading the text, constructed much of his racial hygiene policy

³³ Peter Weingart, "German Eugenics Between Science and Politics," *Osiris*, vol. 5 (The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The History of Science Society, 1989), 266, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/301800>.

³⁴ Sussman, "Eugenics and the Nazis: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea," 118.

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based it.³⁵ Erwin Baur was a geneticist and botanist who was the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Plant Breeding Research.³⁶ Baur, similarly to United States eugenicists, believed in sterilization and how that would improve a country's population. Baur also had his own connections with the United States and Davenport. In 1921, a year before the well-known work was published, Baur met with Davenport and asked for a summary of the laws regarding eugenics and sterilization in the United States.³⁷ The United States not only had connections with three of the most influential eugenicists within the Nazi party, but they also played a role in eugenic textbooks that would eventually be used to write Nazi racial hygiene policies. The connections between German and American eugenicists were significantly important; exchanging information about the new science was crucial to its eventual development.

German eugenicists closely followed United States racial hygienists and eugenicists and were fascinated by how they applied eugenic practices. The Germans were kept up to date in part by the actions of a Berlin society member, Geza Von Hoffman. He was constantly informing his colleagues in Germany about the United States's progress in eugenics and how the country had adopted eugenic practices. Even publishing a book in 1913 titled *Racial Hygiene in the United States of North America*, which became another well-known eugenics text at the time.³⁸ In this text, he covered legislation that the United States had put into place, such as marriage restrictions among races and sterilization laws he believed attempted to prevent "racial suicide."³⁹ Hoffman allowed European eugenicists to gain insight into the actions of the United

³⁵ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 50.

³⁶ Sussman, "Eugenics and the Nazis: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea." P. 120

³⁷ Sussman, "Eugenics and the Nazis: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea." P. 118

³⁸ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 16.

³⁹ Geza Von Hoffman, *Racial Hygiene in the United States of North America*, 1912.

States and the eugenic practices taking place. The practice of eugenics was gaining traction across the world, and the United States was seen as the country at the forefront of applying eugenic theory to society and its population. Hoffman was able to update his German colleagues on the many eugenics-based laws the U.S. was passing, giving German eugenics and racial hygienists insight into how to implement eugenic policy at the population level.

One specific part of eugenic legislation intrigued the Germans, the United States practice of sterilization. Alexander Sanger states, "In 1907, Indiana became the first of thirty states to legalize compulsory sterilization of 'confirmed criminals, idiots, rapists, and imbeciles.'"⁴⁰ This practice of negative eugenics and sterilization was recognized, globally, by eugenicists. It was also one of the first pieces of eugenics legislation during that period. Therefore, eugenics turned from a science previously considered to be theoretical into a practical one. This change from theoretical to practical was incredibly influential not only in the United States but in shaping Nazi racial hygiene policy: "The leaders in the German sterilization movement state repeatedly that their legislation was formulated only after careful study of the California experiment. It would have been impossible, they say, to undertake such a venture involving some 1 million people without drawing heavily upon previous experience elsewhere."⁴¹ The eugenic practices and legislation, specifically sterilization legislation, in the United States served as a pathway for German racial hygienists to follow. In 1924, Dr. Gustave Boeters, a sterilization advocate in Germany, explained that "what we racial hygienists promote is by no means new or unheard of. In a cultured nation of the first order – the United States of America – that which we strive [that is, sterilization legislation] was introduced

⁴⁰ Alexander Sanger, "Eugenics, Race, and Margaret Sanger Revisited: Reproductive Freedom for All?," journal-article, *Hypatia*, vol. 2–2 (Wiley on behalf of Hypatia, Inc., 2007), 211, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4640075>.

⁴¹ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 42-3.

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and tested long ago. It is all so clear and simple.”⁴² German eugenicists believed that the work already done in the United States laid the groundwork for what they believed needed to be done in Germany. Eugenicists in the Fatherland closely followed United States eugenic practices and sought to emulate them. Furthermore, the Germans believed that they could do it more effectively.

Even though the United States was seen as an innovator in the eugenics community, the eugenicists in America believed that there was more work to be done. Harry H. Laughlin believed that if sterilization took its full effect in the United States, 100,000 people would be sterilized within the first few years, and that number would climb to 400,000 by 1980. In 1931, Fritz Lenz cited Laughlin and his views in his book *Human Selection*.⁴³ Ideas regarding eugenics were shared between the United States and Germany; ideas about how to apply them were shared as well. However, as previously stated, Lenz was a critic of United States eugenics not because of its research or legislation, but because of its government, believing that bureaucracy in the United States stood in the way of the potential of the eugenics movement and racial hygiene overall. Therefore, with a less bureaucratic and amore authoritarian government, German eugenicists would be able to continue and possibly complete the work the United States had already begun. The United States sterilization legislation was influential; this legislation “resulted in the sterilization of some 15,000 individuals before 1930; many of them against their will and while incarcerated in prisons or homes for the mentally ill. By 1939 more than 30,000 people in twenty-nine American states had been sterilized on eugenic grounds; nearly half the operations (12,941) were carried out in California.”⁴⁴ Racial hygienists within the Nazi Party took this sterilization law and practice and, through their own authoritarian government, were able to increase the

⁴² Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 98.

⁴³ Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 99.

⁴⁴ Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 97.

number of sterilizations. In 1934, when the sterilization law was passed in Germany, almost 65,000 sterilization decisions were handed down by German health courts, who were in favor of over ninety percent of the cases.⁴⁵ German racial hygienists took the legislation and practice of sterilization that the United States government had established domestically and applied it within their own country. Taking Laughlin's idea of how to improve the Nordic race, and, because of the less democratic government and less bureaucracy, was able to follow through with his belief. The shared beliefs and connections between the two countries allowed Germany to follow the United States's state lead in seeking to expand the Nordic race while also seeking to rid the world of the "unfit."

Furthermore, the sterilization laws were not the only piece of influential legislation in the United States that was passed due to the rising popularity of eugenics and American racial hygiene policy. The Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which passed in Virginia, was also a form of negative eugenic legislation. This bill stated that there was a "mandatory registration certificate for every resident of Virginia was to be prepared under the supervision of the Bureau of Vital Statistics showing the racial composition of each person." Additionally, these certificates had to be shown to local clerks before they could receive a marriage license because it was "unlawful for any white person in this State to marry and save a white person."⁴⁶ Therefore, making it illegal for a white person to marry any person who was considered of color. The act also mentioned that the term "white person" would only apply to someone who had no trace of any other blood but Caucasian. This piece of legislation not only made it mandatory to know one's race but also made the definition of what it meant to be white, one that was considered "pure" or not mixed with other races and therefore

⁴⁵ Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 106.

⁴⁶ Richard B. Sherman, "The Last Stand: The Fight for Racial Integrity in Virginia in the 1920s," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 54 (Southern Historical Association, February 1988), 77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2208521>.

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“fit” by eugenics standards, in addition to making illegal to marry anyone not considered pure Caucasian.

German racial hygienists were guided by this legislation when they established the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. The Law for the Protection of the Genetic Health of the German people required “couples to submit to medical examination before marriage to see if ‘racial damage’ may be involved”.⁴⁷ Comparing this to the Racial Integrity Law enacted in Virginia almost a decade earlier, there are some similarities. The only way to get married was if there was documented proof that both individuals were of sound mind and were not “feeble-minded.” The goal of this law was that no miscegenation would occur, while also implementing selective breeding practices so that people of higher intelligence would procreate with people of higher intelligence, resulting in the preservation of the Nordic race. The influence of the Racial Integrity Act is clear; both the United States and Nazi Germany believed that establishing definitions of race while also making it illegal to marry outside of one’s race would preserve the Nordic race. In addition, the Nuremberg Laws mention that the only way for a person to be of German blood meant they were not allowed to have any Jewish Grandparents; anything more than zero was either “mixed breed” or Jewish. This is similar to the third part of the Racial Integrity Act, which established the meaning of what it is to be white or, in the Nazi’s case, German. This allowed both sides to alienate the race they believed to be inferior, while also making miscegenation illegal in an attempt to preserve the “superior” Nordic race.

In addition, the immigration policies were notable acts of negative eugenics. Harry Laughlin played a key role in the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson Act. This act was one of the first major pieces of legislation to restrict immigration from Europe, which had previously been an open-door policy allowing almost unlimited numbers of immigrants to enter, and brought that tradition to a

⁴⁷ Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 106.

halt. This piece of eugenic legislation imposed immigration caps on countries that the United States believed had individuals who were “unfit.”⁴⁸

Laughlin even testified in front of the United States Congress, stating, “Making all logical allowances for environmental conditions, which may be unfavorable to the immigrant, the recent immigrants, as a whole, present a higher percentage of inborn socially inadequate qualities than do the older stock.”⁴⁹ Laughlin, in this case, made an argument using eugenic talking points such as stating that by letting new immigrants in, the strength of the American population would drop. This would be due to differences in characteristics of new immigrants, such as intelligence, alcoholism, and insubordination. This testimony by Laughlin had a significant impact on the passing of the Johnson Act in 1924.⁵⁰ These acts of legislation that turned what was previously a theoretical science into a practical one were praised by Germans in the field of eugenics and racial hygiene. Walter Schultze, a Bavarian Health Inspector, wrote in the official Journal of the Nazi Physicians League that there was much to be learned from the United States racial hygienists. Mentioning that the Johnson Act had effectively restricted the continuing immigration of Jewish people to the United States.⁵¹ German racial hygienists saw the United States as a mentor in the field. Eugenicists in Germany believed that the United States did not have a Jewish problem because of these immigration acts and forms of eugenic legislation.

Additionally, it was not only the racial hygienists and eugenicists who approved and supported the practice in the United States, Adolf Hitler himself approved of the practices. Hitler states in *Mein Kampf* that,

⁴⁸ Freidlander and Niewyk, “The Opening Act of Nazi Genocide.”

⁴⁹ Allen, “The Misuse of the biological Hierachies” 5:120.

⁵⁰ Allen, “The Misuse of Biological Hierachies,” 121.

⁵¹ Proctor, *Racial Hygiene Medicine Under the Nazis*, 100.

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There is today one state in which at least weak beginnings toward a better conception are noticeable. Of course, it is not our model German Republic, but the American Union...By refusing immigration on principle to elements in poor health, by simply excluding certain races from naturalization, it professes in slow beginnings a view which is peculiar to the folkish concept.⁵²

The entire scientific community studying eugenics in Germany, along with the man who would eventually become its most famous ruler, supported the American eugenic policies. Overall, the ways in which the United States turned this theoretical science into action through legislation were emulated by German racial hygienists.

The German eugenics movement had similarities to the American movement, but it played out differently. The German movement scientists had a much larger role in the eugenics movement than in the U.S. because most were physicians and medically educated, which was the preferred career path for eugenicists.⁵³ The Nazi's cornerstone precept of "racial hygiene" gave birth to their policy of "racial cleansing" that led to the murder of millions of Jews and other undesirables.⁵⁴ With the rise of science-based medicine and physicians' roles in national health reform, physicians gained political leverage and sustained public recognition. In the 1920s, two scholars, Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, published a polemical work called *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens* (Authorization for the Destruction of Life in Worthy of Life).⁵⁵ They argued that the law should permit the killing of "incurable feeble-minded" people from

⁵² Hitler, *Mein Kampf: Complete and Unabridged, Fully Annotated.*, 439–40.

⁵³ Friedlander, "The Opening Act," 43.

⁵⁴ François Haas, "German Science and Black Racism—Roots of the Nazi Holocaust," Shibboleth authentication request, February 2008, <https://faseb-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/doi/full/10.1096/fj.08-0202ufm?sid=vendor%3Adatabase>.

⁵⁵ Friedlander, "The Opening Act," 43.

a “medical perspective.” The Binding-Hoche polemic was followed by other publications favoring euthanasia for those deemed unworthy of life. Although the idea was never officially accepted during the Weimar Republic, it was discussed in German medical circles, and eventually the ideas would be used as justification by the Nazis.⁵⁶

After the Nazi party came into power, they began to develop social policies and draft laws aimed at racially strengthening the German nation in the shortest time possible. Hitler and the Nazi regime had pledged to preserve the “purity of German blood” and were determined to cleanse the German gene pool.⁵⁷ After 1933, German science rapidly synchronized with Nazi ideology. Nazi ideology was spearheaded by Hitler, who believed that a person’s characteristics, attitudes, abilities, and behaviors were determined by their racial makeup.⁵⁸ Drawing on social Darwinism, Nazis believed that human beings could be classified collectively as “races,” with each race possessing distinctive characteristics passed down genetically since the first appearance of humans. The Nazis believed that superior races had not just the right but the obligation to subdue and even exterminate inferior ones.⁵⁹

The goal of racial hygiene in Germany was to “improve the stock of the German Volk through the eradication of its inferior members and of the racial aliens dwelling among them.”⁶⁰ The exclusion of groups was at the center of “improving the stock of the German people” and preserving the “Aryan” race.⁶¹ From Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, “Nation and Race” was also published on its

⁵⁶ Friedlander, “The Opening Act,” 43.

⁵⁷ Friedlander, “The Opening Act,” 44.

⁵⁸ “Victims of the Nazi Era: Nazi Racial Ideology,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 20, 2025, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/victims-of-the-nazi-era-nazi-racial-ideology>.

⁵⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Victims of the Nazi Era,”

⁶⁰ Friedlander, “The Opening Act,” 48.

⁶¹ Friedlander, “The Opening Act,” 45.

own as a pamphlet, which widely promoted the Nazi ideology.⁶² The preservation of the “Aryan” race, which was the term for the superior strain of people, was something Hitler often preached.⁶³ This often included the idea that there was a harm done to the “Aryan” race by marrying and having children with inferior races. The survival “Aryan” race in Hitler’s mind was at stake if intermingling with the inferior races continued. This intermingling was the cornerstone for the execution of undesirable groups.

The exclusion of groups began with those with disabilities. Laws were put into place that systematically killed people with “hereditary diseases such as Huntington’s chorea, epilepsy and schizophrenia, the process they termed ‘euthanasia.’”⁶⁴ Laws on voluntary sterilization were put into place by the Weimar bureaucracy, which the Nazi regime turned into compulsory laws after 1933.⁶⁵ Other groups of undesirables were also set up for elimination. Groups of “asocial” people, including criminals, drunkards, social vagrants, homosexuals, Gypsies, or any person deemed a burden on the state, were included in this elimination. The German welfare system was both exclusive and tightly regulated, allowing the state to control undesirable populations. The first organized mass killing techniques that the Nazis developed were used on the disabled. The success of the euthanasia policies convinced the Nazi leadership that mass killing was a possibility and could be effectively used. The T4 Killing programs, which were the code name for the euthanasia programs,

⁶² Richard Weikart, “The Role of Darwinism in Nazi Racial Thought,” ProQuest, October 2013, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1470088808/fulltextPDF/6B0668DCEA8F4D45PQ/1?accountid=10359&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>.

⁶³ Anne Maxwell, “Creating the Master Race: Photography and Racial Selection in Germany,” essay, in *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics, 1870-1940* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 147–71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.4116440.11?seq=1>, 147.

⁶⁴ Maxwell, “Creating the Master Race,” 147.

⁶⁵ Friedlander, “The Opening Act,” 46.

served as a model for the final solutions.⁶⁶ There were different methods of killing that developed from lethal injections to, eventually, gas chambers, making the killing of large masses of people possible. The T4 programs were successfully used in early concentration camps on “asocial” groups. The program required physicians to pick who would be healthy enough to work and who would be sent to gas chambers.⁶⁷ The T4 programs were the models used for the mass killing of the Jews and would replace the mass shootings originally used. This system of killing would speed up the process of mass killings. The experimentation of killing methods was not applied to the Jews at the beginning, but eventually it would be during the final solution.

In the 1930s, the third and final International Eugenics Congress took place, and many scientists openly criticized eugenics. Along with new scientific discoveries, the American population began to learn how scientists and politicians in Nazi Germany advocated for eugenic policies such as forced sterilization against Jews and persecuted minorities.⁶⁸ The eugenics movement lost its standing due to the cooperation between American and German eugenicists and the revelation of Nazi crimes, and by the 1940s, there was a discredit of eugenic theories.⁶⁹ The United States eugenics movement had withered somewhat, but the German eugenics movement remained in full force, using practices they had learned from their American counterparts.

In conclusion, the influence and impact that the United States had in shaping racial policies in Nazi Germany cannot be overstated. Through international collaboration amongst racial hygienists, the United States established strong connections with

⁶⁶ Haas, “German Science and Black Racism.”

⁶⁷ Haas, “German Science and Black Racism.”

⁶⁸ “Eugenics: Its Origin and Development (1883 - Present),” Genome.gov, November 2021, <https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/educational-resources/timelines/eugenics>.

⁶⁹ Friedlander, “The Opening Act,” 43.

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Germans in the eugenic field. Furthermore, these connections enabled German racial hygienists to gain insight into American eugenic practices and legislation. The United States was an innovator in the field of eugenics and turned what many believed to be an academic or theoretical science into a practical one through its legislation. This legislation got the attention of German racial hygienists, who were already collaborating with eugenicists in the United States due to the countless connections that had already been set up by Charles B. Davenport and Harry H. Laughlin. These two influential American eugenicists developed relationships with Nazi racial hygienists who would have enormous leverage over racial policies during the Nazi's time in power. The shared views and beliefs, along with the collaboration by Davenport and Laughlin with influential racial hygienists such as Ernst Rudin, Eugen Fischer, Fritz Lenz, Erwin Baur, among others, led to a flow of information into Germany on American eugenics practices. These networks and constant flow of information and understanding of eugenic practices in America paved the way for Nazi racial policies to occur since the former had provided the latter with research and procedures for its proper implementation. The Nazi regime capitalized on its authoritarian political power and forcefully implemented eugenic practices it learned from the United States, which the U.S. could not fully execute due to its democratic form of government. While the genocidal outcomes in Germany may have overshadowed American eugenics in scale and horror, the intellectual, legal, and ideological roots of those policies were in substantial ways transatlantic. Understanding this connection is vital not only for historical accountability but also for guarding against the resurgence of pseudoscientific racism under new forms. The legacy of eugenics is not confined to the past; its lessons remain urgently relevant to a world that continues to wrestle with the intersections of science, ideology, and human rights.

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Elizabeth Vazquez is a first generation Mexican-American student who will be graduating from California State University, San Bernardino with a Bachelor of Arts in History. Her love for this subject comes from a desire to learn more about her own cultural history and her father's shared love for this history. She hopes to continue her education by pursuing a master's degree. Moreover, she is also working on becoming a history teacher to inspire love for this discipline and to show the power of historical legacy. She would like to thank all who contributed to making this paper, her co-author and editor. *Tambien le gustaria dar las gracias a toda la gente que le a ayudado especialmente a su familia. Ella no estaria aqui sin su apoyo. Que nunca nos olvidemos de donde venimos. Que Viva la Raza Latina!*



History in the Making

The Soviet Dimension of Normalization: Motivations and Obstacles Involved in the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations

By Andrea Dixon

Abstract: The United States of America and the People's Republic of China established full diplomatic relations on January 1, 1979, after decades of the United States failing to fully recognize the legitimacy of the government in mainland China. This "normalization" of relations between the United States and China was completed by the Carter administration and Deng Xiaoping after more than a year of negotiation between the two parties. The governments of the United States and China were motivated to normalize their relations due to many factors, and they overcame significant obstacles to do so. This paper argues that both governments evaluated the Soviet Union in light of many of these motivations and obstacles. Moreover, the negotiations to normalize relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China cannot be properly understood without examining how both governments thought of the Soviet Union.

Introduction

On December 15, 1978, President Jimmy Carter of the United States announced that the United States of America and the People's Republic of China had reached an agreement to establish full diplomatic relations that would take effect on January 1, 1979. The establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United States (U.S.) and the People's Republic of China or the "normalization" of relations between the two countries represented a reversal in decades-old policies. In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) drove the Government of the Republic of China (ROC) out of the Chinese mainland and formed the People's

Republic of China (PRC), eliminating ROC authority from mainland China. However, the U.S. Government refused to recognize the PRC for about 30 years, continuing to recognize the ROC on Taiwan as the sole legal government of China.¹ The anti-communist sentiment of the Cold War in the United States was one major reason for this refusal to recognize the PRC.

The Cold War between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Soviet Union began before the Chinese Communist Party forced the ROC out of mainland China and ended with the collapse of the USSR in 1991, more than a decade after the normalization of relations between the U.S. and the PRC. The Cold War was a global contest between the two “Superpowers” (the United States and the Soviet Union) for greater power and influence than the other. This rivalry involved the promotion by each country of its own political ideology, the buildup of massive nuclear arsenals, and proxy wars in various regions of the world. Importantly, President Richard Nixon of the United States and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev of the Soviet Union initiated a relaxation of tensions between their two countries, referred to as *détente*, in 1969. *Détente* involved increased negotiation between the U.S. and the USSR, negotiations that continued until after full diplomatic relations with China were established. However, *détente* could not eliminate the rivalry or the tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Due to numerous factors, tensions between the two countries rose during Jimmy Carter’s presidency until *détente* was abandoned.²

Not long after its formation, the People’s Republic of China established friendly relations with the Soviet Union, but these two communist countries did not manage to maintain a good relationship. According to the book *A Companion to Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter*, edited by Dr. Scott Kaufman:

¹ “China Policy,” in *Milestones: 1977-1980*, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/china-policy>.

² Carole K. Fink, *Cold War: An International History*, (Westview Press, 2013). Accessed April 16, 2025. ProQuest Ebook Central.

The United States had broken diplomatic relations with China after it fell to communism in 1949, and a year later Beijing signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. By the late 1950s, however, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union had begun to worsen; they became bad enough that in 1969 the two former allies engaged in military skirmishes along their border. Indeed, by that time, the Chinese government regarded the Soviet Union as a greater threat to its existence than the United States.³

This excerpt notes that the relationship between the PRC and the USSR deteriorated until the two countries were fighting along their border and claims that the Chinese government felt more threatened by the Soviet Union than the United States by 1969. In a similar fashion, Dong Wang stated, “beginning in the latter half of 1969, and against the background of possibly over 4,000 Sino-Russian border skirmishes between 1964 and 1969, the Chinese leadership was inclining to the view that the Soviet Union was a more dangerous threat to China than the United States was. A Soviet military attack on China was even a distinct possibility.”⁴ This reinforces the notion that the leaders of the PRC began to view the USSR as a greater threat than the U.S. around 1969.

The United States likewise regarded the Soviet Union as a greater threat than the People’s Republic of China. While describing a document written by National Security Adviser Brzezinski to President Carter in February of 1977, Dr. Betty Glad paraphrased, “China, much weaker than the Soviet Union, he continued, posed no immediate threat to the United States.”⁵ Thus,

³ Scott Kaufman, *A Companion to Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter*, 1st ed. (Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

⁴ Dong Wang, “Rapprochement, the Default Superpower, and China Resurgent, 1970–Present,” in *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013).

⁵ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2009), 121, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7z5zk>.

it appears that Dr. Brzezinski pointed out to Carter in 1977 that the PRC was much less of a threat to the United States than the USSR was. In his first visit to the PRC as secretary of state under Carter, Cyrus Vance told Foreign Minister Huang Hua, "The central security concern of our country over the last thirty years has been the Soviet Union and in my judgment this will remain true for the foreseeable future."⁶ In this way, Secretary Vance acknowledged to the Chinese that the Soviet Union was the country that the United States saw as its most significant threat. In his conversation with the same Chinese foreign minister the next day, Vance remarked, "it is clear that neither of us poses a security challenge to the other. Neither has territorial claims against the other, and neither seeks to impose its will against the other."⁷ Vance claimed not only that neither the U.S. nor the PRC represented a security problem for the other, but also that neither sought to impose its will on the other. Whether or not these assessments were accurate, they suggest that the United States government did not see the PRC as a serious threat.

Jimmy Carter was not the first president of the United States to reach out to the leaders of the People's Republic of China. President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, had begun a dialogue with the PRC that was continued by subsequent administrations. In February 1972, Nixon had visited China to negotiate with the revolutionary and founder of the PRC, Chairman Mao Zedong, and with Premier Zhou Enlai. The result was the Shanghai Communiqué, a document in which the leaders of the U.S. and the PRC stated their respective positions to the world, recognized what they could agree on, and expressed an interest in the eventual normalization of relations

⁶ "47. Memorandum of Conversation," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, 812-6. Edited by Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 145.

⁷ "48. Memorandum of Conversation," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XIII, China*, ed. David P. Nickles, 170.

between their two countries.⁸ Dr. Kaufman attested, “Nixon had hoped eventually to normalize ties with Beijing, but the Watergate scandal put the brakes on any breakthrough. Ford opted not to take up the issue, afraid of the domestic backlash and the negative impact on détente with the Soviet Union.”⁹ Although Nixon had supposedly intended to normalize relations with China, the Watergate scandal led him to resign, which elevated Gerald Ford to the presidency. President Ford did not attempt to normalize relations with the PRC, leaving the task to his immediate successor, Jimmy Carter.

James Earl Carter Jr. or Jimmy Carter, born in Plains, Georgia, had been an officer in the navy, a Georgia State Senator, and the governor of Georgia before becoming president of the United States in 1977. As president, he intended to create a more ethical foreign policy which promoted human rights, improved relations with developed and less-developed countries, deemphasized the rivalry with the Soviet Union and other communist countries, furthered détente, and was more transparent with the American people.¹⁰ Carter also wanted to halt nuclear proliferation through a second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) with the Soviet Union and normalize relations with the PRC among other goals.¹¹ Carter appointed an experienced diplomat named Cyrus Vance to be his secretary of state, an expert on the Soviet Union named Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski to be his national security adviser, and a retired labor leader and former

⁸ “203. Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People’s Republic of China,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 812-5.

⁹ Kaufman, *A Companion*.

¹⁰ Kaufman, *A Companion*.

¹¹ Brian Hilton, “‘Maximum Flexibility for Peaceful Change’: Jimmy Carter, Taiwan, and the Recognition of the People’s Republic of China,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (2009): 599.

member of the American Socialist Party named Leonard Woodcock to be the head of the liaison office in China.¹²

Mao Zedong died in September 1976, prompting the leaders of the People's Republic of China to struggle amongst themselves for power. Hua Guofeng was Mao's nominal successor, but he faced challenges to his leadership.¹³ A group of extremists labeled the Gang of Four, who were blamed for the Chinese Cultural Revolution were successfully deposed and imprisoned, but Deng Xiaoping was restored to power not long afterwards.¹⁴ Deng had learned about Marxism-Leninism while working in factories during his time studying in France. He returned to China in 1927, slowly rising to power as an early Chinese communist revolutionary.¹⁵ Although he had been purged from the leadership of the PRC, he was rehabilitated in 1977.¹⁶ According to Dr. Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping became the leader of China, solidifying his position at the Eleventh Communist Party Congress in August 1977, the Fifth National People's Congress in March 1978, and the Third Plenum of the Eleventh CCP Central Committee in October-November 1978. Although Deng engineered the replacement of Hua Guafeng as Chinese Communist Party chief in 1981, he himself never assumed that position."¹⁷ As the de facto leader of the PRC, Deng Xiaoping aimed to modernize his country, and he believed that normalization of relations with the United States could help him accomplish this.

The Carter administration and the leaders of the People's Republic of China had many different motivations for normalizing

¹² Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping and U.S.-China Relations," in *The United States and China Since World War II: A Brief History*, 1st ed, (Routledge, 2013) 97, 99.

¹³ Harry Harding, "Normalization," in *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972*, (Brookings Institution Press, 1992), 67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctv86dgd9.6>.

¹⁴ Glad, *An Outsider*, 120.

¹⁵ Glad, *An Outsider*, 121.

¹⁶ Harding, "Normalization," 69.

¹⁷ Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping," 97.

relations between their two countries and faced quite a few obstacles to achieving this goal. One commonality among many, if not most, of these motivations and obstacles was the fact that the American and Chinese leaders were thinking of the Soviet Union. To some extent, both sides were motivated by the desire to contain Soviet influence, expansion, and aggression. This was a major reason that the United States and the PRC wanted to work together on global issues. However, even the motivations to advance world peace and expand economic ties and the obstacle of the close relations between the United States and the ROC government in Taiwan included a Soviet dimension that impacted the decision to establish full diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

Scholarship on Normalization

Many scholars have written about the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. In 1992, Dr. Harry Harding published the book, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972*, which included a chapter on normalization. In this early historical analysis of normalization, Harding discussed how the desires of the Carter administration, the U.S. Congress, and the American people to continue relations with Taiwan and ensure a peaceful future for the island clashed with the desires of the leaders of the Chinese mainland for recognition of the PRC's government as the only legitimate government of China and for the inclusion of Taiwan in the PRC. The relationship between the United States and Taiwan has been recognized as an obstacle to the normalization of relations between the United States and the PRC by many scholars, including Harding, Bryce Harland (1996), Michael Schaller (2002), Betty Glad (2009), Brian Hilton (2009), Chi Wang (2013), Dong Wang (2013), Scott Kaufman (2016), and Stephen J. Hartnett (2021). Of course, Brian Hilton also claimed that, although negotiations between the U.S. and the PRC were complicated by disagreements over the future of Taiwan and of

U.S. relations with Taiwan, several actions by the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan had eroded the relationship between it and the U.S. and helped to convince Carter to compromise with the PRC on the subject of Taiwan.

Dr. Harding argued that the Carter administration prioritized other issues over normalization of diplomatic relations with the PRC, including the improvement of relations with the Soviet Union, in the beginning of Carter's term as president. This argument was later reiterated in the work of Bryce Harland, Betty Glad, and Brian Hilton. However, unlike these other authors, Harding made a convincing case that the leaders of the PRC were also preoccupied with other issues and exploring the possibility of better relations with the Soviet Union during the start of the Carter presidency.

Multiple scholars mentioned disagreements within the Carter administration that hindered progress towards normalization. While Hartnett merely mentioned that Carter had to survive an “‘all-out civil war’ within his administration” before he could announce the normalization of relations with the PRC,¹⁸ Harry Harding, Betty Glad, Chi Wang, Louise P. Woodroffe (2013), and Scott Kaufman explained the disagreements between administration officials (particularly between Vance and Brzezinski) on how and when to normalize these relations. Chi Wang said that, in contrast with Brzezinski, Secretary Vance “was a supporter of carefully balancing relations with the PRC and the USSR.”¹⁹ Betty Glad stated, “Vance was concerned that too steep a tilt in the Chinese direction would harm U.S. relations with the USSR. In the spring of 1977, he argued that the normalization of relations with China should proceed cautiously and that any

¹⁸ Stephen J. Hartnett, “We Prefer to Stay Single, 1990–1998.” In *A World of Turmoil: The United States, China, and Taiwan in the Long Cold War*, (Michigan State University Press, 2021), 85.

¹⁹ Chi Wang, “Deng Xiaoping,” 99.

significant military relationship between the United States and the Chinese would be a mistake.”²⁰ Harding posited:

The new secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, was particularly interested in reviving détente with Moscow and in reaching an ambitious strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT). Vance feared that an energetic American attempt to normalize relations with China, particularly if it took on anti-Soviet overtones, might run counter to this objective. Vance's initial strategy, therefore, was to adopt an evenhanded approach to both Communist giants, moving toward China only in tandem with improvements in Soviet-American relations.²¹

Scholars seem to agree that Vance did not want to rapidly improve relations and expand ties with the PRC to the detriment of the relationship between the U.S. and the USSR. Harding, Glad, Chi Wang, and Kaufman claimed that Carter originally supported this, but eventually decided to support Brzezinski's plan to move towards normalization with China more quickly.

Kaufman's book asserted that, at first, Carter was “convinced by Vance that seeking normalization with China could jeopardize the president's effort to sign a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II) with Moscow. Frustration with the Kremlin, particularly Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Horn of Africa, led Carter to side with Brzezinski, who contended that playing the ‘China card’ could gain the United States leverage over the Soviets on such matters as SALT.”²² Some scholars have used the phrase, “playing the ‘China card,’” or a similar phrase to refer to the attempt by some members of the U.S. government, especially Brzezinski, to improve relations with the PRC in order to put pressure on the Soviet Union. For example, Dr. Louise P.

²⁰ Glad, *An Outsider*, 121.

²¹ Harding, “Normalization,” 69-70.

²² Kaufman, *A Companion*.

Woodroffe wrote, “The national security advisor... believed that allying with Beijing against Moscow would increase American leverage with the Soviets. Since Brzezinski had failed to make linkage of SALT with Soviet and Cuban intervention in the Horn an official policy, he refocused his energies onto ‘playing the China card’ to persuade the Soviets into more acceptable behavior in the Third World.”²³ This excerpt and the previous one make the case that National Security Adviser Brzezinski wanted the United States to improve its relations with the PRC in order to pressure the Soviet Union into either greater negotiation with the U.S. or restraint from interventions in other countries. They also suggest that Soviet and Cuban intervention in the Ogaden War (1977-1978) in the Horn of Africa motivated the Carter administration to improve relations with the PRC.

