

# **HISTORY IN THE MAKING**

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## **Alpha Delta Nu Chapter, Phi Alpha Theta National History Honor Society**

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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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*History in the Making*



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## Introduction

The History Department of California State University, San Bernardino welcomes you to the fifth edition of our annual journal, *History in the Making*. The journal is proudly managed and edited by California State University, San Bernardino students, and is exclusively written by current and recent undergraduate and graduate students. Our mission is to produce a journal containing interesting and informative articles that will keep readers thinking long after they have turned its pages. This year's journal features four full-length articles, two articles on student's travels to far-away lands, and three reviews.

In our first article, "Coping with an Impossible Reality: The Jewish *Sonderkommando* of Auschwitz-Birkenau," Jennifer Weed brings to light the story of Jewish men forced to work in the crematoriums of the infamous Nazi death camp. Jennifer uses published testimonials and interviews to shed light on the coping strategies used by these men in an article that challenges our notions about the lengths to which people will go in order to survive.

Our second article moves us from the death camps of Poland to the cocoa fields of Africa. In "There Is No Bournville in Africa: Chocolate Capitalist, African Cocoa Workers, and International Labor Relationships from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present," Ryan Minor looks at the connection between the exploitation of West African cocoa laborers and neocolonialist chocolate manufacturers of Europe. Ryan combines multiple economic and sociological theories with secondary sources on the African chocolate industry in an article that seeks to discover just how easy it is to exploit a person that is geographically distant from the society exploiting them.

Our third article shifts focus from neocolonialism in Africa to the mean streets of East Los Angeles. In "To Protect and To Serve: Effects of the Relationship Between the Brown Berets and Law Enforcement," Paul Flores focuses on the social movement that became a militant movement in its war of words with local and

federal law enforcement during the tumultuous time of the Vietnam Conflict. Paul uses rich detail to explore how legal and physical harassment and police infiltration led to the collapse of the once-powerful movement.

Our final full-length article takes us from the streets of Los Angeles to the televisions and movie theaters of the atomic-age. In “Marvin the Martian, Godzilla, and Other Purveyors of Atomic Destruction,” Bethany Underhill explores the influence atomic testing had on children’s media and popular culture in America. Bethany employs extensive research, citing a wide variety of films, to show the ways the tests were presented to the public and how those presentations changed the public’s attitude about the atomic bomb.

History is not just about the exploration of events in time, but also the temporal region of space. This idea is brought to light in our section “Travels Through History,” where we feature a pair of short articles written by those who have personally visited the places about which they have written. First, Melissa Fitzgerald takes us on a trip to China, and shows us the ways funeral rites and the honoring of ancestors links traditional Chinese culture to that of modern-day China. Next, Jennifer Weed guides us through the streets of modern-day Poland and shows us how the country has been shaped, virtually and literally, by its Holocaust history.

Rounding out this year’s journal are two book reviews and an exhibit review. First, Chris Moreland reviews Tiffany Fawn Jones’ book, *Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa*. Next, Briana James reviews Pang-Mei Natasha Chang’s book, *Bound Feet and Western Dress: A Memoir*. Finally, Brandi Rauterkus reviews the Bowers Museum’s exhibit, *Warriors: Tombs and Temples*.

We hope that you find these articles as interesting and informative as we do, and sincerely thank you for reading the 2012 edition of *History in the Making*.

Thomas Hagen,  
Chief Editor

## **Acknowledgements**

Bringing a peer-reviewed journal from concept to print is a process that requires the collaboration of many dedicated individuals who devote countless hours to the project. Three such individuals are faculty advisors, Dr. Tiffany Jones, Dr. Cherstin Lyon, and Dr. Jeremy Murray. Their unyielding patience and thorough guidance throughout this process provided a beacon of light to editors and authors, alike, illuminating our path and keeping us focused on our ultimate goal to produce a high-quality, educational journal. Further recognition goes to our editorial staff, whose hard work, dedication, and professionalism never wavered, even in the face of such adversities as a social life, occupations, and exams. Special recognition goes to *all* of the authors who answered our call for papers and took a chance by submitting their articles for critical peer review, and to Melissa Fitzgerald, whose cover photograph allowed us to again maintain the spirit of a student-only journal from cover to cover. Finally, we would like to recognize the entire faculty, staff, and student body of the California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) Department of History, CSUSB's Instructional Related Programs, and Phi Alpha Theta for their continued support of *History in the Making*.

Thank you all.



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# Articles

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## **Coping with an Impossible Reality: The Jewish Sonderkommando of Auschwitz-Birkenau**

By Jennifer Weed

*Abstract: Despite the vast amount of western scholarly work on the Holocaust, there are issues that remain under-analyzed which would help nuance our understanding of this historical event. One of these issues is the experiences of groups who challenge our conceptual frameworks and present opportunities for developing different analytical methods. The testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando, or forced crematorium workers, of Auschwitz-Birkenau present such an opportunity by defying the categories used to describe victims and perpetrators, and by forcing us to reconsider how humans survive when conditions are extreme and violent. This paper argues that the testimonies of the Sonderkommando demonstrate that the conditions of their incarceration necessitated the construction of unique, situational system of personal morality and humanity and that their post-Holocaust lives are marred by extreme difficulty in attempts to construct usable narratives about their experiences. Using published testimony and interviews as a source base, the paper endeavors to open up a space in which the coping strategies of the Sonderkommando can be analyzed. To do so, it proposes two particular frames of analysis: the equivocal psyche (a mechanism that, in the absence of cultural, moral, and emotional guidance, constructs an ethical continuum, allowing for a range of mental responses to trauma), and usable narratives (the construction of a personal story of Holocaust trauma that can adequately convey the gravity of the situation and explain one's actions in that period in a way that does not offend the beliefs of the survivor and their post-Holocaust context).*

## **Preface**

Auschwitz, the largest and most prolific of the Nazi death camps, maintains a notorious reputation to this day for good reason: the unspeakable death and privation that occurred between 1939 and 1945 was on a level and scale that remains unparalleled in human history. The estimates of the number murdered in the camp and its surrounding auxiliaries vary widely (from one to four million), with the official count resting around 1.3 million. Regardless of this variance, it is clear that millions of people perished in what some have called the *anus mundi*<sup>1</sup>, a small strip of Poland. The majority of Jewish prisoners were murdered soon after their arrival to Auschwitz-Birkenau, especially at the height of the industrialized mass murder operations in Auschwitz II from 1943-1944.<sup>2</sup> Those who were not killed immediately were tattooed with an identification number, shaved bald, and assigned to brutal work details in an effort to effectively dehumanize them and exploit their labor.

While much is known in Western discourse about the general ideology and conditions of Auschwitz, there are subsections of the prisoner population that remain obscured outside of scholarly circles, despite their integral positions both within Auschwitz and after liberation as witnesses (if they survived to

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<sup>1</sup> This term, though used by scholars, actually originates with SS Doctor Johann Paul Kremer, who described Auschwitz as such in his personal diary. See Walter Laquer's "Forward" in: Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle: 1939-1945* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1990), xvi.

<sup>2</sup> The main complex of concentration camps known collectively as Auschwitz-Birkenau consisted of Auschwitz I (*Stammlager*, or main camp), Birkenau (Auschwitz II), and Monowitz-Buna (Auschwitz III). Construction on Auschwitz I began in 1940; it was originally intended to imprison and terrorize local Poles. The presence of a major railway juncture in the nearby town of Oświęcim and overcrowding in the *Stammlager* motivated the construction of Birkenau in 1941. Birkenau came to function as an extermination camp by 1942, with expansion of the infrastructure of gas chambers and crematoria occurring into 1943, and was thus the locus of the vast majority of the industrialized mass murder that took place in the complex, especially of Jewish prisoners. Auschwitz III, or Monowitz-Buna, was a slave labor camp utilized by the chemical manufacturing firm I.G. Farben. See Israel Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Indiana University Press, 1994); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1996).

testify). The prime examples of people in such a position are the men of the *Sonderkommando*, or "special squad," which were teams of largely Jewish men who worked in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz I and Birkenau. The tasks they were forced to perform exemplify the extreme outer boundaries of mental suffering, and the damage the few survivors carried out of Auschwitz-Birkenau remains difficult to conceive. Since they were the bearers of incredible Nazi secrets, the SS made a point to exterminate the members regularly, which accounts for the mere handful of testimonies that exist today.

### ***Introduction***

Once imprisoned, the Jewish men of the *Sonderkommando* were expressly prohibited from practicing their religious traditions and found that the mores and social norms they had previously followed were irrelevant. The conditions of their imprisonment as Jews and the struggle to survive necessitated the ability to discard moralistic notions that could prove dangerous. Thus, these men were bereft of the moral compasses that would have guided their actions in the outside world. Thus, the Nazi's crimes against humanity were more personal than transgressions against the human race as a whole: their actions also created crises of humanity and morality for the men who labored forcefully in the special squads. These crises remain extant in their memories. As such, the conditions of the *Sonderkommando*'s incarceration necessitated the construction of unique, situational systems of personal morality and humanity and the testimonies of survivors demonstrate that their post-Holocaust lives are marred by extreme difficulty in attempts to construct usable narratives about their experiences.

### ***Arbeit Macht Frei*<sup>3</sup>**

In the world of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where work supervisors were encouraged to use deadly force without provocation and the dead were hardly distinguishable from the living, previously held sensibilities were of little use. However, in the unprecedented

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<sup>3</sup> "Work makes one free."

world of the *Sonderkommando*, where human beings were referred to as *Stücke* (pieces) and bodies were burned using their own melted fat as accelerant, reliance on the social mores and emotional responses of their lives before Auschwitz could prove fatal. This concept is best understood in the context of the work that these men were forced to perform on a daily basis.

Upon arrival to the railway ramp at Auschwitz, new prisoners were selected for one of two fates: forced labor and starvation or immediate death in the gas chambers. Those chosen for execution were herded into a large room where they disrobed (the *Auskleideraum*, or Undressing Hall) in anticipation of a disinfection shower. In fact, the room with the showerheads was merely a ruse, as it actually functioned as a hermetically sealed gas chamber. While in the *Auskleideraum*, men of the *Sonderkommando* were tasked with patrolling the anxious, hungry crowd and promising them that if they hurried up and showered, they would be given food and drink before being assigned to work teams. These promises were blatant lies, but to deviate from this script meant a cruel, immediate death for any special squad member who exposed the truth.<sup>4</sup>

After the naked, helpless people were herded into the gas chamber, it was sealed and deadly Zyklon-B crystals were poured into ventilated shafts that allowed the poisonous vapors to penetrate the room.<sup>5</sup> Amidst the distinct screaming and coughing of the dying, the men of the special squad then gathered up the belongings left behind in the *Auskleideraum* and sent them away for sorting. Once all in the gas chamber were confirmed dead by the SS, fans dispersed the remaining gas and the door was opened to reveal a scene of unimaginable suffering. Bodies were piled in heaps, discolored, covered in blood and excrement, and tangled in a sickening mass of flesh as evidence of a traumatic collective death throe. Amongst the dead were people of advanced age, the

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<sup>4</sup> *Sonderkommando* survivor Filip Müller notes that a member who did just this was pushed into a crematorium oven alive as punishment. See *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 80.

<sup>5</sup> The actual act of pouring the Zyklon-B into the gas chamber was always reserved for SS men. This is one step in the process from which the *Sonderkommando* were explicitly excluded. See Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz*, 15; Jeremy Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: A New Look at the Eichmann Trial* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 201.

physically disabled, infants, and pregnant women, “some of whom had expressed the head of their bab[ies] just before they died.”<sup>6</sup> The men of the *Sonderkommando* untangled the knot of corpses, sheared off the hair of the females, ripped out any gold or false teeth with pliers, and examined body orifices for any hidden valuables. The bodies were then dragged to an elevator, where they were transported in groups to the crematoriums on the floor above.

Once the elevator was unloaded upstairs, the next team arranged the bodies according to a pattern that would allow for the most efficient burning, often in groups of three or four, with the bodies of two or three men cremated alongside the body of a woman and/or child, as the body fat of the latter would facilitate the burning of the thinner corpses.<sup>7</sup> The groups were loaded onto a metal stretcher of sorts, which was pushed into the raging heat of the oven and pulled back out empty as the bodies were held in place with a metal pole or pitchfork wielded by a *Sonderkommando* member. Approximately one half hour later, the process was repeated. Despite the heat, some larger bones like the pelvis remained unburned and were ground to dust and mixed with the ashes this procedure produced. The ashes were generally dumped into the River Vistula or one of its tributaries by *Sonderkommando* members under heavy guard. Rarely, the ashes were buried in large pits, some of which were later excavated by the men of the special squads.<sup>8</sup>

In Birkenau, the scale and scope of the operations were much larger than in Auschwitz I, which necessitated strategies and facilities that were decidedly different. Small cottages leftover from the previous town of Brzezinka were used as gas chambers and pits were dug for mass cremations before the Birkenau crematoria were constructed and later when the volume of corpses overwhelmed them. The pits macabre but efficient, thanks to their

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<sup>6</sup> Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 117.

<sup>7</sup> Testimony of Shaul Chazan. Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 273. This is also noted in the testimony of other survivors of the special squads, such as Filip Müller, who were involved in or witness to this part of the process. See *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 99.

<sup>8</sup> This process is recounted in numerous testimonies by *Sonderkommando* survivors, including Filip Müller, Shlomo Venezia, Morris Eisenstein, Saul Chasan, Ya'akov Silberberg.

meticulous design by SS Hauptsharführer Otto Moll (known to the men of the *Sonderkommando* as a notorious sadist<sup>9</sup>), who devised a channel in the center of each pit's floor which sloped toward pans on both ends. In these receptacles melted human fat was collected and poured by the *Sonderkommando* over the burning mass of bodies to further accelerate the flames. As explained in detail by survivor Filip Müller:

As the heap of bodies settled no air was able to get in from outside. This meant that we stokers had constantly to pour oil or wood alcohol on the burning corpses, in addition to human fat, large quantities of which had collected and was boiling in the two collecting pans on either side of the pit. The sizzling fat was scooped out with buckets on a long curved rod and poured all over the pit causing flames to leap up amid much crackling and hissing. Dense smoke and fumes rose incessantly. The air reeked of oil, fat, benzole and burnt flesh.<sup>10</sup>

When faced with such testimony, it becomes clear that the experiences of the *Sonderkommando* were so extreme that their ability to function after Auschwitz is remarkable. In addition to such trauma, these men bore an enormous responsibility as witnesses to explain the depth, scope, and methods of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" and to elucidate the last moments of the innumerable victims who died upon its implementation. Still, their experiences as witnesses are arguably exceeded by the reality of their positions—that their work constituted active participation, however forced, in a process that destroyed the remains of millions of their fellow Jews. The men of the *Sonderkommando* had only two choices when designated for the squad: perform the work and live (at least temporarily) or refuse the work and die immediately. Nevertheless, to opt for life inside the crematoria and gas chambers of Auschwitz was to enter into an agreement that exacted a toll on the mind and soul. The resulting

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<sup>9</sup> Müller, 130; Greif, 203.

<sup>10</sup> Müller, 136. This process is validated by the memoirs of Camp Kommandant Rudolf Höss, who describes it in similar detail. See Rudolf Höss, *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, ed. by Steven Paskuly, trans. by Andrew Pollinger (New York: De Capo Press, 1992), 160.

survival strategy was a simultaneous destruction and preservation of oneself as it kept one's physical life force intact, but doomed the person to an existence that cannot be clearly defined as perpetrator or victim.

### ***The Grey Zone***

The internal conflict of the *Sonderkommando* of Auschwitz-Birkenau was created by the conditions of their imprisonment. The sheer scale of the camp's operation, which adapted modern industrial techniques to the destruction of human beings en masse, necessitated a system of factory-style workers and overseers that were plucked from the pool of prisoners. It was sensible, according to the ideologies of the SS, to place particularly cruel Gentile prisoners in positions with a certain modicum of power, because they reinforced their policies of extremity, forced labor, and nonsensical killing. Such ideals and the labor requirements of the massive system gave rise to an entire network of prisoner-functionaries such as *Kapos* (squad foremen) and *Blockälteste* (block supervisors). These were usually non-Jewish political prisoners who obtained something of a privileged status and often abused it, much to the delight of the camp's Nazi administration.

The prisoner-functionary system was not limited to Gentiles in positions of power, however. The members of the *Sonderkommando* were in positions that afforded them a type of power that was less concrete and did not extend over other prisoners, but the nature of their work pushed them closer to complicity and collaboration with their Nazi oppressors than any "regular" Jewish prisoner. Complex issues such as these are rife with misjudgments and confusion, as people in prisoner-functionary positions seem to inhabit two spaces at once, that of oppressor and oppressed, while also failing to fully inhabit either space correctly or completely. The very name assigned to the prisoner-functionary category belies the duality and contradiction it encompassed, which explains why such people were inhabitants of what Holocaust scholar and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi calls the "Grey Zone."

The Grey Zone describes the area between the two extremes of the camp inhabitants, namely SS officers and guards versus their defenseless victims. According to Levi, there exists no clear boundary between these two categories, and the indistinct

area that occupies the space instead is “studded with obscene or pathetic figures,” some of whom “possess both [these] qualities simultaneously.”<sup>11</sup> The figures he describes are torn in two directions, being neither victims nor perpetrators in the truest sense, and the incongruity of their existences is one of the most disconcerting aspects of life in Auschwitz. The *Sonderkommando*, with an exceedingly ambiguous position that made them neither fully innocent nor fully guilty, are utilized by Levi as the supreme example of Grey Zone. The work these men performed indicated a level of complicity and collaboration with the Nazi program of Jewish destruction, but the fact that murder was not *de rigueur* as per their “job descriptions” leaves them a rather indefinable group in the Auschwitz hierarchy.

Levi maintains that the Nazi system of using prisoners as functionaries and administrators faced inherent problems, as they were, “collaborators who originate[d] in the adversary group, ex-enemies” who were “untrustworthy by definition.”<sup>12</sup> The best way to overcome this problem and trust these enemies of the state, he claims, was to bind them to the Nazi regime by “burden[ing] them with guilt, cover[ing] them with blood, compromis[ing] them as much as possible, thus establishing a bond of complicity so that they can no longer turn back.”<sup>13</sup> Whereas such a policy likely grew out of twisted ideals about efficiency and the utilization of free labor, the special squad seems to take this both literally and a step further, to a degree that Levi deems that their inception was “National Socialism’s most demonic crime.”<sup>14</sup> Rather than simply utilizing slave labor in the crematoriums, where work was both mentally and physically taxing to an enormous degree, he argues that one can hear “satanic laughter” and chilling implications behind the plan to use Jewish prisoners in such a fashion:

[I]t is consummated, we have succeeded, you no longer are the other race, the anti-race, the prime enemy of the millennial Reich; you are no longer the people who reject idols. We have embraced you, corrupted you, dragged you to the bottom with

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<sup>11</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 40.

<sup>12</sup> Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.



us. You are like us, you proud people: dirtied with your own blood, as we are. You too, like us and like Cain, have killed the brother.<sup>15</sup>

Further, Levi declares that, "the existence of the squads had a meaning, a message: 'We, the master race, are your destroyers, but you are no better than we are; if we so wish, and we do so wish, we can destroy not only your bodies but also your souls, just as we have destroyed ours.'"<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Equivocal Psyche***

Primo Levi's beliefs about the inception of the *Sonderkommando* indicate why he chose them as the flagship example of the Grey Zone and its complexity, but it is useful to apply his logic about this *institution* to the men of the squads *themselves* in ways that he likely never considered. This amorphous zone, with its blurred boundaries and blending of the areas which surround it, can be used to understand and analyze the individual mental processes of *Sonderkommando* members. As stated, these men were denied their culture: their beliefs, morals, and humanity. With no substitute systems available to fill the void, they were forced to create their own systems on an individual basis. These creations were necessary to allow them to exist and survive in unprecedented situations. Without these constructs, the men of the *Sonderkommando* could not have conceivably withstood the inhumanity of their positions.

Shlomo Venezia, a survivor of the special squad, documents an instance early in his tenure where a man in his mid-twenties was carrying corpses to the burning pits in Birkenau and stopped his work suddenly and inexplicably. Despite urgings from his fellow squad members and screams from an enraged Otto Moll (the aforementioned sadistic *Hauptsturmführer*), the worker stared into the distance for a long period of time, entirely impassive.

[Moll] started lashing him with his whip. But the man just stood there, motionless, as if nothing could affect him anymore; he didn't even attempt to avoid

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

the blows. In my opinion, he'd completely lost his wits; his mind was no longer of this world. He no longer seemed to feel pain or fear. The German, furious at the offense committed and the lack of any reaction to his blows, pulled a pistol from his belt. [...] We saw him take aim and fire from a distance of a few yards. But, as if the bullet hadn't hit him, the man continued to stand there, motionless. [...] The German, increasingly agitated, fired a second shot from the same pistol. But still no reaction; the bullets, the noise, the fear -- nothing seemed to affect him.<sup>17</sup>

The young man was finally killed by a third shot from a larger-caliber weapon in Moll's possession.<sup>18</sup> This poor man's inaction, even through whipping and bullet wounds, is indicative of a paralyzing mental break that was not followed by the necessary construction of a psychological Grey Zone of sorts, which would have allowed him to function in this unimaginable world of horror and atrocity.

This mental Grey Zone is a situation-based system of morals and humanity that I call the *equivocal psyche*. In the absence of cultural, moral, and emotional guidance, the equivocal psyche constructs an ethical continuum, allowing for a range of mental responses to trauma. At the bottom boundary of this zone, one can entirely surrender their humanity and behave in a way that is devoid of humane hallmark emotions such as grief, empathy, or mercy. This allows the person to become indifferent to suffering, a quality that was often paramount to the survival of *Sonderkommando* members. A temporary increase in sympathy or humane emotion was not an indication of the equivocal psyche's disappearance; rather, it was a sign that a shift on the continuum had taken place. Such is the nature of equivocation, as it is difficult to define such a state and the reaction is subject to the individual's interpretation of their surroundings and circumstances.

Morality also plays an important role in the equivocal psyche. For the *Sonderkommando*, previously-held systems of morality bore no utility inside Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the

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<sup>17</sup> Shlomo Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers: Eight Months in the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 60-61.

<sup>18</sup> Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 61.

contrary, such ideologies were inherently dangerous as hesitation was tantamount to a death sentence. Out of necessity, these beliefs were discarded and replaced by a system that would render otherwise unbearable circumstances virtually unmoving. For example, in their pre-Holocaust existences, the men of the special squad would surely have felt a moral obligation to warn people that they were about to be murdered if they knew that was undoubtedly the case. To be forced to lie to these people and stand by as they died would certainly have caused internal conflicts severe enough to permanently traumatize, leaving the men crippled with guilt and regret. Instead, their equivocal psyches constructed a morality which rationalized such approaches as lying and inaction, allowing the murders to proceed unquestioned. This construction told the men of the *Sonderkommando* that it was better for these people to die hopeful than needlessly terrified, and that it was morally sound to lie in order to preserve order and, by extension, one's own life.

An extreme example of the equivocal psyche at work is contained in the straightforward words of Tadeusz Borowski, a Polish Gentile Auschwitz survivor who volunteered to help the *Sonderkommando* working at the railway ramp for a day. Borowski wrote about his experiences in a way that conveyed the disjointed, senseless horror of the camp and the special squad, and his words are profoundly disturbing. While herding new arrivals out of cattle cars and collecting their belongings for the Germans, Borowski is repeatedly asked about what the future holds for the fresh prisoners. When asked politely, "Sir, what's going to happen to us?," Borowski responds with a bold lie: "I don't know, I don't understand Polish."<sup>19</sup> He justifies this transgression by stating that such a response is "the camp law: people going to their death must be deceived to the very end. *This is the only permissible form of charity.*"<sup>20</sup> Surely, Borowski's pre-Holocaust self could never have understood that herding unsuspecting victims to their deaths with lies was tantamount to charity. His equivocal psyche, which functioned only within the context of Auschwitz and the time he spent with the *Sonderkommando*, allowed him to rationalize such

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<sup>19</sup> Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, Translated by Barbara Vedder (1959 in Polish. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. Emphasis added.

an act as permissible, even merciful, when the outcome of such situations was always the same - the people died regardless, and exposing the truth would only serve to send them to their deaths afraid when that need not be the case. Such an approach is a quintessential example of the ambiguity of the Grey Zone and the flexibility of the equivocal psyche, and it masterfully displays how these systems operated to make the unbelievable quite acceptable.

Filip Müller exemplifies this convergence in his written testimony, which records his understanding of the very same situation:

Would anything have been changed in the course of events if any of us had stepped out and, facing the crowd, had shouted: "Do not be deceived, men and women, you are taking your last walk, a terrible death in the gas chamber awaits you!" The majority would not have believed us because it was too terrible to be believed. On the other hand a warning like this would have led to a panic, ending in a bloody massacre and our certain death. Did we have the right to take such a risk and, in taking it, to gamble away our chance to go on living for the time being? What, at that moment, was more important: a few hundred men and women, still alive but facing imminent death from which there was no saving them, or a handful of eyewitnesses, one or two of whom might, at the price of suffering and denial of self, survive to bear witness against the murderers some day? <sup>21</sup>

Müller's anguished fatalism explains this unique rationale within the context of accepting responsibility for bearing witness to the atrocities. In allowing these people to die without raising dissent, he is justifying their deaths in the interest of leaving eyewitnesses behind. The compliance of the *Sonderkommando* with this process, upon which their own survival was contingent, placed them squarely within the Grey Zone, but their ability to rationalize such behavior is a working example of the equivocal psyche.

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<sup>21</sup> Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 37.

The equivocal psyche is somewhat similar to what Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer calls the impromptu self.<sup>22</sup> Langer describes a situation in which there is "a kind of annihilation, a totally paradoxical killing of the self by the self in order to keep the self alive."<sup>23</sup> The annihilated self was that which guided the survivor's actions before the Holocaust. Despite its name, the annihilated self was not entirely destroyed, but it was reduced to tatters in such a way that it was rendered unrecoverable as a whole entity. Once the annihilated self was sufficiently shattered, the new creation, the impromptu self, held primacy "during the ordeal of survival."<sup>24</sup> While the impromptu self helps explain some of the problems *Sonderkommando* survivors encountered with memory when the time came to testify (which will be discussed later), it is only part of the answer to the question of how men in the special squads survived and coped with their Auschwitz-Birkenau experiences in real time. It does not delineate the complex mental processes which allowed them to participate in the destruction of their own people and witness unimaginable atrocity without losing their sanity. This is because the impromptu self is an analytical tool for understanding Holocaust survivor testimony *in general*; the unique situation of the men of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* requires a more comprehensive explanation of how such unprecedented extremity was survived both physically and mentally.

It is the marrying of the impromptu self and the equivocal psyche that provides the construction of an inclusive analytical framework with which the testimony of *Sonderkommando* members can be adequately examined. Their personalities were altered to a degree that a new "self," the impromptu self, emerged to take control of a situation for which the annihilated self had no tools to cope. However, these men also lost the ability to utilize cultural and humane norms and markers for guidance. While the impromptu self was employed by all manner of Auschwitz prisoners, their ability to hold onto some semblance of their culture (as evidenced by their version of trading markets, the tendency to create substitute families, and the capacity to maintain hope of

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<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 126.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

liberation<sup>25</sup>) meant they did not require such a dramatic reorganization of their psyches. The men of the *Sonderkommando*, on the other hand, were in a situation that necessitated a drastic change taking place at an alarming speed.

The emergence of the situational system of morality and humanity that is the equivocal psyche was an incredibly swift process. It goes against common logic that the life-long process of enculturation could be negated and replaced in a matter of hours. However, the gravity of the situation in which the *Sonderkommando* found themselves necessitated an incredibly rapid response. There were cases in which conventional logic ruled and a person was unable to withstand the drastic change—Shlomo Venezia's story of the young man whose mind and body stopped functioning serves as an example of such a case. Those that were able to surrender themselves to the shift in a way that he could not were able to survive, in some cases until the end of the war, and their ability to change their worldviews so quickly was absolutely essential in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination complexes. Though the SS could not and surely did not consider the moral conundrums men on the special squads would face, they undoubtedly organized the work to separate the weak from the strong, in both the physical and mental senses. Integral to this process was a rite common to all secret societies and exclusive institutions: the initiation.

### ***Initiation***

We had a gut feeling [on the first day in the *Sonderkommando*] that we couldn't identify. We didn't know a thing. On the one hand, I saw the bodies down there [in the mass burning pits]; on the other hand, the Kapo and the SS men were beating me and cursing at me all the time, to the accompaniment of barking dogs. It was hell on earth. If there's a hell after death, I think it must look like that.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

<sup>26</sup> Testimony of Saul Chazan. Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 266-267.

Like most initiations, the first day on a Special Squad was intended to give new members a grasp of the fundamentals of their new position. Indeed, narratives that include the sight of tangled masses of fresh corpses and the machinery conceived to burn them into oblivion on the very first day are near-universal amongst *Sonderkommando* survivors, despite the fact that every initiation was surely unique by virtue of differing circumstances and personalities. However, the extremity of the extended *Sonderkommando* experience is foreshadowed in this opening ritual, which seems designed to shock members into submission. In general, it stands to reason that the large majority of the men who entered the crematoria as workers had never before seen piles of dead bodies, and the initial confrontation with such overwhelming, unnatural death incited a level of fear and horror that paralyzed all into compliance.

Just as universal was the result of the initiation process: the inability to resist or react to what these men observed. Knowing that their very lives depended upon their ability to perform such horrifying work as handling and cremating the dead bodies of men, women, and children, the men of the *Sonderkommando* had to find a way to minimize the psychological damage of their experiences. The response was incredibly rapid, as was necessary, and as intense as the conditions of their incarceration: these men dramatically restructured their internal systems of morality and humanity, creating new systems that were individual and contextual. These constructs, their equivocal psyches, were much like personal Grey Zones that gave them a gradient on which to judge their own actions as moral, humane, right, or wrong.

Though this was a drastic step, many of those in the squads are unable to articulate exactly how such a shift occurred, as it seems that this process was undertaken outside the conscious mind. Survivor Ya'akov Silberberg describes the horror of his first day in the crematorium, when his personal friend and Kapo of his new squad, Shlomo Kirchenbaum, insisted, “the first night is really hard but you get used to it.”<sup>27</sup> His response gives unique insight to the struggle which raged within him at the time: “How can a person get used to it? Look, I’m not human anymore!”<sup>28</sup> The requirement that Silberberg dispose of his previous moral compass and become totally inured to suffering made him feel as though he had lost his

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<sup>27</sup>Testimony of Ya'akov Silberberg. Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 317.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

humanity. In reality, his initiation had forced him to begin the establishment of his equivocal psyche, which would render useless the sensibilities of the outside world and allow him to perform his task in Auschwitz with impunity.

The struggle to grasp such a reality was compounded by disorientation and the ever-present threat of violence posed by the SS. As intended, the initiation was usually successful in bringing the new *Sonderkommando* members into immediate, unquestioning obedience. Filip Müller describes his first few hours on the squad by stating: "I was like one hypnotized and obeyed each order implicitly. Fear of more blows, the ghastly sight of piled-up corpses, the biting smoke, the humming of fans and the flickering of flames, the whole infernal chaos had paralysed [*sic*] my sense of orientation as well as my ability to think."<sup>29</sup> This unique combination of fear, horror, and confusion stunned Müller and his fellow squad members to a degree that is inconceivable to anyone who was not in Auschwitz-Birkenau working alongside them. The startling revelation of one's new reality and that escape from this horrific existence was impossible, made mental adaptation not only plausible, but urgently crucial. Shlomo Venezia explains: "It's difficult to imagine now, but we didn't think of anything - we couldn't exchange a single word. Not because it was forbidden, but because we were terror-struck. We had turned into robots, obeying orders while trying not to think, so we could survive for a few hours longer."<sup>30</sup>

The term "robot" to describe the mental state of *Sonderkommando* members is recurrent in their testimony, as is the similar term "automaton."<sup>31</sup> Both express the feelings of dehumanization that accompanied their loss of cultural and moral guidance and the use of terms that are devoid of human emotion and entirely mechanical to describe themselves is an indication that their equivocal psyches were created outside of their conscious minds. Since they had no control over the processes that created these mental constructs, they may feel ill-at-ease with the way in which they coped with such horror. This discomfort is evidenced by the words of Jakov Silberberg, who distances himself from the idea of coping by condemning himself as something less than human: "From the first day I entered another world. I didn't know

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<sup>29</sup> Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 59.

<sup>31</sup> See Müller, 88; Greif, 103, 266, 299.



where on earth I was. I ceased to be a human being. I couldn't tell who I was and what I was doing."<sup>32</sup> While Silberberg did not entirely cease to be human, his reflection on his past behavior likely presented him with a person he did not recognize, whose behaviors he could no longer comprehend (the problems of memory with regard to survivors like Ya'akov Silberberg will be addressed later in this analysis). In all, it seems a great deal of disassociation was imbued in the equivocal psyche and its processes, and this disconnect with humanity was vital to the long-term mental survival of *Sonderkommando* members.

### **Maintenance**

To maintain their sanity in a such a situation, the men of the Auschwitz-Birkenau *Sonderkommando* had to create emotional distance between themselves and the victims whose destruction was the reason for their survival. The same men who were horrified by the idea of handling corpses on the first day found themselves decidedly unmoved by even the most incredible scenes of suffering and death only a short time later. According to Shlomo Venezia:

Your only choice was to get used to it. Very quickly, too. On the first days, I wasn't even able to swallow my bread when I thought of all the corpses my hands had touched. But what could you do? A person had to eat.... After a week or two, you got used to it. You got used to everything. The same way that I'd gotten used to the sickening smell. After a while, you stopped registering it.<sup>33</sup>

Ya'akov Silberberg's testimony is strikingly similar, stating:

I definitely became indifferent [to the bodies]. You lose your ability to feel. The bodies no longer had any value for me. Gradually, I stopped having human emotions about the bodies. I no longer related to them as I would to human bodies.

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<sup>32</sup> Testimony of Josef Sackar. Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 102-103.

Sometimes they were covered in blood and feces. You get so used to sights like these that during breaks or whenever people got hungry, they sat down on the bodies and ate [...] as if it were in another world.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, the revelation that *Sonderkommando* men were able to eat and drink in the presence of (or even on top of) corpses is quite common in survivor testimony, as is the idea that they "got used to it" in order to survive. The use of such examples seems to be more than simply relating common experiences; their utility lies in the conveyance of the horror these men experienced and the true depth of the ensuing trauma. The image of an average young man who can eat with filthy hands while actually *seated* upon the corpses of his own people conjures up more than simple shock, as was likely the intention: it is a visual representation of the Grey Zone and the equivocal psyche. Only within the contradictory Grey Zone can one fathom such behavior, and only with the moral guidance and disassociation of the equivocal psyche can such conduct be properly explained. Whereas previously-held sensibilities and the cultural context of one's upbringing would likely dictate that this is abnormal, even psychopathic behavior, the equivocal psyche of the *Sonderkommando* member proclaims such actions as acceptable, even commonplace, and undeserving of recrimination because of the situation that originated them.

Due to the situational nature of the equivocal psyche, it is a flexible mechanism that allows for a range of responses to changing circumstances. Whereas the initiation provoked the reaction of robotic compliance and disbelief, the men of the *Sonderkommando* were able to shift to a different point on the continuum as they spent more time in the crematoria. No longer acting out of simple fear of violence, they came to accept actions that would have been unimaginable only days or weeks earlier when they arrived at the complexes of death. In this lies the most important feature of the equivocal psyche – it maintains the ability to adapt to a wide range of circumstances.

That their psyches were adaptable is not to say that the trauma of the *Sonderkommando* experience was free of extensive mental damage. While sanity was preserved, disconnection with

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<sup>34</sup> Testimony of Ya'akov Silberberg. Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 322.

the ideas of morality and emotion extant in the outside world was disconcerting and harmful for the men of the special squads. In their testimonies, they recognize their descent into inhumanity and express distress about the process.

Shaul Chazan: I'd stopped being human [after a few days]. If I'd been human, I couldn't have endured it for even one minute. We kept going because we'd lost our humanity.<sup>35</sup> As time passed, we got particularly depressed. We didn't feel like thinking people anymore. We just worked, ate, and slept, like automatons.<sup>36</sup>

Ya'akov Gabai: Reality proves that people are crueler than animals. Yeah, we were animals. We didn't have emotions. Sometimes we doubted whether we were still human.<sup>37</sup>

Leon Cohen: During that time we had no emotions. We were totally drained. We blocked up our hearts; we were dehumanized. We worked like machines. We were human beings devoid of human emotion. We were really animals, not people. It's frightening, but that's how it was - a tragedy.<sup>38</sup>

Dehumanized and victimized to a degree that can be difficult to understand, these men arguably suffered from a sense of identity that was severely damaged. While it is impossible to quantitatively measure such a condition, such damage seems a plausible consequence of their experiences, and accounts for the common feelings of depression, disassociation, and emotional deficit.

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<sup>35</sup> Testimony of Shaul Chazan. Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 273.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 305.

## ***The Buried Diaries of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando***

The overwhelming majority of *Sonderkommando* members did not survive to give testimony. Their positions afforded them a level of knowledge about the processes of mass murder that made their survival dangerous for the Nazi regime. The SS was careful to minimize the survival rate of these men (who could conceivably testify against them with alarming accuracy if allowed to survive), so the overwhelming majority of the men of the *Sonderkommando* died long before liberation. To accomplish this goal of attrition, the SS subjected the squads to regular selections and liquidations, and sheer luck kept a member of the special squad alive for more than six months.<sup>39</sup> Extraordinary luck and quick thinking were required to see liberation, as was the ability to cope with the reality of the special squad and its work. Most of the men of the *Sonderkommando* were not lucky enough to experience all of these conditions at the correct time, but even those who died in the camp found the drive to testify so powerful that they wrote invaluable testimonies from the inside - primary, real-time documents which they wrote by hand and buried in various receptacles on the grounds of the crematorium.<sup>40</sup> They accepted that it was incumbent upon them, as eyewitnesses who might not survive, to record an unparalleled account of the destruction of European Jewry within Auschwitz.

Several of these manuscripts have been unearthed thus far, and the words of these brutalized men haunt from beyond the grave with juxtaposed emotions: urgency and futility, shame and pride, responsibility and hopelessness. Knowing that they would die, men like Zalman Gradowski, Leyb Langfus, and Zalman Lewenthal secretly recorded their terrible knowledge in the shadow of the crematoria, giving us the only documents discovered thus far of the Auschwitz experience written on the inside. In these words, we hear the voices of the murdered begging for justice not for their

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<sup>39</sup> There are notable exceptions to this rule, however. Those with certain training, such as stokers and mechanics, were often spared during selections because of their specialized skills. See Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle: 1939-1945*, 278.

<sup>40</sup> See the edited volume: Bezwinska, Jadwiga, and Danuta Czech, eds, *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime: Manuscripts of Prisoners in Crematorium Squads Found at Auschwitz* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1992).

own truncated lives, but for that of the multitudes whose slaughter they witnessed in the last days of their lives:

Dear finder, search everywhere, in every inch of soil. Tens of documents are buried under it, mine and those of other persons, which will throw light on everything that was happening here. Great quantities of teeth are also buried here. It was we, the Kommando workers, who expressly have strewn them all over the terrain, as many as we could, so that the world should find material traces of the millions of murdered people. We ourselves have lost hope of being able to live to see the moment of liberation. [...] I am writing these words in a moment of the greatest danger and excitement. May the future judge us on the base of my notes and may the world see in them, if only one drop, the minimum, of this tragic world amidst which we had lived.<sup>41</sup>

Zalman Gradowski wrote these words in a letter dated September 6, 1944 and buried it along with 81 other pages of writing in a corked glass bottle near the Birkenau crematoria.<sup>42</sup> Gradowski was one of the main organizers of the famous *Sonderkommando* uprising on October 7, 1944, which took the lives of three SS men and resulted in the death of 450 squad members (250 in the fighting itself and 200 executed afterward by the SS).<sup>43</sup> For orchestrating the only uprising in Auschwitz history that was carried out, Gradowski was hanged the following day after suffering incredibly cruel torture that included the crushing of his skull.<sup>44</sup> The manner of his death was something he anticipated because of his intention to lead the revolt, and he told his friend and fellow inmate Ya'akov Freimark that "he would someday wipe out his sins and those of his comrades with his blood."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Bezwinska, Jadwiga, and Danuta Czech, eds, *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime*, 75-76.