On a related note, one of Harding’s major arguments was that the Soviet Union’s foreign policy and its lack of cooperation with the United States and the PRC in negotiations convinced the two countries to work towards normalization of their relations. Brian Hilton supported the notion that the Soviet Union’s refusal to cooperate with the United States convinced Carter, at least, to improve relations with China. He maintained the following:

[Carter’s] carefully crafted and flattering introductory letter to Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev invited the Soviet Union to cooperate with the United States for mutual benefit. Brzezinski characterized the Soviet response as “a bucket of cold water.” Brezhnev offered no flexibility on strategic arms, and responded in an aggressive, patronizing manner to the administration’s emphasis on human rights, stating that he would not “allow interferences in our internal affairs, whatever pseudo-humanitarian slogans are used to present it.” The letter was

²³ Louise P. Woodroffe, *Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden: The United States, the Horn of Africa, and the Demise of Détente* (The Kent State University Press, 2013), 103.

a turning point. On the evening of February 28, five years to the day after the issuance of the Shanghai Communique, and with the Soviet rebuke fresh in his mind, Carter decided to take more initiatives toward China.²⁴

Although the Soviet Union would eventually negotiate the SALT II deal with the Carter administration, Hilton saw Brezhnev's prompt response to Carter as an offensive rejection of negotiation that led Carter to reach out to the PRC.

Several scholars noted that some members of the United States government wanted the cooperation of the PRC to combat the USSR. According to Harding, "some American analysts and officials had begun in the mid-1970s to advocate a more extensive security relationship with China to prevent the erosion of Sino-American relations in the absence of normalization and to bolster both countries' strategic position compared with the Soviet Union's."²⁵ Harding clearly contended that some people in the U.S. government were urging strategic cooperation with the PRC against the Soviet Union starting in the mid-1970s. Michael Schaller said that Brzezinski "viewed cooperation with China as an

²⁴ Hilton, "Maximum Flexibility," 599. Of course, Hilton admitted in a footnote that Carter's decision to improve relations with the PRC coincided with a publication by the National Chinese-American Committee for the Normalization of United States-China Relations. On page 609 of his article, Hilton explained that this was "a group of Chinese-American intellectuals led by the American-educated Nobel Prize-winning physicist Yang Chen Ning" and that "Yang launched his organization on February 27, 1977, the fifth anniversary of the Shanghai Communique, and marked the occasion with 'An Open Letter to President Carter' calling on him to complete the task begun by his predecessors." Therefore, an organization of Chinese-Americans published a persuasive letter addressed to Carter in favor of normalization of relations with the PRC the day before Carter reportedly decided to focus more on relations with the PRC.

²⁵ Harding, "Normalization," 72.

effective way to squeeze the Russians.”²⁶ Thus, Schaller declared that Brzezinski aimed to use U.S. cooperation with the PRC against the USSR. Betty Glad claimed, “using China as a counter to the USSR was exactly what Brzezinski had in mind. The normalization process he was working on would go beyond Nixon’s goal of restoring diplomatic relationships. New economic and security ties with China would be fashioned.”²⁷ Later in the same chapter of her book, Glad wrote that normalization “prepared the way for a security relationship that Brzezinski had long worked for and which the president now embraced.”²⁸ In this manner, Glad alleged that Brzezinski sought to create security ties with the PRC to counter the Soviet Union and that Carter eventually agreed with this policy. Chi Wang concurred that “Over time, [Carter] had moved away from Vance and gravitated over to Brzezinski’s position that China was a valuable U.S. ally against the Soviet Union.”²⁹ He held that Carter was convinced by Brzezinski to work with the PRC against the USSR.

Brian Hilton and Kenneth Lieberthal and Susan Thornton went even further than Harding, Schaller, Glad, and Chi Wang by proclaiming the importance of the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for the completion of normalization. To Hilton, normalization with the PRC “represented the culmination of more than eight years of effort by three presidential administrations to bring about a substantial reorganization of the Cold War global balance of power.”³⁰ Hilton reinforced the theory that members of the U.S. government saw normalization of relations with the PRC as a means to put the Soviet Union at a disadvantage, but he also emphasized the

²⁶ Michael Schaller, “‘Tacit Allies’ to Tiananmen: China and Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, 1974-1992,” in *The United States and China: Into the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 189.

²⁷ Glad, *An Outsider*, 120.

²⁸ Glad, *An Outsider*, 129.

²⁹ Chi Wang, “Deng Xiaoping,” 109.

³⁰ Hilton, “‘Maximum Flexibility,’” 595.

importance of this for motivating three different presidential administrations to work towards normalization with China. Lieberthal and Thornton insisted, “Cold War concerns and strategic competition with the USSR provided the glue for U.S.-China relations through the Carter, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush presidencies.”³¹ They therefore determined that competition with the Soviet Union is what facilitated cooperation between the U.S. and the PRC during Carter’s presidency and the next two administrations.

Some scholars postulated that the leaders of the People’s Republic of China chose to normalize relations with the United States partly due to their concerns about Vietnam. Relations between the PRC and Vietnam seriously deteriorated from the time Carter’s presidency began until the United States and the PRC normalized their relations. During this time, Vietnam fought the PRC in border clashes, allied itself with the Soviet Union, and escalated tensions with a regime that the PRC supported by invading Cambodia. Dr. Harding reasoned, “The growing signs of Vietnamese designs on Cambodia, and particularly the conclusion of the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance in November, increased Peking’s interest in securing a strategic alignment with the United States.”³² Harding concluded that Vietnam’s alliance with the USSR and apparent intentions to invade Cambodia encouraged the PRC to enhance its relationship with the United States. Dr. Chi Wang asserted, “Vietnam had begun pressuring Cambodia, leading the Chinese to fear encirclement by Soviet allies if all of what was once French Indochina fell under Vietnam’s control (Laos already had). Normalizing relations with the United States showed Vietnam that China had powerful friends as well.”³³ Chi Wang supposed that Vietnamese expansion made Chinese leaders afraid

³¹ Kenneth Lieberthal and Susan Thornton, “Forty-Plus Years of U.S.-China Diplomacy: Realities and Recommendations,” in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, edited by Anne F. Thurston, (Columbia University Press, 2021), 365. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/thur20128.15>

³² Harding, “Normalization,” 80.

³³ Chi Wang, “Deng Xiaoping,” 104.

of being surrounded by the Soviet Union and its allies, which incentivized them to improve relations with a powerful nation like the United States. He went on to say, "According to a senior Chinese official, Deng went along with normalization because of the Vietnam situation."³⁴ Dr. Dong Wang reported that "one important motive driving Deng's willingness to compromise on Taiwan was the need 'to clear the American flank before addressing the issue of Vietnamese imperialism and the occupation of Cambodia.'"³⁵ Dong Wang argued that Deng Xiaoping accepted American terms for normalization in order to settle things with the U.S. before dealing with Vietnam. Dr. Michael Schaller was more explicit, writing, "China contemplated invading Vietnam and wanted to secure a deal with Washington before doing so."³⁶ He avowed that the PRC leadership anticipated a potential invasion of Vietnam but wanted to finalize normalization with the U.S. first.

Dr. Schaller and Dr. Betty Glad both mentioned that President Carter ended his administration's efforts to normalize relations with Vietnam after receiving feedback that normalization of relations with Vietnam would damage U.S. relations with the PRC. Schaller alleged that "both Brzezinski and Deng objected to a deal" with Vietnam and that "When Brzezinski warned the president that recognizing Hanoi would be interpreted by Deng as an anti-Chinese, pro-Soviet act, Carter pulled back."³⁷ Glad observed the following:

... on October 11, in a meeting with Brzezinski and Woodcock, Carter decided to drop the normalization talks with Vietnam that under Holbrooke's direction had been drawing near a successful conclusion. The Vietnamese had met all U.S. conditions, but the Americans stalled. Brzezinski had been telling the president for some time that

³⁴ Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping," 107.

³⁵ Dong Wang, "Rapprochement, the Default Superpower."

³⁶ Schaller, "'Tacit Allies' to Tiananmen," 189.

³⁷ Schaller, "'Tacit Allies' to Tiananmen," 190.

the movement toward the normalization of relations with Vietnam would impede the progress they were making in their talks with the Chinese.³⁸

In this excerpt, Glad revealed that Carter ended promising negotiations with Vietnam and suggested that Brzezinski's advice that improved relations with Vietnam would hinder negotiations with the PRC was to blame. Schaller and Glad each implied that Carter felt the need to choose between normalizing relations with Vietnam and normalizing relations with the PRC. This could have been an obstacle to normal relations with the PRC.

Some scholars acknowledged that, to some extent, the PRC was driven to normalize relations with the U.S. by economic considerations. The economy of the PRC was relatively weak at this time. Dong Wang discerned that, "Aware of the need to put its economy on a stronger footing, China was now eager to seek diplomatic relations with the United States and to get American help in industrializing its backward economy."³⁹ Chi Wang concurred with Dong Wang that the PRC saw normalization with the U.S. as a recourse to improve its economy when he said, "China had powerful economic incentives to normalize relations with the United States. Deng understood that normalization could help anchor reform by stimulating exports to the United States and bringing in badly needed investment and technology."⁴⁰ Chi Wang deduced that Deng hoped normalization with the U.S. would lead to exports to the U.S. and an influx of investment and technology, while Bryce Harland emphasized Western technology as central to Deng's grand plans for the economic development of the PRC. Referring to Deng Xiaoping as Teng, Harland stated that, after rising to power, "Teng's main objective was economic — to speed up China's development. The key to this, he saw, was technology, and Western technology was better than anything the Soviet Union

³⁸ Glad, *An Outsider*, 128.

³⁹ Dong Wang, "Rapprochement, the Default Superpower."

⁴⁰ Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping," 103.

had to offer. So it was essential to... fully normalise relations with the United States.”⁴¹ After giving an account of normalization negotiations regarding Taiwan between the U.S. and the PRC, Schaller inferred, “Deng tolerated what he considered interference in China’s internal affairs because he believed that diplomatic recognition by the United States would speed the flow of Western and Japanese capital, which China desperately needed to foster economic modernization.”⁴² Schaller evidently thought that Deng was willing to negotiate with the U.S. on the issue of Taiwan because he expected that normalization with the U.S. would facilitate necessary foreign investment in the PRC.

A few scholars hinted that the U.S. government likewise had economic reasons to normalize relations with the PRC. Harry Harding wrote that, between the U.S. and the PRC, “bilateral agreements—including those on trade, transportation, and consular relations—were negotiated in 1978 as part of the discussions on normalization.”⁴³ If an agreement on trade was reached during normalization negotiations, that indicates that the two countries may have viewed improved trade as a priority and a goal of normalization. Harding also related the following:

The business community was also excited about the new opportunities being created by the American decision to grant diplomatic recognition and most-favored-nation status to China, just as it had been by the more tentative rapprochement of the early 1970s. Even before normalization of Sino-American relations, there were clear signs of China’s interest in expanding economic ties with the United States as part of a massive drive to import foreign technology and equipment... Normalization only increased the excitement. A headline in the Sunday *San*

⁴¹ Bryce Harland, “The Anti-Soviet Coalition,” in *Collision Course*, 109-123. (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996), 114.

⁴² Schaller, “‘Tacit Allies’ to Tiananmen,” 189.

⁴³ Harding, “Normalization,” 99.

Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, appearing the day after the normalization of relations with Peking was announced, described China as a “gigantic, juicy new plum for [American] business.” In the following article, Christopher Phillips, president of the National Council on U.S.-China Trade, was quoted as saying that the potential for commercial ties with China seemed “without limits.”⁴⁴

In this fashion, Harding implied that American businesses saw normalization of relations between the U.S. and the PRC as an opportunity for profit. Michael Schaller suggested that the United States had desired increased trade with China for a long time when he declared, “For over a century, Americans had waited for trade with China to boom.”⁴⁵ Schaller also asserted, “Carter had hoped to broaden the cultural and economic scope of Sino-American relations, placing less emphasis on its military aspects. He did, in fact, lay important groundwork for this.”⁴⁶ Schaller clearly argued that Carter wanted to expand economic relations between the U.S. and the PRC and started the process of doing so. After explaining the risks Carter took to normalize relations with the PRC, Chi Wang divulged, “Carter believed that any strategic and economic benefits to the United States that would result from the new relationship warranted the risks to his administration.”⁴⁷ Chi Wang therefore affirmed that Carter expected the U.S. to economically benefit from normalization with the PRC, and that this was one of the reasons he went through with it.

Kenneth Lieberthal and Susan Thornton and Brian Hilton supposed that the Carter administration wanted to improve the circumstances of the common people of the PRC, especially economically. While speaking of the Carter, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush administrations, Lieberthal and Thornton claimed,

⁴⁴ Harding, “Normalization,” 101-2.

⁴⁵ Schaller, “‘Tacit Allies’ to Tiananmen,” 192.

⁴⁶ Schaller, “‘Tacit Allies’ to Tiananmen,” 193.

⁴⁷ Chi Wang, “Deng Xiaoping,” 103.

“motivations—such as... providing advice and know-how to help lift several hundred million Chinese out of abject poverty, helping to develop legal expertise that would be important to China’s economic development, and making educational opportunities in the United States available for a gradually growing number of Chinese students—increasingly took hold.”⁴⁸ Thus, they proposed that the Carter administration and successive administrations were guided in their interactions with the PRC partly by the desires to alleviate poverty in the country, aid it in its economic development, and offer the Chinese people chances for advancement. On a similar note, Hilton maintained the following:

... Carter came to view normalization as a tool to facilitate a gradual improvement in the lives of ordinary Chinese under the Communist regime, a change that began in 1972 and had progressed significantly over the subsequent five years. Senator Mike Mansfield reported to Carter on this progress following a visit to China in late 1976. Mansfield described the Chinese people as “politically activated and organized,” and noted the rapid rise in industry in even remote provinces which previously “would have presented a picture of human misery and mass idleness and ignorance.” Early the following year, administration China specialist Michel Oksenberg similarly noted that “the economy appeared bustling and the standard of living was noticeably improved over my 1972 and 1973 visits.” Accordingly, the administration praised initial Chinese steps towards modernization, and began planning ways to assist the PRC in these efforts. By mid-1977, the administration had already noted how assistance to the PRC in developing its considerable energy potential might offset the demands of China’s modernization and help alleviate the global energy crisis. In early 1978, Carter approved a broad program of science and technology exchanges that

⁴⁸ Lieberthal and Thornton, “Forty-Plus Years,” 365.

included medical and agricultural delegations to work towards an end to global epidemics and famine.⁴⁹

In this manner, Hilton posited that Carter thought normalization could lead to better lives for everyday Chinese people, that their lives already seemed to be improving, and that the Carter administration made an effort to help further this progress.

The Carter administration professed that promoting human rights was one of their foreign policy objectives.⁵⁰ Whether the Carter administration applied this policy in its interactions with the PRC or even intended to do so has been debated by scholars. Scott Kaufman's book mentioned, "Carter himself hoped to apply... human rights in his dealings with Beijing."⁵¹ This implies that Carter intended to uphold human rights in his relations with the PRC. Yeshi Choedon published an article that focused on the Carter administration's handling of the human rights situation in the PRC. She acknowledged, "Although violation of basic rights remained widespread, human rights situations were [*sic*] improving under the post-Mao leadership. As the trend within China was towards relaxation and opening up, in these circumstances encouragement seemed more appropriate than denunciation."⁵² Choedon therefore recognized that the Carter administration may have held back criticism of human rights violations in the PRC because the situation was changing for the better. However, Choedon concluded that the administration could have done much more to promote human rights in the PRC. This is demonstrated by her following statement:

⁴⁹ Hilton, "Maximum Flexibility," 602-3.

⁵⁰ Yeshi Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor in US-China Relations: The Carter Period." *China Report* 36, no. 2 (May 2000): 207-8. <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/10.1177/000944550003600203>

⁵¹ Kaufman, *A Companion*.

⁵² Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 215-6.

The students, who were carrying on Democracy Wall Movement [*sic*], called on President Carter to ‘pay attention’ to the problem of individual rights in China, but they had no effect. Although the State Department issued a mild criticism of the imprisonment of Wei Jingsheng, one of the activists in the Democracy Wall Movement of 1979-80, its annual human rights reports did not single out China for condemnation, and it successfully barred the Dalai Lama from meeting any American officials during his visit to the United States in 1979. Continuing restrictions on freedom of emigration did not prevent the Carter administration from proposing, and Congress approving, the extension of MFN status to China as part of the bilateral trade agreement of 1980.⁵³

Choedon revealed that the Carter administration refused to condemn the leaders of the PRC for punishing free speech and restricting the movement of their citizens, while rewarding them with a favorable trade agreement and even snubbing the Dalai Lama to avoid upsetting them. According to Kenneth Lieberthal and Susan Thornton, “Jimmy Carter wanted to focus on China’s human rights problems when he assumed the presidency in 1977, but for reasons both practical and principled, he was persuaded of the wisdom of proceeding with normalization.”⁵⁴ Lieberthal and Thornton affirmed that Carter originally meant to address human rights issues in the PRC, but had good reasons to prioritize normalization. They also suggested that, if Carter had concentrated on human rights, it would have obstructed normalization.

Some scholars distinguished how the Carter administration dealt with human rights violations in the PRC from how it dealt with the same problems in other countries. Choedon contended, “the Carter administration did exempt China from most human rights initiatives reserved for other countries. The U.S.’s

⁵³ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 211.

⁵⁴ Lieberthal and Thornton, “Forty-Plus Years,” 371.

diplomatic representations on human rights were low key, infrequent and mostly unspecified. Public expressions of concern about Chinese violations were generally avoided. This sharply contrasted with the vigorous private diplomacy and frequent public statements made about human rights violations in other countries.”⁵⁵ Choedon alleged that the Carter administration did not pressure the PRC on human rights in public or in private nearly as much as other countries. Brian Hilton argued the following:

Significantly, although Carter had claimed that human rights formed the centerpiece of his foreign policy decisions, PRC human rights violations played virtually no role in the administration’s discussions of normalization. A 1977 study suggested that the number of executions in China that year may have reached 20,000. In comparison, the administration had placed aid sanctions on Bangladesh for that country having performed just thirty-seven political executions, suggesting that Carter’s efforts to improve relations with Beijing constituted a double standard in his human rights policy.⁵⁶

Hilton juxtaposed the general lack of discussion of human rights in normalization negotiations with the Chinese despite their widespread use of execution with the sanctions placed on Bangladesh for a few dozen political executions to demonstrate the uneven application of Carter’s human rights policy in favor of the PRC. Chi Wang compared how the Carter administration addressed the USSR’s human rights situation with how it ignored Chinese pleas for human rights and Deng Xiaoping’s suppression of free speech in the following passage:

Even while Carter’s administration raised human rights issues in its interactions with the USSR, it largely avoided

⁵⁵ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 213.

⁵⁶ Hilton, “Maximum Flexibility,” 601.

such issues in its contacts with China. For instance, the normalization period coincided with the 1978–79 Democracy Wall movement in China, in which ordinary Chinese citizens posted posters on walls and gave speeches calling for freedom and democracy... A poster in Beijing pleaded for Carter to intervene directly to protect human rights in China. But the Carter administration ignored the Democracy Wall movement, which Deng suppressed.⁵⁷

Michael Schaller wrote, “President Carter had made U.S. support for human rights a major diplomatic initiative. He criticized political repression in countries as varied as the Philippines and the Soviet Union. Yet the Carter administration turned a blind eye toward Chinese mistreatment of the regime’s critics. Washington avoided picking a fight with the Chinese government, especially given the rapid deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations.”⁵⁸ Schaller attested that Carter criticized many different countries (including the Soviet Union) for violating their citizens’ human rights, but did not raise the issue with the PRC. Schaller insinuated that this was partly due to the failure of diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Brian Hilton and Stephen J. Hartnett held that the Carter administration normalized relations with the PRC in order to create a more peaceful world. Hilton presumed the following:

Carter pursued normalization because of his moralistic belief that the Sino-American rapprochement that began in 1972 had produced genuine and tangible progress toward the goal of helping China develop into a productive and cooperative member of the international community. He hoped that this development would lead to a gradual improvement of China’s human rights and to a peaceful conclusion of the Taiwan issue, and while he realized that

⁵⁷ Chi Wang, “Deng Xiaoping,” 107-8.

⁵⁸ Schaller, “‘Tacit Allies’ to Tiananmen,” 193.

Beijing still had far to go toward achieving these ends, the president gladly accepted his role as facilitator by completing normalization.⁵⁹

As far as Hilton could tell, Carter genuinely believed that normalizing relations with the government of the PRC could lead it to be more cooperative and peaceable and to eventually be more respectful of its citizens' human rights. Hilton also stated, "normalization promised the administration significant advancement toward facilitating the formation of the peaceful, more prosperous world that Carter envisioned."⁶⁰ Here, Hilton asserted that normalization was a step toward Carter's goal of a more peaceful world. Hartnett said of normalization, "Carter believed this breakthrough pointed toward global peace."⁶¹ Hartnett gave Carter credit for intending to advance world peace through normalizing relations with the PRC.

Peace and Stability as Motivations

When President Carter announced that the United States and the People's Republic of China would normalize their relations, he claimed, "The normalization of relations between the United States and China has no other purpose than this: the advancement of peace."⁶² The joint communique issued on this occasion proclaimed that the United States and the PRC "wish to reduce the danger of international military conflict" and "believe that normalization of Sino-American relations... contributes to the

⁵⁹ Hilton, "Maximum Flexibility," 605.

⁶⁰ Hilton, "Maximum Flexibility," 613.

⁶¹ Hartnett, "We Prefer to Stay," 86.

⁶² Scott Kennedy, ed. *China Cross Talk: The American Debate over China Policy since Normalization: A Reader*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 5.

cause of peace in Asia and the world.”⁶³ Carter also posited that normalization would “enhance the stability of Asia.”⁶⁴

The desire of the U.S. and the PRC for peace and stability was a motivation for normalization. However, the pretense that it was the only purpose of normalization is not even consistent with the rest of Carter’s speech, as will be demonstrated later. In addition, both countries had significant practical and strategic reasons to work towards a more peaceful and stable world.

The PRC was planning to modernize its agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense under the “Four Modernizations” official state policy.⁶⁵ When Deng Xiaoping met with President Carter on January 29, 1979, he told him, “China does not wish for war... To realize our Four Modernizations, we need a prolonged period of a peaceful environment.”⁶⁶ In this manner, Deng admitted that his desire for peace was a matter of practicality, at least in part.

The leaders of both the U.S. and the PRC recognized that the Soviet Union could exploit instability to gain an advantage over them. During Cyrus Vance’s 1977 trip to Beijing, Foreign Minister Huang Hua remarked, “The continuation of the stalemate in the Middle East situation has caused great difficulties for the Arab countries against increasing Soviet influence and will increase the likelihood of internal turmoil in those countries so as to give an opening to the Soviet Union to take advantage.”⁶⁷ The Chinese foreign minister thus voiced the belief that the Soviet Union was willing to take advantage of instability in the Middle East to increase its influence in the region. In January 1979, Carter

⁶³ Kennedy, *China Cross Talk*, 4.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, *China Cross Talk*, 4-5.

⁶⁵ Chi Wang, “Deng Xiaoping,” 108.

⁶⁶ “202. Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006)747.

⁶⁷ “49. Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 179.

told Deng, “we do everything we can to alleviate tension in the trouble spots around the world because often the Soviets take advantage of disharmony or an outbreak of violence or instability in a country to move in—hopefully temporarily.”⁶⁸ Here, Carter straightforwardly stated that his administration tried to remedy conflicts around the world because the Soviet Union often took advantage of a country’s instability to gain a foothold in that country. Deng expressed concern that “the ASEAN countries... have complicated internal situations. There are thus loopholes for the Soviets to exploit.”⁶⁹ Therefore, Deng also suggested that the Soviet Union exploited countries’ internal problems for its own benefit.

Shared Opposition to the Soviet Union

President Carter read the joint communique that the United States and the PRC had agreed upon during his announcement of normalization. It asserted that both nations were “opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish... hegemony” over any region of the world.⁷⁰ According to Betty Glad, hegemony was “a Chinese code word pointedly used to refer to Soviet expansionism.”⁷¹

The leaders of the PRC were worried about the Soviet Union’s influence and interference in other countries. During Vance’s 1977 stay in Beijing, Foreign Minister Huang Hua told him, “The contention of the Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa and its dispatching of mercenary troops between Angola and Zaire . . . shows that it uses massive infiltration to repress liberation

⁶⁸ “204. Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 765.

⁶⁹ “205. Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 767.

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *China Cross Talk*, 4.

⁷¹ Glad, *An Outsider*, 120.

movements in Africa in the hopes of seizing control and outflanking Europe, fixing positions of future importance and strategic balance in its preparation for war.”⁷² Minister Huang represented Soviet interference in certain regions of Africa as repression of indigenous movements through which the Soviet Union aimed to take control and gain an advantage over Europe for a coming war. Foreign Minister Huang also maintained, “... Soviet ambitions for aggression and expansion have become bigger and activities for aggression and expansion have been stepped up... Soviet activities for expansion and aggression menace the security of other countries.”⁷³ The minister portrayed the Soviet Union as an aggressive power that was increasingly trying to expand to the detriment of other countries. If the representative of the PRC had this view of the Soviet Union, it is clear that at least some members of the PRC saw the Soviet Union as a dangerous country willing to harm others to increase its influence.

The Soviet Union’s influence and interference in other countries also worried the Carter administration. In his response to Foreign Minister Huang Hua, Vance confirmed, “we believe the Soviets have global ambitions and do pose a global threat.”⁷⁴ In this way, Vance acknowledged the U.S. government’s position that the Soviet Union was dangerous and was trying to be globally powerful. When National Security Adviser Brzezinski visited Beijing in May 1978, he told Foreign Minister Huang Hua the following:

As we see it, Soviet strategy today involves the following: it is designed...to gain political preponderance in Western Europe; to radicalize the Middle East; to destabilize southern Africa; to surround those countries in the Middle East friendly to the West; to reach and penetrate the Indian Ocean; to encircle China; and to become eventually the No.

⁷² “49. Memorandum,” 180.

⁷³ “49. Memorandum,” 183.

⁷⁴ “49. Memorandum,” 184.

1 global power. It is thus a policy of transcontinental pressure...That is why the President takes so seriously Soviet actions in Africa and that is why he is concerned about the Soviet military buildup in central Europe.⁷⁵

Brzezinski claimed that, from the Carter administration's perspective, the Soviet Union was attempting to achieve dominance over Western Europe, support extremism in the Middle East, create turmoil in southern Africa, surround enemy powers, stretch its power to the Indian Ocean, and become the dominant world power. He also asserted that Carter was worried about the Soviet Union's interference in Africa and their increasing forces in central Europe.

The increasing military strength of the Soviet Union made the leaders of the U.S. and the PRC uneasy. In his first meeting with Ambassador Huang Chen, Carter admitted, "We are concerned about increases in Soviet strength."⁷⁶ While in Beijing, Secretary Vance told Foreign Minister Huang Hua, "as we all know, the Soviets over the last several years have been putting extremely large amounts of money into improving their conventional forces in the central regions of Europe. This has been a matter of concern to us."⁷⁷ The Chinese expressed significantly more apprehension on the subject. Foreign Minister Huang Hua said the following to Cyrus Vance:

In recent years, the Soviet Union has been stepping up arms expansion [in the West] and is intensifying its activities, trying its best to control positions of strategic importance as well as strategic resources...the Soviet Union is trying its

⁷⁵ "108. Memorandum of Conversation," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 395.

⁷⁶ "5. Memorandum of Conversation," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 22.

⁷⁷ "47. Memorandum," 146-7.

Soviet Dimension of Normalization

best to maintain strategic supremacy over the US... In the past decade and more, the balance of military strength has changed between the US and the Soviet Union...we think the Soviet Union is going on the offensive and the US is on the defensive... In our view, the continued rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union is about to lead to a world war.⁷⁸

While American leaders simply noted their concern with the Soviet Union's increasing strength, the Chinese believed that the Soviets' military strength had surpassed that of the United States and predicted that another world war was on the horizon. This discrepancy was likely due to the belief of the American leaders that the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States was about even. For example, Vance stated, "in terms of raw military power there is at the present time a rough overall equivalence."⁷⁹

The leaders of the United States and the People's Republic of China wanted each other's cooperation, not necessarily a formal alliance, to thwart the Soviet Union. After speaking about the dangers posed by the Soviet Union, Deng Xiaoping told Carter, "we are not recommending the establishment of a formal alliance, but each should act on the basis of our standpoint and coordinate our activities and adopt necessary measures."⁸⁰ Later that day, Carter confirmed his agreement with Deng, saying, "we obviously have problems and challenges from the Soviet Union that we need to address together. We think it would be a mistake to form an alliance against the Soviet Union but there are many areas of the world where we can act in concert."⁸¹ After insisting on the necessity of action against the Soviet Union rather than just negotiation with them, Deng said to Carter, "Wherever the Soviet

⁷⁸ "49. Memorandum," 177-8.

⁷⁹ "47. Memorandum," 145.

⁸⁰ "202. Memorandum," 747.

⁸¹ "204. Memorandum," 757.

Union sticks its fingers, there we must chop them off.”⁸² Both leaders wanted the other country’s cooperation in dealing with the Soviet Union, even if neither thought it necessary or wise to enter into a formal alliance against the USSR.

Shared Foreign Policy Goals

In his announcement of the normalization of relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China, Carter expressed the hope that Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the United States would “give our Governments the opportunity to consult with each other on global issues.”⁸³ The U.S. and the PRC had similar views on many of the international issues of the time. Several of these views were related to their shared desire to contain Soviet expansion and influence and resist Soviet aggression. As a result, they had many similar foreign policy goals and, therefore, powerful sources of motivation to work together to address international problems.

The Carter administration and the leadership of the PRC both wanted Western Europe and its security ties with the United States to be strengthened to ensure their ability to resist the Soviet Union. For example, Ambassador Huang Chen told Carter, “The U.S. and China believe that a strong Europe is of great significance and is important... Western Europe is not strong enough to cope with the Soviets alone. The U.S. alone also may not be strong enough [to cope alone]. This is why the two together should strengthen their unity and cooperate with each other.”⁸⁴ Carter replied, “There is no doubt that the situation in Europe needs to be improved in military strength. This will guide me in making decisions with respect to Western Europe.”⁸⁵ During his 1977 trip to Beijing, Secretary Vance told Foreign Minister Huang Hua the following:

⁸² “204. Memorandum,” 764.

⁸³ Kennedy, *China Cross Talk*, 5.

⁸⁴ “5. Memorandum,” 23.

⁸⁵ “5. Memorandum,” 24.

... our policy depends in a critical way upon the alliance relationships which we have—particularly with our European allies and with Japan...we have taken a number of other steps to strengthen the alliances. One of those is the major effort which is underway to strengthen NATO... On the military side, a number of steps were taken at the NATO Conference which were of major importance. In terms of long-term actions, the decision was taken to undertake a study of defense improvement programs which will be completed next spring, and reports will be made at the NATO Meeting which will be held in the United States. The aim of these actions and of the study is to achieve a permanent strengthening of NATO...Two short-range decisions were taken at the same time—one was to increase the readiness of the NATO forces and at the same time to increase the ability of the United States to project its forces from the United States to supplement the forces already in NATO should the need arise. To this end, the United States pledged itself to take concrete action this year, and called upon NATO allies to take similar action. The United States action was to add \$600 million to its defense budget for this purpose.⁸⁶

Two days later, Foreign Minister Huang Hua told Vance, “The common enemy of the US and Europe is the Soviet Union. We are in favor of a united Western Europe which will build up its own strength... We think Western Europe is in need of the United States, and the United States is also in need of Western Europe.”⁸⁷

The leaders of the United States and the PRC had corresponding goals about working together and with other countries to resist the Soviet Union. Carter suggested to Ambassador Huang Chen, “To the extent that Western Europe,

⁸⁶ “47. Memorandum,” 143-5.

⁸⁷ “49. Memorandum,” 178.

Japan, the U.S. and China can cooperate, can be friends, and exchange ideas and share mutual purposes, the world peace can be assured and the Soviet threat met. I view these global issues with deep concern. That is why it is so important to me as the representative of the American people that we strengthen ties with China. We will strengthen ties with Japan.”⁸⁸ Ambassador Huang Chen responded, “Chairman Mao mentioned what he called a ‘one-line strategy: Japan, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Western Europe.’ This line can cope with Soviet expansion and aggression...As our leaders have said to the Japanese, Japan should place their relations with the U.S. first and their relations with China second.”⁸⁹ According to the footnote attached to this text, what Mao had actually said in a meeting with Kissinger was, “‘we should draw a horizontal line—the U.S.–Japan–Pakistan–Iran (Chairman Mao coughs badly.)–Turkey and Europe.’”⁹⁰

According to the paraphrased records of Secretary Vance’s Luncheon for Deng Xiaoping in January 1979, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that “The Germans are taking the lead, with our strong support, to organize a consortium to bolster Turkey’s economic strength, and this would in turn enhance the strength at the eastern end of the NATO Alliance,”⁹¹ while Secretary Brown “noted that the Administration’s budget this year has a comparable amount of military assistance and foreign military sales, which would enable Turkey’s state of readiness to be brought back up, including both air and land forces...Secretary Brown said that although Turkey’s relations with NATO never completely broke down, it is now possible for us to work more closely to improve NATO’s military capability in that area.”⁹² In response, “Vice Premier Deng said he believes that these measures with Turkey are beneficial, but he wanted to reiterate what he had

⁸⁸ “5. Memorandum,” 24.

⁸⁹ “5. Memorandum,” 24.

⁹⁰ “5. Memorandum,” 24.

⁹¹ “203. Memorandum of Conversation,” 749.

⁹² “203. Memorandum,” 750.