<sup>42</sup> Gutman, Yisrael, and Michael Berenbaum, eds, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 523-524.

<sup>43</sup> Czech, 726.

<sup>44</sup> Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, 523.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 527. There are variations on this story in other sources, but the overall effect of the story remains unchanged.

Found buried in a glass jar in 1962, the deteriorated manuscript of Zalman Leventhal, Gradowski's contemporary, provides evidence of the equivocal psyche at work from the unique perspective of one still within the camp, as Leventhal did not survive the special squad either.<sup>46</sup> He describes the mental state of his fellow *Sonderkommando* members, noting conditions in words that are remarkably similar to those of the survivor's in their own testimonies:

I must speak the truth here, that some of that group have in the course of time so entirely lost themselves that we ourselves were simply ashamed. They simply forgot what they were doing [...] and with time [...] they got so used to it that it was even strange [that no one wanted] to weep and to complain; that [...] such normal, average [...] simple and unassuming men [...] of necessity get used to everything so that these happenings make no more impression on them. Day after day they stand and look on how tens of thousands of people are perishing and [do] nothing.<sup>47</sup>

The way in which Leventhal describes the *Sonderkommando* "getting used to" their position and its ghastly work is identical to that of nearly all special squad survivors who reflected on their experiences after liberation. As well, his depiction of men "look[ing] on how tens of thousands of people are perishing and doing nothing" is a clear and definitive example of the type of disassociation typified by the situational, Auschwitz-specific equivocal psyche. It seems that such a coping mechanism was incredibly common amongst men of the special squad, which indicates its import to their mental survival.

Elsewhere in his haunting manuscript, Leventhal demonstrates incredible foresight and analytical sophistication

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<sup>46</sup> Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, 527.

<sup>47</sup> Bezwinska and Czech, *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime*, 139. Areas in square brackets and ellipses indicate sections of missing writing, as the dampness degraded the document to a degree that portions of it are illegible, and writing in the brackets indicates words inserted by the editors.

when he fatalistically discusses the way in which he and his comrades will be studied:

No one can imagine the events that occurred, because it is unimaginable to exactly recount our experiences.... However, we - the small group of grey people - will present the historian with quite a task, as well as the psychologist interested in learning of man's mental condition while practicing such terrible, dirty work. Who knows whether these researchers will ever get to the truth, whether anyone will ever be able to.<sup>48</sup>

One can only hope that someone will at least come close to explaining the truth of Leventhal's and his fellow squad members' experiences.

The buried writings of the *Sonderkommando* serve to validate the words of the lucky few who survived via their corroboration of testimony that is difficult for some to believe and accept.<sup>49</sup> As well, they open a window into one of the largest crimes in history from a point of view that is extremely rare: one of a prisoner while he was incarcerated in a Nazi death camp, witnessing the unbelievable, instead of reflection after the fact. As such, it is important to remember that these are not survivor testimonies. Rather, they are the furtive and desperate last will and testament for several men who felt that history deserved to know the truth, even if it cost them their lives.

## **Aftermath**

Life [was destroyed in me]. Since then I've never had a normal life. I've never been able to pretend that everything was all right and go off dancing, like others, without a care in the world.... Everything takes me back to the camp. Whatever I do, whatever I see, my mind keeps harking back to the

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<sup>48</sup> Gutman and Berenbaum, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, 373.

<sup>49</sup> The testimonies of *Sonderkommando* survivors (especially that of Filip Müller) have been used by Holocaust deniers as counterfactual evidence against its occurrence. See the Institute for Historical Revisionism website for published pamphlets and articles on the *Sonderkommando*, <http://www.ihr.org>.

same place. It's as if the "work" I was forced to do there never really left my head. *Nobody ever really gets out of the crematorium.*<sup>50</sup>

Shlomo Venezia's simple declaration that one can never truly escape the horror of the Auschwitz-Birkenau crematoria appears to be unfortunately true. In the end, there were only two kinds of *Sonderkommando* members: those who died in the camp and those precious few who lived forever after liberation in the dark shadow of the crematoria. The trauma experienced by the men of the *Sonderkommando* who survived can never truly be healed, and many find simply leading normal lives post-Holocaust to be too great a challenge—one for which they are seriously ill-equipped. Many express the feeling of being broken or irreparably altered by their experiences, and such feelings spring from a convergence of several situations: the loss of most or all of one's family, the inability to properly function in a world of humane emotions, the transition out of the equivocal psyche, and the problems of reflection on horrendous memories.

The most immediate, pressing problem upon liberation from Auschwitz, outside of physical disability and disease, was confronting the decimation of one's family. Many prisoners entered the camp as vivacious sons, brothers, and husbands, only to leave as homeless, damaged orphans, aged well beyond their years.<sup>51</sup> In some cases, this made liberation seem decidedly anti-climactic: it brought long-desired freedom, but what do with that freedom was unclear. Without homes to which they could return or families to connect, liberation represented a moment in which there was freedom to choose but a lack of viable choices. As such, with this freedom came an emptiness that one is hard-pressed to fill as an uprooted, tortured individual with no supportive network.

The men of the Auschwitz-Birkenau *Sonderkommando* had the added pain of intimate knowledge regarding the actual processes that constituted the destruction of humans in Auschwitz. They could hold no illusions about how their beloved family members died as they had seen the death factories with their own

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<sup>50</sup> Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 155. Emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> The exclusion of women in Auschwitz is not to diminish their importance or the gravity of their experiences. As this study focuses on the *Sonderkommando*, which were exclusively male, it is helpful to keep the scope of the analysis focused on men.



eyes. This knowledge carried the added sting of deep shame, as these actions were committed by their brethren, the *Sonderkommando*. Survivors of the squad had to contend with the fact that they themselves had done the very same to the families of innumerable others. The scar of this fact is deep in these men, as evidenced by their post-Holocaust psychological states. Josef Sackar claims, "I don't sleep at night. I sleep two or three hours, that's all. I've been that way for years. Because of the memories."<sup>52</sup> Ya'akov Silberberg describes his mental anguish as suffering that he endures constantly, and, as a result, "I cannot cry anymore. All emotions of a human being, of crying, have died in me. [...] I think I'm no longer a person."<sup>53</sup> These men need not imagine how the end of their loved one's lives played out: they had clear and distinct memories of the screams, the tangled corpses, and the cremation process.

Bearing these mental scars, *Sonderkommando* survivors faced issues of adjustment regarding their equivocal psyches and impromptu selves, which had served them well but posed a threat to their post-Holocaust survival. Once outside the unique system of Auschwitz-Birkenau, these coping mechanisms were no longer required and actually posed as potential hindrances to their reunion with civilization. They had to resurrect the tatters of their annihilated, pre-trauma selves and use them to construct personalities relevant to the postwar world, with the added problems of horrific memories and shame over the terms of their survival. Langer describes this new incarnation as the integrated self, as it is something of an amalgam that takes several perspectives into account when constructing the post-disaster identity.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the post-Auschwitz self had to drastically reorganize its inner systems of morality and humanity, much in the same fashion as the pre-Auschwitz self was required to do upon entrance into the camp. The result of the first shift, the equivocal psyche, was not an experiential lens compatible with the world outside of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as evidenced by its ability to allow *Sonderkommando* members to eat their meals whilst seated upon corpses. Such sensibilities were drastically inconsistent with the mores of postwar society, and had to be discarded.

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<sup>52</sup> Testimony of Josef Sackar. Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 121.

<sup>53</sup> Testimony of Ya'akov Silberberg. *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>54</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 133.

Alongside issues of maladjustment that the *Sonderkommando* experienced in the absence of familial support and the shift away from their contradictory Auschwitz selves, was their difficulty transitioning back into the postwar world of "normal" emotion and attachment. When the moral guidance of their upbringing was discarded in favor of their flexible, situational equivocal psyches, the prewar moral structure of these men, in some cases beyond all repair. It is for this reason that Shlomo Venezia reports difficulty in raising his own children - he was spiritually damaged, broken even, and likely found his capacity for nurturance severely hampered by the shame of his all-encompassing victimization. Having experienced this shift, Venezia found himself unable to enjoy idyllic family experiences, and instead was decidedly uncomfortable and found them incompatible with his mental state:

I knew that I couldn't behave like a normal father who helps his children to do their homework and merrily plays with them. I was lucky to have a very intelligent wife who was able to manage that side of things.<sup>55</sup>

Venezia's words explain his complicated position as both a father and a *Sonderkommando* survivor. He could not conceive of how to be a "normal father" in light of what he had done while in Auschwitz. This deep shame over his own actions and his memories darkened even the most joyous of occasions and caused Venezia to avoid interaction with his family on even a basic emotional level. Ya'akov Silberberg echoes this pain when describing his life after Auschwitz:

I was depressed. I ran away from myself. I had only two things in my life: work and sleep - to escape from the memories. I didn't raise my children; they grew up only thanks to my wife. She took care of them. I couldn't. [...] The nights were long and agonizing. They were torture. [...] I was ashamed [of his work on the special squad]. Ashamed of myself, of the things a man was

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<sup>55</sup> Venezia, *Inside the Gas Chambers*, 155.

capable of. That's why my wife and children didn't know [about his work].<sup>56</sup>

Though these men may have been unaware of why they could not handle raising their children, one facet of the problem seems to be that they found it impossible to reconcile the intense shame of their victimization with their roles as fathers, which pinned on them the responsibility of parenthood. In light of their experiences, they found it difficult to conceive of themselves as authority figures. This was compounded by their disrupted sense of self, which made functioning in the post-Holocaust world difficult. Realizing this issue brings up difficult questions about one's social and cultural identity, the quality of their existence, and their capacity to be comfortable in the world.

Finally, one exceedingly difficult aspect of *Sonderkommando* survival is reflection, which requires the men to remember the crimes they witnessed and the behaviors they exhibited while in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Such reflection is undertaken while the survivor is trying to make their way in a post-Holocaust world, and one in which their integrated self is in control. Since their equivocal psyches have been discarded, it becomes difficult for these men to justify some of their actions, even if they were in the interest of survival. As Langer states, "the situation-based ethics of the camp led to a way of behaving for which we do not have - and probably never will have - a systematic analytic approach."<sup>57</sup> The closest we can get to an analytical framework of the *Sonderkommando* experiences are Levi's Grey Zone and the equivocal psyche, that provide an admittedly imperfect framework to incite further research into the contextualization of the Auschwitz experience.

As difficult as it is for the reader to analyze these testimonies without a working framework, it is even more problematic for the survivors themselves to construct what I call *usable narratives*. When attempting to explain atrocity and privation, many survivors find that the vocabulary required to convey the gravity of the situation simply did not exist. However, the issue of constructing usable narratives consists of far more than vocabulary deficits - it strikes at the heart of *Sonderkommando*

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<sup>56</sup> Testimony of Ya'akov Silberberg. Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 333.

<sup>57</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 122.

testimonies and examines how they told their stories of inhumanity while inhabiting post-Holocaust societies.

### ***Tainted Memory***

When analyzing the testimonies of the Auschwitz-Birkenau *Sonderkommando*, it is important to take into account that these were reflections on a past that is immeasurably different from the present in which they speak. It is likely that these men were somewhat comfortable with their equivocal psyches while in Auschwitz-Birkenau because of its necessity for survival, but find the idea takes on a much more distressing tone when viewed in retrospect. The mechanism of their memories betrays this conflict, resulting in what Langer terms "tainted memory." As Langer explains, "memory sacrifices purity of vision in the process of recounting, resulting in what I call tainted memory, a narrative stained by the disapproval of the witness's own present moral sensibility, as well as by some of the incidents it relates."<sup>58</sup> Thus, the special squad members' narratives of their actions in Auschwitz are colored by their inhabitation (at the time of such reflection) in a moral, post-Auschwitz world, which they navigate as their integrated selves. The integrated self does its best to reconcile memories with the prevalent sensibilities and morals existing after the event, thus their tainted memory affects what they choose to expose, what they choose to conceal, and how they tell their stories overall. Their narratives are predicated on the stains their integrated selves place on their experiences, and where the stains are placed either obscures or distorts their memories and influences the overall outcome of their testimonies.

The idea of tainted memory and its effect on constructing usable narratives can be analyzed in a way that illuminates sources of inconsistency. For example, many *Sonderkommando* survivors have documented that these men were allotted extra food rations and allowed to supplement their diets with perishables left behind by those who were killed.<sup>59</sup> Their living quarters were usually located above the crematoria, where they had individual beds with something akin to linens; the heat from the horrific activities below kept their living area warm in the winter. Filip Müller, on the

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<sup>58</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 122.

<sup>59</sup> For a small sampling, see Greif, 106, 276, 304.

other hand, mentions certain comparative privileges that the *Sonderkommando* had access to by virtue of their position only in brief passing, and he entirely omits discussion of their comparatively comfortable living quarters. Obviously, his tainted memory has affected his story, concealing certain details in the interest of satisfying his post-Auschwitz moral sensibilities.

Consider that Müller declares early in his written memoirs that, as a regular prisoner, he had come to appreciate the “thin and far from appetizing soup” that kept him barely alive, and that “any prisoner considered himself very lucky if now and then he managed to wangle a second helping.”<sup>60</sup> However, when he is incarcerated in a cell with a few other *Sonderkommando* members at the beginning of his tenure on the squad, he states that “during the next few days, [their] cell door was opened three times a day at meal times.”<sup>61</sup> While there is no mention of what the food consisted of, the concept of *three* daily mealtimes was totally foreign to the rest of the camp. This would have been a significant increase in Müller’s food intake. As well, he mentions the ability of the *Sonderkommando* resistance members to *organize*<sup>62</sup> valuables from the possessions of the dead in order to purchase black market arms and ammunition rather than precious black market edibles. As he explains, they were already “amply supplied with Hungarian salami, goose dripping, jam and cigarettes,”<sup>63</sup> presumably from the same source as the valuables. Throughout the whole of his written and video recorded testimony, Müller glosses over the extra food he received, which was a substantial privilege in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and never discusses his superior living conditions because his tainted memory seems to have changed the narrative of his experience and made these facts irrelevant.

Such inconsistencies are not restricted to memories about working in the special squad itself. *Sonderkommando* survivor Daniel Bennahmias states that during his traumatic boxcar transport to Auschwitz that he recalls almost nothing, and feels he has “blocked out” the memory of whether or not a receptacle existed in his car in which the prisoners were to relieve

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<sup>60</sup> Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Camp slang for stealing. For example of use, see Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

<sup>63</sup> Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 140.

themselves.<sup>64</sup> Later on in his testimony, Bennahmias seemed to recover some of this "blocked" information and notes that a receptacle existed, but claims he cannot remember whether it was a pail of some sort or a small barrel.<sup>65</sup> Though such distinction, especially in contrast to the clear, concise memories he retained of what occurred during his tenure on the special squad, may seem inconsequential, it is a classic indication of tainted memory in operation as the stain on the particular event has altered his perception, and thus denied Bennahmias the ability to adequately reflect on his past.

Müller, Bennahmias, and other *Sonderkommando* survivors are likely attempting to derive a sense of dignity from their decidedly dehumanizing experiences as a way to heal themselves while bearing witness. This is indicative of humane reflection on an inhumane existence, which causes them to struggle with the construction of usable narratives. Historian Timothy Pytell noted a similar attempt in his study of Holocaust survivors Bruno Bettelheim and Victor Frankl. His argument was that these men were "working through their victimization to recover some sense [of] dignity."<sup>66</sup> Such a statement is applicable to the *Sonderkommando* and may help further explain the processes behind divergences in their testimony. Filip Müller may find it perverse to discuss privilege in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where others suffered such unspeakable privation, and thus avoids delineating what may be construed as undignified collaboration. Daniel Bennahmias surely feels that being forced to relieve himself in the open while his family must do the same was an admission that they had been successfully reduced to the lowest indignity by their Nazi oppressors. In failing to definitively admit to such conditions, he allows himself to reclaim a bit of his lost dignity and does the same for his mother and father, who did not survive to reclaim their own.

### ***The Special Case of Filip Müller***

Filip Müller presents a unique analytical opportunity as a multi-faceted special squad case study. His testimony in several

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<sup>64</sup> Fromer, *The Holocaust Odyssey of Daniel Bennahmias*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 n2.

<sup>66</sup> Timothy E. Pytell, "Extreme Experience, Psychological Insight, and Holocaust Perception: Reflections on Bettelheim and Frankl," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 24, no. 4 (2007): 652.

mediums allows one to view tainted memory in action as his story shifts at times. His recollections are rife with examples of disassociation, the Grey Zone, and the equivocal psyche. Müller arrived in Auschwitz on one of the earliest transports in April 1942. Only twenty years of age, Müller was assigned prisoner number 29236 - for contrast, the number assigned to writer and Holocaust scholar Primo Levi upon his entrance just under two years later in February 1944 was 174517.<sup>67</sup> Prior to his imprisonment, Müller was a good student and a promising violinist in his small hometown of Sered, Czechoslovakia, which lies approximately 40 miles from the Slovak capital of Bratislava. His parents and brother died during the Holocaust, and he was the sole survivor of his birth family. Müller's residency amongst the "average" prisoners of Auschwitz was short-lived as he was sent to work with the *Sonderkommando* as punishment for stealing few mouthfuls of tea only a month after his arrival.

Müller formally published his memoirs in the 1970's under the title *Sonderbehandlung. Drei Jahre in den Krematorien und Gaskammern von Auschwitz* (published in English as *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*), though a summary of the material was included in a 1946 Czech publication authored by Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka that was released in English in 1966 under the title *The Death Factory*.<sup>68</sup> Müller testified against the Nazi criminals of Auschwitz in person several times: at a 1963 trial in Prague, at the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials in 1964, and on film to French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann for his documentary *Shoah* in the 1970's. His statements in Frankfurt are vital to understanding his post-war years and his perception of his experience. Compelled to testify against Auschwitz perpetrators like SS Unterscharführer Stark, Müller took the stand and stated the paradox of his past and present:

"I have my job, my children and I wanted to forget what it was [Auschwitz]. It interested me, everything that was written about the concentration camps and such, but I did want to

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<sup>67</sup> Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 27. The numbering system in Auschwitz-Birkenau was sequential; this difference indicates that over 145,000 people were assigned prisoner numbers in this two year interval.

<sup>68</sup> Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, x.

forget, even if that is not possible - we cannot forget that."<sup>69</sup>

When one compares Müller's book, his verbal testimonies in the documentary *Shoah*, and his words on the stand in Frankfurt, there is much that will give a researcher pause. First, Müller's testimony to Lanzmann is so similar to that of his written memoirs that he seems oddly consistent, even rehearsed, lacking much of the differences in language use and reflective pauses that usually distinguish a Holocaust survivor's written and spoken narratives. Filip Müller is consistent to an enormous degree across multiple mediums, using strikingly similar language in his testimony in *Shoah* as that of his written work. It seems that his tainted memory is extant in both mediums, and that his integrated self is working to keep his impromptu self and its differing memories sufficiently subsumed.

Further issues arise when Müller's testimony on the stand at the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial of 1964 is taken into consideration. When asked specific questions, his answers are far less composed and homogenous, and his mastery of German seems rather rusty in comparison to his smooth use of the language with Claude Lanzmann. Beyond his lack of composure are the contradictions his testimony in Frankfurt illuminates, which are considerable. The timeline of events Müller explains on the stand seriously conflicts with that of his memoirs, written at least in summary in 1946, nearly 20 years before the trial, and his verbal account to Lanzmann, over a decade after the trial. The largest and most curious of these conflicts takes the form of a story regarding his position within Auschwitz-Birkenau from mid-1942 to mid-1943.

In Frankfurt, Müller testified that he literally bought his way out of the *Sonderkommando* temporarily in late June 1942, after spending only six weeks working in the Auschwitz crematorium. He states that while being transported with a group from the crematorium to a holding cell in Block 11 (within the camp proper), a work supervisor (*Arbeitsdienst*) offered to, in

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<sup>69</sup> Filip Müller, Witness Testimony at Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, October 1964. Veronique Chevillon. "Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt: Deposition of Filip Müller." *Sonderkommando.info*. In French, translated with Google Translate. <http://www.sonderkommando.info/proces/francfort/temoins/muller/index.html>. (Accessed 24 March 2010).



Müller's words "get [him] out of there" if he was paid "many dollars."<sup>70</sup> After Müller brought the man "a large bundle of US dollars," he was secretly taken to Block 14 (a non-*Sonderkommando* unit), and began working with those prisoners until the group was moved to Monowitz-Buna, a subcamp of Auschwitz that was entirely a work camp (*Arbeitslager*).<sup>71</sup>

Müller explains that he remained in Monowitz-Buna until the spring of 1943. At some point while working there, he was seriously injured when a large piece of metal fell on his right thigh, and the ensuing abscess sent him to the sickbay (*Krankenbau*). From there he was moved to Birkenau, where he found two old friends, one of whom was a doctor, who sheltered him, gave him medicine, and even operated on his leg. Afterward he was assigned "sitting light work,"<sup>72</sup> which amounted to peeling potatoes, and in July 1943, he was recognized while engaged in this task by SS officers Schwartzhuber and Aumeier, who were in charge of the *Sonderkommando*. Müller was immediately removed from the hospital crew and taken to Block 13 in Birkenau, where he rejoined the special squad and began working in the newly constructed complex of crematoria.<sup>73</sup> His absence from the *Sonderkommando* for such a long period shielded him from some of the selections that liquidated the squads on a fairly regular basis. He seems to have simple luck to credit for escaping the last two selections that took place before the evacuation of the majority of the Auschwitz prisoners on January 18, 1945.

Yet the most surprising thing about the Monowitz-Buna story is not Müller's exceptional luck, but the fact that it is *entirely absent* from his other testimony, and is directly contradicted by the timeline in his written work. The very title of his book, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*, can be called into question as he spent nearly an entire year working outside the *Sonderkommando* based upon his Frankfurt testimony. In addition, Müller's writing describes events that cause serious conflict with his testimony on the stand about his whereabouts from June 1942 to July 1943. If he was in Monowitz-Buna until the spring of 1943, how could not have been on a crew in mid-December of 1942 that removed the bodies of liquidated *Sonderkommando*

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<sup>70</sup> Müller, Testimony at the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, October 1964.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

members from the gas chamber in Auschwitz, as described in his book<sup>74</sup> Further, his written work depicts his transfer to Block 13 in Birkenau as a relief "after almost fourteen months of isolation in Block 11."<sup>75</sup> It is unclear whether he spent nearly a year and a half in a cell in Block 11, or bought his way into Buna after only six weeks in the Auschwitz crematorium and spent nearly a year living as a non-*Sonderkommando*.

It is inconsistencies such as these, when coupled with his near-unbelievable memories of Nazi atrocity that make Müller popular fodder for fervent Holocaust deniers. While a complete denunciation of his testimony because of these conflicts is unfair and likely incorrect, these are serious discrepancies. What they say about Müller is that he certainly suffers from the effects of tainted memory and when caught unprepared on the witness stand, his impromptu self was allowed primacy over his integrated self and his memories, removing the filter that his integrated self utilized when writing and speaking to Claude Lanzmann.

### ***Misconceptions***

Such inconsistencies as those of Filip Müller are explainable in the context of analytical frameworks like tainted memory and the equivocal psyche, but they are still dangerous to the credibility of survivors in an age when Holocaust denial vies for validation through nitpicking and misrepresentation. When the moral conundrums encompassed by the men of the *Sonderkommando* are examined by those who fail to understand the psychological bases for their behavior, grievous errors can be made that harm their overall image and further damage their already delicate psyches.

A prominent example of this type of erroneous reporting on the men of the *Sonderkommando* is contained in German political theorist Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, first published in 1963. In her provocative approach to analyzing the trial of the man considered the "architect of the Holocaust," SS *Untersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann, Arendt uses the actions of the *Sonderkommando* to validate her argument that people under a totalitarian regime can and do behave in a way that appears evil to save their own skin. The problem

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<sup>74</sup> Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

with her analysis are the fallacious and misleading examples that she uses, which run counter to the evidence in existence today, and the seemingly copious use Auschwitz Kommandant Rudolf Höss' memoirs as the basis of her assertions.<sup>76</sup>

Arendt correctly designates the men of the *Sonderkommando* as collaborators, but fails to contextualize their level of collaboration and its significance when she states that they "had everywhere been employed in the actual killing process, they had committed criminal acts 'in order to save themselves from the danger of immediate death.'" <sup>77</sup> Perhaps because Arendt herself was Jewish, she seems particularly disgusted by the Jewish war-time institutions such as the *Sonderkommando*, the *Judenräte* (Jewish Councils), and certain Jewish leaders who either failed to act or acted in a fashion that seemed "criminal" or complicit. Several times, Arendt makes clear her belief that the men of the special squads were the true murderers of the Jews, but her statements are unsupported, and woefully incorrect.<sup>78</sup>

For example, Arendt has constructed a wildly misleading account of the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* revolt of 1944. She claims:

In Auschwitz, many Greek Jews were employed in the so-called death commandos, which operated the gas chambers and the crematoria, and they were still alive in 1944, when the Hungarian Jews were exterminated and the Łódź ghetto was liquidated. At the end of that summer, when rumor had it that the gassing would soon be terminated and the installations dismantled, one of the very few revolts in any of the camps broke out; the death commandos were certain that now they, too, would be killed. The revolt was a complete disaster--only one survivor remained to tell the story.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, 336 n167.

<sup>77</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 91.

<sup>78</sup> Admittedly, Arendt's access to sources was limited by the period in which she wrote. Most memoirs and testimonies of the *Sonderkommando* were published well after her study was written, and Soviet archives were unavailable to Western researchers.

<sup>79</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 189.

While it is true that the men of the special squad actually came to rely on a steady influx of prisoners to be executed, nowhere in *Sonderkommando* survivor testimonies nor the buried Auschwitz manuscripts is it stated that the uprising was staged in protest of the lessening transports, as Arendt implies. On the contrary, the revolt had been in planning stages for quite a long time, but the non-*Sonderkommando* prisoners in the resistance movement kept delaying in hopes that liberation was imminent.<sup>80</sup> The men of the *Sonderkommando* knew all too well that liberation was not in their future—based upon the precedent of murdering squads regularly, they likely assumed that the Nazis would liquidate them before that occurred. Thus, they were motivated by a sense of futility, desperation, and a strong desire to destroy as much of the machinery of death as possible before their inevitable deaths. It is no secret that escape was a part of the plan,<sup>81</sup> but the overarching goal was to hinder the ability to continue extermination on such a massive, mechanized scale. It is true that the slowing transports were a factor in creating a sense of imminent death and danger amongst the squad members, but Arendt is alluding to a much more sinister intention on their part, and she pins on them a level of responsibility that is undeserved.

It seems that Arendt did not have a clear grasp of the real work of the Auschwitz-Birkenau *Sonderkommando* nor their mental status and motivation. When one is faced with a choice between immediate, violent death and acceptance of revolting, inhumane work, it is remiss to say that their actions in this context after the decision was made are considered wholly "criminal." Arendt cannot claim to understand why or how these men processed these dreadful decisions, and her judgment of them is unjustly harsh, especially considering that she never endured the intense victimization and debasement of the Nazi death camps. It is because of incorrect assessments such as hers, without the contextualization of victimization, that Primo Levi asks that "we meditate on the story of 'the crematorium ravens' with pity and

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<sup>80</sup> See the Manuscript of Zalman Gradowski in Bezwinska and Czech, *Amidst a Nightmare of Crime*, 76 and the Manuscript of Zalman Leventhal in the same volume, 154-155; Greif, *We Wept Without Tears*, 306 (testimony of Leon Cohen).

<sup>81</sup> See Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 152-155 and Fromer, *The Holocaust Odyssey of Daniel Bennis*, 64-65.

rigor, but that judgment of them be suspended."<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, Arendt's conclusions are drawn on untruths such as: "in the death camps it was usually the inmates and the victims who had actually wielded '*the fatal instrument with their own hands*,'"<sup>83</sup> "when a trainload of Jews arrived at a center, the strong among them were selected for work, often *operating* the extermination machinery, all others were immediately killed,"<sup>84</sup> and "the well-known fact that the actual work of killing in the extermination centers was usually in the hands of Jewish commandos."<sup>85</sup>

While the men of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* were certainly not wholly innocent victims because of the actions they performed, Arendt does them an enormous disservice in claiming that they were the actual murderers in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In fact, she serves to bring the original goal Primo Levi deduced (making them perform tasks that shifted the onus of guilt from entirely on the Nazis to partially on the shoulders of the Jews themselves) to fruition, and completes their twisted circle of shifting the burden of blame and shaming through intense and spiritually detrimental victimization. Had Arendt been aware of her serious miscalculations and the true state of the *Sonderkommando* situation, especially with regard to mental damage, it stands to reason that she may have reevaluated her original assumptions.

## Conclusion

The extreme experiences of the men the Auschwitz-Birkenau require the creation of analytical frameworks that are as unique and unprecedented as their position in history. For this reason, these men came to personify analyses created by Holocaust scholars Primo Levi and Lawrence Langer. However, *Sonderkommando* survivor testimony necessitates the further application of the equivocal psyche and struggle to produce usable narratives in order to understand the reasons and consequences of their survival. It is also important to keep in mind that, as with the analysis of any Holocaust testimony, one walks a fine line when explaining the special squads' situations and their choices. They were not

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<sup>82</sup> Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 60.

<sup>83</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 246. Emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., Emphasis added.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 123.

perpetrators, but they still ended many days with blood on their hands. When understanding this and the myriad other moral conundrums encompassed, it is important to stress that these men were still victims of the Nazi terror.

Faced with such unspeakable atrocity, the Jewish *Sonderkommando* chose to live as long as possible, but at an immense cost. Burdened with memories that no one else can endeavor to understand, they were robbed of what Primo Levi calls the “solace of innocence,” leaving them in an interminable limbo between victim and perpetrator.<sup>86</sup> A handful miraculously survived to tell their incredible tales, for which history and humanity are indebted. However, a vital part of each died in the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is impossible to know if the outcome was worth the price they paid.

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<sup>86</sup> Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 53.

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# **There Is No Bournville in Africa: Chocolate Capitalist, African Cocoa Workers, and International Labor Relationships from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present**

By Ryan Minor

*Abstract: The issue of labor exploitation and the impact of neocolonialism, have in recent years, become extremely important as our global community continues to shrink. This paper focuses on the relationships between European chocolate manufactures and West African cocoa laborers from the 1870's to the present day as a means of discussing the complex connections that have developed between industrial capitalism and labor in Africa. This study will address two key questions: One, if labor exploitation is necessary for industrial capitalists to maintain the high levels of profit they desire; and two, if the exploitation of labor becomes increasingly easier the farther away the exploited person is from the society that benefits from their work. These issues will be explored in the context of trade relationships established during the colonial era, between Europe and West Africa, as well as through the various types of labor used in cocoa production including, accusations of slavery. To further complicate these questions, and in order to reach well rounded conclusions, a case study will also be used that focuses on the Cadbury chocolate company, and their dealings in São Tomé, Príncipe, Angola and Ghana over the last 130 years. In closing, a brief discussion of present day labor issues in the Cote d'Ivoire cocoa industry will be analyzed as well. Overall this study seeks to reveal the complex and often contradictory process of colonialism and capitalism in Africa.*

## **Introduction**

This study examines the history of the chocolate industry in Europe, and its connections with cocoa production in West Africa (particularly the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola, Ghana, and The Ivory Coast) where over three-fourths of the world's cocoa is grown today. As the pages of this study unfold, the chocolate industry will be used to examine the complex relationships between industrial capitalist and labor exploitation (both domestic and international). Cocoa is an example of a luxury product that fetches a premium price for the manufacturer in the world market, while often, bringing poverty and oppression to the laborers and farmers who grow and harvest the crop. The contradiction of wealth for certain sectors of the supply chain and poverty for others is what has motivated my interest in researching this commodity. As this topic is explored, the questions of why this exploitation is happening, how it began, how it evolved, and the justifications given for allowing it to continue today, will all be addressed.

The purpose of this paper is three fold: first, to ask if it is possible for an industrialized capitalist business to create the high levels of profit it desires without the exploitation of a labor force; second, to ask if the exploitation of a labor force becomes increasingly easier, the farther away the laborers are from the core society that benefits from their work (as in the case of international labor exploitation); and third, to lift the veil that exists between the consumer and the human rights violations that often occur at various stages in a commodity supply chain, in order to reveal the darker side of international “free” trade. The chocolate industry's involvement with African cocoa laborers is a perfect example of this veil, as the abuses have largely been concealed by the companies involved, as well as generally ignored by researchers and the public alike. This paper will attempt to uncover, to some small degree, why cocoa laborers have remained poor, oppressed, and without a voice despite the vast amounts of wealth having been made, over the last one hundred and fifty years, in the European chocolate industry.

### ***A Quotation Before we Begin...***

Man has always exploited his natural environment in order to make a living. At a certain point in time, there also arose the exploitation of man by man, in that a few people grew rich and lived well through the labor of others. Then a stage was reached by which people in one community called a nation exploited the natural resources and the labor of another nation and its people.<sup>1</sup>

-Walter Rodney

In the quote above, Walter Rodney is writing about colonization. In particular, he is referring to the form of colonization that began to manifest itself in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century between Europe and Africa. Imperialism is the term most often used when describing this type of empire building. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most African nations were under European imperial control.<sup>2</sup> The history of European involvement in Africa, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is often a story of brutality, exploitation, and at times, genocide. Over the last five hundred years, millions of Africans have been displaced, sold into slavery, forced to work under horrific conditions, or murdered. There is little debate regarding the countless atrocities committed in Africa under European influence, nor is their discussion the focus of this study. Those atrocities have been well documented over the years by numerous scholars, and do not need to be examined in depth again here. What will be examined in this study, is rather the development of European ideologies formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that enabled colonizers to justify treating Africans as less than human; as well as, how those abuses have continued to manifest themselves up to the present day.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press 1981), 22.

<sup>2</sup> There were in fact only two free African nations by WWI: Liberia and Ethiopia.

## ***Capitalist Ideologies and the Creation of the Factory Worker***

In order for the questions raised in the introduction, to be addressed appropriately, a series of events must first be considered. The first piece of this puzzle, is having a basic understanding of the intellectual thought processes and ideologies of 19<sup>th</sup> Century European political economists regarding domestic labor, and the way those ideas were translated into society.

### ***Rethinking Class Structures***

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europe was being reinvented. The early ideas of capitalism had taken a firm hold on society, and small business owners were reshaping the world in their image. While this new economic system had yet to be labeled “capitalism,” it is clear that the ideas of the time exhibit many of its early stages. During this time the class structure in Europe, especially in England, was changed drastically, which had polarizing effects on the population. The new middle class, who would eventually be referred to as capitalist, or the bourgeois by Marx, found itself in a position to gain vast amounts of wealth from recent advancements in technology and from the rising ideologies of both business and religious thought. The ideas of Smith and other like-minded political economists were heavily influencing the way new business models were being formed, while at the same time the Protestant Reformation caused a shift in religious thought, which moved people away from communal responsibility to a focus on individual salvation that came through hard work. Both of these ideological shifts were instrumental in defining what would come to be known as the European middle class.<sup>3</sup> The lower class on the other hand, became the working poor, and to many in the middle and upper classes, was considered little more than fuel to keep the industrial fire burning.

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<sup>3</sup> E.K. Hunt, *Property and Prophets* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe 2002), 36-40.

## ***Divisions of Labor and the Birth of the Factory***

By its very nature the system of capitalism must constantly progress and expand in order to maintain profits. Immanuel Wallerstein has defined capitalism as “a system that gives priority to the endless accumulation of capital,” and one that seeks to penalize any structural mechanisms that restrict this process; eventually removing the barriers all together or rerouting the flow of goods and services to exclude individuals and firms who are not willing to act accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

The pinnacle of this new era of profit maximization and market expansion was the creation of the industrial factory system. The factory was a place where large numbers of workers could be confined in a small space under the direct supervision of the manufacturer or a hired overseer. In the factory, the laborer, for the first time, was required to work at a pace set by a master; When to start, how many items to produce, when to take a break, and how many hours in a work day, were all out of his or her control. The introduction of machinery also implied for the first time a complete separation from the means of production; in essence the worker was transformed from a skilled artisan to little more than a ‘hand’ used to keep a machine running smoothly.<sup>5</sup>

In the factory, efficiency was more important than human contentment and machinery was more valuable than workers lives. Working conditions were horrid, with employees constantly being injured, losing body parts, and even dying from the crude machinery coupled with the long exhausting work hours. Those who survived the work often died at a young age, from exposure to volatile chemicals, or lung malfunctions brought about from years of working in poorly ventilated rooms. If injured or ill, employees had no choice but to keep working or face the prospect of losing their job. During this time, to be unable to work was grounds for dismissal, even if the causes were job related. Once a workers ‘hand’ was no longer useful, most business owners simply found a new fully functional one to replace it. A damaged worker became a hindrance to the accumulation of capital and as such, was removed from the system.

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 24.

<sup>5</sup> David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 43.

One of the most important writings that shaped this dehumanized view of the working class was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*; and more precisely, his view on divisions of labor. Smith believed that the maximization of labor output was key in increasing the wealth of a nation. He proposed that the best way to achieve this increase was to divide every aspect of a society into specialized tasks that allowed people to freely find a balance between their passions, natural abilities, and desire for income.<sup>6</sup> When applied to factory work, this process proved to be revolutionary, was soon implemented all across England, as well as other parts of Europe, and did in fact greatly increase production. This division of factory labor eventually came to be known as the assembly line.

Smith believed that the happiness of a nation was heavily dependent on the wealth of the middle class, and argued that they should be allowed to operate with as little constraint as possible from outside agencies, including the state government, or religious institutions. This belief in a "free market" would be one of the most important aspects of his economic ideologies, and would be overwhelmingly favored by the majority of business owners at the time. This line of reasoning also led many economists of the day to conclude that worker's wages must be kept at a level of subsistence.<sup>7</sup> Smith stated that any increase in wages above this

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<sup>6</sup> Smith's idea on division of labor revolved around the entire society and involved both physical and mental effort. He saw the division of labor, in a system of natural liberty, as a way to allow people to use their talents to increase production, which would lead to more wealth for a nation. Smith did not see his ideas as a means for personal wealth accumulation among all classes. For the purposes of this paper, specialization of labor is used to examine the way his ideas were eventually applied to factory work, as they were the basis for dividing tasks into simple repeatable steps to increase production. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003, original pub. date: 1776).

<sup>7</sup> Living at subsistence, is when a worker's wage is just enough income to buy basic necessities like food and shelter, as well as raise a family, who would eventually become the new generation of factory workers. Smith did not think laborers should be mistreated, but he did believe they had a specific role to play in the greater system. Smith never saw his ideas as an opportunity for the lower classes to move up the social ladder, but that they could still experience an increase in their quality of life, through advancements made by the business owning class. This process came to be known as living at cultural subsistence. For example: if one compares the living conditions of a worker from 2012 to those of a worker from 1912 one would find that the former of the two has a much higher standard of living, even though both are labeled as part of the same class, and are considered to be living at the level of subsistence for their



level would diminish the returns of the middle class, which could lead them to shut down their businesses, and ultimately cause the wealth of a nation to decrease.

Placing the emphasis on profits over labor conditions, in order to obtain happiness for a nation proved to be instrumental in shaping the climate of thought in Europe during this time. Two major effects that came from this mode of reasoning were: one, massive amounts of wealth for manufacturers from the increased rate of production and the cheap wages paid to workers; and two, the emergence of a new class of impoverished, dehumanized factory laborers who were used to do the repetitive, menial tasks necessary for the increase in production and subsequent wealth for middle and upper classes.