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said at the meeting in the morning—that Pakistan is no less important than Turkey.”⁹³ Later that day, Carter told Deng, “We are resuming our efforts to renew our strong ties with Pakistan and here we can work in harmony with you. The British and French and others are also interested in having a strong Pakistan, both economically and militarily.”⁹⁴

The Carter administration and the leaders of the PRC both worked towards or advocated reductions of nuclear arsenals. Carter informed Ambassador Huang Chen of the following:

...we will pursue efforts mutually to reduce [the Soviets’] dependence on nuclear and atomic weapons... We seek to assure the entire world that we can reduce our reliance on atomic weapons. We have offered the Soviet Union a comprehensive test ban treaty. This would be a bilateral agreement with the Soviets. If it can be worked out, then perhaps others such as China or France can consider joining in some form, but at the present time this is just an effort with the USSR.⁹⁵

Ambassador Huang Chen told Carter,

As to nuclear weapons, our government position has been constant and clear. We have three points: 1) We are for complete and thorough annihilation of all nuclear weapons; 2) We will never be the first to use nuclear weapons; 3) We propose that all heads of state come together to discuss how completely and thoroughly to ban and annihilate all nuclear weapons. As a first step, all heads of state should agree to a no-first-use pledge.⁹⁶

⁹³ “203. Memorandum,” 754.

⁹⁴ “204. Memorandum,” 758.

⁹⁵ “5. Memorandum,” 22.

⁹⁶ “5. Memorandum,” 23.

Vance told Foreign Minister Huang Hua, “As you know, for a long time the United States has tried to decrease the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As the President said to Ambassador Huang, our goal is total elimination of nuclear weapons. In the meantime, steps should be taken to lessen the danger of nuclear weapons.”⁹⁷

Addressing Differences in Foreign Policy

The United States and the People’s Republic of China did, of course, have some differences of opinion on international issues. It is only natural that two countries with so many distinctions from each other will not agree on everything. Differences in foreign policy may have discouraged the improvement of relations between the U.S. and the PRC to some extent. However, leaders of both countries may have realized that the normalization of their relations would allow greater communication and, over time, interdependence between them, both of which could foster greater influence on the other country’s foreign policy. Therefore, differences in foreign policy between the U.S. and the PRC could have obstructed normalization or, conversely, been a motivation for achieving it.

While reminiscing about his time as president leading up to normalization of relations with China, Carter wrote:

One of the more interesting potential benefits of having China as a friend would be its ability to quietly sway some third-world countries with whom it was very difficult for us to communicate. Most revolutionary governments did not naturally turn to the United States, and the Soviets sometimes had a clear field in forming new ties... China’s credentials among some of the developing nations were excellent; we saw our cooperation with China as a means to

⁹⁷ “48. Memorandum,” 163.

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promote peace and better understanding between the United States and those countries.⁹⁸

In this excerpt, Carter revealed that some people in the U.S. government hoped that, once relations with the PRC were better, the Chinese government might help the U.S. improve its relations with countries that the PRC was on better terms with than the United States. He also divulged that this was recognized as a way to compete with the Soviet Union.

The Carter administration wanted the PRC to work with them in swaying other countries, especially against the Soviet Union. While speaking about the Carter administration's policy in Africa in August 1977, Vance told Foreign Minister Huang Hua the following:

We believe that by identifying with the forces of change and through development efforts and selected military assistance, we are approaching competition with the Soviets in a more effectively comprehensive and politically advantageous perspective. In sum, we believe that our objectives in Africa have many common threads with those of the People's Republic of China and we would welcome working with you in the future in developing the most constructive solutions to the problems of that continent.⁹⁹

In a conversation with Deng Xiaoping in January 1979, Carter stated, "there are many areas of the world where you and we have a common goal and where we can cooperate... [including] among the non-aligned countries who look to you for leadership and guidance quite often."¹⁰⁰ Carter also told Deng, "I think that as we deal with countries where the Soviets now have a foundation, you

⁹⁸ Jimmy Carter, "On the Same Earth." In *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, (University of Arkansas Press, 1995).

⁹⁹ "48. Memorandum," 162.

¹⁰⁰ "204. Memorandum," 761.

can help us and vice versa to replace or reduce the Soviet influence.”¹⁰¹

In Carter’s memoir, he wrote that his administration and the South Korean president “wanted the Chinese to help prevent any military moves by North Korea and to help reduce existing tensions in that peninsula.”¹⁰² As early as February 1977, Carter told Ambassador Huang Chen, “I hope China will join to prevent aggression by either side in Korea.”¹⁰³ Vance told Foreign Minister Huang Hua the following:

Insofar as Korea is concerned, our objective is to prevent the outbreak of hostilities and to allow for a peaceful resolution in Korea in accordance with the desire of the Korean people. Unfortunately, the danger of war and the drastic consequences that would flow from such an event exists, and we should do everything we can to prevent such a situation from arising. We are not opposed to reunification as an ultimate objective and, as I indicated to you yesterday, we would support efforts to bring the parties together to discuss constructive steps that could be taken along those lines and other lines, which would be conducive to peace and stability in the peninsula. Let me make it clear that we are prepared to work with you for peace and peaceful development in Korea. We hope that you will use your influence to see that peace is maintained in the peninsula, as we will on our side.¹⁰⁴

Carter suggested to Deng that, in order “to bring [North Korea and South Korea] together for discussion,” the United States and the PRC should “cooperate and share advice.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ “204. Memorandum,” 765.

¹⁰² Carter, “On the Same Earth.”

¹⁰³ “5. Memorandum,” 24.

¹⁰⁴ “49. Memorandum,” 186-7.

¹⁰⁵ “204. Memorandum,” 762.

Carter told Deng that the U.S. was interested in helping Pakistan and India come to a “mutual agreement” and in preventing the two countries from becoming nuclear powers and that “your good influence in Pakistan would be very valuable. We would like to have your advice and information as the possibility for peace is explored.”¹⁰⁶ Carter told Deng, “we would hope that you could continue to use your own good influence among the other Arab nations to encourage and support the Camp David accords.”¹⁰⁷

The leaders of the PRC criticized the foreign policy of the United States on several issues. According to Brian Hilton, “In the early stages of Sino-U.S. discussions... the Chinese dodged the issue of cooperation in the third world. Instead, PRC officials’ sensitivity to Soviet initiatives led them to criticize virtually all facets of U.S. foreign policy.”¹⁰⁸ Although the Carter administration vocally supported the creation of a Palestinian homeland, they were still supporting Israel in substantial ways. In 1977, Foreign Minister Huang Hua said the following to Secretary Vance:

...we firmly support the just struggle of the Arab and Palestinian people to recover the occupied territories and reestablish their homeland...The weakness of the US policy in this regard is that in order to serve the interests of the 1 to 2 million Israelis you have set yourselves against more than 100 million Arabs... the Israelis are overbearing with the support and connivance of the US. The just demands of the Arab countries, including Egypt, have remained unsettled for a long time.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ “204. Memorandum,” 758.

¹⁰⁷ “204. Memorandum,” 760.

¹⁰⁸ Hilton, “Maximum Flexibility,” 600.

¹⁰⁹ “49. Memorandum,” 179.

Foreign Minister Huang Hua expressed to Vance, “Mr. Vance told us about his US formula for peaceful transition to majority rule in Zimbabwe. We are doubtful with regard to this formula. When the local peoples’ strength has not been developed to such a degree that they are able to defeat the white racist regime of Ian Smith, the regime will not give up its political power.”¹¹⁰

The PRC criticized the policy of the United States in Korea as well. Foreign Minister Huang Hua told Vance the following:

...the United States continues to try to delay the dissolution of the UN Command and the total withdrawal of US armed forces from South Korea, and it is also trying to perpetuate the division of Korea so as to obstruct the reunification of Korea. The US side should learn that the reunification of Korea is the common desire of the entire Korean people...Our consistent position is that the Korean people should settle their question of independence and peaceful reunification among themselves, free from outside interference. We firmly support the responsible proposition put forward by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on independence and peaceful reunification. We will never take part in any activities designed to perpetuate the division of Korea.¹¹¹

After Vance defended American policy in Korea, Foreign Minister Huang Hua replied, “you mentioned just now that in Korea a war may flow out of the development of events there. If there exists the danger of war in that area, it exists from the Park Chung Hee Clique...Although you have answered that you will withdraw part of your forces, you are maintaining your air forces in South Korea. This means that you continue to support the warlike actions of

¹¹⁰ “49. Memorandum,” 189.

¹¹¹ “49. Memorandum,” 180-1.

South Korea. This is of no help to the independent and peaceful reunification of Korea.”¹¹²

Détente with the Soviet Union

In some ways, the attempt of the United States government to improve its relations with the Soviet Union served as an obstacle to improving relations with the People’s Republic of China. Bryce Harland asserted that, when Deng Xiaoping came to power, “Détente remained the obstacle” to the full normalization of relations between the U.S. and the PRC.¹¹³ Brian Hilton claimed:

In the opening months of his term, Carter sought to create a more cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union. The administration initially did not focus much attention on the PRC, however, likely because of the administration's preoccupation with other foreign policy priorities and the realization that the Soviet Union could provide more capable assistance in global management than the PRC. The era of Mao Zedong had concluded with the Chairman's death in 1976, but the political and social turmoil within China had not yet subsided to the point where the administration could realistically view the PRC as either a reliable or a capable international partner. In contrast, the administration could readily identify areas in which the United States and the Soviet Union might begin immediately to make important contributions to global stability.¹¹⁴

In January of 1977, Michel Oksenberg wrote to Brzezinski, “I fear that the President has done nothing so far to express his personal interest in [the issue of establishing normal diplomatic relations with China], and he is setting policy through non-action.

¹¹² “49. Memorandum,” 189.

¹¹³ Harland, “The Anti-Soviet Coalition,” 114.

¹¹⁴ Hilton, “Maximum Flexibility,” 598.

Soviet-U.S. relations receive attention and move forward, while Sino-American relations languish. *We are not being balanced.*¹¹⁵

Dong Wang suggested that Chinese leaders were worried about the possibilities of collusion between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and of the two nations joining forces against China.¹¹⁶ Chinese leaders certainly did discourage their counterparts in the United States from relying on détente to control the Soviet Union. Ambassador Huang Chen told President Carter, “In recent years the Soviet Union under the camouflage of détente has been stepping up military preparations for expansion. Not only have the Soviets caught up with the U.S. in conventional forces, but they are seeking overall military superiority... They talk disarmament but do the opposite.”¹¹⁷ Foreign Minister Huang Hua told Vance:

...experience has proved that it is unrealistic to try to use some agreements to restrain Soviet expansionist activities and check the momentum of Soviet expansion. Take the facts after 1963, for instance, the time when the US and the Soviet Union concluded the partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. In the past decade and more, the balance of military strength has changed between the US and the Soviet Union... Take the SALT I Agreement in 1972, for example; after that, have Soviet strategic arms increased or decreased? I think this is a clear fact. To be candid, we have never attached significance to the agreement reached between your countries on so-called disarmament or SALT... the Soviet Union... will never give up its objective of seeking world hegemony.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ “3. Memorandum From Michel Oksenberg of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski),” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 15.

¹¹⁶ Dong Wang, “Rapprochement, the Default Superpower.”

¹¹⁷ “5. Memorandum,” 22.

¹¹⁸ “49. Memorandum,” 177-8.

Once normalization had been accomplished, Deng claimed not to object to the signing of an agreement between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but clarified his opinion of negotiation with the Soviet Union to Carter by saying “just by signing agreements with the Soviet Union, no matter how many agreements, you cannot by means of those agreements put Union may have obstructed restraints on the Soviet Union.”¹¹⁹

Although détente with the Soviet the normalization of relations between the United States and the PRC, the desire of the Carter administration to reach agreements with the Soviet Union also served as a motivation for the United States to improve relations with the PRC. The reasoning was that by securing the friendship of the PRC, the United States could tilt the global balance of power in their favor, thus forcing (or at least encouraging) the Soviets to negotiate in order to protect themselves. General George Brown of Carter’s Department of Defense “stressed that while the effect of Sino-American relations upon Sino-Soviet relations may be hard to ascertain, the impact of the Sino-US connection on Soviet-US relations was more evident. Leverage could be secured over the Soviets.”¹²⁰ In one memorandum, Brown, Vance, and Brzezinski held that “a marked success on either [SALT negotiations with the Soviet Union or normalization with the PRC] could strengthen our hand in dealing with the other. In considering timing, it is our judgment that a success on PRC normalization is more likely to strengthen our hand on SALT approval, than vice versa.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ “204. Memorandum,” 763.

¹²⁰ “34. Summary of Conclusions of a Policy Review Committee Meeting,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 105.

¹²¹ “99. Memorandum From Secretary of State Vance, Secretary of Defense Brown, and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 361.

Human Rights

In the years leading up to the Carter presidency, the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War and in supporting repressive regimes disillusioned the American people and led Congress to enact legislation that restricted the president's ability to support governments that violated their people's human rights.¹²²

According to Yeshe Choedon, "the American public and political elites were asking for a return to principles and it was clear that no foreign policy could be conducted successfully abroad unless a major new effort was made to gain the support of the Congress and public opinion. The Carter administration believed that the focus on human rights provided the basis for building consensus on foreign policy and rallying domestic support."¹²³

Carter and multiple members of his administration expressed a desire to promote human rights through foreign policy. "In his inaugural address, Carter declared, 'Because we are free we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere.... Our commitment to human rights must be absolute.... Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies who share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights.'"¹²⁴ "Secretary of State Cyrus Vance saw the need for 'harnessing our foreign policy to the basic values of our Founding Fathers' and 'the championing of human rights' as 'a requirement for a nation with our heritage'. [*sic*]"¹²⁵ Brzezinski told Foreign Minister Huang Hua that one of the president's main foreign policy objectives was to "seek to sustain and obtain domestic support for our policies by rooting them clearly in our moral values. Insistence on human rights not only reflects our deep beliefs but is also a source of domestic support for a policy which has been lacking it and thereby

¹²² Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 204-6.

¹²³ Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 207.

¹²⁴ Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 207.

¹²⁵ Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 207-8.

weakening America's international position."¹²⁶ "Secretary Vance distinguished three categories of human rights: the right to be free from government violation of the integrity of the person (freedom from fear); the right to the fulfilment of vital needs such as food, shelter, health care and education (freedom from want); and the right to civil and political liberties."¹²⁷

The People's Republic of China had a dismal record of human rights violations. Derian asserted to the Congress and the public that despite 'the encouraging trends' in China under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping:

Entrenched patterns of harassment, arbitrary arrest and harsh punishment without fair trial for political dissent still exist. Chinese Public Security officials are engaged in roundups of dissidents and do not generally respect the provision in the constitution providing that the citizens' freedom of person and their homes are inviolable. The Government sentenced the best known activist, Wei Jingsheng, to 15 years in prison in October 1979, and an editor of the 'April 5th Forum' has been in jail since November. Another activist was sentenced by the police to three years in prison for distributing transcripts of the trial. The senior Deputy Premier's speech of mid-January 1980 ruled out any early return to China's recent period of free wheeling, open discussion, and urged the abolition of Chinese constitutional guarantees of the 'four freedoms' i.e. speaking out freely, airing views fully, holding debates, and writing wall posters. New legislation was adopted in September 1980, which abolished these 'four big freedoms'...wall posters, which had become in the post-Mao period a genuine outlet for freedom of expression, have been outlawed.

¹²⁶ "108. Memorandum," 396.

¹²⁷ Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 208.

Derian's forthright testimony, which for the first time drew attention to explicit human rights violations in China, occasioned an unprecedented rebuttal by the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau of the State Department. The Deputy Assistant Secretary John Negroponte, also present at the hearings, announced that he would "supplement" Derian's testimony and countered her evaluation by reporting that "an encouraging trend has begun to emerge in the direction of liberalisation and away from the lawlessness and repressiveness of the cultural revolution which has been publicly condemned." A Chinese expert testifying at the hearings challenged the East Asian Bureau's assessment, "I would take strong exception to Mr [*sic*] Negroponte's statement that things have gotten extremely better...the situation has not gotten better since 1978. It has gotten considerably worse." The Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs also took issue with Mr [*sic*] Negroponte's description of an 'orderly transition of power' since Mao's death, reminding him that the Gang of Four had been arrested and were now on trial for their lives.¹²⁸

Choedon also wrote that a human rights report on the PRC "revealed 'a large prison system and numerous labor camps', [*sic*] ongoing political trials and an 'extensive police system' monitoring 'the political activities of China's citizens' [*sic*]. Even more importantly, no 'extraordinary circumstances' could be said to warrant assisting China in exercising internal controls over its people."¹²⁹

The PRC's record on human rights could have been an obstacle to the normalization of U.S.-China relations. If Carter's resolve to promote human rights had been as firm as he had suggested in his inaugural address, it seems unlikely that he would have normalized relations with the PRC and supported the country in the ways that he did without seriously pressuring the government to improve its human rights record. However, if the Carter administration had seriously pressured the PRC to improve

¹²⁸ Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 211-2.

¹²⁹ Choedon, "The Human Rights Factor," 213.

its human rights record, it may have halted progress towards normalization. Choedon claimed that many U.S. officials “feared that American demands for improvement in China’s human rights situation would be regarded by Chinese leaders as unwarranted intervention in China’s internal affairs and might thus strengthen the hands of conservatives opposed to a stable relationship with the United States.”¹³⁰

Still, the desire to improve the human rights protections of the common people of mainland China may have motivated some members of the Carter administration to push for normalization. According to Choedon, some members of the U.S. government “accepted that a relationship with China first had to be developed before leverage could be forthcoming to promote human rights. Assistant Secretary Derian thus readily expressed support for first developing these ties with China in 1978. ‘It is our view that you can’t really get very far if you are not talking to people.’”¹³¹ National Security Council staff member Michel Oksenberg wrote a memo to Brzezinski to inform him of an attempt by members of the CIA “to generate interest in the subject of labor camps in China,” remarking, “Let us look forward to the day when our diplomatic relations with China are such that we can begin to raise this issue, and the Chinese will have a sufficient stake in their relationship with us that they will simply have to respond.”¹³²

Cold War strategic considerations may have been another reason that the Carter administration did not pressure the PRC to respect its citizens’ human rights. China’s strategic importance, magnified by antagonistic superpowers relations throughout the seventies, provided reasons to solidify their relationship...For the United States, political and strategic concerns were paramount, in

¹³⁰ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 216.

¹³¹ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 210.

¹³² “33. Memorandum From Michel Oksenberg of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 100-1.

particular, containment of Soviet power in Asia, curbing potential Chinese and North Korean aggression, gaining an edge for the United States in its global competition with the Soviet Union, and increasing military and political stability in Asia. Such objectives have consistently overridden the issue of human rights. That is one of the reasons why the Carter administration did not want to jeopardize the progress already made in improving their relations by bringing up the human rights issue.¹³³

“Brzezinski justified the administration’s strategy by offering a broader interpretation of human rights that included ‘basic minimum standards of social and economic existence,’ and stressing that ‘achieving human rights *is a process*,’ mirroring Carter’s own statement that the United States should not conduct its foreign policy ‘by rigid moral maxims.’”¹³⁴ Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher admitted, “I recognize that in many instances our security considerations will require us to continue programs of assistance to countries with poor human rights records...”¹³⁵ “Vance noted: ‘In each case [involving human rights considerations] we must balance a political concern for human rights against economic and security goals.’”¹³⁶

Economics

When Deng Xiaoping took control of the PRC, the country was struggling economically. According to a report by the CIA in February 1977, China’s leaders needed “to restore socioeconomic stability following a year of extraordinary domestic turmoil and devastating natural disasters. Growth rates for most economic sectors slipped badly in 1976, reflecting the impact of political infighting, indecision over economic plans, labor unrest, adverse

¹³³ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 216.

¹³⁴ Hilton, “‘Maximum Flexibility,’” 602.

¹³⁵ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 216.

¹³⁶ Choedon, “The Human Rights Factor,” 210.

crop conditions, and several major earthquakes.”¹³⁷ Clearly, the PRC had a lot to recover from.

Deng Xiaoping was further motivated to improve relations with the U.S. to improve the economy of the PRC. In one of their meetings late in January of 1979, Deng told Carter, “we also have the idea that we could sign a long-term trade agreement, such as the long-term trade agreement we reached with Japan, at least equal in magnitude, in volume of trade.”¹³⁸ The fact that Deng suggested this indicates that he wanted to expand trade between his country and the United States. As discussed earlier in this paper, scholars have argued that PRC officials were motivated to normalize relations with the United States, in part, by the potential economic advantages of increased exports to the U.S., easier access to Western technology, and increased foreign investment in the PRC. In a memorandum to President Carter, the president’s special adviser for science and technology wrote the following:

Over the past few weeks the Chinese leadership has taken a number of actions to move technological development to the highest priority including a decision to strengthen technical education and obtain technological help from abroad. The head of the Chinese Academy of Sciences was elevated to the Politburo. Chinese technological delegations touring space, energy and industrial facilities in Western Europe, Japan, and the U.S. have increased. The Chinese have repeatedly stated a desire to buy U.S. technology...¹³⁹

¹³⁷ “4. Intelligence Report Prepared in the Office of Economic Research, Central Intelligence Agency,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 17.

¹³⁸ “208. Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 774.

¹³⁹ “64. Memorandum From the President’s Special Adviser for Science and Technology (Press) to President Carter,” in *Foreign Relations of the United*

The Carter administration may also have been motivated to normalize relations with the PRC, at least in part, by the potential for expanded trade and economic ties with China. In his announcement of normalization, Carter claimed, “Normalization—and the expanded commercial and cultural relations that it will bring—will contribute to the well-being of our own Nation, to our own national interest.”¹⁴⁰ While speaking to Deng of the improved relations between the U.S. and the PRC, Carter stated, “One of the immediate benefits to both our countries will be to establish normal trade relations.”¹⁴¹ In the same meeting, Carter remarked, “We hope to have maximum trade with China also.”¹⁴² According to the summary of conclusions of a Policy Review Committee meeting held by the Carter administration in June of 1977, the United States’ Treasury Department “thought we should receive assurances from Peking that our economic relationship would be enhanced post-normalization.”¹⁴³

Those who support civil technological sales cite the large potential market which will accrue to Japan and Western Europe, if not the U.S... Perhaps most important is establishing long-term ties between China and American industry, as well as our scientists and engineers. The Chinese are making decisions now on technologies which they wish to acquire abroad and from whom they wish to buy. These choices should be made with a view of the U.S. as a valuable potential source.¹⁴⁴

The United States and the PRC both saw a strong economy as a helpful strength in their struggle against the Soviet Union. While talking to Foreign Minister Huang Hua about the

States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 256.

¹⁴⁰ Kennedy, *China Cross Talk*, 4-5.

¹⁴¹ “208. Memorandum,” 773.

¹⁴² “208. Memorandum,” 774.

¹⁴³ “34. Summary,” 102.

¹⁴⁴ “64. Memorandum,” 257.

competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, Vance said of the United States, “There can be no question but that we have devastating power, both to deter and to respond. In addition to our military strength, we have economic strength that is unparalleled in the world.”¹⁴⁵ He would go on to argue, “we do not delude ourselves that [the Soviets] will desist from seeking to obtain competitive advantage. That is the very reason that we are taking the kind of actions we are in the economic and military fields. Therefore, we must disagree with you in your conclusion on strategic positions—I am using strategic to include not only military, but economic and political as well—and I say in terms of that position the US is not on the defensive...”¹⁴⁶ Returning to a quote that was previously mentioned in this paper, Deng told Carter, “China does not wish for war...To realize our Four Modernizations, we need a prolonged period of a peaceful environment. But even now we believe the Soviet Union will launch a war. But if we act well and properly, it is possible to postpone it. China hopes to postpone a war for twenty-two years.”¹⁴⁷ The “Four Modernizations” policy of the PRC involved ambitious plans to boost the country’s domestic economy. Deng expressed concern that the Soviet Union would start a war and disrupt this economic growth. He had no confidence that war with the Soviet Union could be avoided, but he did hope to delay war with them for 22 years. This implies that the PRC leadership wanted to modernize and strengthen its economy in preparation for war with the Soviet Union.

Taiwan

After the United States and the People’s Republic of China reached a deal to normalize their diplomatic relations, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) stated, “The question of Taiwan was the crucial

¹⁴⁵ “49. Memorandum,” 183.

¹⁴⁶ “49. Memorandum,” 185.

¹⁴⁷ “202. Memorandum,” 747.

issue obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States.”¹⁴⁸ Carter seemed to agree with this assessment. He wrote in his memoir about normalization and negotiations between the U.S. and the PRC stating the “United States-Taiwan relations had always been the foremost question to be resolved.”¹⁴⁹

For decades the United States had granted official diplomatic recognition to the Republic of China (ROC) on the island of Taiwan rather than to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), despite the facts that both governments considered Taiwan to be a part of China and the PRC controlled mainland China, including much more land and many more people than the ROC. The relationship between the United States and the ROC was not limited to diplomatic ties. The two governments had a military alliance, and U.S. military troops were stationed in Taiwan for years.

President Richard Nixon had made some commitments in the Shanghai Communiqué in 1972 which the leaders of the PRC expected the United States to keep. In the Shanghai Communiqué, the U.S. declared the following:

The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Hartnett, “We Prefer,” 86.

¹⁴⁹ Carter, “On the Same Earth.”

¹⁵⁰ “203. Joint Statement,” 815.

Soviet Dimension of Normalization

Even before the Carter presidency officially began, Ambassador Huang Chen, the chief of the PRC Liaison Office, told Vance, “Frankly speaking, the Shanghai Communique constitutes the foundation of the present Sino-US relationship and only if both sides strictly observe all the principles of the Shanghai Communique, then relations between our two countries can continue to be improved. Any action which goes back on the principles of the Communique will result in harming the Sino-US relationship.”¹⁵¹

The PRC had three requirements regarding Taiwan for the United States to meet before the country would agree to normalize relations. Foreign Minister Huang Hua told Vance the following in August of 1977:

We have stated on many occasions that in order to realize normalization, the US must accomplish the following three things: first, the US must sever its so-called diplomatic relations with Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan. Second, it should withdraw all its troops and military installations from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait. Third, it should abrogate its so-called joint defense treaty with the Chiang clique in Taiwan. No one of the three conditions can be dispensed with, and there is no alternative either.¹⁵²

Indeed, representatives of the PRC had repeatedly demanded that the U.S. end diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan, remove its troops and military installations from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait, and break off its defense treaty with the ROC on Taiwan in order to normalize relations. All of the officials at a Policy Review Committee Meeting in Washington on June 27, 1977 “agreed we should meet Peking’s three conditions only if we

¹⁵¹ “2. Memorandum of Conversation,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, ed. Steven E. Phillips, (United States Government Printing Office, 2006), 6.

¹⁵² “49. Memorandum,” 181.

were confident that by so doing, Taiwan's chances for enjoying a peaceful future would not be diminished and that we would be able to retain unimpaired our economic and cultural relations with Taiwan, including the sale of arms."¹⁵³

The Carter administration insisted on continuing to sell weapons to the Republic of China on Taiwan after the normalization of relations with the PRC. Officials of the PRC objected to this multiple times. For example, Chi Wang mentioned, "In a meeting in New York on October 2[, 1978], Huang Hua told Secretary of State Vance that China would not accept continued arms sales to Taiwan after normalization. Huang went so far as to say that an insistence on continuing arms sales to Taiwan could stymie the normalization process."¹⁵⁴ Both Chi Wang and Betty Glad acknowledged that Carter's insistence on continuing to sell arms to the ROC after normalization led to arguments between the U.S. and the PRC as late as December 14, 1978, just one day before normalization was set to be announced to the world.¹⁵⁵ Apparently, the PRC expected the United States to permanently cease all arms sales to the ROC after normalization, while the Carter administration would only commit "to a one-year moratorium, after which sales of defensive arms would be resumed."¹⁵⁶ After much protesting, Deng agreed to these terms.¹⁵⁷ However, he advised Carter of the following in January of 1979:

And then with regard to providing weapons to Taiwan authorities. With regard to those you have already promised to deliver, there is no problem with completing your commitment. But after that we hope the American Government will be very prudent. As for whether the weapons are defensive or offensive, there is really no clear

¹⁵³ "34. Summary," 102.

¹⁵⁴ Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping," 102.

¹⁵⁵ Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping," 102-3; Glad, *An Outsider*, 128-9.

¹⁵⁶ Glad, *An Outsider*, 129.

¹⁵⁷ Chi Wang, "Deng Xiaoping," 103.

line of demarcation. Regardless of what defensive weapon it might be, it would not be difficult for them to cross Taiwan Straits.¹⁵⁸

Many members of Congress and of the American public attached great importance to the alliance between the United States and the ROC on Taiwan and to a peaceful future for the people of Taiwan. Intensive lobbying in the United States by the ROC may have played a role in this. According to Brian Hilton, the ROC successfully worked to obtain resolutions from American states and city councils in favor of U.S. diplomatic recognition of the ROC and the Mutual Defense Treaty, provided expense-paid trips to Taiwan to members of Congress, gave Carter's hometown of Plains, Georgia money to build an oriental garden, offered expense-paid trips to Taiwan to Carter's relatives and neighbors in Plains once Carter began winning primaries, and treated Carter's relatives and neighbors who accepted to meals, meetings with important officials, and expensive gifts, while asking them to convince Carter not to normalize relations with the PRC.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately for the ROC, Carter disapproved of this and of lobbying in general.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, support from Congress and the American people for the alliance with the ROC on Taiwan served as an obstacle to the normalization of relations with the PRC. Indeed, Vance related the following to Foreign Minister Huang Hua in August of 1977:

In preparing for these talks which we are having, we conferred with many members of our Congress, including the leadership of both political parties. And it was evident from those discussions that, while the members of our Congress recognize the importance of good relations with the People's Republic of China for peace and progress in

¹⁵⁸ "208. Memorandum," 781.

¹⁵⁹ Hilton, "Maximum Flexibility," 610-1.

¹⁶⁰ Hilton, "Maximum Flexibility," 610-1.

Asia, they also maintain a high level of concern for the future of the people on Taiwan...This is partially a reflection of popular sentiment in the United States, which includes both strong support for full normalization and, at the same time, strong feelings of friendship for the people of Taiwan...As we proceed, we will have these factors very much in our own minds. I hope you will take them fully into account as well. The President wants to make progress, and he wants you to know that he needs your understanding if he is to do so.¹⁶¹

At first, representatives of the PRC insisted that their country had a right to integrate Taiwan in whatever way they chose, argued that no other country had a right to interfere, and admitted that they would probably need to resort to violence to take back the island. For example, Foreign Minister Huang Hua informed Vance of the following in 1977:

As early as the 1950's, we stated in explicit terms that Taiwan was a province of China. As to when and how we would liberate Taiwan, it is entirely the internal affair of China, which no other country has the right to interfere in, and that is not a question to be discussed between China and the US. At the 11th National Congress of the Party, our wise leader Hua Kuo-feng again clearly stated this position of China...So the United States side should cherish no illusion with regard to this question. We are firm and unswerving on matters of principle. The Chinese people will liberate Taiwan sooner or later...If we can't liberate Taiwan in this generation, we will do it in the next generation. We have long experience in dealing with the Kuomintang in Taiwan. They are a bunch of counter-revolutionaries. We don't cherish any illusion that they

¹⁶¹ "48. Memorandum," 171-2.

may return to the Motherland of their own accord. It seems that fighting is inevitable.¹⁶²

Deng Xiaoping eventually stated that the PRC intended to integrate Taiwan through peaceful means. However, he told Carter the following:

...there are two conditions under which we will be forced not to use peaceful means. One situation is when the Taiwan authorities just absolutely refuse to talk with us. We believe that the methods of reunification which we have put forward and the various methods given were very magnanimous. But if under those circumstances they still will not negotiate with us, what choice do we have? Of course, we do not mean that such changes will take place in one or two years time. But if such a state of affairs continues over a long period of time then we cannot consider other possibilities. Another situation would be for the Soviet Union to go into Taiwan. I think if that were to take place then maybe both our countries will work together to solve the problem.¹⁶³

The previous excerpt demonstrates that Deng believed that it was possible that the Soviet Union would insert itself in Taiwan. According to Brzezinski's memoir, he wasn't the only one concerned about this. Brzezinski wrote, "I had earlier pointed out the danger that an insecure Taiwan, after normalization, might turn to the Soviet Union. Deng responded that the Chinese had thought about this possibility, but since the United States would maintain economic relations with Taiwan, this would be less of a problem."¹⁶⁴ Apparently, Brzezinski and some Chinese leaders

¹⁶² "49. Memorandum," 182.

¹⁶³ "208. Memorandum," 781.

¹⁶⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 218.

were apprehensive that normalization of relations between the U.S. and the PRC could potentially alienate Taiwan from the United States and drive it towards the Soviet Union. This could well have been an obstacle to normalization and may have been one of the reasons that the Carter administration insisted on maintaining extensive relations with Taiwan and one of the reasons the PRC allowed the United States to maintain such extensive relations with Taiwan after normalization. On the surface, the obstacle that the United States' relationship with Taiwan posed to normalization between the U.S. and the PRC had little to nothing to do with the Soviet Union, but some leaders of the U.S. and the PRC were still thinking of the Soviets in regard to this issue.

Conclusion

The governments of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China had many reasons to normalize diplomatic relations with each other in the late 1970s. They also had to overcome significant obstacles to reach this goal. An important feature of many of these reasons and obstacles was the relevance of the Soviet Union to each country's considerations.

Some of these reasons and obstacles obviously had something to do with the Soviet Union. Both countries were motivated to work together to restrict the Soviet Union's influence and interference in other countries. Meanwhile, the United States' negotiations with the Soviet Union took time and attention away from their negotiations with the PRC and concerned the leaders of the PRC. However, members of the Carter administration thought improved relations with the PRC could help the United States in negotiations with the Soviets.