### ***The Enclosure Movement and the Poor Laws***

As industrialization continued to expand and dominate every aspect of European life, the average working class citizen found their ability to determine their livelihood steadily declining. In Britain for example, “Some 5,000 ‘enclosures’ under private and general Enclosure Acts broke up some six million acres of common fields and common lands, transforming them into private holdings, with numerous less formal arrangements supplementing them.”<sup>8</sup> This enclosure movement was enacted in order to increase the profitability of the land through the charging of rent; as well as, giving landowners an opportunity to compete with the new middle class, by keeping large herds of sheep, for the purpose of selling wool to the rapidly expanding English clothing manufacturers. To make room for these new enclosures, the lower classes, which had

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respective eras. This increase in the overall quality of life is due to the development of new technologies and products brought about by fierce competition between businesses to dominate the market and make a profit. Smith believed that all classes benefited from these advancements within a generation or two of their initial development, which led to a higher quality of life for all classes as a result. Unfortunately, many business owners have abused the idea of subsistence, paying workers unlivable wages, which led to the exploitation of the working class. These abuses, as mentioned above, were not what Smith proposed. This perversion of his ideas did not always lead to increased happiness for a nation, but rather an increase in happiness for a few, and discontentment for the majority.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Hobsbawm *The Age of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 153.

lived on the lands for centuries, were evicted. Once homeless, most people had no choice but to migrate to the cities in search of a place to live and work.

For those who tried to remain in the country a new *Poor Law* was also enacted to coerce the unemployed to find work or face severe consequences. To be unemployed was to be sent to a workhouse (basically a prison for the poor), beaten, or even killed. These conditions made it nearly impossible for the poor to remain in the countryside since most of the jobs had been recentralized to factories in the cities. “In the 1840s several counties were already on the verge of an absolute loss of population, and from 1850 land flight became general.”<sup>9</sup> With their lands striped away through enclosure, and unemployment laws in affect, the majority of the population could now only survive on wage labor; and as such, fell under the direct control of the emerging capitalist class. Thus the stage “where the exploitation of man by man, with a few people growing rich and living well through the labor of others,”<sup>10</sup> reached fruition.

### ***Opposing Views on Labor from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century***

Not all people agreed that an increase in wealth directly translated into happiness for a nation, or that protecting the business owners profits should be the primary objective of a society or government. Two scholars who deserve a brief mention on this side of the debate are Thomas Malthus and Karl Marx. Both of these men questioned the notion that a society could, or should, obtain “happiness” on the backs of the laboring poor.

Malthus questioned Adam Smith’s argument, which stated that increased national wealth always led to increased national happiness. He saw that the working poor, the majority of a nation, rarely benefited from an increase in wealth by the business class, a small minority. Malthus asked if this kind of wealth could ever bring true national happiness? He furthers his argument by stating that even if the worker sees an increase in wages from rising profits (cultural subsistence), as Smith proposed, it does very little to increase the happiness or status of his or her condition, in that soon after the increase in pay is given, an increase in the cost of

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<sup>9</sup> Hobsbawnm, 153.

<sup>10</sup> Rodney, 22.

purchasing provisions will soon follow. This increase in the cost of living would counteract the higher wage, thus leaving the poor in the same social position as before the increase in profits took place. From this conclusion Malthus reasoned that the working poor would never be able to break out of the cycle of oppression the middle class held them in, simply because the upper classes were able to manipulate the market in such ways as to yield maximum profits for themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Marx believed that Smith's system, which he first labeled as capitalism, was full of inequalities. Marx, having been born forty years after *The Wealth of Nations* had first been published, had the ability to write from the perspective of seeing Smith's system translated into reality. What he saw was a system where the rich were getting richer and the poor were not only getting poorer, but were also being stripped of their humanity. One of Marx major contributions to the discussion on capitalism was the idea of the alienation of labor. Marx wrote,

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* – and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general.<sup>12</sup>

And in another passage he writes,

The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the

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<sup>11</sup> M. P. Cowen and R. W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), 28.

object confronts him as something hostile and alien.<sup>13</sup>

Marx believed that a laborer had the right to be connected with what he created; and that it was impossible to be a legitimate member of society, or even fully human for that matter, if one's work was reduced to the making of an *alien* product, or portion of a product. Once the object of production was no longer understood, but was only seen as a task to be done, the labor itself became a thing of hostility and lost the ability to bring satisfaction to the worker.

From these viewpoints it is clear that capitalism, the socioeconomic system that had taken 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe by storm, was one that caused division and great debates among political economist and moral philosophers as it evolved from Smith's original ideologies into reality. These debates were especially strong in regards to the treatment of the working class. Some thought of laborers as necessary cogs in the machine with a subservient role to play, while others viewed them as a group of oppressed, marginalized, and exploited people who had fallen victim to the evils of a system that desired profits more than anything else.

It is also important to note that not all manufacturers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century viewed exploitation of the working class as an acceptable road to profit; and, while it may be true that the description of the factory system previously described was the common practice of most business owners of the time, there were some notable exceptions. It is necessary at this point of the study to examine one such group of capitalist, Quaker chocolate makers, who believed that one did not have to choose between business profits and worker's rights.

### ***Quaker Capitalism***

Chocolate has been called the "food of the gods", and has been enjoyed by emperors, kings, nobles and enlightened thinkers for centuries. Cultures have used it as currency, an aphrodisiac, medicine, and simply for the delicious taste. Over the last five hundred years, chocolate has gone from a drink unknown outside

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 28.

the jungles of Mexico and South America, to become one of the most heavily traded and universally loved commodities in the world. Chocolate is made from a bean called cocoa. The trees that grow these beans are extremely fragile, requiring near perfect conditions and warm climates to flourish. Before Europeans were introduced to cocoa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the trees could only be found in the equatorial forest of South and Central America, as well as Mexico. Today the crop is prevalent all along the equator, in multiple continents, including parts of Asia and Africa.

Decolonization throughout the Americas over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, created instability in trade relationships between the locals and former colonizers; which disrupted the cocoa markets there. At this same time, diseases wiped out large quantities of cocoa trees in certain areas of South America and Mexico. Both of these factors led to a shift in cocoa production, allowing Africa to become a major player by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, where these issues were not prominent.<sup>14</sup> Today, three quarters of all cocoa beans sold in the world are grown in West Africa.<sup>15</sup>

From Chocolate's initial introduction into European society, until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it was almost universally used in a powder form, mixed with water, to make drinks. The only solid forms were very brittle, bitter, and rarely eaten. Chocolate drinks were served alongside of coffee and tea in social houses and became a favorite among the elite classes of the time.<sup>16</sup> Chocolate, in what would be considered the modern candy bar form, would not be introduced to the public until the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Van Houten's Powder and Fry's Candy Bar***

In 1828 a Dutch inventor, named Coenradd Van Houten, would introduce the cocoa bean to the hydraulic press, in search of a purer form of cocoa powder, and unknowingly begin the processes that changed the way chocolate would be enjoyed by future

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<sup>14</sup> W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> To examine the history of cocoa from its discovery in South America to modern times would take more pages than this paper has to offer. For additional historical background see: *The True History of Chocolate* by Coe and Coe (see bibliography).

<sup>16</sup> Clarence-Smith, 13-14.

generations. Van Houten's device used 6,000 pounds of pressure, to expel the fat from the cocoa bean, leaving a finely ground, purer form of cocoa than had previously been possible to create by hand.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, it was the fatty by-product from this process, that Van Houten found useless, not the refined powder he was after, that revolutionized the industry.

The discovery of what to do with the fat from the bean, called cocoa butter, is credited to a chocolate producing firm from England called Frys. Joseph Fry, a third generation chocolate maker, discovered that by combining Van Houten's press with a steam engine he was able to control the expulsion of the fat from the bean. Carol Off writes,

Van Houten's machine had been inspired by his determination to produce the finest possible form of dry chocolate powder. The residue – that unappetizing cocoa butter – became a useless by-product. But Fry and his family found a purpose for it. By blending small amounts of melted, clarified cocoa butter with cocoa solids – along with sugar and flavours – the company had a substance they could mould.<sup>18</sup>

It was out of this substance that the modern chocolate bar was born. Through the invention of this bar, Frys became the premier chocolate manufacturer in Europe by the 1860's. The success of the bar was due to the fact that it could be eaten right off the shelf, and because of the sweet taste that came from the addition of sugar. During this time, competition began to develop from other companies looking to reap the financial benefits of the growing industry. Of these new companies, the two most notable were Rowntree and Cadbury.<sup>19</sup> Eventually both these companies would surpass the Frys, but it would be the Cadburys, through their creation of milk chocolate, who would soon be the undisputed rulers of the English chocolate empire.

Besides chocolate production, the Fry, Rowntree, and Cadbury families had another thing in common, Quakerism.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> Carol Off, *Bitter Chocolate* (New York: The New Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 51.

Quakers, a protestant sect of Christianity, had experienced persecution and exile from the Church of England for generations. Holding government positions and attending universities were just two of the many areas of life that Quakers were forbidden from participating in. These hardships shaped the way Quakers viewed their surroundings; as a result they lived by a very strict set of principles, which included a strong work ethic and a belief in the betterment of one's fellow man. They believed that salvation was attained through hard work, and saw wealth as a tool to improve society, which included alleviating the lives of the oppressed. No Quaker would ever admit to desiring riches for themselves; and accumulating wealth without some form of distribution in the community was considered a sinful act.

As the demand for chocolate grew throughout Europe and the rest of the world, so too did the fortunes of the Chocolate makers. True to their Quaker heritage, these families would use their wealth to make lasting improvements on society and in the lives of the poor. The Rowntrees and Cadburys in particular would lead the charge in alleviating the hardships of the underpaid and overworked lowest class.

### ***The Rowntrees***

Joseph Rowntree was preoccupied for much of his life with trying to improve the lives of his employees, providing a library in the factory, education for workers under the age of seventeen, free medical and dentistry services, as well as pension funds. All of these services were unheard of in England during this time, where sweatshops and indentured labour were common practice.<sup>21</sup>

In 1901, Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, Joseph's son, published a book researching the condition of the wage-earning class in York, the town where Rowntree's factory was located. He wrote in the introduction to his work,

My object in undertaking the investigation detailed in this volume was, if possible, to throw some light upon the conditions which govern the life of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 51.

wage earning classes in provincial towns, and especially upon the problem of poverty.<sup>22</sup>

To obtain this information, He went from house to house in York, interviewing thousands of working class families, in an attempt to understand the root causes of their poverty. Beyond his research, Benjamin Rowntree was also an active member of a group of moral businessmen, who petitioned the government to establish a minimum wage, while also arguing that democratic power should be in the House of Commons (the elected body of government) not in the House of Lords (the appointed body). True to these beliefs, Rowntree, allowed his factory workers to democratically elect managers, and had the rights, wages, and benefits of the workers written down and declared openly by the company.<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Cadburys***

Like the Rowntrees, the Cadburys desired to see the lives of the working poor improved and were horrified by the general working conditions in factories of the day. Determined to do something about what they saw, the Cadburys decided to move their operations four miles away from the city center of Birmingham, to the countryside. In 1878 construction began on the new home of Cadbury Chocolate, the town of Bournville, built by the Cadbury family on four and a half acres of open space along the banks of the Bourn brook. The move was completed in September 1879 and was given the name Bournville at that time. The Cadburys adopted a French sounding name, as France had a good reputation for food, in the hope that their chocolate sales would improve.<sup>24</sup>

Once the factory was complete, George Cadbury set out to work on creating a model village of well-built cottages with large gardens for his employees. During the factory's construction, sixteen decent sized cottages had been built for key workers. In

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<sup>22</sup> B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1971), xvii.

<sup>23</sup> *Off*, 52-53.

<sup>24</sup> Birmingham City Council. Bournville Village Trust Archive. <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Lib-Central-Archives-and-Heritage%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092756354&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper>



1895 more land was purchased and architect Alexander Harvey was employed. Construction on more homes began the following year. The project was called *Bournville Building Estate* and publicity from the time told of its virtues. Bournville was based on a concept known as “garden cities” which were designed to give workers the benefits of both urban and country life. Each house was to occupy no more than a quarter of its building plot and each garden was “not less than one-sixth of an acre” with at least six fruit trees. Cadbury hoped that workers would grow their own fruit and vegetables in these gardens.<sup>25</sup>

By 1905 Bournville consisted of 315 well built homes, gardens, open landscapes, shops, a dining hall, churches, and a cricket pavilion, all centered around the “Factory in a Garden,” and surrounded by clean air, and the rushing river. The village was considered revolutionary for its time, and the Cadburys were soon revered for their benevolence and ingenuity.<sup>26</sup> The experiences of factory workers in Bournville would have seemed like a different world from most other laborers of the day. Life was rich and rewarding for those who had been fortunate enough to find work there. *The Bournville Village Trust* came into being in December of 1900, with its purpose to oversee development of the village for the benefit of the residents. Bournville was an exemplary model of a Quaker city and its residents felt the morals of the sect in every aspect of life. There was an insistence on a healthy diet, having a strong work ethic, attending church, as well as taking care of those around you.<sup>27</sup>

The English Quaker chocolate makers had developed a type of industrial capitalism where human rights and equality were valued. By bringing their ideologies to the workplace, these families had simultaneously achieved profits and advancements in working conditions for the poor. These Quakers were the exception in a time when labor exploitation was considered a necessary and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> It has been argued that a visit to Bournville gave Milton Hershey the inspiration to build Hershey Pennsylvania, the utopian chocolate city that would eclipse the philanthropic work of any business owner at the time it was constructed. Off, 78.

<sup>27</sup> Off, 50-55; Birmingham City Council. Bournville Village Trust Archive. <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Lib-Central-Archives-and-Heritage%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092756354&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper>

acceptable means to increase profit margins by most business owners. Yet these companies, while going against the traditional capitalist model, not only managed to maintain profits, but increase them dramatically. Was the key to their financial success simply their loyal workforce, who diligently labored in the factories to show appreciation to their benevolent employers? Was it the deeply instilled, frugality and strong work ethic of the Quaker community? Was it the popularity of the new forms of chocolate the industry provided? Perhaps it was a combination of all of these elements working together; or perhaps it was something less obvious. There will be an attempt to answer these questions in a later section of this study, but before the chocolate industry is examined further, the role of technology and the expansion of international trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century must be briefly addressed.

### ***Technology, Science, and Imperialism***

One of the traits of capitalist societies is fierce competition. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century this was especially true. Due to the smaller size of most businesses, and the ability to enter a new field of production in a relatively short period of time, no company could hope to maintain a monopoly on a product for very long. This extreme competition forced business owners to constantly strive for, new markets, new ideas, and new innovative ways to produce current items that would give them an economic advantage over their competitors.

One of the benefits of this type of market competition is that technological advancement is achieved at an incredibly high rate. It was during this time of technological breakthrough, that portable engines were first developed and used in the transportation of people and commodities. By the 1880's Railroads were cutting down shipment times on national and continental commerce, while the use of compound steam engines coupled with advances in shipbuilding, made trans-oceanic commerce more economical as well.<sup>28</sup>

As capitalism continued to move like a rushing river all across Europe, it was becoming obvious to the business world that domestic markets must be expanded if profits were to be maintained, or allowed to grow, above the current rate of return. It

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<sup>28</sup> Clarence-Smith, 112.

is during this time that European business owners turned their eyes toward the non-industrialized world, and Africa in particular. Full of potential consumers, natural resources, open lands, and exploitable labor, the African Continent was a capitalist's utopia waiting to be conquered. Once these new market based relationships with Africa could be established, the continent would offer the industrialized world a new, untapped market in which to sell cheap factory textiles and manufactured goods; while also, increasing European access to the vast supply of natural resources, open lands, and laborers there. Many of these resources were essential to the growth and maintenance of "modern" civilization; and Europe was growing more reliant on them every year.

### ***European Land Crisis, Legitimate Trade, and Monoculture***

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many European countries, especially England, were reaching maximum capacity for land use and were in desperate need of additional soil. Moreover, many of the crops central to industrialization could only be grown in tropical climates. These two factors made Africa very attractive to European industrial interests. Among these tropical crops were palm oil, cocoa, coffee, kola nuts, rubber, and other groundnuts.<sup>29</sup> Beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Europeans began encouraging African nations to plant these crops in large quantities.<sup>30</sup> This form of commerce that came to be known as 'legitimate' trade, would eventually overrun Africa with what is known as monoculture economies, and in essence, turn much of Africa into an external source of fertile land to feed Europe's growing economic and industrial needs.

With new modes of transportation between Africa and Europe achieved by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, fostering economic advantages that were previously thought impossible. the idea of colonization began to creep into the forefront of many European capitalist's minds. Once colonized, Africa would offer capitalist the opportunity to secure their monoculture trade routes as well as

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press 1981), 234.

<sup>30</sup> This was partially done in an attempt to rework the existing trade relationships that were no longer an option after abolition outlawed human trafficking in the early 19th century.

obtain access to all of the before mentioned advantages for an incredibly low cost. It was this advancement in transport, coupled with the necessity of land, resources, and labor, all available at incredibly low production cost, which would eventually push Europeans toward colonization.

## ***Weapons***

Another aspect of technological advancement manifested itself in the form of weaponry. The industrialized world was arming itself with weapons during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that could do much greater damage than those from previous generations. These weapons were necessary for the conflicts between the industrialized powers of Europe, and for the protection of national borders. The need for national safety coupled with the fear of invasion had a stimulating effect on the rate at which offensive weapons and defensive battlements were developed. These weapons gave industrialized countries a distinct advantage in conflicts with Africans, when they began to seize their lands. And while it is true that some Africans had access to European forms of weaponry through the slave trade, these armaments were generally of inferior manufacturing and often malfunctioned.

## ***Scientific Racism***

Besides the before mentioned advantages, Europeans used technology and science for far more destructive and sinister purposes in the colonization of African nations. Scientific Racism would be used in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century to not only prove the “superiority” of Europeans, but also to justify the subjugation and exploitation of the “inferior natives.” Some of these “racial scientists,” in “modern” nations, began to question the idea that all men were actually capable of being equal.

These ideas were in direct contrast to the ideologies of the Enlightenment movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Enlightenment philosophers were known for believing that all men were created equal and that given proper education and laws, could reach the state of the already “enlightened” Europeans. While it is an issue of debate as to how much progress was actually attempted by Europeans toward achieving equality during this time, the ideology itself spoke of human altruism and universal respect.

Many scientific ideas regarding humanity that were taking root in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on the other hand, were often overtly racist, with its supporters publically proclaiming racial inequality, making no attempt to hide their beliefs that non-European races were biologically inferior.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scientific racism, which took many forms, including phrenology, craniology, eugenics, and racial hierarchy, would be used as a justification to dehumanize non-European races as an inferior sub-set of the species. As Europe and the rest of the industrialized world began to make colossal, technological leaps and bounds over places like India and Africa, these scientific racists would cite examples of innovation, creativity, and modernity to attempt to reinforce their claims that certain races were more intelligent than others.

In his, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, from 1915, Arthur de Gobineau wrote that there were three distinct races: white, black, and yellow. He also wrote that the rise and fall of civilization hinged upon these races being kept pure. The reason he gave for this separation was the natural superiority of the white race, who were the guardians of advanced civilization. In excerpts from his *Essay*, regarding black Africans, he writes,

The negroid variety is the lowest, and stands at the foot of the ladder... His intellect will always move with in a very narrow circle... The very strength of his sensations is the most striking proof of his inferiority... To these qualities may be added an instability and capriciousness of feeling, that cannot be tied down to any single object, and which, so far as he is concerned, do away with all distinctions of good and evil... And finally he is equally careless of his own life and that of others: he kills willingly for the sake of killing...<sup>31</sup>

In the closing paragraph of his essay Gobineau writes,

Such is the lesson of history. It shows us that all civilizations derive from the white race, that none

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, "Essay on the Inequality of Human Races" in *Racism: A Global Reader* eds. Kevin Reilly, Stephen Kaufman, and Angela Bodino (New York: M. E. Sharpe), 2003.

can exist without its help, and that society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belong to the most illustrious branch of our species.<sup>32</sup>

It was ideologies like these that gave Europeans the justifications to overlook the moral dilemmas of colonization. Armed with superior technology and backed by “scientifically proven” racist ideologies, Europeans took Africa and its people hostage, and used the continent for the sole purpose of aiding in the development of their industrialized society. Thus “the stage was reached by which people in one community called a nation exploited the natural resources and the labor of another nation and its people.”

### ***Cadbury v. Nevinson***

In order to fully address the connections between exploitation of labor and higher profits for European capitalist, it is important to expand this study to include an examination of the international component of labor along the supply chain. In the introduction to this paper, two questions were posed. One, is it possible for an industrialized capitalist business to make the high level of profits it desires without the exploitation of a labor force, and two, does the exploitation of a labor force become increasingly easier, the farther away the laborers are from the society (as in the case of international labor exploitation).

To answer these questions, the study will now return to the chocolate industry; and in particular, an investigation from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, launched to examine claims of slave labor on cocoa plantations in Africa that involved the Cadbury family, and a reporter named Henry Nevinson. The investigation, performed first hand by Mr. Nevinson, regarding the conditions of laborers on cocoa plantations, in Portuguese Angola and two of their colonial islands, would link slavery with the chocolate industry, and tarnish the reputations of some of the most beloved families in Europe.

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<sup>32</sup> Reilly, 197.

## ***The First Confrontation***

As early as the 1880's reports began circulating in anti-slavery newspapers in Europe and America, linking cocoa plantations with slavery in Portuguese Angola, and on two islands off its coast, São Tomé and Príncipe. One of these papers, *The Reporter*, published many accounts describing what the Portuguese called "indentured servitude" as nothing more than a new name for slavery. These reports are what would initially stir Nevinson to action.

Englishman Henry Woodd Nevinson was a professor of history turned investigative reporter, who spent the majority of his life speaking out for the poor and oppressed around the world. In 1904 Nevinson was asked to write a story, of his choosing, for *Harper's Monthly*. The topic He chose was the Portuguese labor system in Angola. Nevinson was determined to uncover whether or not the claims of modern slavery, existing behind the guise of indentured servitude, were justifiable. He was also interested in discovering why the British government was so quick to accept Portuguese reports that stated there was no slavery on the plantations, in spite of years of mounting evidence that seemed to prove otherwise.

Before embarking on the journey, Nevinson decided to speak with the Cadburys, who purchased the majority of their cocoa from São Tomé and Príncipe, to see if they would be willing to help him in his investigation. The Cadburys in recent years had become outspoken activist against the atrocities in the Belgian Congo and of King Leopold's "civilization" processes imposed on the Africans there. George Cadbury, along with other activist, had criticized the Belgian Government for still practicing slavery, under the name of "indentured" servitude; and, in their claiming that Congolese worked for a wage, and of their own free will, when neither of these things were true. Nevinson thought, given their interest in abolition, the Cadbury's would jump at the chance to expose the truth about slavery on Portuguese cocoa plantations. What he encountered instead was awkwardness by the Quakers when the subject was brought up in discussion. George Cadbury, the elder of the family, told Nevinson that they were aware of the problem, and that an investigation was currently being launched. That was the end of discussion between the two men.

Cadbury's reaction bothered Nevinson. Given the family's history of championing human rights in the work place and

fighting to end slavery in the world, he found their lack of concern perplexing.<sup>33</sup> The Cadburys were not only at the forefront of revealing human rights violations in Africa, but were also subscribers to *The Reporter*, which had published the articles that originally compelled Nevinson to act.<sup>34</sup> Nevinson began to question the motives behind the Cadburys reluctance to speak on the reports from Angola. He wondered if they could approach the topic in a non-biased way, with it being so closely related to the family's livelihood. Undeterred, and more curious than ever, Nevinson headed for Angola to find the truth. He arrived on the coast of equatorial African in December 1904.

### ***An Englishman in Africa***

What Nevinson discovered in Angola was just as he had thought and feared. Soon after his arrival in the coastal town of Luanda, he encountered Men, women, and children locally referred to as contracted laborers, boarding the lowest decks of passenger ships headed for São Tomé and Príncipe. Many of these Africans were in shackles, and showed physical signs of torture and malnourishment.

To conduct his investigation Nevinson soon left Luanda to walk the alleged slave trade route himself. Following a local guide, this journey lead him to the interior, eventually back to the coast, onto one of the transport ship he had previously seen in Luanda, and eventually to the islands themselves. By the time he reached São Tomé, Nevinson had already seen more than enough to write his *Harper's* article. Angola was indeed rampant with a modern form of slavery. In regards to the slave route on the mainland, Nevinson wrote,

The Path is strewn with dead men's bones. You see the white thigh-bones lying in front of your feet, and at one side, among the undergrowth, you find the skull. These are the skeletons of slaves who

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<sup>33</sup> Off, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 61.



have been unable to keep up with the march, and so were murdered or left to die.<sup>35</sup>

Once on the island, while at a dinner with a few prominent citizens of São Tomé, Nevinson was told by a doctor, that one of the “largest and best managed” plantations had a death rate of one in four among servant children, and that the death rate on Príncipe was almost one in five among African workers of all ages and genders per year.<sup>36</sup>

Nevinson also debunked the claim that a portion of each weeks wage was set aside to aid these “indentured servants” in their return home after their contract was over. He wrote,

They never send a slave home, and they do not deduct the money for doing it. Neither do they deduct a portion of the wages, which according to the law, might be sent to the mainland for the support of a man’s family till the termination of his contract. They know that a contract only terminates at death...<sup>37</sup>

Workers were forced to sign these labor contracts before leaving the mainland, which were automatically renewed over the years when they ran out. Contracts were sold between landowners on the islands, and children of laborers were forced to sign contracts as well when they were old enough. Some 70,000 people were imported this way to São Tomé and Príncipe before the practice was ended in 1908.<sup>38</sup>

For all intents and purposes the cocoa laborers on São Tomé and Príncipe were slaves. Nevinson had seen the signs of abuse, the lack of freedom, the inability to return home, and the overall inhumane treatment that were all common characteristics of slavery in its most brutal forms. The payment of wages did somewhat validate the indentured servant propaganda; however, it was a minuscule amount of money with most of it returning to the plantation owners, as Africans bought goods at inflated prices from

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Nevinson, “A Modern Slavery” in *Slavery in Portuguese Africa: Opposing Views*, (Northbrook, IL: Metro Books, 1972), 113.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>38</sup> Clarence-Smith, 221.

the plantation stores. The Portuguese could call the system whatever they wanted; what was clear to Nevinson was that in Angola, and on the Portuguese controlled islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, these “indentured” servants were being worked to death at an alarming rate, many to harvest a luxury crop that served no purpose outside of bringing pleasure to the “civilized” world.

A quote by another guest at the plantation dinner referred to above, sums up the views of the colonizers on these islands quite well. The unnamed woman is quoted as saying, “Call it slavery if you like. Names and Systems don’t matter. The sum of human happiness is being infinitely increased.”<sup>39</sup> From the colonist perspective this quote was true. During this time, São Tomé and Príncipe were being transformed by the profits made off of agricultural exports. Fifteen hundred kilometers of railroads were built on the islands, as well as many ports and roads to aid in transportation. Steamers and sailing ships were common, and telephone lines and electricity were incorporated into the society as well. Truly “modern cities” were springing up on the plantations, built on the profits made by the use of “indentured” labor.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The Second Confrontation***

Armed with his findings, Nevinson came back to England, and began working on the *Harper’s* Article. Once published, his story outraged the chocolate manufactures of Europe who claimed an over-exaggeration of the situation. To counter Nevinson’s claims, the manufacturers stated they had meet with the Portuguese government, and that their officials had promised to right any injustices that were happening on the islands, in the near future.<sup>41</sup> Nevinson and other activists were not convinced, with many calling for the chocolate makers to boycott cocoa beans coming from the Portuguese colonies.

Nevinson had shed new light on how the Cadburys and other chocolate manufacturers were able to improve the lives of their domestic factory workers and make profits at the same time. The secret was not only in their work ethic, their unique product, nor in their kindness, but also in a far off, and up to this point easily hidden, exploitable labor force that allowed the chocolate makers

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<sup>39</sup> Nevinson, 190.

<sup>40</sup> Clarence-Smith, 184.

<sup>41</sup> Off, 62.

to purchase cocoa at inexpensive prices from the plantations. These events caused the once revered Quaker chocolate makers to fall from grace in the eyes of the public. It appeared that the desire for profits, even if they were to improve the lives of those around them, had blinded the benevolent capitalist to the realities of their own business practices.

### ***To Boycott or Not to Boycott...***

The Cadburys' dilemma in boycotting the Portuguese, at the time Nevinson's story was first published, would have meant paying much higher prices for the enormous amounts of cocoa they needed per year from a variety of scattered suppliers. This increase in production cost might have meant cutting back on the wages or benefits of their factory employees, raising prices on their products, or taking a decrease in profits for themselves. The manufacturers needed more time to devise a solution that avoided these unprofitable outcomes. As a result, the Cadburys chose to stall the issue as long as possible, by not only refusing to boycott, but also by urging others in the chocolate business to downplay the claims of slavery on the islands, reassuring them that the English Government was working to right the situation.<sup>42</sup> The hesitant stance taken by the Cadburys in regards to these distant labor abuses allows one to examine firsthand the tremendous pull that capitalism can have over one's decisions. Here was a family, revered as great philanthropists, labor advocates, and abolitionists, confronted with the seemingly simple choice of placing humanity over personal gain as had been done so many times before; yet for reasons that may never be fully understood, they chose to sit idle, while thousands of people were suffering to harvest their cocoa, and encouraged others to do the same.

To justify their inaction, the Cadburys chose to believe that the laborers were not actually slaves, but rather "indentured" servants or "contracted" laborers as the Portuguese had stressed. Ironically, the justifications given by the Cadburys, for continuing to do business with the Portuguese, were the same reasons given by the Belgians to defend labor practices in the Congo; the very same justifications the Cadburys had publicly condemned in their newspapers as nothing more than a whitewashing of slavery.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 67.

Eventually the Cadbury's did boycott the Portuguese and convinced the other major players in the industry to follow suit. The boycott did not begin until 1909, four years after Nevinson's article was first published, and only then because the Cadburys had secured an alternative source for sustainable cocoa in Ghana. What frustrated Nevinson most was the delay in action, and the countless lives that had been lost in the thirty plus years from the time the reports first surfaced until the boycott took effect.

The point to be made from this series of events is that the farther away labor exploitation takes place from an individual, the easier it becomes to ignore or justify. The Quakers had to see the poverty in England everyday of their lives. This constant exposure would prove impossible to ignore for the group of business owners who considered themselves, in theory, advocates first and capitalist second. As a result, the Quakers would fight for the advancement of living and working conditions in England by improving factory conditions, studying and writing about poverty, as well as lobbying for government action on behalf of the poor. This same exposure would lead the Cadburys to build their "garden city" in an attempt to free their employees from the oppression facing the lower classes at the time.

The African cocoa laborers were not so fortunate. There were no philanthropic business owners walking by the plantations on a regular basis being appalled by what they saw. And with the final destination of their crop thousands of miles away, there was little hope that those enjoying the chocolate made possible by their labor, would ever come to their aid. In fact, even when the Chocolate manufactures eventually did stop supporting the Portuguese labor system, they did very little to alleviate the working and living conditions of the Africans who had suffered and died harvesting their cocoa. Instead, these chocolate manufacturers found a new source for beans that was less controversial, and began doing business with those farmers instead. There would never be a *Bournville* in São Tomé or Príncipe for the African labors of the chocolate supply chain; nor would the Quakers redeem them from their oppressive employers, as had been the case with their English counterparts. The chocolate makers would instead turn to Ghana, hoping to close the wound that had been caused by Nevinson's report before it could leave a permanent scar on their companies or their personal reputations.

## ***Ghana: The New Cocoa Capital of the World***

After the Boycott on the Portuguese began, the European chocolate industry began to purchase the majority of its cocoa from Ghana. In 1909 the first year of the boycott, Ghana had only been growing cocoa for about twenty years. Before 1900 the country was a very small player in international distribution and would have been incapable of handling the volume of cocoa demanded by the major players in the industry. But in the years that followed the boycott of Angola and its islands, when Cadbury and the other major chocolate manufacturers began to rely heavily on Ghana for their beans, the country became the single largest cocoa producing country in the world.

Ghana's success was born out of the country's ability to offer European chocolate makers the two elements they desired most after the Angolan slave fiasco. A place where cocoa could be bought in large quantities for low prices, and most importantly, a nation that was under British control with no major reports of slavery within its borders. Ghana was safe, with no sensational news stories for reporters to uncover. There was poverty, abuse, and even some forms of labor that resembled slavery within the nation, but nothing that would outrage most Europeans of the time. To most people, Ghana was just another distant colony in the British Empire, full of impoverished non-European people who did not know any other way to live.

The lives of the majority of cocoa farmers in Ghana were better than those of the laborers on São Tomé and Príncipe, but by European standards they were still very poor. Cocoa production in Ghana has, by and large, always been in the hands of small independent farmers, not plantations as was the case in the Portuguese colonies. It took hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians on thousands of farms to prepare the crop each year. By 1911, Ghana was the leading producer of cocoa in the world, requiring the equivalent of 37 million labor days, or the work of some 185,000 people to cultivate the crop. Family labor was heavily used in the process, and there were probably as many workers as farmers in Akim and Akwapim in 1910.<sup>43</sup>

Often, migrant seasonal workers were also needed to fill the labor pool. These workers were typically young men from

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<sup>43</sup> Clarence-Smith, 218-219.

neighboring communities or nations, who were paid the bare minimum wage, by farmers to obtain their services.<sup>44</sup> Farmers often saw their own profits reduced at market as well. Merchants were usually able to pay low prices for cash crops leaving the non-market institution, the farming household, to absorb most of the cost of land, labor and capital required for cultivation and production.<sup>45</sup> As a result of this merchant friendly supply chain, foreigners and wealthy traders were able to profit, while African cocoa laborers and farmers were both left with minimal income to show for their work.

By the 1930's, through the money brought into the nation from cocoa exports, many people in Ghana were able to live quite well. Cocoa helped build a decent road system, and funded education for the elite of the nation as well. But Ghana was still a British colony, and while it is true that a few farmers were able to experience moderate financial success, the majority remained impoverished and largely unaffected by the profits that their work was producing for the nation.

John Newman grew up in Ghana in the 1950's and was one of the many elite children who benefited from the profits of the cocoa industry there. He was well educated, played cricket, and described himself as someone who could have been easily transplanted in the UK with very little adjustment.<sup>46</sup> When he was in his twenties, Newman took a job working for the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board. It was during this time that he had his first real interactions with cocoa farmers and their living conditions. He was struck by the contrast of his privileged upbringing and the poverty of the farmers and their families. In an interview, he said,

I was offered bad water and I couldn't drink it. [I said] I will apologize, I can't drink it, the farmer said you *obroni* [white person] go away." It was at this time in my life I began to think, "This is the person who helps create the wealth. I have never been a part of wealth creation, yet I have gone to all the schools and played cricket, I could have been

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<sup>44</sup> Garath Austin, *Land Labor and Capital in Ghana* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>45</sup> Austin, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Orla Ryan, *Chocolate Nations: Living and Dying for Cocoa in West Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 121.

lifted and dumped in the UK, and I would have  
been alright and yet I don't belong [there] I belong  
here.<sup>47</sup>

Here was the lifeblood of the nation, living in filth, uneducated, and poor, while Newman had been living in privilege his entire life as a beneficiary of their labor. From these interactions, Newman decided that he would spend the rest of his life as a consultant fighting for the rights of cocoa farmers and for fair purchase prices on their crops.<sup>48</sup>

In the last fifty years, little has changed for the Ghanaian farmer. In 2008 the global market for cocoa and chocolate products was roughly seventy billion dollars. Total profits made by Ghana in exports of cocoa were \$1.2 billion. This translates to roughly four percent of the total world profit for a nation that supplied over fifty percent of the world's cocoa that year.<sup>49</sup> Most farmers' villages still have dirty water, mud houses, and no schools for their children. The majority of farmers desperately want their children to get an education in order to escape the cocoa fields when they reach adulthood, but with the price of cocoa regulated in far off commodity exchange centers, most Ghanaians do not receive enough money from their crops to even send their children to school. The Ghanaians, like the Angolans before them have been caught in a system of international exploitation for decades, where a few major manufacturers control the majority of the purchases, and the price as well. With cocoa, as has been the case so many times in the history of international capitalism, the business owning class, is able to extract what they want, for the price they set, from the lowest classes of society who often have no choice but to accept whatever terms they are given. This trifecta of circumstances leaves the African cocoa farmers with no voice, and often very little income as well. The lives of the Ghanaian cocoa farmers, while perhaps better than those of the Angolans, have never measured up to the ideals set forth by the Quakers for their European workers. Many of these chocolate capitalists have been involved in the nation for over a century, and while some have attempted to make minor improvements to the farmer's lives, there still has yet to be a *Bournville* built in Ghana.

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<sup>47</sup> Ryan, 121.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6.

### ***Cote d'Ivoire, and the Continued Struggles Cocoa Laborers***

If there is one positive thing to be said about cocoa in Ghana, it is that the majority of workers have never been actual slaves. In the neighboring nation of Cote d'Ivoire no such claims can be made. Over the last decade, and dating back as early as the 1990's, Reports have been made claiming that between 12,000 and 20,000 children have been stolen from neighboring countries, including Mali and Burkina Faso, and forced to work on cocoa plantations.<sup>50</sup> Cote d'Ivoire is the leading producer of cocoa in the world today. According to the World Cocoa Foundations website, seventy percent of all cocoa is produced between Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and a few other smaller producers in West Africa.

In her book, *Bitter Chocolate*, Carol Off records a conversation with an ex-Malian diplomat named Abdoulaye Macko, who worked in Cote d'Ivoire to free some of these children. After Macko shows Off a photo album of the boys he has personally met, she writes,

The photographs are startling. Page after page reveals groups of dusty, frightened children, without footwear, dressed in scanty clothing, unsmiling faces revealing poignant details that illustrate the story the former diplomat is telling. There are scores of boys in the pictures, ranging in age from about ten to eighteen; dozens of the photos show the shoulders and backsides of the youths with their open sores and cuts. It's difficult to know which wounds are from beatings and which are from carrying the heavy sacks, but the sores were all untreated. Most of the boys had been on these

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<sup>50</sup> These reports have been backed up by many firsthand accounts, documentaries, and non-profit organizations that are involved in trying to stop human trafficking. Off, 124; UNICEF, "The state of the World's Children 2011", [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC\\_2011\\_Main\\_Report\\_EN\\_02242011.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2011_Main_Report_EN_02242011.pdf)



farms for months or even years before Macko found them.<sup>51</sup>

Macko said that most of these children were stolen from their families and smuggled into Cote D'Ivoire by mercenaries, for the sole purpose of being sold to cocoa plantations. Macko also said that he was able to free some of the children he met, but that it was a very small percentage of the total number of young boys still in captivity.<sup>52</sup>

With so much of the world's cocoa crop coming from Cote d'Ivoire, and so much of it harvested by these stolen children, it is virtually impossible to keep slavery out of the major manufacturer's cocoa purchases today. Commodity exchange markets complicate these issues further, by co-mingling beans from around the world, with little accountability for how they are grown or harvested. As a result, most chocolate, unless labeled fair or ethically traded, is made with at least some cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire harvested by these child laborers.

### ***The Hypocrisy of it All***

The history of the chocolate industry can be divided into two parallel co-existing stories. One story is of the benevolent, paternalistic Quaker, whose riches flowed like the Bourn River into the lives of their workers, the community, and the fight to see all oppression ended in the world. These families were the anti-capitalist's capitalists, who put humanity before profitability and found success in both circles. The visuals of this story are the advertisements of children playing in grassy fields while eating candy; of young lovers sharing first kisses over hot cocoa and of joy and laughter. This is the story of delicious chocolate.