Other reasons for the U.S. and the PRC to normalize their relations and obstacles to this accomplishment only revealed what they had to do with the Soviet Union upon closer inspection. The Carter administration and the leaders of the PRC saw normalization as a step towards a more peaceful and stable world order, while recognizing the practicality of stability and the

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tendency of the Soviet Union to take advantage of instability to increase its global influence. The leaders of both countries sought to strengthen their economies, aware that a strong economy would be beneficial in their struggle against the Soviet Union. The United States' ties to the Republic of China on Taiwan and intention to ensure a peaceful future for the island obstructed progress towards normalization with the PRC, and the fear that Taiwan might turn to the Soviet Union for support further complicated the matter.

Unfortunately, sources with inside information on the deliberations of the Chinese Communist Party were much more difficult to find than sources with inside information on the deliberations of the Carter administration. This is largely due to the enduring secrecy of inside information on the CCP, while the records of the meetings and messages of the Carter administration have been published by the United States government. Due to this discrepancy, this paper is bound to have more information about the dilemmas, motivations, and machinations of the Carter administration than it has about the leaders of the People's Republic of China.

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Author Bio

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American Fascism: How Patrick Buchanan Paved the Way for Donald Trump

By Hayden Cross

Abstract The term fascism is often thrown around to describe one's political opponents; it constantly appears in the news and is used heavily in contemporary political conversation. However, what is fascism? Do the people espousing fascist characterizations on their political opponents know what it means? Furthermore, in the United States, there is a prevalent belief that the nation is immune to fascism. Like the ironic title of Sinclair Lewis' novel, It Can't Happen Here, so aptly suggests, people believe that American liberal democracy is an unmalleable constant. During Donald Trump's second term, concerns regarding a turn to fascism in the United States has seen a profound surge. Most of this worry resides within the political left while people politically aligned to the right don't see it as so. This work explores the history of fascism within the U.S., as well as abroad, in order to establish a more concrete illustration of what "American Fascism" is. Having established the definition and meaning of fascism, this paper elaborates on how fascist ideologies have worked their way into the modern Republican Party through the influence and sway of Patrick Buchanan and brought into reality by the Trump administration.

Introduction

“In order to win popular support, it must appeal to the ideals and slogans in which most Americans still believe - to liberty and freedom.”¹

-Magil & Stevens

Fascism is a word that has been so often used that it has slipped into a state of borderline uselessness. At this current point, fascism has become synonymous with “bad” or simply used as a descriptor for something that someone disapproves of. Despite many instances of fascism appearing in history, the term has been notoriously difficult to define, especially within an American context. As historian John Whittam states, “It has been convincingly argued that attempting to define fascism is like searching for a black cat in a dark and possibly empty room.”² Whilst standing on the outside and peering in, fascism may seem quite easy to point out. However, due to its populist nature,³ fascism is almost immune to introspection as it tailors its appeal to the host population itself. If American fascists proclaimed a dedication to liberty and freedom, how can another American discern their true colors? This work has been written to improve understanding of how fascism operates and how it came to power within the United States by utilizing historical evidence of past international and domestic fascist movements, exploring the political rhetoric and background of Patrick J. Buchanan, as well as analyzing contemporary instances of fascism appearing within the MAGA (“Make America Great Again”) movement and the Trump presidency. This paper further asserts that Patrick Buchanan represents the through-line of fascist ideology that

¹ A. B. Magil and Henry Stevens, *The Peril of Fascism: The Crisis of American Democracy* (International Publishers, 1938), 12.

² John Whittam, *Fascist Italy*, (Manchester University Press, 1995), 1.

³ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Routledge, 1991), 26.

bridges the gap between the American interwar fascists and the MAGA movement itself.

Throughout his political career and presidential campaigning, Buchanan invoked a white Christian nationalist and palingenetic sentiment that had last been publicly attempted in the U.S. during the interwar period (1918-1939). Buchanan stoked fears of a white racial replacement and the decline of culture, all while framing his movement as a palingenetic reconquering of the America that he and his followers felt had been lost. Despite never succeeding in his presidential ambitions, Buchanan provided the proof of concept and political legitimacy of an American form of fascism that Donald Trump benefitted from in creating his own “Make America Great Again” movement. Because the concept of fascism had originated beyond the borders of the United States, the story of how American fascism emerged must begin in interwar Europe; however, due to the populist nature of fascism, two fascist countries will never look the same. Furthermore, looking at European fascist precedents, it can be deduced that fascism's populist core and extreme political right-wing orientation has led American fascism to align its messaging and execution to contemporary, homegrown far-right ideologies.

First, by considering that different countries will produce a different type of fascist, it may appear meaningless to draw information from another country's fascist movements. However, there are many underlying similarities that allow the application of the fascist label. From studying the many global instances of fascism, fascist ideology is rooted in the idea of palingenesis.⁴ This “rebirth,” or ascension to a former glory, is also rhetorically juxtaposed with some form of an “outgroup” or “enemy within” that is the cause of the nation's problems.⁵ To fascists, the process of making their nation great again requires conformity to a more traditional way of life and the purging of the chosen outgroup or groups. In *Fascists and Conservatives*, Geoff Eley argued:

⁴ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 26.

⁵ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 37.

“...fascism defined itself against liberalism, social democracy and communism, or any creed which seemed to tolerate difference, division and conflict against the essential unity of the race-people as the organizing principle of social and political life.”⁶ From Eley’s words, fascism is a reactionary movement that is designed to push back against change in the nation’s organizational structure.

A changing social, political, or economic environment can be an unnerving thing for a populace. Because fascism is a reactionary movement, fascism typically arises during times of great uncertainty or fear. Since fascism grows from a palingenetic sentiment, there can’t be a rebirth if there isn’t a perceived death or threat of it. To Benito Mussolini and Italian fascism, the perceived threat came from communist and socialist influence that undermined the Italian war effort during the first World War and ultimately led to the economic downturn that later affected the Italian populace.⁷ This endemic Italian communism was not only seen as a threat to Italy’s return to greatness, but it also provided the outgroup necessary for the government to target. This same sentiment presented itself in Nazi Germany with the “Stab in the Back Myth” that Adolf Hitler utilized in his efforts to vilify the Jews as well as the communists. The term that the Nazis would create for this undermining ideology was Judeobolshevism.⁸ This core tenant of opposition and open hostility towards a chosen outgroup manifested in, what many scholars deem as, “redemptive

⁶ Geoff Eley, “Conservatives and radical nationalists in Germany: The Production of Fascist Potentials, 1912 - 1928,” in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (Routledge, 1990), 53.

⁷ Angel Alcalde, “War Veterans and the Transnational Origins of Italian Fascism (1917-1919),” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 21, no 4 (2016): 565-583.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1354571X.2016.1207317?scroll=top&needAccess=true#abstract>.

⁸ John Weiss, “Anti-Semitism Through the Ages,” in *The Holocaust: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, ed. Donald L. Niewyk (Wadsworth, 2011), 19-20.

violence.”⁹ This adherence to maintaining the nation’s social hierarchies led fascists toward an illiberal world view that frowned upon any form of individuality that existed outside of the approved social roles of the nation.

Although redemptive violence against an outgroup is common amongst fascist movements, the Fascist state of Portugal under António de Oliveira Salazar was a bit quieter than the regimes of Italy and Germany. In *Fascists and Conservatives*, Tom Gallagher states:

Although Salazar, like Mussolini and Hitler, set about creating a strong state to fulfill his goals, it was not required to be as drastic as theirs in its regulatory or coercive methods; the aim was merely to strengthen existing social values and modes of behavior rather than pioneer a radically new social order. Education was viewed as a key aspect of social control that could reaffirm traditional values.¹⁰

Violence was no doubt utilized by the Salazar regime; however, Salazar’s reign lasted longer than his fascist contemporaries, most likely due to his softer approach to enforcing the social and behavioral norms that he approved of. Not only was the control of education important in maintaining the social structure that Salazar was looking for, but his leftist political opponents were not terrorized so long as they refrained from participating in any form of politics. However, violence would be the result for anyone who did choose to infringe upon this policy.¹¹ Social order is paramount to fascism, and it is through this preservation of social order that

⁹ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Vintage Books, 2005), 218.

¹⁰ Tom Gallagher “Conservatism, Dictatorship and Fascism in Portugal, 1914 - 45,” in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (Routledge, 1990), 167.

¹¹ Gallagher, “Conservatism, Dictatorship and Fascism,” 166.

traditional conservatives begin to work with fascists to achieve their joint aims.

During the interwar period in France, far-right political organizations such as Action Francaise, Croix de Feu, and the Union Nationale des Combattants formed to build support for their nationalist views, violent anti-communism, and xenophobia.¹² To fund their organizations, these groups needed to build connections with more conservative groups on the political right wing. As Roger Austin states in *Fascists and Conservatives*: “The two shared enough common ground ideologically to make an alliance possible. What they both wanted was the destruction of communism, for schools to be patriotic and for parliamentary democracy to be reformed in such a way as to provide a guarantee of order in the country.”¹³ These aims suited the industrialists of France, and fascist groups such as the Croix de Feu would find the funding they needed. Because of the financial backing required to effectively organize, the leader of the Croix de Feu, Francois de La Rocque, remained beholden to the wishes of France’s industrialists. To this effect, Austin states: “Industrialists like Mercier and Wendel, who were sympathetic to the movement, began to have serious doubts about continuing to support it when La Rocque persistently denounced banking interests. The threat of losing their backing led La Rocque to divert his followers’ attention away from the causes of economic discomfort and towards its symptoms.”¹⁴ France was not the only country to hold a fascist movement beholden to entrenched economic interests. Despite the political rhetoric of corporatism, fascism is a political ideology that matches incredibly well with capitalism and, often, commits to maintaining the capitalist hierarchy already in place.

¹² Roger Austin, “The Conservative Right and the Far Right in France: The Search for Power, 1934 - 1944,” in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (Routledge, 1990), 179.

¹³ Austin, “The Conservative Right,” 179.

¹⁴ Austin, “The Conservative Right,” 181.

Capitalism has proven to be somewhat of an amorphous specter when it comes to the history of fascism. Much of the fascist rhetoric has typically been directed toward setting up a corporatist economic structure, where representatives of business, labor, and the government make national decisions regarding economic output. However, such corporatist and even anti-capitalist rhetoric has always been a necessary lip service required to energize the popular masses. Robert O. Paxton asserted in *The Anatomy of Fascism* that “Once in power, fascist regimes banned strikes, dissolved independent labor unions, lowered wage earners purchasing power, and showered money on armaments industries, to the immense satisfaction of employers,” while also stating that “they respected the property of national producers, who were to form the social base of the reinvigorated nation. When they denounced the bourgeoisie, it was for being too flabby and individualistic to make a nation strong, not for robbing workers of the value they added.”¹⁵ The idea of respecting the property of “national producers” is what is most telling. Despite the appearance of a working-class-oriented party, fascism operates within smoky backrooms accompanied by the industrialist elite.

Hitler, along with other top Nazi officials, met with some of Germany’s most influential industrialists on February 20, 1933. The meeting itself provides a glimpse of how “national producers” were instrumental in the rise and perpetuation of fascism. The industrialists present at this meeting were: Gunther Quandt, Friedrich Flick, August von Finck, Kurt Schmitt, “executives from the chemicals conglomerate IG Farben” and Gustav Krupp.¹⁶ Outlined by David De Jong in his book *Nazi Billionaires*, the meeting was organized to raise funds for the Nazi party going into the next election – “the last election” according to Hitler.¹⁷ De Jong states that during this meeting, “Hitler argued that, in

¹⁵ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 10.

¹⁶ David De Jong, *Nazi Billionaires: The Dark History of Germany’s Wealthiest Dynasties* (Mariner, 2023), 1.

¹⁷ De Jong, *Nazi Billionaires*, 3.

supporting his rise as Fuhrer, the moguls would in effect be supporting themselves, their firms, and their fortunes. ‘Private enterprise cannot be maintained in the age of democracy.’”¹⁸ To the Nazi’s pleasure, the industrialists chose to “support themselves.” The companies that the aforementioned men owned, “...were some of the largest private-industry users of forced and slave labor.”¹⁹ Not only did these men profit from the forced labor of concentration camp inmates, but “Any German business could request coerced workers and prisoners of war at the local labor office.”²⁰ Since fascism is built upon expansionism and conquest, it stands to reason that these “national producers” would expand their businesses to capitalize on the newly seized land and labor force.

For Adolf Hitler, Timothy Snyder states in *Black Earth* that, “Globalization led Hitler to the American dream.”²¹ The vast naval empire of England and the growing economic power of the United States urged Hitler to look Eastward to establish a German land empire. The idea behind Hitler’s expansionism was not only a racialized resettlement of the land throughout Europe and beyond, but also to build an “autarkic economy” that could better compete with the British and Americans.²² The building of a large autarkic land empire was what Snyder describes as an instance of “keeping up with the Joneses.”²³ Since Hitler was working to build a greater Germany, it was imperative that the Germans’ perspectives on their standard of living had to be greater than that of the English or the Americans. To this point Snyder stated, “If the German housewife’s point of reference was Mrs. Jones rather than Frau Jonas, then Germans needed an empire comparable to the

¹⁸ De Jong, *Nazi Billionaires*, 2.

¹⁹ De Jong, *Nazi Billionaires*, 156.

²⁰ De Jong, *Nazi Billionaires*, 156.

²¹ Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 13.

²² Snyder, *Black Earth*, 12.

²³ Snyder, *Black Earth*, 13.

American one.”²⁴ The term “Lebensraum” didn’t only apply to the nation-state as a whole but to that of the German households themselves. This idea of German expansionism to build a society that strives to “keep up with the Joneses” is an entirely consumerist mindset that mirrors American westward expansion and the “American dream.”

Hitler’s mindset toward his nation’s expansion was very much derivative of John O’Sullivan’s declaration of manifest destiny. As the Hitlerian worldview was closely tied to Darwinist theories of nature and survival of the fittest, it was the Americans of the mid nineteenth century that believed that they were divinely chosen to conquer the lands to their west. Both the Nazis and the expansionist minded Americans shared the chauvinistic idea that their race was pre-ordained through either natural or spiritual means to control the wilderness. To this effect Snyder states: “Nature’s bounty was for man, as in Genesis, but only for the men who follow nature’s law and fight for her. As in Genesis, so in *My Struggle*, nature was a resource for man: but not for all people, only for the triumphant races. Eden was not a garden but a trench.”²⁵ This same outlook was demonstrated within the declaration of manifest destiny regarding the future American conquest of California:

The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle...And they will have a right to independence - to self-government - to the possession of the homes conquered from the wilderness by their own labors and dangers, sufferings and sacrifices - a better and a

²⁴ Snyder, *Black Earth*, 13.

²⁵ Snyder, *Black Earth*, 3.

truer right than the artificial tide of sovereignty in Mexico...²⁶

The reading of John O'Sullivan's declaration of manifest destiny within this context presents quite a damning indictment of American westward expansion for those who have not investigated U.S. history with a critical eye before. Because of the tendency to view U.S. history through triumphalist lenses, many Americans have been somewhat anesthetized to the existence of fascist worldviews within the American past and present.

In their 1938 publication *The Peril of Fascism*, authors A.B. Magil and Henry Stevens communicated a dire warning to their contemporaries by stating that a danger to the prevention of fascism in America comes down to "... large groups of people, who have a vague abhorrence of fascism, are insufficiently familiar with its nature to recognize it in its various disguises and to combat it intelligently."²⁷ Both Magil and Stevens, having lived in 1930s America, had become quite aware of the machinations of the American fascist. Although a successful regime never took over the government, efforts by multiple people and organizations had been made. The primary point that Magil and Stevens argue is that not only is the United States not immune to fascism, but when fascism does appear, it will do so disguised as something uniquely American. To this point, Magil and Stevens state: "For Americans who hate fascism because they know what it means in Europe and who would reject it under its own name, sometimes follow fascist and semi-fascist organizations, when these hide their real purposes and programs under the cloak of '100 per cent Americanism.'"²⁸ The idea of "100 percent Americanism" has been an ongoing theme throughout U.S. history, as many politicians utilized fear of

²⁶ John O'Sullivan, "John O'Sullivan Declares America's Manifest Destiny, 1845," *The American Yawp Reader*.

<https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/manifest-destiny/john-osullivan-declares-americas-manifest-destiny-1845/>.

²⁷ Magil and Stevens, *Peril of Fascism*, 11.

²⁸ Magil and Stevens, *Peril of Fascism*, 11.

out-groups – what they often called “hyphenates” – in order to prove that they were part of the “true American” group.

During the latter half of the 19th century and beyond, American westward expansion became an irresistible economic opportunity for the working-class people of the world. Despite the mythological images of the hardy white frontiersman striking westward, was the reality of a “white flight” that worked to move away from eastern cities and the immigrants moving into them. Because of the nation’s growth and international finance capital investing in it, the United States became an attractive destination for immigrants around the world.²⁹ The effects of this mass immigration would prove to become instrumental in fostering nativist attitudes while simultaneously viewing worker’s issues as issues of immigration. To this effect, Eric Rauchway states in *Blessed Among Nations*:

As the market in migrants gave some people what they most wanted, it also disappointed others, some of whom came to view the newcomers as the cause of their troubles. Because many of the newcomers could vote..., the peculiar politics of a diverse and highly mobile working class pushed America onto its own peculiar political path. Whenever Americans took up the politics of working people, they were concerned overwhelmingly with the issues of migration.³⁰

Although not the result of a singular strong-man type demagogue, the very nature of U.S. expansion and economic growth created an environment of nativist discontent with the immigrant. Because the working class was conflated with immigrants, the general political spectrum of the U.S. moved more to the right and thus became opposed to socialist sentiment.

²⁹ Eric Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* (Hill and Wang, 2006), 61.

³⁰ Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations*, 61.

To the dismay of socialist leaders in the U.S. the workers of the nation failed to unite. This was primarily due to the economic pressures forcing wages down, along with a lack of shared languages and cultures. The “melting pot” of the United States had proven to crack under the heat. Because of this lack of unity among the working class, even the socialist party had to change their pitch in 1910 by adopting a strikingly anti-socialist platform of anti-globalization and immigration restriction. To the point of appealing to the American voter, Rauchway states, “And the working Americans of the era knew quite well who the robbers were: the immigrants who came to America and took local jobs at lower pay, and the absent capitalists whose distant interests drew their attention away from local conditions.”³¹ Politics turned away from solidarity and toward an individualism of the people and the state as a whole. Influenced by their views toward the international community, the workers of America isolated themselves and strove to keep America separate from the rest of the world.

Much of the isolationist sentiment of the early 20th century came to the fore during the events of the First World War. Not only were immigrants targeted as the root cause for labor disputes, strikes, and low wages, but immigrants were now viewed as a national security threat. Speaking to this point, Sarah Churchwell states in her book *Behold, America*: “...immigrant communities, especially German-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Irish-Americans, were being attacked as ‘hyphenates,’ whose allegiance to the United States could not be trusted because their divided identities implied divided loyalties.”³² By drawing attention to the idea that issues of loyalty are tied to immigrant status, the usage of the term “America First” began to spread widely across the country. Churchwell brings up a speech by Woodrow Wilson in 1915 to the Daughters of the American Revolution where Wilson stated: “that very large numbers of our fellow-citizens born in

³¹ Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations*, 91.

³² Sarah Churchwell, *Behold America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019), 46.

other lands have not entertained with sufficient intensity and affection the American ideal'. In response to this impression, the president called upon every American 'to declare himself, where he stands. Is it America first or is it not?'³³ This type of sentiment caused what Churchwell titled "hyphenate hysteria."³⁴ Churchwell later states that "'America first' also strongly connoted, however, promises to protect 'real' Americans from the threat of treachery by 'hyphenate' Americans with supposedly divided allegiances."³⁵

This "us versus them" type of thinking plays into the "100 percent Americanism" that Magil and Stevens had warned of in their 1938 book, and what Churchwell describes as: "... a code for debates about 'hyphenate' Americans versus 'pure' Americans, before rapidly evolving into ways to suggest – without specifying – other kinds of 'un-American' people or behavior."³⁶ With hyphenates being the target of much suspicion and ire, "America first" was a sentiment that was here to stay. This application of American purity would be the standard that future American fascist movements would have to adhere to, and during the inter-war period of American history, many such movements would try.

During the 1930s, one of the most prominent of American fascist groups would grapple with the conflicting image of the hyphenate and the "100 percent American." Originating in 1936, the German American Bund would form out of the defunct group "Friends of the New Germany." Led by Fritz Julius Kuhn, the German American Bund set out to create a Nazi movement within the United States. Primarily consisting of German immigrants, the Bund would begin to market their own brand of Nazism that they felt was compatible with the American imagery that a successful fascist movement would require. In his book *Hitler's American Friends*, Bradley Hart describes the Bund rallies as follows: "Bund rallies would see the American flag carried side by side with the

³³ Churchwell, *Behold America*, 47.

³⁴ Churchwell, *Behold America*, 48.

³⁵ Churchwell, *Behold America*, 50.

³⁶ Churchwell, *Behold America*, 52.

new German national flag bearing the swastika. All the standard imagery of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy...were now being associated with symbols of the United States and Americanism itself.”³⁷ For Fritz Kuhn, the German American Bund was his own version of Nazism that would eventually place him in the position of the American Fuhrer. Despite adopting American imagery, the Bund was a carbon copy of the Nazi movement that simply substituted Hitler for Kuhn and Germany for America.

This similarity to the original Nazi movement, and Kuhn’s very public admiration of Hitler, were highly publicized and caused substantial public concern in the United States. The Bund’s creation of children’s camps, similar to that of the Hitler Youth, its implementation of paramilitaristic groups reminiscent of the German SA and placing the U.S. flag on equal grounds to that of the swastika, had all led the American public to rapidly view the movement as an affront. Americans would question how serious the threat of the Bund was and what it was that they were capable of.³⁸ Not only did the Bund’s high profile foreign appearance cause concern for the American populace, but so too with the U.S. government.

During the Bund’s years of operation, the F.B.I. inserted a mole within the organization by the name of “Hellmut Oberwinder.”³⁹ Oberwinder was merely an invented identity for John C. Metcalfe, who rapidly gained the trust of Fritz Kuhn and climbed the ranks within the organization. Although Metcalfe was able to supply the F.B.I. and the media with much of the information necessary to dismantle the group, some of his findings were quite troubling. Although the Bund didn’t succeed in its plan, there were still many thousands of Americans who held sympathetic sentiments to the Bund’s aims. To this point Hart states, “Metcalfe’s surveillance diaries are replete with

³⁷ Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States* (St. Martin’s Press, 2018), 31.

³⁸ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, 38.

³⁹ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, 46.

conversations with average Bund members and nonmembers alike who believed that the United States should seek closer relations with Germany, escalate its battle with communism, and adopt anti-Semitic legislation.”⁴⁰ It wasn’t the inherent fascism of the movement that soured much of the American populace, it was the foreign character the organization represented. Although unsuccessful, Kuhn understood that his group needed to appear American to gain the appeal needed; however, the hyphenated image of the “German-American” Bund was simply not “American” enough.

Friendly to the aims of the German American Bund was the Silver Legion led by a man named William Dudley Pelley. Pelley, a failed Hollywood screenwriter, formed the Silver Legion on the day that Hitler was appointed as the Chancellor of Germany on January 30th, 1933. In *The Old Christian Right*, Leo P. Ribuffo stated that after the Silver Legion’s inception, Pelley “openly praised Hitler, cooperated with the German American Bund, and fashioned a remarkable anti-Semitic program even by the standards of fellow American bigots. All social issues, he told Silver Shirts, reduced to ‘one problem’ – whether ‘Christian tenets’ could survive assault from the ‘atheists of Judah.’”⁴¹ For Pelley, the creation of a “Christian Commonwealth” was his primary goal, where he advocated for a corporatist state led by himself as an authoritarian ruler. In building his movement, Ribuffo stated: “Anyone over eighteen could apply to run with the Chief in the ‘Great Marathon.’ Prospective Silver Shirts swore allegiance to Christian principles, submitted a photograph, and listed their ‘racial extraction,’ baptismal faith, lodge affiliations, and income.”⁴² The underlying philosophy of the Silver Legion boiled down to the idea that “Jewish capitalists and radicals

⁴⁰ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, 47.

⁴¹ Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Temple University Press, 1983), 57-58.

⁴² Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 63.

cooperated to destroy Christian civilization.”⁴³ Naturally Pelley’s anti-semitism led him to attribute The New Deal and Roosevelt himself as part of a greater Jewish plot.⁴⁴ Eventually the Silver Legion would be disbanded, as Pelley ran into legal problems at both the federal and state levels, but the Silver Legion was never called into question for its theocratic aims and anti-semitism. The Silver Legion folded primarily because Pelley was viewed as a grifter and a charlatan.⁴⁵ Despite the dissolution of the Silver Legion ending Pelley’s quest to form a Christian Commonwealth, the idea of promoting a Christian nationalist form of fascism within the United States proved to be a popular one. In discussing Henry Ford’s publication, the *Dearborn Independent*, Ribuffo said the following: “To the *Dearborn Independent*, ‘100% Americanism’ was virtually synonymous with Christianity.”⁴⁶ As a staunch anti-semite, Ford adhered to the nativist views of the time and became a supporter and donor to the America First Committee.

Although not explicitly created to place a fascist regime in the white house, the America First Committee was founded to keep the United States out of World War II, which ultimately served to benefit the various fascist regimes abroad. Despite the diverse nature of the America First Committee’s membership, Matthew Specter and Varsha Venkatasubramanian argued in *Fascism in America* that “Although the AFC initially provided a big enough tent for socialists, Republicans, and Democrats alike, the organization’s history reveals how reactionary movements centered on foreign policy issues could easily be shaped by nativist concerns.”⁴⁷ Due to the America First Committee’s corporate backing, much of the group’s political messaging was anti-

⁴³ Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 59.

⁴⁴ Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 59-60.

⁴⁵ Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 72-73.

⁴⁶ Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 12.

⁴⁷ Matthew Specter and Varsha Venkatasubramanian, “‘America First’ Nationalism, Nativism, and the Fascism Question, 1880 - 2020,” in *Fascism in America: Past and Present*, ed. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Janet Ward (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 118.

Roosevelt and anti-New Deal. This messaging served to mesh well with the various American fascist groups of the time due to their distaste for the “Jewish” Roosevelt administration and their shared desire to prop up international fascism through American non-intervention. For the innocent minded, the AFC was simply a way to prevent the loss of American lives in a European war, while for Nazi sympathizers, non-intervention served their own ideological ends. The AFC did make attempts to ban fascist groups, such as the German American Bund or the Silver Legion from joining its ranks, but the members of these groups would still continue to appear at their meetings.⁴⁸ In spite of their efforts to stave off the accusations of fascist sympathies, the AFC’s choice in leadership would prove to make the effort impossible to achieve.

The choice to appoint Charles Lindbergh as the committee's figurehead appeared, at first, to be a clever move. Lindbergh had famously been known as the first man to fly across the Atlantic Ocean and held a certain celebrity status hard to build from the ground up. Lindbergh proved to be such an apt choice for the face of the organization even though he too held fascist beliefs. Lindbergh had also been awarded a medal from Herman Goering himself.⁴⁹ Although not “explicitly” embracing Nazi ideology, “he clearly admired fascism as a response to the interwar crisis of liberalism.” and “...initially worried about the ‘downfall of all European civilization, and the establishment of conditions in our own country far worse than those in Germany today.’”⁵⁰ Lindbergh’s concern for losing American lives in a European war was not an effort in pacifism, but one of genuine concern for protecting the “Western world.” The airing of his beliefs at the September 11th, 1941, Des Moines speech proved to be a watershed moment for the America First Committee. In discussing his view that the United States should seek a “negotiated peace” between the European powers, Lindbergh took his statements a

⁴⁸ Specter and Venkatasubramanian, “America First,” 120.

⁴⁹ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, 170.

⁵⁰ Specter and Venkatasubramanian, “America First,” 122.

step too far. Specter and Venkatasubramanian state that Lindbergh “...went further, alleging that the British had conspired with President Roosevelt and the Jews to instigate the war.”⁵¹ In regard to the Jewish population, Lindbergh’s phrasing makes it explicitly clear that the Jews are not a part of the group of “true Americans.” To this point, Lindbergh stated in his speech:

Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government. I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races, I admire. But I am saying that the leaders of both the British and the Jewish races, for reasons which are as understandable from their viewpoint as they are inadvisable from ours, for reasons which are not American, wish to involve us in the war. We cannot blame them for looking out for what they believe to be their own interests, but we also must look out for ours. We cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction.⁵²

In framing the “Jewish race” as a separate entity from “us,” Lindbergh had revealed his hand to the public at large. To Lindbergh, America was not a place for the “Jewish race,” he had always viewed them as “others.” This speech had proven to be the death knell for the America First Committee. Over the course of the next few months, the committee would lose much of its base, and by the end of the year the “date that will live in infamy” would put the final nail in the America First Committee’s coffin. Ideas of “100% Americanism” and “America First” had always been exclusionary mantras that were only thinly veiled in a seemingly anodyne appearance. These terms have a long history of

⁵¹ Specter and Venkatasubramanian, “America First,” 121.

⁵² “Des Moines Speech: Delivered in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 11, 1941, This Speech Was Met with Outrage in Many Quarters,” CharlesLindbergh.com, accessed May 2, 2026, <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/americanfirst/speech.asp>.

exclusionary meaning, and even when invoked after the war, “the song” remains the same.

After the end of WWII and shortly following the dissolution of the USSR, one man would bring “America First” style rhetoric back into the political arena. In *A Republic Not An Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny*, he would tie his own support base to that of the America First Committee by stating: “Most America Firsters were actually small-government Republicans... Small town America and the local chamber of commerce wanted no part of a new war.”⁵³ His connections to the America First Committee are so close that *A Republic Not An Empire* was published by Regnery Publishing. This publishing agency was founded by Henry Regnery, son of William H. Regnery who was a founding member of the America First Committee.⁵⁴ His 1991 presidential campaign announcement would echo the words: “... Today we call for a new patriotism where Americans begin to put the needs of Americans first,”⁵⁵ and: “When we say we will put America first. We mean also that our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations and not dumped onto some landfill called multiculturalism.”⁵⁶ This opening salvo of “America First” style rhetoric would then be capped off by attacking the current sitting president at the time, George H.W. Bush:

⁵³ Patrick J. Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny* (Regnery Publishing, 1999), 275.

⁵⁴ “William Regnery, Who Funded Right-Wing Extremism, Dies at 80,” *AP News*, July 17, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/william-regnery-alt-right-obituary-9f571c1cd8d90061cfd9f1f4725f80e3>.

⁵⁵ Patrick J. Buchanan, “Pat Buchanan Presidential Campaign Announcement,” December 10, 1991, Concord, New Hampshire, United States, Video, 20:24, <https://www.c-span.org/program/campaign-1992/pat-buchanan-presidential-campaign-announcement/16990>.

⁵⁶ Buchanan, “Pat Buchanan Presidential Campaign Announcement.”

He is a globalist, and we are nationalists. He believes in some pax universalis, we believe in the old republic. He would put America's wealth and power at the service of some vague new world order. We will put America first. And so to take my party back and to take our country back, I am today declaring my candidacy for the Republican nomination for president of the United States.⁵⁷

The closing of these words in the early 1990s would see the emergence of a new era of American fascism that would again don the clothes of "true Americanism" in the presidential campaigning of a man by the name of Patrick J. Buchanan.

Patrick Buchanan embodied the past interwar American fascists. Buchanan promoted the nationalist rhetoric of "America First," as well as championed a Christian Nationalism similar to that of the Silver Legion, while having managed to keep his Nazi sympathies and anti-semitism guarded behind a shield of plausible deniability that the German American Bund could not. Taking these three aspects and placing them within an urgency that only a threatened palingenetic sentiment could create, proved to have been the formula required to bring American fascism out of its latent state and into a political legitimacy that had never been established in the United States. Buchanan was able to achieve this political legitimacy due to his background as a speech writer for Richard Nixon, his position as Director of Communications in the Reagan administration, and having built public recognition through his time on the CNN political talk show—*Crossfire*. It was within these positions that Buchanan was able to weave threads of racial nationalism within the very fabric of American politics.

Besides his political outreach, Buchanan viewed racial groups as a singular monolith. Much of his political rhetoric is draped in words concerning "The West," or "The Western World." In *Churchill, Hitler, and 'The Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost its Empire and The West Lost the World* he begins the preface

⁵⁷ Buchanan, "Pat Buchanan Presidential Campaign Announcement."

by stating, “Having lost the will to rule, Western man seems to be losing the will to live as a unique civilization as he feverishly indulges in *La Dolce Vita*, with a yawning indifference as to who might inherit the Earth he once ruled. What happened to us? What happened to our world?”⁵⁸ The use of the words “us” and “our” are incredibly telling. Buchanan views white people of European descent as one bloc. As Buchanan laments the decline of the West, he further contextualizes both World Wars in stating: “These were World Wars I and II, two phases of a Thirty Years’ War future historians will call the Great Civil War of the West.”⁵⁹ The notion of labelling the two World Wars a “Civil War of the West” is a ridiculous notion, for instance, to anyone who has spent more than twenty minutes learning about the war itself and the participants involved. If the war truly was a “Civil War of the West,” then the “World Wars” would have been called the “European Wars;” the name of “World War” would not be applicable. Furthermore, the notion of the war being a civil war is off base simply because of the fact the European powers involved belonged to completely separate nation-states. The Germans would not have viewed the French as fellow nationals, if they had, the tensions around the Alsace-Lorraine region would not have existed in the first place. To Buchanan however, the world wars were a catastrophic loss of ‘Western’ lives that he deemed as unnecessary and “fratricidal.”⁶⁰ Buchanan’s views on intervention echo that of Charles Lindbergh, in that the violence was not viewed as separate nations going to war, but a war that would inevitably weaken “The West.”