The other story is of a completely different nature. It reeks of exploitation, oppression, cover-ups, the dragging of feet, and the concern for profits over human life. It is a story of protecting self-interests while hundreds of thousands of people have suffered under oppressive forced labor conditions or kept in poverty, for over a century. It is unfortunately a story too often associated with large-scale industrial capitalist business. The visuals of this story

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<sup>51</sup> Off, 123.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 124.

are the littered bones of dead slaves along highways, or the emaciated bodies of living slaves waiting to die, of shackles, scars, and child labor. This story has no joy, no open spaces for playing, no love to be shared, and no laughter to be heard. This is the story of bitter cocoa.

It is obvious, from the events described earlier in this paper, that the chocolate makers cared deeply for their factory employees, and used their wealth to make lasting improvements for the oppressed of their local society. At first glance it would seem that the chocolate industry was proof that it was possible to make profits without exploiting labor. However, by considering the work of Henry Nevinson, and other investigators who have exposed the exploitation of cocoa workers in Africa over the last century, one begins to see that there are many facets to the relationships between laborers and capitalist business owners that can easily be overlooked or ignored. If one removes enough of these layers, it appears that even the most moralistic of capitalist, such as the Quakers, might be responsible for making profits from dehumanized, exploited labor.

### ***Why is There No Bournville in Africa?***

The Cadburys and other Quaker business owners, were publicly involved in abolitionism; But did this mean that they saw Africans as equal to Europeans? There is no direct response to that question, but through an examination of some of the Cadburys interactions and writings on the subject, an educated assumption can be made.

In a meeting with the Cadburys during their investigation of Angola, The Portuguese officials on São Tomé had said, “One shouldn’t judge labour conditions in Africa by European standards.”<sup>53</sup> The fact that the chocolate makers continued to purchase cocoa from the Portuguese after hearing that statement suggests, at the very least, that they bought into the belief that a different set of moral standards was acceptable for African labors. Perhaps even more telling of the way chocolate manufacturers may have viewed African workers can be found in a private correspondence from William Cadbury, the nephew of George Cadbury, to a fellow Quaker Activist. He wrote,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 62.

One looks at these matters in a different light when it affects one's own interest but I do feel there is a vast difference between the cultivation of cocoa and gold or diamond mining [in reference to the reports of the time concerning British abuse in African mining].<sup>54</sup>

Once the surface is penetrated, it appears that the Quaker capitalists, despite all their good intentions and moral ideologies, would fail to completely separate themselves from the pull of profits and the misuse of international labor to achieve wealth. Perhaps the Quaker chocolate makers' greatest flaw was underestimating the impulse for greed that comes along with money and power. Perhaps in the beginning these families believed they could build a new kind of capitalist empire founded on the value that the lives of all people mattered. Perhaps in their mind all people did not include non-Europeans. The truth will never be fully known regarding these questions.

What can be seen through the patterns observed in this study however, is that even if genuine concern has existed, at various times, on the part of the chocolate manufacturers for the living conditions of cocoa producers, equality has never been the goal. These claims can be substantiated by reiterating once more that there is not, nor has there ever been, a *Bournville* for cocoa farmers or laborers in any African nation; and, given the overarching nature of the system of capitalism itself, which seeks profits over equality, the chances are there never will be.

### ***An End to Exploitation***

It has been over one hundred years since Henry Nevins first published his findings linking Cadbury and other chocolate manufacturers with African slavery, which eventually led to the boycott on São Tomé and Príncipe. Yet today the same questions are still being asked by new investigators, knowingly or unknowingly, walking in Nevins's footsteps; confronting the same human rights violations, being committed by the same companies, in the same industry. These companies, who have

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 61.

continued to drag their feet, look the other way, and cover up their hidden labor exploitations, have shown time and again their unwillingness to act on behalf of the laboring poor connected to their international supply chains.

As we reach the end of this study the question still remains, has there ever been a profitable multinational capitalist business completely free of labor exploitation? Perhaps there has, but given the complexity and interconnectedness of the modern world, combined with the need to expand profit margins in highly competitive markets, the possibility of such a company seems highly unlikely.

Perhaps the answer to this question is not nearly as important as asking the question itself. Perhaps the only way to reach a point where labor exploitation ceases to exist is if enough consumers demand products from manufactures that are fairly traded at each step of the supply chain. As long as the consumer remains ignorant of, or complacent about, where their products come from, or how they are made, companies have no incentive to change their practices. Maybe the more important question to ask, is why consumers allow businesses involved in labor exploitation to remain profitable? Perhaps all of us who consume these goods need to start asking questions of ourselves. Do we believe that paying cheaper prices for products is worth the exploitation of laborers around the world? If we continue to uncritically accept suspiciously low prices on products, are we just as guilty of being driven by greed as the capitalist whom we so often condemned for their selfish actions? As consumers we must all remember that businesses will only manufacture products that sell, and that we have the collective power to change the way products are made, by simply refusing to purchase them until they are made in ethical ways. This is not always an easy thing to do, but ultimately it is always the right thing to do.

### ***Fair Trade v. Free Trade***

In theory, fairly traded products should not cost the consumer more money. By purchasing direct from farmers, corporations can eliminate expensive middlemen, who currently take much of the farmer's profits for themselves. Fair trade, in simple terms, is removing these intermediate stages in the supply chain, which allows farmers to receive a higher percentage of the profit from

their labor. This in turn allows corporations, as well as consumers, to pay similar prices for fairly traded products, as those that are unfairly traded currently.

Yes, fair trade costs more money right now, which in turn means our ability to purchase and own products decreases temporarily; but that is only because manufacturers currently consider these items a specialty product. Eventually, if enough consumers demanded fair trade products, the prices would begin to drop. Even if the prices for these products always remain slightly higher than those favored by “free” market capitalist, which typically come from origins of questionable ethics, the choice should still be clear. Until the consumer truly believes in justice for international laborers, strongly enough to ask for fairly traded goods, manufacturers will continue to practice business as usual; which as this study has attempted to show, even in the case of seemingly benevolent multinational capitalist, involves finding and using exploitable sources of land and labor in the pursuit of ever increasing profit margins.

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Ryan Minor is currently attending California State University, San Bernardino to obtain a master's degree in social science with an emphasis in Africa history. He obtained his bachelor's degree in History from the University of Redlands in 2003. His major academic interests are in West African history, the development of capitalism, issues related to international trade, and labor history. He is hoping to pursue a PhD in African History in the fall of 2013, with the ultimate goal of becoming an African history professor. Besides this contribution to the 2012 History in the Making journal, he has also had the privilege to work as an editor with the journal staff as well. In November of this year, Ryan has also been given the opportunity to present the research for this present study at the Africa Studies Association national conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Ryan currently lives in Beaumont, California, with his wife Brittney, and their two young children, Benjamin who is four years old, and Chloe who is three. Outside of academia, and his family, he is also very interested in classical literature, photography, music, film, art, and whenever there is time, riding his bicycle.

Finally, he would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to read this article, and hopes you have found it as fascinating a topic to read through as he found it to research.





## **To Protect and To Serve: Effects of the Relationship Between the Brown Berets and Law Enforcement**

By Paul Flores

*Abstract: During the late 1960s and into the early 1970s the Brown Berets were heavily involved in the Chicano Movement. They formed as a group of students with the goal of reforming the inequalities Hispanic people faced within the Los Angeles school system, though the greater circumstances quickly led the Brown Berets into the direction of being a militant organization with their focus shifting to police brutality and the Vietnam War. As a result of this shift they became an enemy of the local police and later the federal government. Thus, the Berets adopted the motto, "To Serve, Observe, and Protect," which they consciously chose as it was extremely similar to the motto of the LAPD (To Protect and To Serve). Using this motto indicated that the Berets believed they were, or should have been, the police of the community. Both the Berets and the Los Angeles police department engaged in what can be called a war of words, in order to discredit one another. Protests, marches, and violence would result from this widening rift between the young militant Chicanos and the local police. The research gathered and presented in this paper allows one to dissect the effects of this hateful relationship and conclude that police harassment, brutality, and infiltration ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Berets, but not before it helped propel the overall Chicano movement. This study not only highlights the negative relationship between the Brown Berets of East Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), but also the tensions between the Berets and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, as well as with the federal government, as the movement gained momentum. These relationships will all be examined within the context of police and legal harassment, brutality, and infiltration tactics put into practice by these institutions against the Chicanos.*

## ***Introduction***

The late 1960s and early 1970s in American history produced many social changes, which proved intense. These years witnessed hundreds of riots, increased United States involvement in Vietnam and a changing of political parties in the White House. These years also witnessed the emergence of a Chicano activist organization known as the Brown Berets. The Brown Berets emerged as a militant group, and were part of the Chicano Movement in East Los Angeles. During this time, the *barrio* of East Los Angeles was predominantly populated by Anglos with Spanish surnames, and was the most populous Mexican enclave outside of Mexico City. The Brown Berets emergence in the Chicano movement, as well as their demise a few years later, can both be traced to a variety of sociopolitical interactions between the Chicano minority and the dominant White culture of Los Angeles. Of all these interactions, it appears that the most influential, in the formation and dissolution of the Brown Berets, were those with local and regional law enforcement.

## ***Historiography***

Since the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and early 70s, many scholars have discussed the rapid rise and decline of the movement. The scholarship produced since that time, has come from individuals with a variety of backgrounds, ranging from those who were first hand participants in the events, to those who had no direct involvement in the movement whatsoever. Of these scholars, few have specifically discussed the National Brown Beret Organization of East Los Angeles. The few scholars who have covered the Brown Berets either mention them briefly in larger works or include them as part of the larger movement. Limited as the resources may be on this subject, the work of these scholars has played an important role in helping us better understand the Chicano Movement and the National Brown Beret Organization.

Armando Morales, was one of the first scholars to publish on the subject in 1972. During this time the Brown Berets were still in existence, as the movement had not yet died down. After, Morales' *Ando Sangrando (I am Bleeding)*, the topic did not see

much attention.<sup>1</sup> It was not until Carlos Munoz' *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, was published in 1989, that a steady influx of scholarship begin to be produced.<sup>2</sup> It appears that every couple of years following the release Munoz' book, scholarship continued to be published through journal articles and books up until the early 2000s. Some of the major scholars who have published on the Chicano Movement are Carlos Munoz, Marguerite Marin, Ian-Haney Lopez, Ernesto Chavez, Ernesto Vigil, Francisco Rosales, Edward Escobar, and Mario Garcia. Munoz and Vigil were in fact heavily involved in the Chicano Movement.

The scope of this study is to cover the National Brown Beret Organization and how they fed off the police harassment and brutality they experienced. It concludes by discussing the role law enforcement's continued harassment and involvement had in the dissolution of the Brown Berets. In order to illustrate this, many articles and books were relied on to structure this argument with the use of primary sources to legitimize the argument.

Carlos Munoz, a pioneer of the Chicano Student Movement and Professor at the University of California Berkeley, brings not only his scholarship, but his knowledge from first hand experiences to his book, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*. Munoz illustrates how the identity of the youth began to change from the "Mexican-American" generation to the Chicano identity. In doing so Munoz covers key topics, which provide basic knowledge of the movement and its roots. He also touches on the Brown Berets and their role within the movement allowing the reader to see how they blended into the movement. Munoz does touch on the issues facing the Brown Berets and the Chicano community as a whole while offering insight and analysis into their rise and fall. However, he does not specifically offer that same detailed insight or analysis for the Brown Berets as this study.

Other Scholars such as Marguerite Marin have been able to offer more insight on the Brown Berets. In her book titled, *Social Protest in an Urban Barrio: A Study of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1974*, Marin asserts that the conflict between law

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<sup>1</sup> Armando Morales, *Ando Sangrando (I am Bleeding): a Study of Mexican American-police Conflict* (Perspectiva Publications, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Munoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989).

enforcement and the Brown Berets influenced the Beret's behavior, ideology and how the group structured itself.<sup>3</sup> Although this holds true, and is acknowledged in the following discussion, this article goes in a different direction to analyze how the conflict also played a major role in the Brown Beret's quick rise to prominence and popularity within the community; while also asserting that these conflicts made them visible and gave creditability to their cause. From here they were able to recruit, protest, and grow into a national organization. Marin's perspective looks at how the Brown Berets structured themselves because of these conflicts. She points out how the Brown Beret's did not trust other groups and how that influenced their rigid structure and how it led to their eventual infiltration.

Marin also offers interpretation on the dissolution of the Brown Berets. She touches on the subject of how they were easily infiltrated due to their rigid chain of command and suspicious behavior; however, she does not concentrate on the infiltrators direct actions. This article aims to focus on these actions and how they directly affected the Brown Berets.

Ernesto Chavez attributed the formation of the Brown Berets to the poor educational system in East Los Angeles at the time. He makes this claim in *Mi Raza Primero! Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978*.<sup>4</sup> In his chapter titled, "Birth of a New Symbol" Chavez explains how the Brown Berets began and disbanded. Chavez describes events such as police brutality and protest in his discussion, but does not offer them as reasons for the Beret's rise to prominence; rather, he suggesting these struggles had the effect of changing the movement from civic-minded individuals to a more radicalized group. He goes on to describe police infiltration and harassment of the Berets, but asserts instead, that the groups dissolution was a result of David Sanchez exceeding his authority and creating quarrels within the organization.

Ian Haney-Lopez is another scholar who focuses less on the Brown Berets and places more attention on the formation of the identity of Chicanos in East Los Angeles. Haney-Lopez places his

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<sup>3</sup> Marguerite V. Marin, *Social Protest in an Urban Barrio: a Study of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1974* (University Press of America, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Erensto Chaves, *Mi Raza Primero! Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1962).

main argument around two important trials: the East L.A. 13, and the Biltmore 6. These are two significant judicial cases that can help the reader better understand the various effects these trials had on the Chicano Movement and the Brown Berets themselves. Haney-Lopez uses these trials to show the formation of an identity. This article uses these trials not only to show how an identity was being formed, but also how the trials initially gave momentum to the Chicano movement and Brown Berets, while having the opposite effect in the years that followed and in fact played a part in their disbanding.

Another important work is Ernesto B. Vigil's *The Crusade for Justice Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent*.<sup>5</sup> Vigil is another individual who was actively involved in the Chicano Movement. He places his attention on Corky Gonzales and the Crusade for Justice out of Denver. However, Vigil does offer insight into law enforcements infiltration tactics and surveillance of the Brown Berets in East Los Angeles as well. Although Vigil does not offer interpretation on how these acts may have contributed to the Brown Berets growth or dissolution, the reader learns about the different law enforcement agencies and special units within these agencies that either monitored or infiltrated the Brown Berets. Through his work we learn of different incidents and accounts that allow us to use primary sources to interpret them.

The scholars listed in this historiography have all made important contributions to the scholarship on the Chicano Movement and the Brown Berets. Some have offered facts and details, while others have given in-depth analysis on certain areas of the movement. Each of their contributions is unique, and equally important to the overall purposes of this research; such as, Haney-Lopez' analysis of the legal system during the movement, and how it helped form an identity, or Vigil's informative facts regarding police infiltration of the Brown Berets. These author's writings are necessary for building a structure in which the true life of the research can live, the primary sources that provide the backbone to the argument. The remainder of this paper will use these two essential elements of research to concentrate exclusively on the Brown Beret's encounters with local, state, and federal law

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<sup>5</sup> Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

enforcement, and the lasting effects these relationships had on the organization.

### ***The Relationship Between The Brown Berets and Law Enforcement***

Four components of the relationship between the Brown Berets and law enforcement will now be explored to understand how the Berets were ultimately affected. The first area explored is the police brutality to which Chicano residents of East Los Angeles were subjected. Police brutality occurs when police officers use excessive amounts of force in dealing with an individual or suspect. Cases of police brutality in East Los Angeles during this time had a distinct characteristic. Often the individuals were not guilty of any major crime. In some instances, minor traffic violations were used as provocation to pullover and harass Chicanos. However, it was often the Chicanos who faced charges for assault on a peace officer, or for resisting arrest, after the encounter. Charges for assaulting a peace officer, or resisting arrest, became common during this time. The increase in these charges was partly due to the type of instruction given to officers while being trained at the academy. One former sheriff's deputy stated, "in the sheriff's academy, officers are told that if you ever hit a suspect, or have to strike a person, that person shall be arrested for assaulting a police officer."<sup>6</sup>

The Jesus Dominguez case is a prime example of this brutality. Dominguez let his teenage daughter and son attend a wedding dance with the expectations that his son would call him to pick them up when it was over. Before the dance concluded, it was broken up by the police and Dominguez' son, Mario, called his father notifying him of the circumstances. The elder Dominguez woke his wife and younger son and headed down to the dance with their neighbor to pick up their children. When Dominguez could not find his children, he asked a police officer as to their whereabouts. According to Dominguez the officer responded by saying, "We're not talking to anymore of you dumb Mexicans. Get out of here or we'll run you in."<sup>7</sup> As a concerned parent, Dominguez asked a second time. Apparently, the officer

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Haney-Lopez, *Racism On Trial The Chicano Fight For Justice* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 142.

<sup>7</sup> "Hung Jury In Second Dominguez Trial," *La Raza*, November 1969.

felt this was out of line and responded by beating Dominguez. After a severe beating that rendered him unrecognizable due to swelling and bruises on his face, he was then arrested for assault on a police officer. Unfortunately, Dominguez' troubles did not end that evening. He was released from police custody on Wednesday, but two days later slipped into a coma because of his head injuries.<sup>8</sup> In due course, Dominguez stood trial for assault on a police officer, which resulted in a hung jury. However, District Attorney Evelle Younger decided to try Dominguez a second time, and again the result was a hung jury. Not only did the brutal beating take a physical toll on Dominguez' body, but it also took a financial toll because of attorney fees and the time the trials took away from his ability to make a living.

Cases such as Jesus Dominguez' were the ones the Brown Berets were shedding light on and protesting. Subsequently, they became an enemy and target of local law enforcement agencies and later the federal government. It was not until November 24, 1967 that they chose to protest police brutality for the first time. The first protest was in response to the treatment of the Santoya family after a simple call of disturbing the peace.<sup>9</sup> The Brown Berets would hold three protests at the local courthouse and the East Los Angeles Sheriff's Station between November 24, 1967 and the following January. These protests were held to show law enforcement, and other authorities that Chicanos were tired of the unfair treatment they were receiving, as well as to bring a greater awareness to the Chicano community regarding these issue.

During this two and half month span Chicano underground newspapers, such as *La Raza* also attempted to make the Chicanos aware of the police brutality and increased harassment facing their community. These paper's reports were also able to document the increased harassment the Chicano community experienced as they began to push back. One article noted that many felt the undue harassment was in direct response to the protest.<sup>10</sup> This type of harassment consisted of sheriff deputies routinely shining their floodlights into a local Chicano hangout known as the "La Piranya" coffeehouse. Deputies used this tactic as a form of

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<sup>8</sup> Celia Rodriguez, "The Torture of Dominguez," *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>9</sup> *La Raza*, December 25, 1967. Pg. 7. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

<sup>10</sup> "Sheriffs Harrass Brown Berets," *La Raza Year Book*, 1968. Pg. 29. La Raza Newspaper Collection. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

intimidation as well as to make their presence known. Deputies would also harass anyone who frequented the coffeehouse, which was run by David Sanchez of the Brown Berets. The most common way the harassment took place was to arbitrarily stop these individuals. During these encounters young Chicanos were subjected to questioning and illegal vehicle searches. The Sheriff's Department went so far as raiding *La Piranya* illegally and arresting individuals inside for curfew violations.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the physical harassment came arrest and subsequently legal harassment as well, which is the second component of the relationship between the Brown Berets and law enforcement that will be examined. Many Brown Berets and leading Chicano activists fell victim to felony charges for conspiracy and assault on a police officer along with many lesser charges. The two cases that highlight this legal harassment best are the "East L.A. 13" case and the "Biltmore 6" case. Both of these cases indicted not only Brown Berets, but other Chicano activists such as Moctesuma Esparza, Sal Castro, Eleazar Risco, and Carlos Munoz to name a few.