Like Lindbergh, Germany’s aggression was never framed as the issue, it was the intervention of the allied forces that were displayed as problematic. To this point Buchanan states:

⁵⁸ Patrick J. Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler, and ‘The Unnecessary War:’ How Britain Lost its Empire and The West Lost the World* (Crown Publishers, 2008), ix.

⁵⁹ Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler, and ‘The Unnecessary War:’ How Britain Lost its Empire and The West Lost the World*, x.

⁶⁰ Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler, and ‘The Unnecessary War:’ How Britain Lost its Empire and The West Lost the World*, xvii.

And it was Britain that turned both European wars into world wars. Had Britain not declared war on Germany in 1914, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and India would not have followed the Mother Country in. Nor would Britain's ally Japan. Nor would Italy, which London lured in with secret bribes of territory from the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. Nor would America have gone to war had Britain stayed out. Germany would have been victorious, perhaps in months. There would have been no Lenin, no Stalin, no Versailles, no Hitler, no Holocaust. Had Britain not given a war guarantee to Poland in March 1939, then declared war on September 3, bringing in South Africa, Canada, Australia, India, New Zealand, and the United States a German-Polish war might never have become a six-year world war in which fifty million would perish.⁶¹

It is evident that Buchanan views territorial conquest on the part of Germany as permissible but clearly laments the idea of losing "Western" lives. The logic is oddly misplaced. If one decries the loss of life, then the blame should be placed on the aggressors, not the forces that assembled to stop them. Furthermore, the statements made regarding the protection of Poland makes light of the violence that had occurred within that region, as well as who that violence was largely directed to.

Buchanan hand waved the violence in Eastern Europe in claiming that the war would have remained a "German-Polish" war, while the violence of that period was massive and widespread across Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Hitler's *lebensraum* was not a push for only Polish lands; to Hitler, the Volga was his Mississippi.⁶² In the area of the world that

⁶¹ Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler, and 'The Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost its Empire and The West Lost the World*, xviii.

⁶² Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 20-21.

Timothy Snyder dubbed “The Bloodlands,” fourteen million people were starved and murdered during the course of 1933 to 1945.⁶³ To Buchanan, the violence was irrelevant, as German occupation of Eastern Europe would have been a more favorable outcome than the “Western” lives lost in stopping this violence. This type of phrasing by Buchanan elucidates his view that the Eastern Europeans, particularly the victims of this aggression, were not categorically included as part of the “West” and whatever happens to them as a result of German conquest was of no importance. This mindset becomes evident in regard to Patrick Buchanan’s sordid history with the Jewish population.

Considering that an overwhelming share of the victims from the violence in the Bloodlands were Jewish, it stands to reason that Patrick Buchanan does not count the Jewish population to be a part of his “West.” Because Buchanan views the violence of Nazi expansion as permissible, he began facing public backlash when he openly advocated for the dissolution of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) during the 1980s. The OSI was an office responsible for hunting down Nazi war criminals in the United States, denaturalizing them and deporting them.⁶⁴ During a 1982 television interview with a former head of the OSI, Buchanan stated: “You’ve got a great atrocity that occurred 35, 45 years ago, okay? Why continue to invest...put millions of dollars into investigating that? I mean, why keep a special office to investigate Nazi war crimes?...Why not abolish your office?”⁶⁵ As an

⁶³ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2010), viii.

⁶⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Office of Special Investigations,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed April 13, 2026, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/office-of-special-investigations>.

⁶⁵ “Group Criticizes Buchanan Over Views on Nazi-Hunting New York,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/04/10/group-criticizes-buchanan-over-views-on-nazi-hunting-new-york/6a0919ac-a76e-48c7-9010-d9bbd012f183/>.

“America First” minded individual, investigating the crimes against those who he views as non-American were not worth the effort; nor would it be worthwhile to him to see punishment fall upon individuals that he sympathizes with.

The condemnation toward Buchanan during this period was not alleviated by the fact that he gave his support to two men, who had been charged of committing atrocities against Jews during the war and were threaten with deportation. Buchanan was approached by the families of Karl Linnas and John Demjanjuk, who claimed they had been wrongfully accused of having murdered Jews. Regardless of whether or not the claims of murder are accurate, Buchanan’s biographer, Timothy Stanley states: “Even if either man was innocent of the specific charges against them, they were guilty of lying to get into the country and had participated in the Holocaust by working as camp guards (something neither denied having done).” Furthermore, Stanley describes Buchanan’s choice to support these two men due to having “felt a personal responsibility toward these men because they were Catholics. They asked for his help in a fight and he gave it...The families of Linnas and Demjanjuk appealed to Pat as a brother in Christ.”⁶⁶ Buchanan’s choice in helping these men was not rooted in having any concrete evidence of their innocence, but in his devotion to protecting the interests of members of his group at the expense of an out-group.

In the case of Karl Linnas, he was “...chief of a Nazi concentration camp in a place called Tartu, where 12,000 East Europeans were executed, including 2,000 Jews. Linnas ordered half-naked men, women and children transported to a ditch and gunned down. Some of them he finished off himself.”⁶⁷ John Demjanjuk’s story had a brief moment of absolution for Buchanan as Demjanjuk’s appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court resulted in a

⁶⁶ Timothy Stanley, *The Crusader: The Life and Tumultuous Times of Pat Buchanan* (St. Martin’s Press, 2012), 98.

⁶⁷ Richard Lacayo, “Ethics: Problems of Crime and Punishment,” *Time Magazine*, April 19, 1987, <https://time.com/archive/6708909/ethics-problems-of-crime-and-punishment/>.

mistaken identity, linking him to an Ivan Marchenko. However, this absolution would not last long. Once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, OSI had access to Soviet archives that had never been available prior. These findings led to a 1999 denaturalization proceeding that found that Demjanjuk served as a police auxiliary at Trawniki, Sobibor, and Majdanek. Furthermore, Demjanjuk was discovered to have been a member of the SS Death's Head Battalion at Flossenbürg.⁶⁸ These were not the only instances of Buchanan trying to defend and legitimize Nazis, his time serving in the Reagan administration would also bring scandal in 1985.

Shortly after being appointed to the position of White House Communications director, the Reagan administration was dealing with massive political fallout over the president preparing to visit a grave site in Bitburg, West Germany. Buchanan was thrust into meetings regarding the Bitburg visit and how the administration can handle the public backlash. The scandal that arose from Reagan's Bitburg cemetery visit stems from the fact that the cemetery was not only the final resting place of over 2,000 German soldiers, but of that number, 48 of the graves belonged to members of the SS.⁶⁹ In what could be perceived as a means to reconcile the past between former adversaries, was mostly seen by the public as an attempt to whitewash the history of Nazi atrocities. The public disdain was palpable, as Stanley states: "Telegrams to the White House ran 11,002-2,213 against the Bitburg visit; telephone calls, 9,942-4,483 against; letters, 1,320-95 against."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "John Demjanjuk: Prosecution of a Nazi Collaborator," Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed April 14, 2026, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/john-demjanjuk-prosecution-of-a-nazi-collaborator>.

⁶⁹ Memo, Nance Roberts to Central F., May 5, 1985, folder "Speechwriting, White House Office of: Speech Drafts." Box 206, Bitburg Air Force Base, Bitburg, Germany, 05/05/1985 (Gilder/Itchon) (1), *Ronald Reagan Library*, 2, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitalibrary/smf/speechwriting-speechdrafts/box-206/40-534-5709750-206-004-2019.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Stanley, *The Crusader*, 108.

Despite the words from Reagan's speech being his own, Patrick Buchanan began to shoulder the burden of blame as the news reported that Buchanan had not only encouraged the Bitburg visit⁷¹ but had also written "succumbing to the pressure of the Jews' repeatedly on a piece of paper during a discussion of the planned cemetery visit."⁷² In response to this scandal, Buchanan's biographer wrote: "Bitburg was Ronald Reagan's fault, or rather the result of letting Reagan be Reagan."⁷³

The phrase of "letting Reagan be Reagan," is quite telling in regard to how Buchanan's views on the Holocaust and World War II may have been similar to Reagan's. In Phillip's words: "With Reagan's own instincts close to Buchanan's, too much ideology, not too little has become the problem...Buchanan and Reagan appear to swing the same shillelagh."⁷⁴ The desire to not "succumb to the pressure of the Jews" was shared between the two men, albeit for different reasons. To Reagan, he felt that there was no reason to hold all Germans responsible for the Holocaust, and he had initially declined requests made for him to visit the Dachau concentration camp.⁷⁵ In Reagan's view, he wanted to bring Germany and The United States together as part of a diplomatic mission. However, Buchanan held stronger feelings in regard to World War II, as he had publicly defended past Holocaust perpetrators. In a later response to the Israeli courts stating that

⁷¹ Kevin Phillips, "Letting Reagan be Reagan Makes for Trouble," *Honolulu Star* (Honolulu, HI), April 28, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/262982934/?match=1&terms=Bitburg%20reagan%20patrick%20buchanan>.

⁷² W. Dale Nelson, "The newest 'Communicator' is Raising a Storm," *Longview Daily News* (Longview, WA), May 11, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/576628627/?match=1&terms=Bitburg%20patrick%20buchanan>.

⁷³ Stanley, *The Crusader*, 109.

⁷⁴ Phillips, "Letting Reagan be Reagan."

⁷⁵ Grzegorz Nycz, "The Bitburg Controversy from the New Cold War Perspective: Reagan's Views on WWII Nazi Germany's Soldiers' Victimhood," *Ad Americam Journal of American Studies*, 22 (2021): 34-35, doi: 10.12797/adamericam.22.2021.22.03.

diesel engines were used as devices of murder, Buchanan stated: “The problem is: Diesel engines do not emit enough carbon monoxide to kill anybody.”⁷⁶ Reagan’s actions were naïve at best, and anti-semitic at worst. However, given Buchanan’s propensity to defend perpetrators of genocide, deny the validity of its machinations, work to defund the OSI, and view Europeans and Jews as separate, his support of the Bitburg visit raises important questions in regard to how Buchanan views the relationship between members of his view of the “West” and minority groups.

One month after Buchanan’s announcement to run for the presidency in 1992, the chair of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Menachem Z. Rosensaft provided an answer to the question of Buchanan’s relationship to minority groups. Rosensaft stated:

Buchanan appeals to the fears and prejudices of white American middle-class voters whose livelihood and security are threatened by the sluggish economy, and who are receptive to diatribes blaming others – blacks, Jews, foreigners – for their troubles... The difference between him and Duke is one of aesthetics and packaging rather than substance... It is often forgotten that by the time he became chancellor of Germany in 1933, Adolf Hitler had distanced himself from the thugs who roamed Germany beating up Jews, Communists and social democrats. He made a successful effort to reassure the German Establishment by letting them know that he was really one of them – that he, too, liked children and dogs.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Patrick J. Buchanan, “John Demjanjuk Victim of a Witch-hunt,” *The Day* (New London, CT), March 17, 1990.
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/971043218/?match=1&terms=Patrick%20Buchanan>.

⁷⁷ Menachem Z. Rosensaft, “It’s ‘Respectable’ Buchanan Who Tars the Republicans,” *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), January 1, 1992.
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/177256538/?match=1&terms=Patrick%20Buchanan>.

Rosensaft summed up Buchanan's demagoguery well. On the campaign trail, Buchanan's 1992 arrival in Concord, New Hampshire read "Christ and America First! Pat Buchanan: Our Next President."⁷⁸ A campaign ad for his 2000 presidential run titled "Time to Take Our Country Back" stated: "They've taken God and the Bible out of our schools. They've pulled the Ten Commandments off the classroom walls...It's time to take our country back from those who are tearing it down."⁷⁹ George H.W. Bush's campaign dug up an old work of Buchanan's where he stated: "The Negroes of the 50s became the blacks of the 60's; now, the 'African-Americans' of the 90's demand racial quotas and set-asides...Who speaks for the Euro-Americans, who founded the United States?"⁸⁰ Buchanan's political campaigns were built on the palingenetic nationalism that the fascists of old had stoked so many years ago.

The rebirth of an idealized white Christian America is the primary goal of American Fascists. The German American Bund promoted the idea of returning to a "white, Gentile-ruled, United States."⁸¹ The Silver Legion advocated for building a "Christian Commonwealth" that was governed by Christian principles. Similarly, Charles Lindbergh aimed to preserve the "West." In this very same tradition, Patrick Buchanan openly lamented that "When the faith dies, the culture dies, the civilization dies, the people die. That is the progression. And as the faith that gave birth to the West is dying in the West, peoples of European descent from

⁷⁸ Stanley, *The Crusader*, 154.

⁷⁹ Golden VCR, "Pat Buchanan: Time to Take Our Country Back - 2000 Presidential Campaign Ad," Youtube, June 1, 2022, video, 0:00 - 0:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfUERTqEoR8>.

⁸⁰ Steven A. Holmes, "The 1992 Campaign: Candidates Records; White House Hopes to Trip Buchanan on His Paper Trail," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), March 1, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/01/us/1992-campaign-candidates-records-white-house-hopes-trip-buchanan-his-paper-trail.html>.

⁸¹ PBS, "A Night at the Garden | An American Nazi Rally in 1939 | POV," Youtube, July 12, 2020. Video, 3:38, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NC1MNGFHR58&t=15s>.

the steppes of Russia to the coast of California have begun to die out, as the Third World treks north to claim the estate.”⁸²

Buchanan’s greatest fear is that the “West” – White European and Americans – will be replaced by various minority groups.

Buchanan’s fear of the white population dying out, is emblematic of fascism’s “obsessive preoccupation with community decline” that Robert O. Paxton has identified as part of the definition of fascism.⁸³ In describing this fear of a declining culture through birthrates, Buchanan states, “Freed from the moral constraints of Christianity, European and American young wish to enjoy the benefits of matrimony without the burdens. Society and science have accommodated them with contraceptives... and abortion on request. And the social sanctions against sexual indulgence and the single life have largely disappeared.”

Following up this quote on the declining birthrate of the “West,” Buchanan’s views on human agency come to the fore. Buchanan states that “Women are putting off having children to enter a labor market where their talents are rewarded and their social and economic independence can be won. Why get married and have babies and be tied down for years and fall behind?”⁸⁴ In recognizing that women would be able to see that their “talents are rewarded” and their “independence can be won,” Buchanan is admitting that he believes that there is a world of possibility for women that should be withheld from them, in order to keep women in their roles as home-makers. Contraceptives that allow women to exercise more agency in their lives is described by Buchanan as “the suicide tablet of the West.”⁸⁵ This fear of the declining white birth-rate is also compounded with Buchanan’s xenophobia.

⁸² Patrick Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025* (St. Martin’s Press, 2011), viii.

⁸³ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 218.

⁸⁴ Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower*, 188.

⁸⁵ Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 26.

Buchanan's abhorrence to immigration is only pointed toward members of populations that he does not consider as part of the "West." In response to Zangwill's *Melting Pot*, Buchanan states, "But the immigration tsunami rolling over America is not coming from 'all races of Europe.' The largest population transfer in history is coming from all the races of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and they are not 'melting and reforming.'"⁸⁶ Juxtaposed against such a "tsunami" of immigration, Buchanan waxes poetically about the antediluvian America that we're allegedly losing. "The America we grew up in is gone. The unity and common purpose we had when we could together pledge allegiance to a flag that stood for 'one nation, under God, indivisible, is gone.'"⁸⁷ Given his statements on how "unified" the nation used to be, it begs the question of who it was that felt this unity.

Because "under God" was placed in the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 by President Eisenhower,⁸⁸ it stands to reason that Buchanan's "unity" existed in the 1950s and ended when "Buchanan sensed that paradise got lost in the 1960s."⁸⁹ Considering that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed when Buchanan lost his paradise, the "unity" that Buchanan was experiencing belonged to white people. Buchanan's political campaigning that advertised the "unified" antediluvian America was targeted at what columnist Sam Francis would title "Middle American Radicals," or MARs. Stanley describes the MARs as, "Mr. MARs was Mr. Average. He was either from the South or a European ethnic family in the Midwest, earned an unsatisfactory salary doing skilled or semiskilled blue-collar work, and probably

⁸⁶ Buchanan, *The Death of the West*, 3.

⁸⁷ Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower*, 6.

⁸⁸ "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill to Include the Words 'Under God' in the Pledge to the Flag," The American Presidency Project, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-president-upon-signing-bill-include-the-words-under-god-the-pledge-the-flag>.

⁸⁹ Stanley, *The Crusader*, 7.

hadn't been to college."⁹⁰ It was this group that resonated the most with Buchanan's xenophobic rhetoric. Unlike the traditional conservatives of the time, the MARS were much more prone to revolutionary action as they felt that they held no political power and needed to take it back.⁹¹ The MARS overwhelmingly supported what Patrick Buchanan would later popularize as the "Culture War."

During his 1992 run, Buchanan sent taped speeches and leaflets describing the coming "Culture War." Contained in this correspondence was a message that, "Rich liberals in both parties were intent on destroying the livelihood and culture of ordinary Americans..."⁹² The battle lines of the Culture War were set. Buchanan had placed non-white immigrants as the out-group that is poisoning American culture, while "Rich liberals" stood as the "enemy within." Although his 1992 campaign ended in defeat, the fact that Buchanan was so prominently platformed had given his rhetoric a legitimacy that would shape the Republican Party for many years to come.

One of Buchanan's most influential moments comes from the 1992 Republican National Convention. Buchanan's speech would forever be known as "The Culture War Speech." In voicing his support for George H.W. Bush in the 1992 general election, Buchanan made it known to America that the Democrats were not simply a countervailing political party but in fact the enemy. In discussing the Democratic National Convention, Buchanan wraps liberals and "radicals" together in the same cloth and titles the various speakers at the DNC "the prophets of doom." This "doom" that is being brought to America was framed as a product of "...radical feminism" and "the agenda that Clinton and Clinton would impose on America." Religious schools were portrayed as victims of discrimination, while Buchanan stoked fears of "homosexual rights." Toward the end of his speech Buchanan

⁹⁰ Stanley, *The Crusader*, 188.

⁹¹ Stanley, *The Crusader*, 189.

⁹² Stanley, *The Crusader*, 199.

states, in no uncertain terms, “There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton and Clinton are on the other side, and George Bush is on our side.” Lastly, Buchanan closed this speech in discussing the Rodney King riots. Nowhere in his speech was there any mention of reconciliation, mending wounds, or unifying the American people, all that was present was the admiration of soldiers who stopped the riot with “force, rooted in justice, and backed by moral courage.” It was with this sentiment that Buchanan capped his speech off by saying “...my friends, we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.”⁹³ Through platforming Buchanan at the RNC, the theme of an America in crisis had now reached a mainstream legitimacy.

Despite pulling fascism out of its dormancy, Buchanan’s ascension to power was halted by two factors: timing and money. Even though there was an economic decline in the early 1990s, the damage was not sufficient for the mass adoption of Buchanan’s platform. Paxton confirms in his “mobilizing passions” that one of the ideas that underlies fascist action is “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions.”⁹⁴ During the years of Buchanan’s campaigning, the American populace had overwhelmingly supported the more political mainstream candidates. The economic malaise was not enough to send the conservative populace into a collective feeling of crisis. Secondarily, the Nazis had become successful in their rise to power through the support of German industrialists. Buchanan’s attempts at gaining power did not see a similar financial windfall. Buchanan’s campaign funds were dwarfed by what the major candidates were able to bring in. Using 1992 as an example,

⁹³ “Historic Convention Speech - Pat Buchanan (1992),” C-SPAN, August 17, 1992, video, <https://www.c-span.org/clip/public-affairs-event/historic-convention-speech-pat-buchanan-1992/5128337>.

⁹⁴ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 219.

Buchanan's campaign brought in 14,521,899.00 dollars,⁹⁵ while George H.W. Bush's campaign brought in 101,936,902.00 dollars.⁹⁶ Although never elected, Buchanan's greatest contribution to the prominence of fascism in America today was twofold: political legitimacy and proof of concept. One last part in paving the way for fascism today was seen in Patrick Buchanan's campaign ad "They Don't Care." The advertisement would end with the phrase "Make America Great Again."⁹⁷

In June of 2015, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president of the United States. During this announcement Trump had made the claim that the American dream is dead and stated that "America first" would be the main theme of his political campaign.⁹⁸ Continuing the thread of fascist elements within Trump's campaign, the very slogan "Make America Great Again" is palingenetic in nature. This palingenesis, already having been firmly established by Buchanan as a return to the period of "unity" between the 1950s and 1960s, has been a central tool in stoking the nostalgia and desires of conservative voters who had been shaken by the economic decline after the 2008 financial crisis. Buchanan didn't have the crisis moment that his movement required, but Trump did. By using the word "again," the slogan is implying that there was a greatness that was lost and that it was the MAGA movement that intended to turn back the clock to make a triumphant return to the past. Because fascists achieved their palingenesis through the persecution and removal of a chosen outgroup while promising to protect the nation from the invading

⁹⁵ Federal Election Commission, "Buchanan, Patrick J: Financial Summary," accessed May 1, 2026, https://www.fec.gov/data/candidate/P80000805/?cycle=1992&election_full=true&tab=summary.

⁹⁶ Federal Election Commission, "Bush, George: Financial Summary," accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.fec.gov/data/candidate/P00000455/>.

⁹⁷ Congressional Archives Carl Albert Center, "Pat Buchanan [Republican] 1992 Campaign Ad 'They Don't Care,'" Youtube, July 18, 2021, video, 0:00 - 0:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfUERtqEoR8>.

⁹⁸ Churchwell, *Behold America*, 1.

non-Americans, the imagery and rhetoric of the Trump campaign centered on the “America first” type of ideology.

Donald Trump had worked to solidify his image as an “America first” style candidate when he was considering a run for nomination in 2012. His initial attempts at achieving this was by publicly calling into question whether President Obama was a natural born U.S. citizen.⁹⁹ This choice is not a surprising one, as many conservatives across the country had become part of the “birther movement” when Obama first ran for the presidency. This idea of Obama not being born in the country was famously called into question by Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential campaign. Palin didn’t simply stop at claiming that Obama was not born in the United States, she also implied that Obama was not a “real American.” In discussing this moment, Levitsky and Ziblatt explained that, “Sarah Palin had used the expression ‘real Americans’ to describe her (overwhelmingly white Christian) supporters. This was central to the Tea Party’s campaign against President Obama, as followers stressed repeatedly that he did not love America or share American values.”¹⁰⁰ Making the claim that an African-American man was not a “real American” is an example of the continuation of the “100% Americanism” and “hyphenate hysteria” from many years ago. This type of sentiment is what has led to forming outgroups that would soon become the target of increased vitriol.

Building upon the ideas of “real Americans” and “America first,” Trump would point his xenophobic aims at the immigrants that pass through the southern border. With chants of “build the wall,” rallies of Trump supporters were whipped into a frenzy. Trump’s rhetoric would not stop at just building the wall, he would also paint immigrants as criminals and drug smugglers. At the very beginning of his campaign, Trump opened with the statement that, “They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re

⁹⁹ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (Broadway Books, 2018), 160.

¹⁰⁰ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 158.

bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."¹⁰¹ This anti-immigrant rhetoric would later be extended to refugees that had been living legally in the United States by claiming that they are eating the neighborhood cats and dogs.¹⁰² For the Trump campaign, immigrants, foreigners, and refugees became the scapegoat for all white America's problems. With foreigners and liberal sympathizers being branded as the cause of the nation's problems, redemptive violence would almost certainly follow.

Having decided that the "Department of Defense" was not a "strong enough" title, Donald Trump signed an executive order on September 5, 2025, to rename the agency to the Department of War. On the name change, Trump stated: "Restoring the name 'Department of War' will sharpen the focus of this department on our national interests and signal to adversaries America's readiness to wage war to secure its interests." This move was publicly championed by the current sitting Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, who stated that the name changes signaled, "Maximum lethality, not tepid legality; violent effect, not politically correct."¹⁰³ This shift in how the Trump administration views warfare is incredibly alarming. This name change and the ideology behind it fits into two of Paxton's "Mobilizing Passions of Fascism." The first being, "The beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success." With the second being, "The right of the chosen people to dominate others

¹⁰¹ "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City," The American Presidency Project, accessed April 16, 2026, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-announcing-candidacy-for-president-new-york-city>.

¹⁰² Alice Herman, "'They're Eating the Cats': Trump Rambles Falsely about Immigrants in Debate," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/sep/10/trump-springfield-pets-false-claims>.

¹⁰³ Matthew Olay, "Trump Renames DOD to Department of War," Pentagon News, September 5, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4295826/trump-renames-dod-to-department-of-war/>.

without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle."¹⁰⁴ What is most concerning on top of what has already been stated is that the current Secretary is an incredibly militant Christian nationalist.

In *American Crusade*, it doesn't take long to see Hegseth's words claiming that the 2016 election of Donald Trump was a "miracle." In fact, it is the first sentence of his book. Shortly following this "miracle," Hegseth states: "Our future existence as sons and daughters of freedom requires the satisfaction of a single paramount objective: the categorical defeat of the Left. America cannot, and will not, survive otherwise." Hegseth's call to action in his own words is: "...for an American Crusade. Yes, a holy war for the righteous cause of human freedom." Toward the end of the first chapter, Hegseth doubles down on his call to action in stating: "The hour *is* late for America. Beyond political success, her fate relies on exorcising the leftist specter dominating education, religion, and culture – a 360-degree holy war for the righteous cause of human freedom."¹⁰⁵ Hegseth embodies the militant Christian fascism of Trump's movement. Given the current war with Iran that this administration has created, it comes as no surprise that Hegseth lumps Islamism in with the Left in his list of villains.¹⁰⁶ Also amongst this list is the same multiculturalism that Patrick Buchanan decried during his political career.

Since immigrants represent the multicultural threat to the nation, according to the MAGA movement, fears of a "great replacement" have been ever present in rightwing circles. With chants of "you will not replace us," the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville Virginia would eventually break out in violence against anti-fascist counterprotesters. In response to the violence that broke out, Trump condemned the "egregious display of hatred,

¹⁰⁴ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 219-220.

¹⁰⁵ Pete Hegseth, *American Crusade: Our Fight to Stay Free* (Hachette Book Group, 2020), chap. 1, PDF.

¹⁰⁶ Hegseth, *American Crusade*, chap. 12.

bigotry and violence on many sides.”¹⁰⁷ Trump’s claim of “many sides” was misleading at best. The white nationalist protestors were present in Charlottesville that day to protest the removal of a confederate statue, and the chants of not being “replaced” were intended to maintain a symbol of white supremacy that should have been removed long ago. The anxieties of a “white replacement” was a tool in Trump’s pocket that had been meticulously created and fostered into the mainstream by Patrick Buchanan himself. As Buchanan often equated the loss of Christianity as a symbol of decline in America, Trump made sure to capitalize on that sentiment.

In recognition of the United States approaching 250 years of existence, Trump and his White House staff have taken every opportunity to make the occasion about Christian nationalism. On the White House’s webpage, *America Prays*, there’s a quote from Trump so eloquently stating, “From the beginning, this has always been a country sustained and strengthened by prayer. So important, if we bring religion back stronger, you’re going to see everything get better and better and better. You are going to see it get better and better. So, as we chart our course for the next 250 years, let us rededicate ourselves to one nation under God.” Furthermore, Trump’s speech in the video claims: “So America has always been a nation that believes in the power of prayer. And we will never apologize for our faith, ever ever never never, we will never surrender our God given rights, we will defend our liberties, our values, our sovereignty, and we will defend our freedom...”¹⁰⁸ Trump’s usage of words such as “defend,” “never surrender,” or “never apologize,” alludes to the ideas on the Right that Christianity is under attack. Even in office, Trump still exploits the victim mentality within his followers.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Katz, “Charlottesville: ‘Unite the Right’ Rally, State of Emergency.” *Time*, August 12, 2017, <https://time.com/charlottesville-white-nationalist-rally-clashes/>.

¹⁰⁸ “America Prays,” The White House, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/freedom250/america-prays/>.

Trump utilizes Christianity as a tool to gain support from his followers that even Buchanan would probably not have been willing to do. On April 13, 2026, Trump posted a “Truth Social” image of himself as Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹ Although Trump has tried denying that it is supposed to be an image of him as Jesus, the tone of such imagery is quite on brand. At his 2016 RNC speech, Trump stated: “I have joined the political arena so that the powerful can no longer beat up on people who cannot defend themselves. Nobody knows the system better than me. Which is why I alone can fix it.”¹¹⁰ In 2024, Trump had been directing his supporters to purchase “God Bless the USA Bibles” for 60 dollars.¹¹¹ In his *Truth Social* sales pitch, Trump stated:

In the end, we do not answer to bureaucrats in Washington, we answer to God in heaven. Christians are under siege... We must defend God in the public square and not allow the media or the left wing groups to silence, censor, or discriminate against us. We have to bring Christianity back into our lives and back into what will be again a great nation. Our founding fathers did a tremendous thing when they built America on Judeo-Christian values. Now that foundation is under attack perhaps as never before.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Katie Rogers, “Trump Posted a Picture of Himself as Jesus. Now He’s Trying to Explain It Away,” *The New York Times*, accessed April 26, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/13/us/politics/trump-jesus-picture-pope-leo.html>.

¹¹⁰ “Trump at 2016 RNC: ‘I Alone Can Fix It,’” *Politico*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/video/2020/08/20/trump-at-2016-rnc-i-alone-can-fix-it-085403>.

¹¹¹ Jill Colvin, “Trump is Selling ‘God Bless the USA’ Bibles for \$59.99 As He Faces Mounting Legal Bills,” *AP News*, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-god-bless-usa-bible-greenwood-2713fda3efdfa297d0f024efb1ca3003>.

¹¹² Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), “Happy Holy Week! Let’s Make America Pray Again. As we lead into Good Friday and Easter, I encourage you to get a copy of the God Bless The USA Bible,” *Truth Social*, March 26, 2024, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112162741690113521>.

Instances like these have all been used by Trump to build up the image of himself as the savior, or the strongman that is solely able to fix the issues at hand. Robert O. Paxton's prediction on American fascism is now seemingly prophetic: "Hitler and Mussolini, after all, had not tried to seem exotic to their fellow citizens. No swastikas in an American fascism, but Stars and Stripes (or Stars and Bars) and Christian crosses."¹¹³ Trump's constant positioning as someone who is uniquely capable of saving America, along with his constant stoking of victimhood complexes, has led to one of the biggest disasters in U.S. political history.

In what will soon be 250 years of the United States operating as a functioning government, not once has there been a violent refusal to transfer power from one president to the next, with the exception of January 6th, 2021. Two months prior to the January 6th insurrection, when Joe Biden was projected to be the winner of the presidential election, Trump's attorneys Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell held a press conference on behalf of the Trump campaign calling for a "full-scale criminal investigation" of voter fraud that needed to be conducted by the Department of Justice. During the month of December, Trump continued to discredit the election process and pressured government officials to investigate the spurious claims that he had made.¹¹⁴ During his speech on January 6th, Trump stated to his supporters in attendance that: "Big tech is now coming into their own. We beat them four years ago... We took them by surprise and this year they rigged an election. They rigged it like they've never rigged an election before." Not only did "big tech" allegedly steal the election, but Trump also stated: "All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by emboldened radical-left

¹¹³ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 202.

¹¹⁴ Marshall Cohen, "Timeline of the coup: How Trump Tried to Weaponize the Justice Department to Overturn the 2020 Election," CNN, November 5, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/05/politics/january-6-timeline-trump-coup>.

Democrats, which is what they're doing. And stolen by the fake news media..."¹¹⁵ These words had emboldened many Trump supporters to head to the Capitol building after the speech. Although, some supporters had been gearing up to take the Capitol before the speech even began.

More than an hour before Trump had begun his speech, members of the Proud Boys had gathered to begin their march on the Capitol building. According to NPR, "U.S. Capitol Police estimated that there were roughly 200 people with the group." Just prior to the Proud Boys arriving at the Capitol, a pipe bomb was discovered at the Republican National Committee headquarters which would ultimately divert police resources to undertake evacuation procedures. Around 1:00 pm officers would find a truck with eleven Molotov cocktails, and an additional bomb would be found at the Democratic National Committee headquarters. By 2:13 pm the crowd at the Capitol building had broken the first window and had begun entering the premises. More than two hours later, Trump posted a video calling for the rioters to return home. Despite a call for the riot to end, Trump never conceded the election and still claimed that it was stolen from him.¹¹⁶

As a result of the riot "Approximately 140 Capitol Police officers were injured by rioters, making it one of the most violent days for law enforcement in recent U.S. history." Furthermore, in the years that followed, four officers that responded to the riot had committed suicide.¹¹⁷ The violence that occurred at the Capitol was

¹¹⁵ Brian Naylor, "Read Trump's Jan. 6 Speech, A Key Part of Impeachment Trial," NPR, February 10, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/10/966396848/read-trumps-jan-6-speech-a-key-part-of-impeachment-trial>.

¹¹⁶ "A Visual Archive of Jan. 6, 2021, Through the Lenses of Those Who Were There," NPR, January 4, 2026, <https://apps.npr.org/jan-6-archive/>.

¹¹⁷ Jay O'Brien et al. "Former Capitol Police Officer Wants to End the Falsehoods About Jan. 6," ABC News, October 5, 2024, <https://abcnews.com/Politics/former-capitol-police-officer-end-falsehoods-jan-6/story?id=114464816>.

a unique moment in American history that will hopefully never be repeated.

Underlying the many different forms of global fascism, it's been identified that fascists rise to power in tenuous alliances with the conservative parties of their host nations. Salazar's Portugal worked to enforce conservative values in schools while quietly coercing leftist parties and influences to stay in the background. The Action Francaise, Croix de Feu, and the Union Nationale des Combattants worked with the conservative parties of France to secure their funding. The Nazis' close relationship with the German industrialists provided the blueprint for how fascist governments can synergize with their industrialist class to gain political power. In response to the developments in Europe, Magil and Stevens recognized the trends of European fascism and its transnational influence on the United States during the 1930s and provided a haunting warning.

For fascism in America to exist "it must appeal to the ideals and slogans in which most Americans still believe."¹¹⁸ Because of a long history of anti-immigrant sentiment that maintained a divide within the working class of America, ideas of "real Americans," "100% Americans," and a desire for placing "America first" have all been long lasting themes throughout U.S. history. Prior to fascism even existing, O'Sullivan's call of "Manifest Destiny" invoked the idea of an "Anglo-Saxon" America that was ordained to span from sea to shining sea. The land of California was chosen for the "Anglo-Saxon," the "100% American" of the time. Early U.S. expansionism need not be anachronistically applied to fascism, but it is important to note that once fascism did come to be, it was Adolf Hitler that designed his ideas of a new Germany after the world that the United States had forged for itself. Aspects of American history finds itself on both sides of the transnational influence of fascism: a contributor to its ideology and later an adherent.

¹¹⁸ Magil and Stevens, *The Peril of Fascism*, 12.

The interwar American adherents to fascism began a trial-and-error process that has proven enlightening in discerning what our own brand of American fascism looks like. The German American Bund had a difficult time gaining legitimacy due to its lack of “100% American” imagery. The Bund had always tried to marry Nazi aesthetics with American ones, but a “50% Americanism” was simply not going to work. William Dudley Pelley and his Silver Legion may have been able to garner more success if Pelley hadn’t run into legal trouble. But to that point, the Silver Legion provided a glimpse at what an American fascism would look like through its close adherence to Christian fascist rhetoric and anti-semitism. But it was the America First Committee that proved to be the best proof of concept moving forward. Through promoting isolationist ideals, the AFC was able to build a big tent following for a cause that seemed righteous up front but hid its more fascist underpinnings. Had Lindbergh not blown his cover during his Iowa speech, and if Pearl Harbor never occurred, perhaps the aims of the AFC may have been realized. From the AFC, it was the concept of “America First,” and what it meant, that would persist beyond World War II.

Bridging the gap between the interwar testing grounds of American fascism and the Donald Trump presidency was Patrick Buchanan. Like the European fascist movements, Buchanan built his political legitimacy within the conservative party. As his values aligned well with the Republican Party, Buchanan was able to influence many American conservatives. Buchanan brought Charles Lindbergh’s ideas of rescuing a declining “West,” to the post-Cold-War world. Buchanan provided the Middle American Radicals a paligenetic goal that they had craved: to win the “Culture War” and return America to its position of greatness that was lost in the 1960s. Despite the proof of concept being provided, the timing was simply not right for Buchanan and his supporters. The economic slowdown of the early 1990s was short lived and not painful enough to truly energize the masses. However, with the blueprint already put on display, the 2008 financial crisis set forth

an economic decline that would become ripe for an observant opportunist.

Donald Trump and his “Make America Great Again” movement exhibit many of the conditions and traits that are associated with fascism. These include the invocation of a national crisis to stoke fear and anxiety among the populace, as well as the presence of a demagogue who mobilizes support through ultranationalist rhetoric centered on societal decline. Trump also frames his supporters as victims of the Leftist “enemy within” and foreign out-groups. Furthermore, the “Make America Great Again” movement fosters a cult of personality that revolves around a strong leader whom they believe will fix all the nation’s problems. Lastly, to achieve their palingenetic aspirations, Trump and his movement are willing to disobey the law to maintain their own base of power. Adolf Hitler wanted to make Germany great again, Benito Mussolini tried to make Italy great again, and Donald Trump is currently working to “Make America Great Again” following the road paved by Patrick Buchanan.

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In Memoriam

In Memoriam: Claudette Colvin

By Luke Hunter



Figure 1 Claudette Colvin speaking at the 2020 Embrace Ambition Summit

On January 13, 2026, one of the surviving figures of the early civil rights movement, the “first cry for justice” Claudette Colvin,

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passed away in a Texan hospice care at the age of 86.¹ Nine months before Rosa Parks' arrest kicked off the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Claudette Colvin would be arrested herself for refusing to give up her seat for a white woman.² This event would draw Colvin into the birth of the Civil Rights Movement, involving herself with various civil rights leaders, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the court case *Browder v. Gayle*. Her participation in those events would shape Claudette Colvin till her final days, cementing her belief that justice is not easy to obtain with niceties but comes through standing firm and demanding issues be made right.³ This stance and her experiences during the Montgomery Bus Boycott are as relevant today as they were when she was fifteen due to the violence once more being perpetrated by U.S. law enforcement in recent times. As one remembers the life of Claudette Colvin, take heart in the evidence that similar events have taken place before, and justice succeeded then as it surely will again so long as there are people to stand firm in their demands once more.

Claudette Colvin was not born ready to take on the world but instead was molded by the world around her until she found it impossible not to push back. Born in Birmingham, Alabama as "Claudette Austin" on September 5, 1939, Colvin and her younger sister were sent to live with her Grand Uncle and Grand Aunt while they were still babies.⁴ There in Pine Level, Alabama, she

¹ Phillip Hoose, *Claudette Colvin Twice toward Justice* (Newbery Honor Book; National Book Award Winner) (Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR), 2009), 104; Legacy News Staff, "Claudette Colvin Obituary," *Legacy*, Jan 15, 2026, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/legacyremembers/claurette-colvin-obituary?id=60536847>.

² Montgomery Police Department, "Arrest Report for Claudette Colvin," March 2, 1955, accessed April 17, 2026, https://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/550302-001.pdf.

³ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 104.

⁴ Samantha Gordon, "Power Dynamics of a Segregated City: Class, Gender, and Claudette Colvin's Struggle for Equality" *Women's History Theses* 10, (2015), 17.

would be raised by those she would consider parents and adopt their last name, Colvin, as her own.⁵ Colvin's early childhood in Pine Level would reveal an inquisitive and stubborn mind in the face of racist sentiments of the time. In Sunday school, she relates how the teacher told her that black people were cursed by Noah's son—the Curse of Ham—as an explanation for white superiority; however, Colvin never accepted such rhetoric even as a child. When the family moved to a poor but tight knit neighborhood in Montgomery after Colvin turned 8, she would not find much kinder treatment in the city. Jim Crow laws and discriminatory practices were alive and well in the 1940s and 50s and Colvin would experience the consequences of that regularly. As an example, she was not allowed to try anything on while shopping for clothes, being told by the white salespeople what would fit and what size to buy. She wasn't even allowed to try on hats as "[black people's] hair was 'greasy,'" or allowed to see the hats she wanted to wear instead of what the salespeople showed her.⁶

Amongst other black people, Colvin still faced internalized racism and colorism that battered at her personhood. Colvin discussed how her black schoolmates constantly put themselves and their racial features down, calling their textured hair "bad" and bullying dark complexioned people like Colvin with words like "nappy-headed" and the "N" word. Her lower class background and darker skin was used by more middle-class black girls to isolate her in school as they sought to "emulate white girls."⁷ Consistently, Colvin had to endure racism from white people and businesses as well as from her black peers, but those experiences were always met with an angry refusal by Colvin to allow them to diminish her and would lay the foundation for her later social activism.

https://web.archive.org/web/20210308042504/https://digitalcommons.slc.edu/womenshistory_etd/10/

⁵ Gordon, "Power Dynamics", 17.

⁶ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 11-17.

⁷ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 22-23.

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Her personal experiences with racism were not the only shaper of her character, but unfortunately for Colvin, the other influences were often tragic, including what Colvin would describe as the “turning point of [her] life.”⁸ Her sister, Delphine, would pass away from Polio on September 5, 1952, Colvin’s 13th birthday. This event leading into her first year at Booker T. Washington High School left her “very sensitive” to cruelty and insults but also increased her determination to succeed academically.⁹ Before she could make much progress on that success, her 16 year old neighbor and schoolmate, Jeremiah Reeves, was arrested on charges of rape in November of 1952 and was sentenced to death by electric chair by an all-white jury. This would be Colvin's turning point as Reeves' sentencing radicalized her, alongside many black people across Alabama, and drove her to act against the injustice facing Reeves and opening her eyes to social injustices against black people beyond herself. It was her involvement in protesting Reeves’ arrest that she saw her first lesson about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the NAACP, as they worked to overturn Reeves’ conviction, and it was the failure to free him from his execution that enkindled in her a fiery indignation at the unfairness afflicting black people. That fire was further stoked by teachers like Ms. Geraldine Nesbitt and Ms. Josie Lawrence who taught her about literature, Black history, and pride in a shared African heritage.¹⁰ Their teachings taught Colvin of the people who had previously stood against injustice like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, who she was determined to mold herself after, and that resolve would be what held her down in her seat the day she was arrested on that Montgomery bus.¹¹

⁸ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 23.

⁹ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 19-21.

¹⁰ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 22-26.

¹¹ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 27; Great Big Story, “Claudette Colvin: The Original Rosa Parks,” YouTube video, 0:00 to 0:37, April 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3NvXzFOb6w>.

Months before the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks' arrest, Claudette Colvin would commit her own act of defiance, in the spirit of freedom fighters before her, by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white woman leading to her arrest and the violence she was subjected to. It was March 2, 1955 on a Montgomery bus when Colvin was told to get up from her seat, and it is that date on which she refused and was accosted by policemen and subsequently arrested.¹² By Colvin's description, the officers grabbed her, kicked her, and dragged her off the bus as she went limp, not fighting back but potentially incidentally causing scratches as she had long nails at the time. She describes herself screaming, "it's my constitutional right," repeatedly and insists she never swore or profaned anything during the altercation. After being handcuffed in the patrol car, Colvin remembers how one officer joined her in the backseat and how, "all ride long they swore at me and ridiculed me. They took turns trying to guess my bra size. They called me 'nigger [sic] bitch' and cracked jokes about parts of my body."¹³ The officers would throw her into a cell in the city jail rather than juvenile detention or the women's penitentiary. She was bailed out the same day, but her family still feared potential violence from Klan members afterwards.¹⁴ In comparison, the arrest report containing the officers' description mentioned none of the insults or the physical and sexual violence Colvin described being done to her, but does describe how she kicked and scratched at the officers after having been put in the back of the patrol car.¹⁵ Her experience and the differences between her remembrance and the officers report display the cruelty so often used to stifle resistance. However, her courageous act drew the attention of other activists like the NAACP to aid her as a potential figure to rally support against the injustice of segregation.

¹² Montgomery Police Department, "Arrest report."

¹³ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 32.

¹⁴ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 32-34.

¹⁵ Montgomery Police Department, "Arrest Report"

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Word spread quickly regarding Claudette Colvin's arrest, inspiring many people with the bravery she displayed in the face of violent and systemic oppression, and this revolutionary spirit drew civil rights leaders in Montgomery to Colvin's side. Jo Ann Robinson, a famous black activist and member of the Montgomery civic group called the Women's Political Council, was organizing resistance towards segregated buses since 1949, and she was looking for something to solidify support for a bus boycott which drew her and others to Colvin with all the attention given to her case. After her family contacted black community leader and head of the Montgomery NAACP, E. D. Nixon put them in contact with a young black lawyer named Fred Gray to represent Colvin in court and a coalition of black leaders to meet the police commissioner on her behalf, including then 26 year old Martin Luther King Jr. in his political debut.¹⁶ That conference would include an admission on the commissioner's behalf that the seating rules were confusing but that the charges would not be dropped. Despite this Martin Luther King Jr. and Jo Ann Robinson felt hopeful after the meeting and, "that everything would work out fairly for everyone."¹⁷

It was during this pre-trial period that Claudette Colvin would meet her defiant successor, Rosa Parks, as she acted in her capacity as head of the NAACP Montgomery youth group and approached Colvin after Nixon encouraged Parks to involve her with the NAACP. Parks and Colvin would work closely together on multiple fundraising events for Colvin's lawyer, Fred Gray, and would discover that Park's brother was close friends with Colvin's biological mother. The NAACP and Fred Gray were eager to take up Colvin's case because she was pleading not guilty to the charge of violating city and state segregation laws, something no one else had pleaded not guilty for on a bus arrest and could be used to get the bus segregation laws declared unconstitutional. Despite Gray warning Colvin and her family that the not guilty plea would be a

¹⁶ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 37-40.

¹⁷ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 41.

direct challenge to Jim Crow's authority in Montgomery with potentially explosive consequences, the Colvin's refused to back down.¹⁸

Colvin's hearing took place on March 18, 1955, and was presided over by Juvenile Court Judge Willey Hill Jr. After only a few hours with testimonies from the police officers and the white passengers' declaring their near saintly patience and gentleness while black witnesses described the "frightening force" they wielded against a teenage girl; Judge Hill ruled Colvin was guilty of all three charges of violating the segregation law, disturbing the peace, and assaulting a police officer.¹⁹ Gray's challenge that segregation was unconstitutional and Colvin's not guilty plea were both thrown out with this judgment, and the devastated Colvin was placed on probation, made a ward of the state, and subsequently released to her parents' custody.²⁰

The attention Colvin received was not solely positive even before the verdict, as there were those in her school and among the community who felt it was not bravery but troublemaking that motivated her resistance. After her sentencing, however, Colvin describes how "more and more students seemed to turn against me," and that the insults and derision made often left her crying which led to criticisms over her being "emotional."²¹ Such sentiments grew alongside the general restlessness and anger over segregated buses within the black community, enough that the

¹⁸ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 41-43.

¹⁹ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 44; "Negro Girl Faces Trial In Bus Row" *Birmingham Post-Herald* (Birmingham, Alabama), March 9, 1955: 12. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A17A08CA9C6AAC5A2%40AAHX-17CFCAF9ADE062CF%402435176-17CDA9BAB12086EB%4011-17CDA9BAB12086EB%40>.

²⁰ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 44; "Negro Convicted In Bus Squabble" *Birmingham Post-Herald* (Birmingham, Alabama), March 19, 1955: 27. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A17A08CA9C6AAC5A2%40AAHX-17CFCB0390B5CC3D%402435186-17CDA9C8B20322CF%4026>.

²¹ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 45.

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NAACP that had been considering Colvin's use as a trigger for the bus boycott began to wonder if they should look for a less controversial symbol. As discussion around Colvin began centering on how she was, "'emotional' and 'uncontrollable' and 'profane' and 'feisty,'" and concerns grew over how young she was and how poor her family was; the NAACP decided not to use her as the figure to build their boycott around.²² However, they did raise money for an appeal of Colvin's case, hoping to clear her name and taking another swing at the segregation law. None of these discussions by the NAACP and other Montgomery groups included Claudette Colvin, nor did they keep her informed, ask for her opinion, or ask her to participate. The appeal was heard on May 6, 1955, with the charges regarding violating the peace and violating segregation laws were dropped but the assault of police officers meant the NAACP could no longer use Colvin's case to challenge segregation. She still had a criminal record which would blight her transcripts, job applications, and credit reports from then on.²³

Colvin's reception by her peers after the appeal deteriorated farther, with many mocking her rather than acknowledging the failed opportunity to achieve justice for themselves. Colvin faced this increased scrutiny by doubling down on her sense of self-esteem and pride. She refused to straighten her hair, returning to her natural texture and putting her hair into cornrows, because she thought "[her] hair looked 'African,' and [she] was proud of it."²⁴ She expanded that pride into many different aspects of her life, including her ambitions when she wrote President of the United States for what she wanted to be when she grew up, and she participated in Parks' NAACP youth group as Parks' appointed youth secretary.²⁵ However, that outward confidence was not an

²² Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 47-48.

²³ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 39- 49.

²⁴ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 50.

²⁵ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 49-52.

indication that Colvin was entirely unaffected by negativity in her life.

On top of her schoolmates' reactions, Colvin was worried about violating her parole, so she began to isolate herself outside of school and church functions like the NAACP meetings. Those meetings were also the only tie Colvin had to the black leaders who had been so interested in her before, with only Rosa Parks still in contact with her. It was during this period of social isolation that she would meet a light skinned black man who she felt understood her. He supported her decision to stop straightening her hair that her peers had ridiculed, and he agreed with her declarations of needing to stand up in revolution. Colvin never gave the identity of the man described here, but sections of the interviews given to Philip Hoose for his book "Claudette Colvin" indicate that he was likely the father of her first child as she became pregnant at around this time.²⁶

The pregnancy magnified the problems she encountered in the aftermath of her trial. As she started showing early, her schoolmates insulted her for getting pregnant and the school had a no pregnancy policy, so she was expelled. It was during this period that Rosa Parks was arrested and the Montgomery Bus Boycott was enacted with her as its centerpiece, and Colvin was alerted by a pamphlet with her name misspelled as "Claudette Colbert."²⁷ Colvin felt that, despite wanting to continue fighting, she had been abandoned by everyone and that she'd lost her chance to make a difference. She would travel to Birmingham for a period of about two weeks in the winter of 1955, where she would recenter herself. She thought through the lingering trauma of her arrest and the uncertainties she faced about her pregnancy during her time in Birmingham, and Colvin would emerge assured of her capabilities once more. She would have her baby, deal with motherhood, take

²⁶ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 51-59.

²⁷ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 61.

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the G.E.D. for her diploma, and return to Montgomery to take part in the bus boycott that she had helped start.²⁸

Colvin supported the Montgomery Bus Boycott in smaller ways, initially. She did not ride the buses, went to the Sunday mass meetings, and took up many of the family duties as her mom participated in the volunteer carpool driving others around.²⁹ However, her largest contribution was in her third foray into the US legal system. Colvin's old lawyer, Fred Gray, worked to build a lawsuit, *Browder v. Gayle*, against Montgomery and the state of Alabama to be heard in a federal court to desegregate buses, and he wanted Colvin to be one of the plaintiffs. Gray would approach Colvin about two months into the boycott, to her surprise as she had not talked to any of the leadership, including Rosa Parks, since the start, and asked her if she would take part in the case. He was transparent about the risks involved with potential KKK and other white supremacists potentially targeting Colvin and her family if she participated, but she agreed regardless as she "wanted white people to know that [she] wasn't satisfied with segregation. Black people, too."³⁰ To add to the pressure on Colvin's shoulders, six weeks before the lawsuit on March 29, 1956, her son Raymond was born. Claudette Colvin would arrive with the legal team of Fred Gray, the three other plaintiffs, and various other black leaders to the federal courthouse on May 11, 1956, to present the case to Federal Justices Richard Rives, Seybourn Lynne, and Frank Johnson.³¹

Colvin would be the last of the plaintiffs called to testify, being the youngest at 16, the most affecting story, and the most experienced as the only one to have fought their charges in court. Her recounting of her arrest drove one of the court spectators to tears, and her handling of the defendant's cross examination led one of the other plaintiff lawyers, Charles Langford, to declare "if

²⁸ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 60- 64.

²⁹ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 68-69.

³⁰ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 72-73.

³¹ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 71-83.

there was a star witness in the boycott case, it had to be Claudette Colvin.”³² In a 1956 Birmingham Post-Herald news article, Colvin was noted to have testified that the only reason a similar push to overthrow the bus segregation laws had not manifested previously was that ““some of us just didn’t have the guts to stand up’ earlier.”³³ The Justices would rule two to one that Montgomery’s segregated buses were unconstitutional, with Justice Johnson later saying, “the testimony of...Miss Colvin and the others reinforced the Constitution’s position that you can’t abridge the freedoms of the individual. The boycott case was a simple case of legal and human rights being denied.”³⁴ This decision would end the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and it is due in no small part to the actions of Claudette Colvin.

Her contributions, however, would not prevent the difficulties Colvin faced after the lawsuit was finished. She would not be informed about the court's decision by any of the boycott leaders nor would she hear from them at all afterwards, not even Fred Gray or Rosa Parks. Colvin would attribute being shunned and left without support to her pregnancy, her un-wed status, and the prevalent assumption that her light skinned baby Raymond’s father was white. She still felt great pride in her actions to culminate in winning the lawsuit, but the problems that plagued her personal life proved overwhelming. Colvin was still expelled from her schooling and had a baby to take care of after her time as a plaintiff, with very little in the way of financial support. She lived rent-free in her parent’s house but still paid her share in utilities and purchased her own food and clothing. Her ability to find and keep employment was also damaged, as she avoided

³² Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 84-88.

³³ “Top Tribunal Voids State, Local Laws,” *Birmingham Post-Herald* (Birmingham, Alabama), November 14, 1956: 6. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A17A08CA9C6AAC5A2%40AAHX-17D0072412BFF4F0%402435792-17CEB64F610F10A4%405-17CEB64F610F10A4%40>.

³⁴ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 91.

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working in white people's homes for fear of potential retaliation by the owners and the jobs she took in restaurants and cafeterias would fire her after connecting her to Claudette Colvin from the legal cases. Colvin also lived in fear of reprisal as racial violence surged in Montgomery after the buses desegregated, with many black people and places being harmed like Colvin's church, Hutchinson Street Baptist, being bombed.³⁵ These would eventually push Colvin to leave Montgomery and social activism behind.

After a year spent getting her G.E.D. in 1957 and attending courses at Alabama State College, Colvin would eventually drop out and leave Montgomery after being unable to find work. In 1958, she would move in with her first cousin, Velma, to New York and spend years moving back and forth until she settled in New York in 1968. These intervening years would include the birth of Colvin's second son, Randy, in 1960, obtaining a nursing degree and employment as a nurse's aide, and would see her keep tabs on the progress of the Civil Rights Movement without actively participating.³⁶

Colvin would remain absent from the public eye and her contributions to the Civil Rights Movement would largely fade out of public consciousness, potentially forever, if not for a Birmingham reporter, Frank Sikora, tracking her down in 1975 for a story on the Montgomery Bus Boycott that he would publish in 1980.³⁷ Sikora's reporting would restore knowledge of Colvin's involvement and see an increase of her mentions in books and articles on the Civil Rights Movement, likely leading to her 2005 invite to return to Montgomery and Booker T. Washington, her old

³⁵ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 92-98.

³⁶ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 101-102.

³⁷ Frank Sikora, "Black teen defied law to ride in bus' 'white' section." *Birmingham News* (Birmingham, Alabama), December 1, 1980: 6.
<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A1424B70CBA6098DF%40AAHX-177072745E8B115A%402444575-17700C945263FE2F%405-17700C945263FE2F%40>.

school, to speak on the 50th anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.³⁸ After relating her ideals of personal agency and continually pushing forward the progress to justice to the new students of her old school, Colvin reflected on how amazing it felt to see that young people were still interested in what she did 50 years earlier. That same drive can be enkindled in everyone, pushed forward by everyone, to make progress even on things too long delayed. This too can be seen in Colvin's life as her arrest was expunged from her record in 2021 when she was 82 years old, with Colvin saying "When I think about why I'm seeking to have my name cleared by the state, it is because I believe if that happened it would show the generation growing up now that progress is possible, and things do get better. It will inspire them to make the world better."³⁹

Claudette Colvin was inspired by her teachers and African American history to stand against the oppression she grew up submerged in. Her contributions showcase how even the very young can have incredible impact as seen with her testimony as a plaintiff. It also shows the complexities inherent to social revolution as indicated by her relationship to the NAACP. Colvin herself maintained that fighting against prejudice and systems of segregation did not end in the 1960s, but that progress was made and the American people were forced to change their view, with the effort being necessary for those that came after. That same effort must be continually spent pushing forward on the ideals Claudette Colvin held until her death. May we all find the courage to take a stand and say, "this is not right," like she did.⁴⁰

³⁸ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 102-103.

³⁹ The Associated Press, "She Refused to Move Bus Seats Months before Rosa Parks. at 82, Her Arrest Is Expunged," NPR, December 16, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/16/1064890661/claurette-colvin-rosa-parks-arrest-record-expunged>.

⁴⁰ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 103-104.

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[com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A17A08CA9C6AAC5A2%40AAHX-17CFCAF9ADE062CF%402435176-17CDA9BAB12086EB%4011-17CDA9BAB12086EB%40](https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=AAHX&docref=image/v2%3A17A08CA9C6AAC5A2%40AAHX-17CFCAF9ADE062CF%402435176-17CDA9BAB12086EB%4011-17CDA9BAB12086EB%40).

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History in the Making

Silencing Dissent?: Campus Protest, Academic Freedom on U.S. Campuses, and the Politics of Antisemitism Amid the Israel-Palestinian War

By Marlet Felix



Figure 1: New York, United States - April 17: "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" demonstration is held on the South Lawn of Columbia University campus with more than 100 students who were demanding that Columbia divest from corporations with ties to Israel in New York, United States on April 17, 2024. Photo by Selcuk Acar/Anadolu via Getty Images.

Over the past two years, U.S. college campuses have emerged as central sites of political contestation over the Israel-Palestinian war. Student protests, faculty statements, encampments, and counter-mobilizations have transformed universities into highly visible arenas where global conflict intersects domestic debates over free speech, civil rights, and state power. In this context, universities have been forced to navigate competing narratives:

protecting student safety, upholding academic freedom, and responding to pressure from lawmakers, donors, and federal agencies. This article examines the landscape of campus discourse through the increasing use of immigration enforcement tools, such as visa revocations and ICE detentions, the expansion of institutional disciplinary mechanisms targeting student activists, and the growing centrality of antisemitism as both a genuine concern and contested political category. While rising antisemitism is a substantial problem that demands institutional response, the convergence of state power and university governance has, in some cases, functioned to suppress or diminish pro-Palestinian dissent.

The wave of campus protests following October 7, 2023, represents one of the most significant periods of student protests in recent history. Demonstrations ranged from teach-ins to large encampments calling for institutional divestment from companies in support of or linked to Israel. At institutions such as Columbia University, these protests reached a national audience when student encampments were dismantled by police, resulting in mass arrests.¹ The scale and visibility of enforcement signaled a shift in how universities respond to dissent, moving away from possible negotiation and toward intervention. While campus protests have long been a feature in American higher education, the current moment reflects a more formalized integration of law enforcement into university management.² This process can be described as the

¹ “Columbia University Protests Lead to Mass Arrests,” *New York Times*, 2024.

² Campus protest has formed a vital part of American history, most notably during the Civil Rights Era and during U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. For more historical precedents, see the role of police and National Guard intervention in campus protests during the Vietnam War and Civil Rights era. In institutions, for example, such as University of California, Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement saw mass arrests but also extensive negotiation between students and university administrators. While these earlier episodes involved significant state intervention, scholars note that campus administration reflects more integration of law enforcement, including policing, surveillance technologies, and formal alliances with federal agencies. UC Berkeley Library, “Free Speech Movement,” <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/bancroft/oral-history-center/projects/free-speech-movement>. See also Geoffrey R. Stone,

“securitization of dissent,” in which political expression is reframed as a potential threat that requires surveillance and control rather than an ability of democratic engagement.³

At Columbia, administrative decisions were shaped by internal concerns about safety as well as by intense congressional scrutiny. Lawmakers criticized university leadership, accusing it of tolerating antisemitism and threatening consequences, which ranged from cutting funding to greater federal regulation. During congressional hearings before the U.S. House Committee, members framed campus protest as part of a broader national crisis, asserting that, “since Hamas’ brutal attack on our friend and ally Israel on October 7th, we have witnessed a disturbing spike in antisemitic violence across our own country...perhaps most prevalent on American college campuses, often funded with billions of taxpayer dollars,” further arguing that many of the demonstrations were “not First Amendment protected speech,” but instead involved vandalism, encampments and, in some cases, violence.⁴ Disciplinary action functioned both as a response to protest and a signal of institutional compliance with federal political expectations.

Alongside the securitization of protest, universities have expanded their use of internal disciplinary procedures to regulate campus speech. Suspensions, expulsions, and the loss of recognition of student organizations have become increasingly common responses to protest activity.⁵ These measures were

Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime: From the Sedition Act of 1798 to the War on Terrorism (W.W. Norton, 2004).

³ Patrick F. Gillham, “Securitizing America: Strategic Incapacitation and the Policing of Protest Since the 11 September 2001 Terrorist Attacks,” *Sociology Compass* 5, no. 7 (2011): 636–652.

⁴ U.S. House of Representatives, “House Committee Hearing on Antisemitism on College Campuses.”

⁵ U.S. House of Representatives, “House Event 117305: Text,” *Congress.gov*; NBC News, “Columbia University Disciplines Students in Campus Protests”; Inside Higher Ed, “Columbia Expels, Suspends Student Protesters”; Columbia University, “Statement by Columbia University President Minouche Shafik”;

typically justified in terms of maintaining order and ensuring compliance with civil rights obligations, particularly under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in federally funded institutions.⁶

At Harvard University, the tensions surrounding campus protest intensified as following demonstrations and widespread public controversy, the university faced federal investigations and lawsuits alleging that it failed to protect Jewish students from harassment.⁷ Congressional hearings place university administration under scrutiny, especially regarding whether certain protest slogans constituted antisemitism.⁸ From one perspective, these responses reflect the necessary effort to address antisemitism and fulfill legal obligations under Title VI. From another, they demonstrate how external political pressure can reshape university administrative efforts. Faced with the threat of investigation, funding cuts, and harm to university reputation, institutions may adopt more restrictive policies not solely out of principle, but as a strategy of risk management. In this context, using Title VI and its enforcement introduces significant ambiguity because antisemitism is not always easily distinguishable from political criticisms of

The Guardian, “Columbia University Punished Our Kids for Gaza Protests”; and *The Harvard Crimson*, “Disciplinary Cases Tripled.”

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Title VI Guidance.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, *Notice of Violation: Harvard University*, 2025; U.S. Department of Justice, “Justice Department Sues Harvard University for Antisemitism,” March 20, 2026; see also “Trump administration sues Harvard, saying it violated civil rights law,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2026; “Harvard says Trump officials made factual errors in antisemitism finding,” *Washington Post*, September 30, 2025; “Trump administration notifies Harvard of alleged civil rights violations,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 2025.

⁸ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and the Workforce, *Holding Campus Leaders Accountable and Confronting Antisemitism*, hearing, 118th Cong., December 5, 2023. During the hearing, university presidents were questioned extensively about whether slogans such as “From the river to the sea,” constituted antisemitism, highlighting congressional scrutiny of administrative responses to campus protests’ speech.

Israel, and universities often require making complex and often subjective judgments about speech, thus affecting campus protests.⁹ In practice, this ambiguity incentivizes a tendency toward restriction, which contributes to a constrained environment for political expression.

In the University of California, Los Angeles, clashes between pro-Palestinian demonstrators and pro-Israel counter-protestors escalated into physical confrontation, drawing national attention and criticism.¹⁰ Observers faulted the university for failing to intervene quickly enough, raising concerns about student safety and administrative responsibility. In response, UCLA authorized police action to dismantle encampments and restore order. While these measures were justified and necessary to prevent further violence between demonstrators and keep peace of mind for the community, they also resulted in the dispersal and disciplining of student protesters. The UCLA case highlights the difficulty of managing not only protests but also counter-protests, particularly when tensions escalate beyond amicable demonstrations. It also demonstrates the limits of institutional neutrality when faced with such adversity from federal forces and communities.

Beyond institutional discipline, the intersection of campus activism with immigration enforcement amidst the current political climate represents one of the most consequential developments presently. Reports of visa revocations and Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) detentions linked to protest activity have

⁹ Kenneth L. Marcus, *The Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Marcus argues that defining antisemitism in contemporary contexts often involves navigating through the boundary between political speech about Israel and discriminatory expression. See also, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, *Working Definition of Antisemitism*, 2016.

¹⁰ “Protests at UCLA Turn Violent as Pro-Palestinian, Pro-Israel Demonstrators Clash,” YouTube video, 1:23, posted by “UCLA News,” May 1, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNrkh8V8IMw>; Department of Art, UCLA, “Gaza Protests,” <https://www.art.ucla.edu/gazaprotests/>; “UCLA Violence Changes the Picture on California Campus Protests,” *CalMatters* (newsletter), May 1, 2024, <https://calmatters.org/newsletter/ucla-violence-campus-protests/>.

highlighted the uncertain position that non-citizen students in the United States face.¹¹ While citizen students may face disciplinary measures such as suspension or even expulsion, international students risk far more severe consequences, including detention or deportation. Such as students Mahmoud Khalil and Rümeysa Öztürk, whose experiences illustrate how involvement in campus protest can lead to consequences that go beyond university disciplinary processes, resulting in unequal and dangerous risks rooted in contemporary student activism. Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia University graduate who was arrested on March 8th, 2025, by the Department of Homeland Security after returning from a dinner in New York with his wife, Noor Abdalla, who is a United States citizen. Similarly, Rümeysa Öztürk was arrested on March 25, 2025, after the revocation of her F-1 student visa by six masked plainclothes agents from the Department of Homeland Security, subsequently being detained at the South Louisiana ICE Processing Center.¹² This reveals a dual system of accountability in

¹¹ Marco Rubio, Secretary of State, press briefing, quoted in NPR, "Trump administration advances immigration crackdown on foreign student protesters," March 28, 2025; TIME, "These Are the Students Targeted by ICE So Far," March 26, 2025 (detailing Columbia student Rumeysa Ozturk case and over a dozen detentions); Association of American Universities (AAU), "State Department Ramps Up Visa Revocations and Student Status Terminations," April 3, 2025 (reporting ICE actions at Harvard, Columbia, Cornell); The Marshall Project, "Trump Targeting International Students Over Pro-Palestinian Protests," April 4, 2025.

¹² Al Jazeera, "Palestinian Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil decries arrest in the US," March 19, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/19/political-prisoner-palestinian-mahmoud-khalil-decries-arrest-in-the-us>; NPR, "Tufts student Rumeysa Ozturk ordered freed from immigration detention," May 9, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/09/nx-s1-5393055/tufts-student-rumeysa-ozturk-ordered-freed-from-immigration-detention>; Both have been subsequently freed from detention. Mahmoud Khalil released on bail on June 20, 2025 (NPR) and Rümeysa Öztürk's deportation proceedings terminated on February 9th, 2026 (CNN, AP). For more on Mahmoud and Rümeysa, see TIME, "Mahmoud Khalil Ordered Released After 3 Months of Detention," June 19, 2025; *New York Times*, "Immigration Judge Says Rumeysa Ozturk Cannot Be Deported," February 10, 2026.

which the costs of participating in such protests equate to unequal punishment.

Historically, the use of immigration law to regulate dissent is not new. From the Palmer Raids to Cold War surveillance and post 9/11 security measures, the U.S. government has repeatedly used immigration enforcement as a mechanism of political control over non-citizens.¹³ Contemporarily, DHS and ICE actions against non-citizen protestors reflect a continuation of this pattern, extending freedom of expression and speech beyond university bounds and into the domain of the federal government. For non-citizen students, the threat of immigration enforcement creates a powerful deterrent to protest, effectively narrowing who can safely participate in activism.

At the same time, any analysis of campus protest must consider the documented rise in antisemitism. Since October 2023, reports indicate a significant increase in antisemitic incidents across the United States, including on college campuses.¹⁴ Jewish students have described experiences ranging from verbal harassment to exclusion from campus spaces, prompting calls for

¹³ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2004). Ngai's work is important here as it demonstrates how U.S. immigration law has historically constructed the term "illegal aliens" as a mechanism of political and racial control. This, in turn, establishes precedents for contemporary visa revocations and ICE actions against student protestors, revealing immigration enforcement's role beyond border security.

¹⁴ Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "Over 10,000 Antisemitic Incidents Recorded in the U.S. since Oct. 7, 2023," press release, October 6, 2024, <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/over-10000-antisemitic-incidents-recorded-us-oct-7-2023-according-adl> (reporting 10,000+ incidents nationwide Oct. 7, 2023–Sept. 24, 2024, a 200% increase year-over-year, with 1,200+ on college campuses alone, up 500%); Hillel International, "Antisemitic Incidents on Campus at Record High in Past School Year," July 16, 2025, <https://www.hillel.org/antisemitic-incidents-on-campus-at-record-high-in-past-school-year/> (2,334 campus incidents in 2024–2025, a ten-fold rise since pre-October 2023).

stronger protections in universities.¹⁵ Universities have a responsibility to ensure that Jewish students feel safe and can participate in campus activities. Yet the definition of antisemitism remains ambiguous.¹⁶ Debates frequently center on whether criticism of Israeli state policy constitutes protected political speech or discriminatory expression. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) defines antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews,” while also noting that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country can’t be regarded as antisemitic.”¹⁷ Debates frequently center on whether criticism of Israeli state policy constitutes protected political speech or antisemitic discriminatory expression. The adoption of frameworks such as the IHRA’s working definition of antisemitism has intensified this debate. Critics such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argue that expansive definitions risk conflating political critique with hate speech, thereby narrowing the limits of acceptable expression.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hillel International, “Antisemitic Incidents on Campus at Record High in Past School Year,” July 16, 2025, <https://www.hillel.org/antisemitic-incidents-on-campus-at-record-high-in-past-school-year/>. 2,334 incidents were reported over the 2024-2025 academic year, 500 more over the 2023-2024 academic year which was 1,853 and a ten-fold compared to 2022-2023 year (289); StopAntisemitism, “2025 Report Cards” (39% of Jewish students conceal identities, 62% are blamed for Israel actions); U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, letters to 60 universities, March 9, 2025 (Title VI obligations to protect Jewish students).

¹⁶ The definition of antisemitism is subjective, hence the frequent debates. Here is the Merriam-Webster definition of antisemitism, “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “anti-Semitism,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-Semitism>.

¹⁷ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), *Working Definition of Antisemitism*, <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>.

¹⁸ American Civil Liberties Union, *Reject Definitions of Anti-Semitism that Encompass Protected Speech* (2024), <https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Reject-Definitions-of-Anti-Semitism-that-Encompass->

The ambiguity of antisemitism creates a complex interpretive environment in which the same speech may be understood in different ways. Expressions that some view as calls for liberation are interpreted by others as threatening or exclusionary. Universities are tasked with being arbiters during these disputes, and yet they often adopt cautious approaches that prioritize avoiding risks. In doing so, Universities contribute to the perception that the open space for political debate and freedom of expression is shrinking. The intersection of securitized protest, institutional discipline, immigration enforcement, and contested definitions of antisemitism has produced a climate in which dissent, the risk of disciplinary action, legal consequences, or reputational harm can deter both students and faculty from engaging in protests. Pro-Palestinian activists, particularly those who are non-citizens, face heightened risks, while Jewish students confront the rising antisemitism, experiencing their own forms of vulnerability amid the current political climate. The result is a polarized campus environment in which multiple groups experience marginalization, all in different ways.

The governance of protest on university college campuses since October 7, 2023, reveals a complex interplay of securitization, administrative discipline, immigration enforcement, and contested definitions of antisemitism. As universities respond to pressures from lawmakers, federal agencies, and public scrutiny, their choices about how to manage dissent often tilt toward restriction rather than discussion. Immigration enforcement and the threat of visa revocation or deportation place burdens on non-citizen pro-Palestinian activists, while Jewish students confront real and documented rises in antisemitism and insecurity. Together, these dynamics produce a campus climate in which multiple forms of marginalization coexist, and the open space for political debate is coming under heavy strain. If higher education is

Protected-Speech.pdf. The ACLU argues that the IHRA's working definition "conflates protected political speech with unprotected discrimination," and warns that the adopting would, "chill the exercise of First Amendment rights."

to remain a site of democratic debate rather than be managed by state and political power, universities must develop more transparent frameworks that distinguish criticism of state policy from antisemitic expression and protect students across all affected communities.

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Reviews

Book Review: *War and Colonization in the Early American Northeast*

By Tyler Daniels

Christoph Strobel's *War and Colonization in the Early American Northeast* argues that warfare and violence fundamentally reshaped the peoples and landscapes of New England, or Dawnland, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His synthesis of military and colonial history centers Native American motives, war tactics, and political agency alongside European conflicts, presenting Indigenous peoples as central actors rather than passive victims. Strobel also makes the forceful claim that the destructive strategies of New England colonists should be considered acts of genocide against Indigenous communities. At the same time, he emphasizes Native resilience: Dawnland peoples adapted military strategies, engaged in war for their own political, economic, and cultural purposes, and influenced European approaches to combat, even as disease, dispossession, and environmental devastation led to long-term decay and diaspora.

Scholars of New England studies will recognize Strobel's distinctive historiographical approach to Indigenous warfare, especially in relation to recent works shaped by NAISA methodology. His reliance on Native violence as a principal force in shaping relations to Dawnland materiality and resources, European colonialism, and tribal survivance marks a departure from newer studies that rely more heavily on contemporary Indigenous language, sources, and perspectives. Although Strobel draws primarily on European sources and narratives to interpret the Algonquian world, he nevertheless incorporates accurate Indigenous names for peoples and places and consistently centers

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Native leaders and tribes as indispensable actors in colonial history.

The book unfolds chronologically through three historical periods. Strobel begins by evaluating pre-colonial warfare through archaeological evidence of war artifacts, forts and human remains to reject modern stereotypes of the “noble savage.” He demonstrates that early Indigenous warfare was flexible, small-scale, and often designed to minimize human casualties. With the arrival of Europeans, however, violent encounters intensified. Man-stealing, skirmishes, and retaliatory raids reflected a pattern of adaptation and resilience that both alarmed Europeans and revealed the effectiveness of Native tactics. Strobel persuasively argues that Dawnland peoples frustrated colonists with their mobile, small-unit style of combat, an approach that would later shape colonial ranger and scouting strategies.

He then examines the impact of European colonialism on Algonquian worlds from early English settlement through King Philip’s War. Firearms, epidemic disease, and colonial military tactics intensified conflicts both between Europeans and Native peoples and among Indigenous communities themselves. His account of the Pequot War stresses the devastating impression of Fort Mystic, where colonists burned the fortified village, killing noncombatants as well as warriors. Strobel argues that this event reshaped Indigenous perceptions of English colonialism and redefined the political landscape of southern Dawnland. Yet the author also notes that colonial victories were often only possible through Native allies and Indigenous tactical knowledge. He situates King Philip’s War as the culmination of these persistent pressures, showing how English violence and land encroachment drove one of the most devastating wars in early American history.

Finally, Strobel turns to the conflicts of the eighteenth century, when Native warfare became deeply entangled with European imperial disputes on full display in the northeast. He analyzes the role of Wabanaki, Haudenosaunee, and other Algonquian peoples in the many wars between English and French empires. Indigenous warriors served as scouts, rangers, and allies,

but they also pursued their own political goals, defended ancient homelands, and maintained cultural practices of revenge warfare. Strobel's narrative captures both the formidable military power of Native war parties and the tragic consequences of sustained conflict, disease, and ecological decline in their communities. Ultimately, Anglo-French hostilities narrowed Indigenous autonomy, contributing to the dispersal and assimilation of Algonquian peoples across the northeast and beyond.

Strobel's book makes two notable contributions. First, it condenses a wide body of scholarship into a clear narrative that attempts to preserve Native peoples at the center of military and colonial conflicts. Second, it foregrounds the destructive consequences of settler colonial warfare, framing English campaigns as genocidal in intent and effect. At times, however, Strobel places heavy emphasis on the role of guns in shaping Indigenous military successes, leaving less room to explore cultural or psychological dimensions of gun-oriented warfare and its aftermath.

War and Colonization in the Early American Northeast succeeds in reframing the history of early American warfare through centering Indigenous peoples while underscoring the destructive power of colonial violence. Both accessible and deeply researched, it will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, students, and general readers interested in military history, Native American history, and the long-term consequences of colonization in Dawnland.

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Book Review: *Cold War on Five Continents*

By Sviatoslav Kozlov

Introduction

In 1975, after decades of brutal war leaving millions of dead, the US-aligned regime in South Vietnam was collapsing. An Air America helicopter took off from a CIA safehouse in Saigon and the last man to board that flight was South Vietnam's head of secret police. The man responsible for the deaths of thousands, all in the name of fighting communism, was escorted to that flight by the arch-communist himself: Pham Xuan An. A communist spy that the CIA themselves trained. After the geopolitical and human catastrophe that was the Vietnam War, many of America's "men on the spot" in Vietnam, such as Tony Poe and Bill Young, would go on to commit suicide. Perhaps traumatized by the violence they once wrought or maybe depressed, seeking that thrill once more of managing the fates of not only the regimes and people they took responsibility for but of the entire global order.

It is this story that Alfred McCoy aims to tell in his book *Cold War on Five Continents*. The story of how a few men, a few conflicts, shaped and pushed the Cold War through its multiple stages until its ultimate completion with the demise of the Soviet Empire. Rather than focusing on the top-down narrative of Soviet American leadership, McCoy reframes the story through the lens of the "man on the spot," a reference to 19th century British imperialists who managed to conquer a quarter of the world by 1918.¹ The author uses this term, the "man on the spot", to describe the various covert operatives that were responsible for both incredible foreign policy successes but also mass human devastation. The crucial part of McCoy's work, however, is not the individual narratives of various conflicts and agents but how these

¹ Alfred W McCoy, *Cold War on Five Continents* (Haymarket Books, 2026), 29.

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impacted and shaped US and Soviet behavior through the Cold War.

The Author

Alfred McCoy himself is no minor figure. Launching his career in 1972 with his book *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, McCoy, merely a graduate student, would find himself at the center of international attention. After years of investigation in the jungles of Indochina, McCoy concluded that heroin grown in the Golden Triangle, a region spanning parts of Laos, Burma and Thailand, was being trafficked across the Pacific straight to American homes. The book was so controversial that the CIA had suppressed it. Which ended with McCoy testifying before Congress charging key South Vietnamese officials and the CIA of colluding to supply American soldiers and American addicts at home with a steady flow of opium.² In part, this work helped inflame public opinion against the Vietnam War and brought attention to many of the CIA's other more distasteful tactics, for McCoy however, this was only the beginning.

Continuing to produce invaluable works through the Cold War, McCoy would emerge as a staunch critic of US foreign policy following the collapse of the USSR. In the early 2000s, two scandals erupted surrounding prisoners held at the Abu Ghraib (Iraq) and Guantanamo Bay (Cuba) detention facilities. In 2006, McCoy would produce a seminal work titled *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Seemingly prone to attention, once again McCoy's book would reignite the controversy surrounding the US government's use of torture. Through collaboration with psychologists and allies overseas, the CIA had developed a refined torture manual based around two principles "sensory deprivation" and "self-inflicted pain." The most devastating revelation of all, however, is that the

² McCoy, *Cold War*, 55.

information extracted through torture was all but worthless, something that McCoy would bring to light.

McCoy's next major works, *Policing America's Empire* (2009) and *In the Shadows of the American Century* (2017) expand his case studies into a wider analysis of contemporary world politics. In *Policing America's Empire*, through studying the US colonial surveillance state in the Philippines, McCoy connects tactics learned in the Philippines to methods used to silence opposition in modern America. *In the Shadows of the American Century* McCoy explores the American quest for global hegemony in the 21st century and how America's relative decline on the world stage is directly linked to this, often violent, hegemonic struggle.

Arriving January 6th, 2026, McCoy publishes *Cold War on Five Continents*. Seeing the world in flames, the United States once again rivals with Russia and China, McCoy assesses that a "new Cold War" is forming. *Cold War on Five Continents* can perhaps be considered the culmination of over 50 years of investigative and original work all rooted in a deeply historical foundation. Combining all the elements of his past books: torture, the drug trade, covert operations, the surveillance state, America's decline and China's rise, McCoy not only lays out the history of the Cold War but sets the basis for analyzing the new one.

Historiography

Western Cold War historiography is commonly placed into one of three camps, traditionalist (orthodox), revisionist and post-revisionist interpretations. The traditionalist view, sometimes attributed to George Kennan but championed by Red Scare era scholars such as Hebert Feis and Arthur Schlesinger, places the blame for the Cold War solely upon the USSR, blaming Stalin, ideology or/and Russo-Soviet imperial ambitions. The second camp emerges in 1959 with William Appleman Williams' *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*; Williams and other Revisionist historians challenge the supposed innocence of the United States and identify the US as the instigator of the Cold War. The final

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camp, the post revisionists, can be seen as reacting to the revisionist interpretation. Starting in the 1970s and dominating onwards to the end of the Cold War, Post Revisionists such as John Lewis Gaddis in his *United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* see the Cold War as an almost inevitable conflict between two superpowers, balancing the blame (sometimes) equally.

Williams and his Revisionist cohort, sometimes called the Wisconsin School, named after their ties to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, undoubtedly had a great influence on Alfred McCoy who, since 1989, has been a professor of history at the same school. Despite this legacy, *Cold War on Five Continents* can be placed squarely into the post-revisionist camp. Quoting the post revisionist scholar Melvyn Leffler, McCoy denies Stalin's or the Soviet Union's usually attributed ambitions of world domination or spreading communism across the world.³ At the same time, quoting the Truman adopted NSC Memorandum No. 68, he shows that the United States was acting off a misunderstanding of Soviet intentions, believing that the USSR was “animated by a new fanatic faith” and sought to ‘impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.’⁴ However, he frames these nuances through a very realist perspective, explaining the Cold War as a competition between empires exacerbated by ideology. The revisionism comes in with the rest of the book which primarily focuses on the US empire. Unlike Gaddis who rejects the idea that US dominance was imposed embracing the theory that it was invited, McCoy emphasizes the imperial aspects of the Cold War, especially the often-horrific massive human loss.

Unlike the authors listed above, who analyzed mainly from a top-down perspective, or direct Soviet-US relations, McCoy frames the Cold War through a bottom-up narrative; peripheral conflicts rather than direct diplomacy shaped the Cold War. Therefore, a second body of literature must be considered which is

³ McCoy, *Cold War*, 44.

⁴ McCoy, *Cold War*, 47.

the role of these conflicts, or rather the covert operations responsible, within the greater Cold War narrative. McCoy frames these covert operations as often bumbling but amazing foreign policy successes; that is, only at first. A primary theme is the long-term consequences that these imperially driven operations lead to arrogance, poverty and perpetual violence. This contrasts with other notable works on the subject such as John Prados' *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* which frames US and CIA operations as well intentioned, aiming to bring democracy if not with some unexpected consequences. A work that aligns far more closely, but not exactly, with McCoy's is Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times*. Westad shares several prominent themes with McCoy, the importance of decolonization, local actors and the unintended consequences of superpower interventions. Where they differ, however, is that Westad elevates the ideological aspect: ideology drove intervention. McCoy almost does the opposite, deemphasizing the role of ideology and in fact narrating how the USSR and US were drawing closer and closer together in their natures (surveillance state, domestic oppression, propaganda, security agencies).

Cold War Analysis

Cold War on Five Continents tells its tale of espionage and covert operations through a chronological retelling of what McCoy identifies as major events for the development of shifting Cold War dynamics. The book is split into four parts and 16 chapters, each (besides the introduction and conclusion) analyzing a specific region or conflict. Chapter 3 focuses on early Cold War conflicts in Greece, Italy and France; Chapter 4 explores the Korean War; Chapter 5 the early American exploits to keep the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam "friendly" and so on. Through this method, McCoy divides the Cold War into 3 distinct periods, the first centering around Europe between 1946-1962, the second on US efforts in Southeast Asia to stop communist expansion in the 1960s

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and 1970s and the final phase focusing on the US-Soviet proxy wars over Central America, Central Asia and Southern Africa from 1975 to 1991.

McCoy identifies, what he calls, “four key historical conditions” that drove the Cold War forward: superpower rivalry, geopolitics, covert operations and decolonization. These serve as the underlying framework for his wider analysis of how and why the Cold War progressed as it did. It is important to delineate these terms in order to understand that bigger picture that McCoy attempts to build.

Superpower rivalry, within the context of the book, refers to the Realist analysis of hegemonic competition: that the USSR and USA were natural competitors not as a result of some sort of ideological difference but of conflicting security interests. Throughout the book, McCoy demonstrates how this superpower rivalry, or rather this series of perceived conflicting interests, led to a series of violent costly conflicts spanning the globe in otherwise remote areas. One of these being Angola, in which the United States supported, at first, the brutal colonial Portuguese administration and then conservative forces aligned with apartheid South Africa. On the other hand, the Soviets supported the, initially, liberationist MPLA which would then over the 30 years of civil war degrade into just another warlord faction. Both the Soviets and United States supported forces which ostensibly were anti-thetical to their own declared ideological goals; displaying that in the end what mattered is with who these regimes align with rather than the nature of their characters. Superpower rivalry meant that ideals and morals, or rather ideology, were a rather background aspect to the competition.

In 1904, Halford John Mackinder submitted the article *The Geographical Pivot of History* to the Royal Geographical Society. In it, Mackinder divides the world into three spheres, the Pivot Area or Heartland comprising Central Asia and Siberia, the inner or marginal crescent including China, India, West Asia and Europe and the outer or insular crescent making up the rest of the world. Mackinder argues that as this giant landmass, which we call

Africa, Europe and Asia, becomes increasingly interconnected that it forms a “World Island.” It is from this central Pivot Area that a nation can attempt to control the world, McCoy quotes Mackinder in his explanation which I shall do as well “Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World.”⁵ It is this World Island that the United States feared the USSR would come to dominate. McCoy points out that most of the Cold War conflicts, especially the more deadly ones, took place within this inner crescent including Vietnam, Korea, Greece, Iran and many more. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Kennan’s and Truman’s containment strategy seemed to confirm Mackinder’s thesis; it is this aspect of the conflict that McCoy defines as “geopolitics.”

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki shocked the world. Such raw destruction had never been seen nor imagined and yet the United States possessed such weapons that could destroy human civilization if used carelessly. This unparalleled power gave US strategists a certain peace of mind in their post-war conduct. What disrupted this short-lived peace was when in 1949 the USSR tested its own nuclear bomb for the first time making any potential war between the two powers suicidal for not only themselves but humanity. With direct conflict out of the question, both states turned to proxy conflicts managed through security agencies such as the KGB and CIA. McCoy refers to the activities of these agencies as “covert operations” overseen by “men on the spot.” Covert operations were responsible for regime change, upholding existing regimes (often brutal ones) or just making the conflict as costly as possible for your adversary without regards to future repercussions such as the US covert ops in Afghanistan. Though on the surface this may seem like a tactic for managing the conflict, McCoy argues that covert operations were responsible for a lot of the change in the wider picture as well.

⁵ Halford Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 421–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1775498>.

Decolonization, meaning the European loss of direct control over much of their former empires, coincided precisely with the Cold War. It was a slow and costly process with some colonies, especially within the inner crescent gaining independence rather quickly (India, Syria, etcetera) but others like Angola would be fought over well into the 70s. Southern Africa would not be decolonized till the late 90s with the fall of the various colonial white regimes in that region. McCoy points out that this slowly evolving process provided new arenas for the superpower contest whether that be in Vietnam or in Korea. Even if Soviet presence was limited in places such as Indonesia, rising communist parties across the “free world” gave Americans enough of an excuse to intervene. These opening arenas allowed for both the expansion and containment of the conflict, as each country, rather than fighting over border regions, kept the contest de-escalated in far-flung former colonies of dying empires.

Along with these four key historical conditions, McCoy identifies a fifth, the timely effects of mass movements which managed to transform Cold War politics at key junctures. In the fifties mass uprisings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia evoked a terrible response from the Soviet authorities but also made them acknowledge that people must be fed if they were to accept Soviet rule. In the West in the 70s, following revelations from the Vietnam war and CIA activities, mass movements simultaneously arose in the US, France, Britain and other countries calling for de-nuclearization, checking the various security agencies and ending overseas wars. Perhaps the most impactful of all, and this is what McCoy identifies as responsible for ending the Cold War, are the world-wide protests in the 80s-90s across both the West and East causing the fall of dictatorial regimes in the Philippines, Poland, Hungary and ultimately the Soviet Union. Although these mass movements weren't permanent features of the Cold War, at key points their presence transformed the world.

Understanding the author's framework is key to understanding the book's narration. Although each chapter dives into the history and personalized details of each conflict,

underlying each story are these themes which sometimes might not be clearly highlighted by the author but nevertheless still influence the narrative. However, despite all of these “conditions,” covert operations are the primary focus of the book. While in each chapter you can find all four, they are all centered around the story of the covert operation and especially around the “man on the spot.” The others serve to explain the presence, the reason why Lansdale was sent from the Philippines to South Vietnam, why Vietnam was seen as vital to American national security, why the massacre of 1 million supposed communists in Indonesia was not met with horror but with glee.

The Man on the Spot

Each chapter features different men on the spot, most American or Western and only two from the Communist bloc, a Cuban and a Vietnamese. Why the author did not include more from the Soviet side is not stated but what can be inferred is that Soviet intelligence was heavily bureaucratized making these influential and independently acting men on the spot impossible. That same bureaucratization process in the CIA is a theme of the book, in the early Cold War, men on the spot like Kermit Roosevelt were able to pull off insane plots of espionage defying all odds; however by 1980s Afghanistan, McCoy ends Chapter 14 with this line “The golden age of espionage created by the Cold War had ended” referring to the inane flood of bureaucrats that managed the Mujahadeen and the Congressional investigations into men like Oliver North.⁶

Nevertheless, the stories of each individual operative, whether they be Kermit Roosevelt or Oliver North, are told masterfully by McCoy, but the important part of McCoy’s contribution is highlighting their outsized importance to the Cold War. In chapter 5, Edward Lansdale, a CIA operative is sent to the Philippines to help the local government destroy the Huk Revolt.

⁶ McCoy, *Cold War*, 387.

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While Lansdale's personal contribution is minimal, his great success was in delegating responsibility to Magsaysay. Magsaysay was the Philippines Defense Minister and under his able leadership, the Philippine army was able to destroy the Huks. He would, with Lansdale's encouragement, go on to become president and stabilize the Republic. Lansdale, meanwhile, despite doing very little other than supporting Magsaysay, took all the credit and glory for destroying a mass communist revolt with very little American loss.

In 1954, Vietnam was at the brink of falling under communist rule, a possibility that was unacceptable to the US president and his administration; Lansdale, hero of the Philippines, was sent to Saigon to sort out the mess. Not speaking French or Vietnamese, Lansdale immediately decided that the existing prime minister of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was the ideal candidate for fighting the communists in the North. Diem was a Catholic, living in monasteries in Belgium and the United States for years with very little knowledge of Vietnamese politics. Nevertheless, Lansdale, totally faithful in his own abilities, propped him up as the self-appointed leader of South Vietnam. For the next ten years till 1965, Diem and his drug gangs (not an exaggeration) would terrorize and mismanage Saigon till its government was on the brink of collapse. Lansdale's personal involvement and incompetency would lead to only one option, the U.S. directly intervening and putting boots on the ground. Perhaps Vietnam would have inevitably fallen to Ho Chi Minh's forces no matter, but Lansdale's intervention assured that reality in the long term. This is significant because McCoy is able to give the audience the direct lineage of events that ultimately led to the horrific debacle called the Vietnam War. This personal story of a CIA operative, Lansdale, is woven into the greater Cold War realities. A single person is able to wield, as McCoy puts it, "an outsized influence on the historical process."⁷

⁷ McCoy, *Cold War*, 30.

The 'Arrogant' Man on the Spot

Another prominent theme of the book is arrogance. Arrogance in one's own abilities and righteousness. As discussed above, Lansdale after his success in the Philippines became a prominent believer in himself leading to the catastrophe in Vietnam but this was not an isolated incident. For example, McCoy points out that the successful coup in Guatemala was simple luck, despite all the planning everything almost fell apart before at the last second an almost divine miracle intervened pulling it back together. The 1953 coup in Iran, planned by CIA Kermit Roosevelt and MI6, almost completely fell apart; the Shah even fled the country before local forces managed to salvage the situation. In both cases, McCoy points out that both luck and local actors played extremely significant roles in their success. Nevertheless, men like CIA Director Allen Dulles and even US presidents such as Eisenhower, Nixon and Kennedy attributed it to their own brilliance; leading to later calamities such as the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam.

The second part of the arrogance was each person's belief in their own righteousness. When British and American covert operatives arranged the toppling of Indonesian President Sukarno and partook in one of the biggest massacres of history, US Ambassador to Indonesia cabled back to Washington these words "I... have increasing respect for its determination and organization in carrying out this crucial assignment." The ambassador here was referring to the Indonesian Army which was at that moment killing indiscriminately anyone who might have affiliations with the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party). The death toll is still unclear but well could have been over a million people with another million put behind bars simply for their beliefs. Nobody in the U.S. administration seemed distraught by this. McCoy estimates over 20 million people were killed by Cold War conflicts, most if not all, containing heavy U.S. involvement. Some Americans still to this day declare Vietnam a victory for the simple reason that only 50 thousand Americans died to two million Vietnamese not realizing the implications of their blatant disregard for human life.

The New Cold War

McCoy's analysis of the new Cold War departs starkly from mainstream analysis of geopolitics. Most Western commentators try to simplify the world into two parts, good and bad, democracy and dictatorship, liberalism and backwardness. It may not need to be stated but from the Western perspective it is the combined West that encompasses all the "good" values and the East, Iran, Russia, China that encompass all the "bad" values. This worldview thus makes generalizations easy: America good, China and Russia bad. In the absence of a "communist menace," new threats had to be generated to justify the massively expanding war machine. At first the threat was terrorism, spawned from "Islamic extremism," however it soon died out to be replaced with the general threat of collective totalitarianism. The old enemies of the U.S.S.R. and Mao's China had dramatically transformed, the idea of communism consuming the world no longer seemed feasible, therefore these rivals came to be a new kind of "other."

McCoy mostly, however, avoids such generalizations or accusations. Instead, he relies upon the same framework that he used for the Cold War: superpower rivalry, geopolitics, covert operations and decolonization. He observes that many of the dynamics present through the Cold War were repeating themselves. The battle for dominance between superpowers is playing out once again in the Eurasian Heartland; as China and Russia, especially China through its Belt and Road Initiative, attempt to usurp American hegemony in the region. Similarly, rather than opting for direct war between nuclear powers, covert operations remain prevalent. McCoy notes how George Bush referred to L. Paul Brenner III as "the guy on the ground" similar to Britain's "man on the spot" terminology. Proxy wars remerged in Ukraine, West Africa and the Middle East (Syria). An even more striking similarity is the decolonization of West Africa. Just as Africans fought to free themselves during the Cold War, West African states in the Sahel including Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso have expelled French and American presence.

Now, there are some glaring issues with McCoy's analysis. There is absolutely no mention of the Neoconservative movement, which through the 1990s amassed power till totally seizing it in 2000 with the election of George W. Bush and has remained in control till the present day. Neoconservatives, led by towering figures such as Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Scooter Libby, John McCain and many more, embraced the idea that the United States had only a brief window, opened by the collapse of the U.S.S.R., to establish hegemony over every corner of the globe. A doctrine, now infamously, called "full spectrum dominance" mandates the United States to assert total control over the Earth: the seas, the sky, above the ground, beneath the ground and space.⁸ To establish full spectrum dominance, the Neoconservatives identified that they must eliminate all non-compliant states as soon as possible before they could grow strong enough to challenge the United States. Three of these enemy states are obvious, China, Iran and Russia, others less so, Serbia, Venezuela, Sudan. General Wesley Clark stated in an interview that a pentagon memo stated the need for the destruction of 7 countries, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran.⁹ This is now known as the Clean Break strategy and besides Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran, all these states have been eliminated within the past 30 years (the effort for the remaining two is ongoing).

The reason for the presence of Neoconservatism makes McCoy's entire analysis problematic is that where he identifies "mistakes and blunders," Neocons, the leaders of the U.S., identify those same "mistakes and blunders" as "part of the plan." For example, McCoy identifies NATO expansion as a colossal mistake which eventually leads to the regrettable 2022 Ukraine War. However, this Ukraine War is no accident. It had been a

⁸ United States Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (Department of Defense, November 8, 2010), 96.

⁹ Wesley Clark, interview by Amy Goodman, "Gen. Wesley Clark Weighs Presidential Bid: 'I Think About It Every Day,'" *Democracy Now!* March 2, 2007.

Neoconservative strategy to incite a war on Russia's borders and give it its "own Vietnam" or a second "Afghanistan."

Neoconservative thinkers have found Putin's government to be unacceptable from its inception and openly contemplate the breaking up of the Russian Federation into smaller ethno-states. The only blunder from the Neoconservative point of view is the underestimation of Russia's military capabilities and the durability of the Russian political system. McCoy for whatever reason is either not aware of these political realities in the United States (and in the broader West) or had decided to exclude them from his analysis.

Understanding Neoconservative thinking allows one to understand otherwise irrational US foreign policy decisions on the global stage. With the liquidation of Assad's Syria, Gaddafi's Libya and Saddam's Iraq, the only thing that stands in the way of Israeli American domination of the Middle East is Iran and its "Axis of Resistance." Many authors such as Flynt and Hillary Leverett in *Going to Tehran: Why the United States Must Come to Terms with the Islamic Republic* and Geoffrey Kemp's *Forever Enemies?* have made very compelling arguments for the normalization of relations between the United States and Iran. In terms of realist geopolitical thinking, that which excludes ideology and focuses solely on interests, these authors prove that normalization makes a lot of sense. McCoy is operating from a similar point of view, not realizing that Neoconservatives are deeply committed to the Zionist project and are arguably fanatical about their desire to establish American hegemony.

All this said, McCoy's framework for the new Cold War is simply missing too many critical elements. Not even thus far mentioned are the petrodollar system, the need to spread globalist neoliberalism, the Zionist and Greater Israel Project and so on. The classic "new Cold War" framing is simply inadequate to describe the existing framework. China and Russia are nation states, primarily and completely concerned with their own national interest whether for better or worse. United States foreign policy is first and foremost dictated by ideology; a belief in American

exceptionalism that justifies endless war and collapsing of dominoes till there's no one left to say "no." Therefore, rather than a Cold War dynamic of equals as McCoy frames it, we have two growing nation states (perhaps empires) and a declining power ruled by fanatical ideologues that intend on collapsing the other two powers.

Conclusion

Cold War on Five Continents ultimately accomplishes two things; it's written like a spy novel meaning once you start you won't stop and it teaches an important aspect of history that Americans tend to neglect: America is an empire. As McCoy points out, the ruling elites of the United States said it themselves, they aren't concerned with democracy and human rights, they are concerned with winning. It did not matter to Kissinger and Nixon that Chile under Salvadore Allende was not a Soviet satellite state, that Allende was not a communist, that human rights and democracy would be destroyed by their actions. What mattered was that Chile fell in line. Allende's nationalization of copper mines threatened corporate profits, something unacceptable enough to facilitate the murders of tens of thousands. It is this story that readers should take note of, whether it was the U.S.S.R. or the U.S., there were no "good guys." If you want to understand why the Congo, Indonesia, Chile, Angola, Guatemala, Nicaragua and many more are impoverished and full of violence, then read this book, as it starts at the beginning.

However, despite the narrative's brilliance, a few key aspects are missing throughout the book. Already discussed in detail above, the "new Cold War" for one. However, even more striking, especially as of 2026 with the ongoing Iran Conflict, is the almost complete absence of Israel. A state which played, and plays, such a significant part in American foreign policy decision making and is famously adept at covert operations deserves more attention than it receives. Whether it be Shin Bet or Mossad, surely, they had produced some notable contributions to the Cold

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War. It is unclear why Israel did not play a more central role in the book especially in the new Cold War chapter.

Another critical missing element is the near absence of Soviet or other Communist bloc men on the spot. The book features only two, Vietnamese Pham Xuan An and Cuban Jorge Risquet. An implied explanation is given that Communist agencies were too bureaucratized to allow for the sort of freedom of action that is necessary to make one a “man on the spot.” If this were the case, perhaps it warranted its own chapter because as it stands, the reader left guessing as to why there are not more men on the spot from the “other side.”

Otherwise, one cannot complain that *Cold War on Five Continents* does not manage to take a deeply historical and nuanced perspective on the Cold War. Rather than simply glorifying these men or pointing out their faults, Alfred McCoy manages to do both. Despite some missing elements, this book forms a compelling analysis of the evolution of the Cold War. It could be said that Alfred McCoy is history’s “man on the spot” right now.

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Book Review: *Raising the Redwood Curtain*

By Samuel Griffin

In *Raising the Redwood Curtain: Labor Landscapes and Community Violence in a Pacific Littoral* (University of Nebraska Press, 2025), historian Michael Karp, an assistant professor at California State University, San Bernardino, reshapes the popular image of California's redwoods as an area deeply integrated with global capitalism, where land exploitation for monetary benefits justifies the violent, racially motivated removal of people. Karp's thesis is that the history of Humboldt County is defined by its sequence of violence, from the genocide of California's Indigenous people, the anti-Asian campaigns, and the oppression of Eastern European immigrant workers. Karp uses the local history of Humboldt County to highlight the unethical labor patterns and manipulation of nature in the broader Pacific World. He structures his argument across nine chapters and divides it into three distinct events of racial and class conflict: the Indian Island massacre of 1860, the anti-Asian expulsions of the late nineteenth century, and the 1935 Great Lumber Strike. A large part of his argument is that these were not isolated events, but a single narrative of the solidification of settler colonialism. Branching over nearly a century, these events emphasize the calculated efforts to reorder labor patterns and social relations, ensuring the monetization of timber through global markets.¹

Karp begins the book by establishing the Humboldt County region before, and during, early colonial settlement. In Chapter 1, he contextualizes the involvement of the Wiyot, Yurok, and other Indigenous groups to challenge the idea of an untouched Western frontier. He argues that the Indigenous peoples' land was not used

¹ Michael Karp, *Raising the Redwood Curtain: Labor Landscapes and Community Violence in a Pacific Littoral*. Studies in Pacific Worlds. (University of Nebraska Press, 2025), 14.

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for the exploitation of resources, something that settler colonialism wanted to dismantle. Karp follows the chapter by examining how the introduction of livestock destroyed Indigenous food sources, which forced Native people to embrace a new, oppressive labor force.² In Chapter 3, the previous discussions culminate in the 1860 Indian Island Massacre. He argues the massacre was not just an atrocity, but a strategic removal of the Indigenous population to clear the “redwood workscape” for capitalistic motives.³

The book shifts to the migration of Asian laborers in the late nineteenth century, which Karp effectively argues is connected to the same economic forces that create the demand for redwood trees. Karp goes on to describe the dangerous, degrading conditions of lumber camps, which amplify his argument that the physical environment became a tool for violence against Asian Americans. Karp compellingly articulates that the eventual anti-asian campaigns, or racial cleansing, were necessary for the creation of a white, settler-colonial identity that argued white people were the only legitimate successors for the land.⁴ The final section of the book analyzes the 1935 Great Lumber Strike, where the violence previously directed at racial minorities was steered toward Eastern European immigrants. Karp further explores how company towns and progressive reforms were used to exert social control and fracture class unification. In the last chapter, Karp persuasively illustrates how “foreign radicalism” was weaponized to justify police violence against striking workers, which completed the idea of a compliant labor force.⁵

One of Karp’s greatest strengths throughout the book is his ability to connect the small landscape of Humboldt County to global economic effects. His ability to connect environmental history and labor history is especially impressive, specifically when he persuasively argues that the ecological transformation of

²Karp, “Indigenous Landscapes,” in *Raising the Redwood Curtain*, 20.

³Karp, “Surviving Genocide,” in *Raising the Redwood Curtain*, 83.

⁴Karp, “A White Settler Community,” in *Raising the Redwood Curtain*, 138.

⁵Karp, “Cleansing the New Outsiders,” in *Raising the Redwood Curtain*, 195.

the forest is intertwined with racial transformations in the workforce.⁶ The book's wide lens, from the 1860 massacre to the 1935 strike, exemplifies the length of settler colonial violence and the systematic ideas ingrained in the American West. Karp was heavily influenced by other scholarly works, such as historian Thomas Andrews' book *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War*. Karp adds to Andrews' existing workforce theory that a labor environment dictates how workers interact with one another. While Andrews focuses on the perilous conditions in the Colorado coal mining industry, Karp applies the same concept to the lumber industry in Humboldt County.⁷ Karp also acknowledged the profound imprint William Cronon's *Changes in the Land* had on his outlook in environmental history, articulating its impact on the conception of *Raising the Redwood Curtain*.⁸ Lastly, Karp's examination of labor movements in Humboldt County reaffirms Gregory Rosenthal's analysis of Native Hawaiian laborers and Kathleen Brosnan's study of labor in Napa.⁹

Raising the Redwood Curtain is a thorough, yet unsettling account of how the American West was built. Karp, who lived in the region as an undergraduate student at Cal Poly Humboldt, effectively demonstrates that the peace associated with the redwood forests is a facade that hides a history of intergenerational racial violence and labor suppression. This book is essential reading for scholars of the American West, environmental history, and settler colonialism, offering a reminder that the "settlement" of the frontier was a constant process of unsettling and removing those deemed obstacles of settler colonialism.

⁶Karp, "The Redwood Workscape," in *Raising the Redwood Curtain*, 102-120.

⁷Andrews, Thomas G. *Killing for Coal*. Harvard University Press, 2008.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c99bg8>.

⁸Michael Karp, "Labor Landscapes & Community Violence in a Pacific Littoral," with Dr. Michael Karp (CSUSB) <https://youtu.be/PrdZ-gwfa0s?si=CNglzRD0ihoCINp>.

⁹Karp, *Raising the Redwood Curtain*, 3.

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Television Review: *Death by Lightning*: How James Garfield Shocked the System

By Hayden Cross

Released on November 6th, 2025, Netflix's original series *Death by Lightning* brought its viewers into the world of late nineteenth-century political intrigue. Following the meteoric rise of James A. Garfield to the presidency, the viewer is introduced to the key players within the Republican presidential nomination process, the Garfield administration, and shown the parallel storyline of James Garfield's killer, Charles Guiteau. *Death by Lightning* did an amazing job in telling this story to a modern audience that was incredibly engaging, as well as providing a mostly accurate retelling of these events. With the exception of painting Chester A. Arthur in a light that was undeserving of the man himself, the only other historical inaccuracies were seemingly only present to provide better entertainment value. Overall, *Death by Lightning* maintains its historical accuracy within the confines of its four-episode run. Had the length of the series been longer, *Death by Lightning* could have improved on itself by elaborating more on Garfield's political stance and contributions to federal reform, fleshing out Chester A. Arthur's character in a way that was more accurate to the man himself, and expanded on Garfield's more progressive stance on racial equality.

During the Grant administration, the government was plagued by the "spoils system." This system saw that the winners of political office appointed their own supporters to cabinet positions.¹ As a result of the rampant corruption within government, two factions ended up splitting the republican party, the Stalwarts and the Half-Breeds. Netflix does a great job of drawing the battle lines between these two factions and introduces

¹ "Pendleton Act (1883)." National Archives. Last Reviewed February 8, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/pendleton-act>.

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Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York as the head of the corrupt Stalwarts fighting to maintain the spoils system, and James Garfield as the man representing the Half-Breeds. *Death by Lightning* does a fantastic job of depicting the uphill struggle that Garfield faced against a massive political machine but leaves the viewer a little high and dry when it comes to showing the political legacy that resulted from Garfield's work in trying to root out government corruption.

Although signed into law posthumously by Chester A. Arthur, James Garfield's contributions eventually led to the passage of the Pendleton Act of 1883.² This law is only alluded to during the ending sequence in *Death by Lightning*, in stating: "Chester Arthur passed landmark civil service reforms that shape our government to this day."³ The Pendleton Act of 1883 was an incredibly significant act, as it ensured that moving forward, government employees would be selected based on merit rather than personal or party loyalties. Expanding on the merit-based requirements of appointment, the law also banned salary kickbacks and required that new employees must start their career at entry-level positions before advancing.⁴ James Garfield laid down the foundation for the Pendleton Act during his inaugural address on March 4, 1881, by stating: "... to require the honest and faithful service of all executive officers, remembering that the offices were created, not for the benefit of incumbents or their supporters, but for the service of the Government."⁵ Even though Garfield's tenure

² "Pendleton Act (1883)," National Archives, Last Reviewed February 8, 2022.

³ *Death by Lightning*, episode 4, "Destiny of the Republic," written by Mike Makowsky, directed by Matt Ross, featuring Michael Shannon, Matthew Macfadyen, and Nick Offerman, aired November 6, 2025, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81586747>.

⁴ Justus Doenecke, "Chester A. Arthur: Domestic Affairs," The Miller Center, University of Virginia, accessed April 19, 2026, <https://millercenter.org/president/arthur/domestic-affairs>.

⁵ "March 4, 1881: Inaugural Address," The Miller Center, University of Virginia, accessed April 19, 2026. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-4-1881-inaugural-address>.

as president was cut short, Chester A. Arthur was able to stabilize the ship and stay on the course that Garfield laid out. Despite *Death by Lightning*'s depiction of Chester A. Arthur as an unsophisticated ruffian, it was the "gentleman boss" that was able to achieve some of Garfield's goals.⁶

In what appears to be somewhat of a head-scratcher, *Death by Lightning* created a depiction of Arthur that is the least accurate relative to the other characters of the show. One scene in episode one of the series assigns a line to Arthur stating: "Well, when we're in need of extra chuckles, brass knuckles."⁷ Given his moniker as the "Gentleman Boss," and stated to be a "man of elegant taste," while holding a reputation for "... throwing elegant parties, for having an exquisite taste for fine food, and for socializing with the most suave and cultivated associates,"⁸ it appears out of character to depict Arthur as a drunken, unsophisticated hooligan. More than likely, this choice was made in order to ramp up the tensions between Arthur and the Garfield administration. However, this approach was not necessary as in later episodes Arthur's conflict of interest between the Stalwart faction and his newly assigned administration was made quite evident to the viewer. This conflict of interest is described in Thomas C. Sutton's chapter on Chester A. Arthur, stating: "... Arthur had to contend with conflict between President Garfield and Arthur's political patron, Senator Conkling. The senator's support for Garfield faded quickly when the president refused to appoint office seekers suggested by Conkling."⁹ Despite the ruffian portrayal, *Death by Lightning*'s final two episodes depict this conflict very well. Chester A. Arthur was a complex man, but

⁶ Doenecke, "Chester A. Arthur."

⁷ *Death by Lightning*, episode 1, "The Man from Ohio," written by Mike Makowsky, directed by Matt Ross, featuring Michael Shannon, Matthew Macfadyen, and Nick Offerman, aired November 6, 2025, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81586744>.

⁸ Doenecke, "Chester A. Arthur."

⁹ Thomas C. Sutton, "Chester A. Arthur," In *the Presidents and the Constitution: A Living History*, ed. Ken Gormley (NYU Press, 2016), 278.

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regardless of the faction split between himself and Garfield, both men ran on a platform that was relatively progressive for its time in terms of civil rights.

Death by Lightning is primarily focused on the stories of Garfield's personal life leading up to its tragic end, as well as his opposition to machine politics. However, the show does take some time to depict Garfield's progressive stance on civil and voting rights. *Death by Lightning* shows a scene in episode two where black veterans of the Civil War meet Garfield on his porch to discuss his stance on equality and voting rights. In response to the veterans' inquiries, Grant states: "I'd rather be with you and lose than against you and win."¹⁰ Garfield's progressive stance is also shown again during episode four, in showing his appointment of Blanche K. Bruce as register of the Treasury.¹¹ In Samuel Shapiro's article on Bruce titled "A Black Senator from Mississippi: Blanche K. Bruce (1841-1898)," Shapiro describes Bruce's new appointment: "... Bruce was responsible for keeping a record of government receipts and expenditures, payment of principal and interest on bonds, issuance of merchant marine registry, and the canceling of used currency; his signature appeared on the greenbacks and national bank notes."¹² To that end, *Death by Lightning* gives Blanche's character a line stating that "Now every dollar bill printed in America will have a Black man's signature on it."¹³ But for the couple of scenes showing Garfield's

¹⁰ *Death by Lightning*, episode 2, "Party Faithful," written by Mike Makowsky, directed by Matt Ross, featuring Michael Shannon, Matthew Macfadyen, and Nick Offerman, aired November 6, 2025, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81586745>.

¹¹ *Death by Lightning*, episode 4, "Destiny of the Republic," written by Mike Makowsky, directed by Matt Ross, featuring Michael Shannon, Matthew Macfadyen, and Nick Offerman, aired November 6, 2025, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81586747>.

¹² Samuel Shapiro, "A Black Senator from Mississippi: Blanche K. Bruce (1841-1898)," *The Review of Politics* 44, no. 1 (1982): 95.

¹³ *Death by Lightning*, episode 4, "Destiny of the Republic," written by Mike Makowsky, directed by Matt Ross, featuring Michael Shannon, Matthew

progressive leanings, it is sad to see that his speech at the Republican National Convention was abridged and his inaugural address was omitted from the show entirely.

Although Garfield's convention speech was shortened, the spirit of his speech was very much present. However, this could have been a great opportunity to have Michael Shannon restate Garfield's speeches word for word, as they show Garfield's views as they were. In Garfield's convention speech in 1880, he made his opinions on the "Peculiar Institution" and the Civil War explicitly known in stating: "The Republican party offers to our brethren of the South the olive branch of Peace, and invites them to renewed brotherhood, on this supreme condition: That it shall be admitted, forever, that in the War for the Union we were right and they were wrong."¹⁴ Earlier within the same speech, Garfield also stated:

Then, after the storms of battle, were heard the calm words of peace spoken by the conquering nation, saying to the foe that lay prostrate at its feet: 'This is our only revenge—that you join us in lifting into the serene firmament of the Constitution, to shine like stars for ever and ever, the immortal principles of truth and justice: that all men, white or black, shall be free, and shall stand equal before the law.'¹⁵

Macfadyen, and Nick Offerman, aired November 6, 2025,
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/81586747>.

¹⁴ "Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, held at Chicago, Illinois, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday, June 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th, 1880. Resulting in the following nominations: for President, James A. Garfield, of Ohio. For Vice-President, Chester A. Arthur, of New York," Internet Archive, May 7, 2009.
<https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofrep00inrepu/page/184/mode/2up>.

¹⁵ "Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, held at Chicago, Illinois, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday, June 2d, 3d, 4th, 5th, 7th and 8th, 1880. Resulting in the following nominations: for President, James A. Garfield, of Ohio. For Vice-President, Chester A. Arthur, of New York," Internet Archive, May 7, 2009.
<https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofrep00inrepu/page/184/mode/2up>.

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Following up on this theme of equality and the horrors of slavery, Garfield's missing inaugural address frames his stance on racial equality in no uncertain terms:

The elevation of the negro race from slavery to the full rights of citizenship is the most important political change we have known since the adoption of the Constitution of 1787. NO thoughtful man can fail to appreciate its beneficent effect upon our institutions and people. It has freed us from the perpetual danger of war and dissolution. It has added immensely to the moral and industrial forces of our people. It has liberated the master as well as the slave from a relation which wronged and enfeebled both. It has surrendered to their own guardianship the manhood of more than 5,000,000 people, and has opened to each one of them a career of freedom and usefulness. It has given new inspiration to the power of self-help in both races by making labor more honorable to the one and more necessary to the other. The influence of this force will grow greater and bear richer fruit with the coming years.¹⁶

It is understandable that a show created for modern audiences, who may not have an interest in exact historical accuracy, would make the choice to abridge political speeches. But it certainly could have been a nice touch to let Garfield speak for himself 145 years later. Garfield made it known that the South was in the wrong and appeared to be quite passionate about preserving the rights of the newly freed slaves. *Death by Lightning* provides this as more of an undertone to the story that they were working to tell; it was a missed opportunity to take some time to let the audience know just how progressive a man he was.

¹⁶ "March 4, 1881: Inaugural Address," The Miller Center, University of Virginia, accessed April 19, 2026. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-4-1881-inaugural-address>.

Death by Lightning is absolutely a must-watch show. Even though historical criticisms do exist, these drawbacks are more than likely only present due to the limited number of episodes. Although the aforementioned criticisms exist, they should really be viewed as more of a “wish list” rather than truly trying to detract from the quality of the show. Because of the reduced time, focus on the parallel stories of Charles Guiteau and James Garfield was clearly prioritized, and these stories are written, filmed, and acted incredibly well. In spite of the shortened run length, *Death by Lightning* still manages to be an incredibly engaging story that pulls its audience into the political world of the late 19th century, which will only result in its satisfied viewers craving more.

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Exhibit Review: “Fire Kinship: Southern California Native Ecology and Art:” Disrupting Traditional Hierarchies

By Lina Tejeda

Fire Kinship: Southern California Ecology and Art at the UCLA Fowler Museum aims to decolonize the museum space not just through the items on display, but through the curatorial process, by shifting power to the voices of the communities the exhibit reflects, and the relationships that it sustains. It challenges misrepresentation and the historical silencing in the museum space by collaborating with Native communities to be the narrators of their own history. The exhibit represents Tongva, Cahuilla, Luiseño, and Kumeyaay communities and challenges long-standing misconceptions rooted in colonial histories. *Fire Kinship* counters the attitudes of fear and illegality around fire, arguing for a return to Native practices. But this exhibit does more than showcase cultural practices; it also challenges how museums have traditionally told stories.



Figure 1: “Fire” in Payómkawichum, Cahuilla, Kumeyaay, and Tongva Languages. Photo credit: Lina Tejeda

I co-curated this exhibit with my faculty advisor, Dr. Daisy Ocampo Diaz. It was part of Getty’s *PST Art: Art and Science*

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Collide, and one of 67 projects across Southern California. *PST*, an acronym for Pacific Standard Time, “is the nation’s largest art collaboration made possible by the Getty” and happens only once every five years.¹ The theme *Art and Science Collide* aims to “create civic dialogue around urgent problems of our time by examining past and present connections between art and science.”²

Museums developed during the periods of settler colonialism, a time when Native Americans did not have agency over the cultural items displayed in museums. In recent times, museums have been shifting away from exhibits that are based in outdated stereotypes of Native Americans, yet not completely. There is still a long history of imbalance between true Native history and how museums depict them. Native people are often depicted as primitive or remnants of the past, perpetuating the idea that Native people no longer exist. The curatorial process challenged this by working directly with the communities to tell their own stories. Power was shifted to the communities, and away from the museum. Interpretation was left to the community, allowing them to speak directly to the audience, leaving little room for the audience to interpret the exhibit through a colonial lens.

Curation was approached through an ethical framework. Fair compensation was ensured to all collaborators who shared knowledge, lent materials and for commissioned works. Participation was consensual and participants had final say on their own materials or resources. Space was provided for Native perspectives to be shared, and cultural protocols were honored along with acknowledging not everything was to be shared with the public. This in particular is very important in curating an exhibit due to past ideals that Native Americans are monolithic. All aspects of the exhibit were consensual, therefore ethical.

¹ “PST Art.” Getty, March 5, 2026. <https://www.getty.edu/projects/pacific-standard-time/>.

² “PST Art: Art & Science Collide.” Getty, March 9, 2026. <https://www.getty.edu/projects/pacific-standard-time-2024/>.

In *Fire Kinship*, the tribal communities represented had total control over the items and information that were on display. “Seeing my dogbane cordage being highlighted in this exhibit was really empowering because you don’t often see items in museums that were made by real Natives. Seeing something that was made contemporarily is inspiring and motivational,” said Alexis Ramirez, whose cordage made from dogbane was displayed in *Fire Kinship*.³

Community collaboration was at the center of this exhibition. “Collaboration” was not just a box to check off on; it relied on care and responsibility. A network would be established, and connections would be made with the future collaborators who contributed to this exhibit that would eventually lead to direct connections to their communities as well. There were so many ideas, but one thing was clear; each community, while different, shared the same connections to fire. Through initial research, it was found that in Northern and Central California, tribal communities reclaiming fire on the land as a stewardship practice had evolved with governmental agencies, while in Southern California, tribal communities were still facing a lot of barriers with those same agencies. This question about the differences in Southern California Indigenous land stewardship and Northern and Central California Indigenous land stewardship helped shape the curatorial choice to focus only on Southern California tribal communities.

³ Alexis Ramirez, in-person interview by author, April 25, 2026.

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Figure 2: Image depicts an “Omar” set up with historic images surrounding it. Omar is the Kumeyaay word for Peon, a traditional game played around a fire. Photo credit: Lina Tejeda.

Some tribal communities specifically asked for ongoing relationships with the museum that transcended the length of *Fire Kinship*. It is crucial for museums to demonstrate commitment to partnership if they want to avoid being extractive. Indigenous knowledge continues to change over time, so prioritizing this commitment will allow museum interpretation of that knowledge to be dynamic instead of static.

Through collaboration with Native communities, contemporary Native experiences were highlighted. This challenges the portrayal of Native people as primitive and breaks the myth of the “vanishing Indian,” which many scholars describe as a period resulting after Manifest Destiny where Native people were destined to go extinct or “vanish.” Native people are active in land management and cultural reclamation. *Fire Kinship* demonstrates that traditional ecological knowledge should be

referenced when dealing with climate change, including the wildfires seen so often in California.

Contemporary artworks in *Fire Kinship* demonstrate *survivance*, which is an active and continuous sense of presence and resistance, rather than survival, against colonial trauma. “Survivance emphasises how Indigenous peoples have created counter-poses/positions to those that are marked out for them by the settler-state through stereotypes, popular culture and national mythology.”⁴ Fundamentally, each artist and their artwork is an act of resistance to the old stereotypes of Native people. They demonstrate that Indigenous people are active agents in their own storytelling and in the case of *Fire Kinship*, their tribal histories.

The use of film and modern materials can be powerful tools to reframe the mindset that Native people are of the past. This brings visitors to the present instead of creating distance that leads to the past. The commissioned artists furthered visitor understanding of Native knowledge systems by presenting their interpretations of traditional ecological knowledge, specifically the use of fire. Contemporary artworks are able to demonstrate futurisms that old museum systems could not and did not. They create space for interpretation and thought, which contemporary exhibitions should strive for in order to re-establish cultural sovereignty by avoiding placing Native people in the past tense.

The exhibit starts with grounding the audience in the context of *good fire*. “*Good fire*” refers to the fire that is used generatively and responsibly by Indigenous communities to tend their lands. This is done at the very beginning of the exhibition with an art installation from Lazaro Arvizu Jr., titled, “Sand Acknowledgement.” It represents the Tongva understanding of fire, which starts in the celestial realm. The piece depicts the way the “Taamet” (Tongva word for “sun”), lights up the Earth during the day and brings darkness when it sets. This piece was

⁴ Published by The Decolonial Dictionary, “Survivance,” *The Decolonial Dictionary*, April 15, 2021, <https://decolonialdictionary.wordpress.com/2021/04/15/survivance/>.

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intentionally placed at the very beginning of the exhibition because UCLA sits on the traditional homelands of the Tongva community.



Figure 3 “Sand Acknowledgment,” by Lazaro Arvizu Jr. Photo credit: Lina Tejeda

The first room was titled, “Our Fire Relative,” and demonstrated the many ways that Indigenous people have always had a relationship, a kinship, to fire. Fire has been used as a tool for tending the land and plant relatives so that they become sturdier. Each item in this room required cultural burning or tending to exist and thrive. There was a large selection of plant materials, such as yucca, deer grass, dogbane, palm fronds, etc., to show the types of materials used in Southern California style basket weaving. There was a selection of ollas and baskets, important for cooking and food storage, used by many Southern California tribes. There was also a rabbit cape, a dogbane cordage necklace adorned with sea shells, a bark skirt, and a basket cap all made by contemporary cultural knowledge bearers. There was maritime cultural representation in this section. Featured here was a replica cottonwood canoe and a Kumeyaay style tule canoe. Cultural burning is used to make cottonwood lumber buoyant and

to rid the tule of pests and fungi. There were many historic photographs in the section that were selected from the San Diego History Center that feature women who are using the materials displayed in this section. Use of these photographs shows the continuity of activity that Indigenous people did in the past and are continuing to do today.

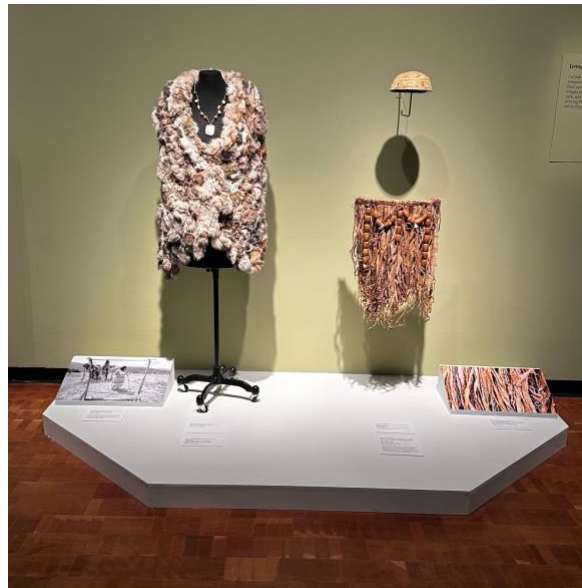


Figure 4: Rabbit cap, bark skirt, basket cap. Photo credit: Lina Tejeda

There was also video footage of cultural burning that happened at Cahuilla Reservation in Anza, California. This cultural burn was done by local tribal communities and La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians Fire Department. This burn included community members who were interested in learning about cultural burning from a firefighting standpoint and others who were basket weavers. All who had had a personal investment in the cultural burn. “Lorene teaches the process of gathering juncus and mentions that the juncus patch was overgrown and needed fire to stimulate healthy growth. This cultural burn finally took place in 2024...it has been 150-200 years since its last fire... as new shoots form,

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Cahuilla weavers will continue to use it as their basket-making material,” said La Jolla Fire Chief Wesley Ruise Jr.⁵



Figure 5: “The Sun is on the Ground,” by Leah Mata-Fragua. Photo credit: Lina Tejada

After exiting the first room, there was a center space that featured three commissioned art works. The first work was titled, “The Sun is on the Ground,” by Leah Mata-Fragua. This ephemeral piece of art featured handmade poppies suspended from the “sky.” The shadows on the wall and the added colors chosen to light the space are intentional experiences in the installation. This room was very popular, and many visitors were left speechless by

⁵ Fowler Museum at UCLA, “Fire Kinship,” Matterport virtual tour, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=JgpQht9KCcP>

the beauty. It was an artwork that really left people to reflect and contributed to continuing grounding in the context of *good fire*. In the next room, there was an art piece called “Dormidera,” (Spanish word for poppy, meaning the “sleepy flower”), which consists of three 4 x 4 canvas panels that were painted by Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva). Each canvas had a Tongva woman who played a large role in the community. The third piece in the space was a poem by Emily Clarke called “Womanfire.” Emily talked about how Native women experience violence at high rates. Similar to a poppy, which must experience a disturbance in the form of a fire to regrow into something beautiful. This poem was emotional for many visitors. During a visit someone is moved to tears as this part of the exhibit resonates with them. Native women are not alone in having experienced abuse; thus it was relatable to many, moving each person who took the time to read it. These three commissioned artworks shared a story about survivance. They were so powerful as separate pieces, but that was magnified when looked at as a group. Dr. Daisy Ocampo Diaz and I were so struck by the women artists all taking inspiration from poppies. All three individually proposed their artwork that had to do with poppies without any influence from the curators or each other.

The second room, titled “Fire Scars,” was where archival research got to be highlighted. The name for this room comes from *Dendrochronology*, the study of tree rings. The “Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research” at the University of Arizona studies fire scars on tree rings samples. In the same way researchers are able to use three rings to count the age of a tree, they are able to find the date when a fire happened in that area based on the scars indicated in the tree rings. This section included items that demonstrate a beginning to fire suppression in what is now called California. There were Spanish diaries, missionary era documents, the ranching period documents, World War II era posters, Smoky the Bear, and newspaper articles from recent devastating fires. These items explained to visitors how and why fire suppression began during the Spanish Missionary period, through Mexican rule, and into California statehood.

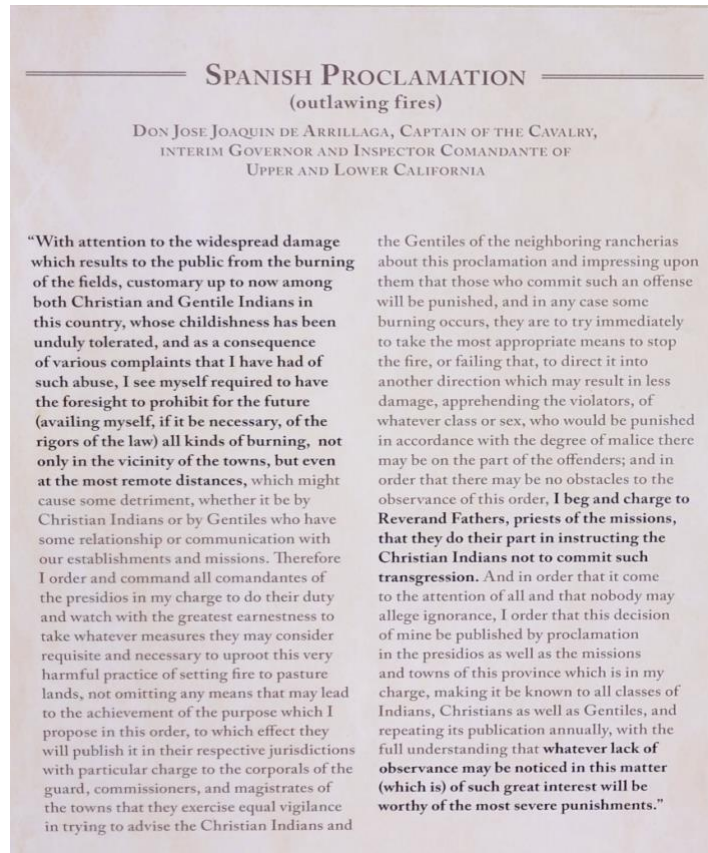


Figure 6: Arrillaga's Proclamation, May 31, 1773 from *Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians* by Thomas C. Blackburn and Kath Anderson. Photo credit: Lina Tejeda

The final major art installation was titled "The Heart is Fire," by Gerald Clark Jr. In this piece, Clarke depicted his understanding and interpretation of fire as a Cahuilla man. This piece included a large cast of a human heart that was lit up inside and flickered to mimic a beating heart. "I sought to create a work that uses fire as a symbol of our passion, strength, and

perseverance,” said Clarke.⁶ Like the other commissioned artists in *Fire Kinship*, Clarke’s piece demonstrated Indigenous survivance.



Figure 7: “The Heart is Fire,” by Gerald Clarke Jr. (Cahuilla), photo credit: Lina Tejeda

The final room titled, “Begging to Burn,” illustrated the efforts being made by contemporary tribal fire departments, cultural fire practitioners, basket weavers and language experts, to reclaim, or re-awaken, their practices that were prohibited as settlers arrived in what is now called Southern California. The overall tone of this room was that while there was a very long history of fire suppression, there is hope for the future of Indigenous fire practices in relation to land stewardship. There

⁶ Fowler Museum at UCLA, “Fire Kinship. Gerald Clarke Jr. Artist’s Statement,” Matterport virtual tour, accessed April 25, 2026, <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=JgpQht9KCcP>

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were two short films in this section. One titled, “The Women They Are Carrying Fire- Pa’asik’tavaansas Kuniktáamvunatih” and the second titled, “MAATHAAW: The Fire Within.” The first film presented the work being done on Karuk land in Northern California with an all-women’s cultural burn fire training program. The second included Cahuilla, Luiseño, and Kumeyaay voices to share experiences with what it means to reclaim Indigenous fire practices. Each film helped visitors understand what it means to allow Native people to be the stewards of their own lands.

Every culturally relevant item in the exhibit became part of the exhibit because the community recommended it. It was a main component of the curatorial process to listen to the communities represented and honor their histories. In the duration of the exhibit, many visitors expressed how moved they were by *Fire Kinship*. Members of the communities represented said that they were very excited that they could recognize themselves in the exhibit. The goal was to create an exhibit that was not extractive of knowledge, one where tribal communities could speak directly to the audience, one that would not and could not be interpreted through a colonial framework. By centering and amplifying Native stories, this exhibit achieved the goals it sought; to shift the power away from the museum, and give it to the communities represented.



Figure 8: Image: Lina and her family at the Fire Kinship opening ceremony. Photo credit: [Lina Tejada](#)

Author Bio

Lina Tejeda is half Pomo from her tribal homelands in Northern California and half Mexican from Nayarit. In August 2024, she graduated with her Master of Arts degree in History at California State University San Bernardino. Her area of focus is California Indian studies and museum studies/ public history. Lina is passionate about working in institutions to advocate for the return of cultural sacred items to tribal nations from which they belong and telling the true histories of the California Indian people. In her spare time, Lina is a traditional Pomo dancer who has taken to learning about her cultural traditions including basket weaving, gathering materials, regalia making, singing, and learning about the traditional ecological knowledge in California. While her passion lies in her own cultural heritage, she finds enjoyment in all areas of history including topics such British history, French history, and social histories of the United States.



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