Carlos Munoz described the arrest and indictment of the East L.A. 13 in a letter to the editor of *La Raza*,

The Arrest can only be described as a terror tactic  
by our honorable law enforcement  
representative...the actions by the district attorney  
can only be described as an act of fascism, political  
intimidation and harassment of innocent citizens  
whose only crime is being concerned about the  
plight of our people...<sup>12</sup>

The East L.A. 13 were charged with a general disturbing of the peace, as well as a separate charge for disturbing the peace of the schools, both of these charges were upgraded from misdemeanors to felonies by the additional stamp of conspiracy to commit the crimes. Because of the conspiracy charges, each defendant faced

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<sup>11</sup> "Sheriffs Harrass Brown Berets," *La Raza*, March 1, 1968. Pg. 12. La Raza Newspaper Collection. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>12</sup> Carlos Munoz, Letters to The Editor, *Chicano Student News*, June 12, 1968. Chicano Student News Newspaper Collection. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.



over 60 years in prison.<sup>13</sup> On top of these charges the defendants were facing a bail that did not fit the crime. According to Sal Castro the bail was \$12,500, which for the time was extremely high and more than twice the amount for assault with a deadly weapon and ten times more than burglary.<sup>14</sup> In the minds of many Chicanos, the punishment and treatment the thirteen faced did not fit the alleged crime.

The Biltmore 6 case was similar to the East L.A. 13 in the legal harassment aspect. Again, numerous Chicano activists were being charged with the crimes they allegedly committed, as well as conspiracy to commit these crimes. Although the jury did not hand down any convictions, the case proved more difficult to defend than the East L.A. 13 for the acclaimed Chicano lawyer Oscar Acosta. The initial trial lasted over two years, and the last member of the six did not stand trial until seven years later when he came out of hiding and surrendered.

Legal harassment kept Chicanos on trial and in the media, which law enforcement used to their advantage. They participated in what is characterized as the war of words, which is the third component of the relationship between the Brown Berets and law enforcement this paper will examine. Both entities were attempting to gain support for themselves while discrediting the other at the same time. While the Berets and police officers implemented different methods in this “war”, each side played an equal role in the slander.

The Brown Berets chose to spread their message mostly through the underground newspapers in the Chicano community as well as through word of mouth. According to the Brown Beret Prime Minister David Sanchez, “the job of every Brown Beret is to preach new words. You cannot have a community that is aware, until you have people preaching awareness, thereby creating an aware society.”<sup>15</sup> Over time, the Brown Beret’s message became increasingly inflammatory and they even began to print articles advising Chicanos of their right to self-defense and the right to

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<sup>13</sup> Mario T. Garcia, and Sal Castro. *Blowout! Sal Castro & The Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 205.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>15</sup> David Sanchez, “Birth of a New Symbol,” Material For The Brown Beret, p. 6. Brown Beret Information Packet Compiled by Luis Angel Alejo, CSC U.C. Berkeley, December 1995. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

shoot in self-defense. One article ends by saying, “Remember – Shoot to Kill.”<sup>16</sup>

Los Angeles law enforcement’s message was not as inflammatory as the Brown Berets, but it was still effective. They red baited them and labeled them as outside agitators, using the media and press conferences to do this. In an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, Mayor Sam Yorty not only pointed out that communists had attended a previous rally, but that older Chicano militants would stir up trouble and leave the younger activist to bear the brunt of the confrontation with police.<sup>17</sup> Another notable attempt to discredit the Brown Berets came from Officer Thoms of LAPD’s intelligence department. He reported to the U.S. Senate subcommittee investigating subversive and violent organizations. In this report he labeled the Brown Berets as an organization considered violent or subversive in nature.<sup>18</sup>

The idea or thought that the Brown Berets were a violent and/or subversive organization gave law enforcement reason to infiltrate the organization, which is the fourth component of the relationship between these two groups. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, and the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) division of the Department of the Treasury, all eventually infiltrated the Brown Berets, which would eventually allow these agencies to create divisions among the Chicano group’s leaders from the inside out. Further, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) monitored the Berets closely as well.

Among the infiltrators were Robert Avila and Fernando Sumaya of the LAPD, and Robert Acosta of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. These local agencies had specialized task forces developed to combat organizations considered violent and subversive. They included the Criminal Conspiracy Section (CCS), Special Operations Conspiracy Squad

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<sup>16</sup> *La Causa*, pg. 6. March 1971. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

<sup>17</sup> “Keep Children Out of Rally, Yorty Urges,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1971. Devra Weber Collection. Box 2. File 15. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>18</sup> Ruben Salazar, “Police-Community Rift,” (April 3, 1970) in *Border Correspondent Selected Writings, 1955-1970*, ed. Mario T. Garcia (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 246-249.

(SOC), and the Public Disorder Intelligence Division (PDID).<sup>19</sup> The ATF infiltrated the Brown Berets with a suspect they had charged in a drug case, Eustacio Martinez. These individuals and departments did not just act as intelligence agents, but as agent provocateurs as well. They created the situations that were used to discredit the Brown Berets and drive rifts between members.

Robert Avila posed as a high school student while joining the Brown Berets in early 1968. Avila was involved in the 1968 school walkouts that took place at numerous East Los Angeles high schools. Sal Castro remembers Avila as a provocateur. He recalls Avila encouraging students to burn trashcans during the protests.<sup>20</sup> A year after the walkouts the Brown Berets discovered Avila to be an infiltrator. *La Causa*, the Brown Beret newspaper reported the discovery and called Avila a traitor, *vendido*, and dog.<sup>21</sup>

The other infiltrator, Fernando Sumaya, was more involved as an agent provocateur and even admitted to participating in the bombing of a Safeway grocery store because it did not support the grape workers strike.<sup>22</sup> Sumaya was not arrested for the Safeway bombing or the fires set in the Biltmore Hotel the day Governor Reagan gave a speech. However, he did become the key witness in the case against the Biltmore 6. Montes, the sixth defendant, fled and went into hiding for seven years before he returned to stand trial. During the course of the trial it was brought to light that many of the fires set on the top floors could not have been started by anyone other than Sumaya because they were sealed off by law enforcement in preparation for Governor Reagan's visit.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 150.

<sup>20</sup> Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 178.

<sup>21</sup> "Wanted," *La Causa*, May 23, 1969. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

<sup>22</sup> Ron Einstoss, "Police Agent at Trial Denies Urging Crimes," *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1971. Devra Weber Collection. Box 2. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>23</sup> Jennifer G. Correa, "Chicano Nationalism: The Brown Berets and Legal Social Control" (master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2006), 72.

## ***To Protect and To Serve***

Whether witnessed or experienced, police brutality and harassment was common for Chicanos growing up in East Los Angeles during the 1960s and early 1970s. However, as times changed and activists became more radical, so too did the Chicanos. The new Mexican-American youth, who now went by Chicano, moved toward forming a new identity and away from the assimilation tactics of the previous Mexican-American generation. Mexican-Americans were not seen as a distinct group and were statistically categorized as Anglos with Spanish surnames. However, society, and more importantly the police, did not treat Chicanos like Anglos. As a result, they began to move away from the Anglo culture forming their own Chicano identity. Ruben Salazar described this identity as, “a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself.”<sup>24</sup> This new identity was firmly established when Oscar Acosta successfully defended the East L.A. 13. He used expert witnesses such as Ralph Guzman to prove that Mexican-Americans were a distinct class with a different language, culture and values.<sup>25</sup> The Brown Berets also embraced this new identification of Chicano culture and race, using these ideals to unite. The group adopted the brown beret as a physical symbol of this newfound pride they had for their race and the color of their skin.<sup>26</sup>

The Brown Berets united in a way that other activists did not. The harassment and brutality forced them to become a protection group for the community. They felt that the East Los Angeles community had to unite against its enemies. According to the *La Raza* newspaper the enemy was an outside force known as law enforcement, which thrived on the poor.<sup>27</sup> The Brown Beret’s

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<sup>24</sup> Ruben Salazar, “Who is a Chicano? And What Is It the Chicanos Want,” (February 6, 1970) in *Border Correspondent Selected Writings, 1955-1970*, ed. Mario T. Garcia (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 235-237.

<sup>25</sup> Viva Los 13 Valientes,” *La Raza*, September 3, 1968. La Raza Newspaper Collection. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>26</sup> “Why a Brown Beret?” *La Raza*, June 7, 1968. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

<sup>27</sup> “Our Community Must Unite Against its Enemies,” *La Raza* November 14, 1967. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

motto stated, “To Serve, Observe, and Protect”<sup>28</sup> which was a play on the LAPD’s motto “To Protect and To Serve”. In essence they saw themselves as the police of the police. The Brown Beret’s motto also meant they would vocally and physically support the different causes of the movement, as well as monitor law enforcement agencies that dealt with Chicanos. Lastly, the Brown Berets vowed to protect the rights of Mexican-Americans by “all means necessary.”

Protecting Chicano rights would take more than spontaneous action. Organization would be needed and David Sanchez, the Brown Beret prime minister would facilitate this organization. One of his early attempts to unite Chicanos was opening the *La Piranya* coffeehouse, which was more of a gathering place than a coffeehouse. Sanchez was able to secure a grant with the help of Father John Luce of the Church of Epiphany, in Lincoln Heights, which he used to open *La Piranya*. The coffeehouse proved to have a significant impact on the Brown Berets and the movement as it gave young Chicanos a place not only to socialize, but also organize. *La Piranya* also sponsored speakers such as Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Corky Gonzales and Reies Tijerina.<sup>29</sup> These events along with the police harassment that continued to take place further politicized Chicano activists as well as the Brown Berets. During their protest, they could be heard yelling “Chicano Power”, which came after Stokely Carmichael coined the term “black power.”

Their motto would lead them to protest cases of police brutality and act as security at protests such as the “blowouts.” Sanchez recalls their roll in these protests: “We were at the walkouts to protect our young people. When they started hitting with sticks, we went in, did our business, and got out. What’s our business? We put ourselves between the police and the kids, and took the beating.”<sup>30</sup> This single event gave them publicity and credibility. And while their way of uniting would land them in legal trouble, it also proved effective in propelling the momentum

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<sup>28</sup> David Sanchez, “Birth of a New Symbol,” Material For The Brown Beret, p. 15. Brown Beret Information Packet Compiled by Luis Angel Alejo, CSC U.C. Berkeley, December 1995. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Haney-Lopez, *Racism On Trial The Chicano Fight For Justice* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 180.

<sup>30</sup> Dial Torgerson, “Brown Power Unity Seen Behind School Disorders,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1968. Carlos Vasquez Collection. Box 2. File 4. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

of the movement as well as the overall unity among Chicanos as well.

The legal harassment that the Brown Berets and other Chicanos faced gave the community something to protest, and once again they came together to help each other out. On May 31, 1968, two months after the school “blowouts” five Brown Berets were either arrested or indicted and became part of the East L.A. 13. The following day, hundreds of protestors gathered in front of the Los Angeles Police Department and even more gathered in front of the county jail the following day.<sup>31</sup> Chicanos not only united in protest, but they also attempted to help by raising money to defend these individuals. There were many advertisements run in the underground newspapers for dances and events that would benefit the defense of the East L.A. 13.<sup>32</sup>

There was also support from others such as politicians and Black activist. Both Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy’s campaign offered bail money before authorities reduced the bail amount. Individuals in allied civil rights movements issued statements of support such as Stokely Carmichael. “We of the SNCC give our full support to our brothers from the Brown Berets, we feel certain that the Berets are going in the right direction. We know the charges are phony...therefore, we have to move together to destroy the man so our people can live.”<sup>33</sup> This arrest aroused the excitement from the blowouts and gave the movement and the cause for educational reform more publicity.

Although the harassment and brutality was initially able to help the Brown Berets emerge as a leading activist organization, it would ultimately be a cause in their dissolution. The legal harassment and intimidation was far more hindering than police tactics such as shining floodlights into *La Piranya*. Legal harassment did two things, it siphoned away resources and it intimidated current members as well as potential members, eventually wearing them out. Legal harassment is evident in the two legal cases mentioned earlier. Less than a year after the East

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<sup>31</sup> Marguerite V. Marin, *Social Protest In an Urban Barrio A Study of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1974* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1991), 101.

<sup>32</sup> *Chicano Student News*, Vol. 1 No. 5. Chicano Student News Newspaper Collection. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>33</sup> *La Raza*, June 7, 1968. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

L.A. 13 indictments, the Biltmore 6 were indicted but did not seem to get as much attention or support in the underground newspapers as the East L.A. 13 did. There was no full page of pictures showing the demonstrations and reporting on them like the previous demonstrations. There were no advertisements for dances to support the Biltmore 6. This is evidence that either support was waning or resources had become far too scarce as Chicanos continued to donate to these legal defense funds.

Along with waning resources and support, key members began to leave the organization as well. Carlos Montes was the Brown Beret's minister of information and associated with the organization since its inception, but he eventually fled and went into hiding as the harassment continued to grow. With threats on his life from an LAPD officer and another high-profile political case pending, Montes felt it was best to flee. While the constant harassment that led to Montes' vacancy continued to cast its black cloud over the movement, the Brown Berets also contributed to the paranoia that came from his flight. They unwisely publicized and blamed Montes' disappearance as a possible kidnapping by the CIA.<sup>34</sup> As an unintended result, they legitimized the danger of becoming part of the movement or the Brown Berets. Furthermore, dealing with court cases kept leaders such as Montes and Sanchez in and out of court rather than organizing and concentrating on the issues. This disrupted not only their lives but the movement as well.

The disruption that was spawned from legal harassment was partly made possible by local and federal law enforcement agencies infiltrating the Brown Berets. The infiltrators acted as agent provocateurs. According to Gary Marx, an agent provocateur is an agent who,

...assertively seeks to influence the actions taken by the group... The agent may go along with illegal actions of the group, he may actually provoke such actions... This may be done to gain evidence for use in a trial, to encourage paranoia and internal

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<sup>34</sup> "Carlos Montes Disappears," *La Causa*, February 28, 1970. East Los Angeles, CA: County of Los Angeles Public Library Microfilms.

dissension, and/or to damage the public image of a group.<sup>35</sup>

Fernando Sumaya was one of these individuals who disrupted the Brown Berets during his short stint as a member. His actions directly led to the arrest of Brown Beret members and gave law enforcement the ability to discredit the Brown Berets while Sumaya was portrayed as the hero. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "Policeman Fernando Sumaya, 23, a key witness before the county Grand Jury, was credited by arson investigators with protecting a devastating conflagration and the possible loss of hundreds of lives... the indictment charges that four of the ten, two of them officials in the Brown Berets, planned the fires."<sup>36</sup> These actions cover all parts of Marx's actions of an agent provocateur whose objective according to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was, "to expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize the new Left organizations, their leadership and adherents."<sup>37</sup>

Another key infiltrator that helped bring the Brown Berets to a halt was Eustacio Martinez. Martinez worked for the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Division of the U.S. Treasury Department. Acting as an agent provocateur, he infiltrated the Mexican-American Youth Organization (MAYO), the Brown Berets, and the National Chicano Moratorium Committee. During this time, he was able to create dissension amongst Rosalio Munoz and David Sanchez, provoke violence and incidents that led to arrests and a raid of the Chicano Moratorium office. While these incidents may not have been the sole cause for the Brown Berets dissolution, they did provide continued obstacles that proved too challenging for the organization to overcome.

These cases are only a few examples of the obstacles that police infiltration and agent provocateurs were able to put before the Brown Berets. There were other infiltrators such as Robert Acosta of the Sheriff's Department, and Robert Avila of the

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<sup>35</sup> Gary T. Marx, "Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agent Provocateur and the Informant," *American Journal of Sociology* 80, no. 2 (1974): 404-405, <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/stable/2777509> (accessed on June 18, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Ron Einstoss, "Hotel Fire Indictments Reveal Heroism of Rookie Policeman," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1969. Carlos Vasquez Papers. Box 4. File 6. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, "The Agent Provocateur," 434.



LAPD, and Sergio Robledo of the LAPD.<sup>38</sup> Through research, it was uncovered that during a raid of the Chicano Moratorium office, provoked by Martinez, Sergio Robledo and two others were arrested.<sup>39</sup> Further, it was discovered in an article for Rolling Stone magazine that Sergio Robledo of the LAPD retired in 1995 after 26 years of service.<sup>40</sup> That would put Robledo right out of the academy during the time the Chicano Movement and Brown Berets began to emerge. This opens up the possibility that there were other infiltrators attempting to destroy the Brown Berets and deserves further research.

Episodes caused or provoked by infiltrators also allowed law enforcement to effectively discredit the Brown Berets in their war of words. Sanchez was even inclined to admit that after the Biltmore 6 indictments that the circumstances did look bad.<sup>41</sup> Further, the Brown Berets alienated the more conservative Mexican-Americans as their message became increasingly inflammatory towards the police. Police Chief Ed Davis echoed this fact when he stated: "In the Mexican community the great bulk of people are very law abiding and very anti-Marxist and very supportive of the police and very respectful of the uniform."<sup>42</sup>

In conclusion, the relationship between the Brown Berets and law enforcement was a passionate struggle for the upper hand. Law enforcement attempted to maintain the status quo while the Brown Berets attempted to attain fair treatment and protection of their rights. This attempt to obtain equal treatment under the law fueled the Brown Berets, as they became a leading Chicano activist organization. However, law enforcement outlasted the Brown Berets determination, which proved to be detrimental to the organization over time. The persistence of harassment, intimidation, and infiltration, from various law enforcement agencies, discouraged participation in groups considered

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<sup>38</sup> Rosalio Munoz, interview with the author. Los Angeles, CA, July 11, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Armando Morales, *Ando Sangrando (I Am Bleeding)* (La Puente, CA: Perspectiva Publications, 1972), 98.

<sup>40</sup> Randall Sullivan, "Music: The Unsolved Mystery of the Notorious B.I.G." *Rolling Stone*, January 11, 2011, <http://m.rollingstone.com/entry/view/id/1979/pn/all/p/0/?KSID=3e15845a90548e22a47bed27823bc2dd> (accessed July 11, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Ruben Salazar, "Brown Berets Hail 'La Raza' and Scorn the Establishment," (June 16, 1969) in *Border Correspondent Selected Writings, 1955-1970*, ed. Mario T. Garcia (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 212-219.

<sup>42</sup> Vigil, "Crusade for Justice," 153.

subversive to the law, such as the Brown Berets. In addition, these patterns of harassment and eventual infiltration allowed them make arrests, which deflected the Brown Beret's physical and monetary resources to legal battles. With little progress made by the Berets and continued opposition from the Los Angeles government, infiltrators found it easy to create situations where individuals would become extreme, even to the point of bombing a grocery store, which proved to be counter-productive. These infiltrators not only enticed members to do things they may not have otherwise done, but they also created dissension within the organization itself. This allowed the authorities to portray the movement and Brown Berets in a negative light, thus discrediting their efforts. While it may not be possible at this time to state the precise ramifications law enforcement tactics had in the disillusion of the Brown Berets; this study has attempted to show, that these actions can be seen as one of the major contributing factors in their eventual demise.

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### **Author Bio**

Paul Flores was born in East Los Angeles, Ca and raised in Rialto, Ca. Paul and his two brothers, Carlos and David were raised by their two loving parents, Carlos and Jeanette Flores. Paul enjoys hiking, reading, taking pictures, and attending his nephew's sporting events. Growing up, he attended school in Rialto and graduated from Rialto High School. He attended Chaffey College prior to transferring to the California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). Paul graduated from CSUSB in December of 2011 with a Bachelor's of Arts in history. During his time at CSUSB he became a McNair Scholar and presented this research paper at the University of Maryland Baltimore County's 19<sup>th</sup> Annual McNair Scholars Research Conference. Paul plans to continue his education this fall at San Diego State University as he pursues a Master's degree in history.



## **Marvin the Martian, Godzilla, and Other Purveyors of Atomic Destruction**

By Bethany Underhill

*Abstract: “Marvin the Martian, Godzilla, and other Purveyors of Atomic Destruction” examines the cultural impact of atomic testing as represented in popular culture. Children’s media, specifically served as a rich source of examples of atomic testing as presented to the general public. Research exposed a trend concerning to attitude toward atomic testing, and how this cultural attitude changed over time. This shift in attitude directly connects to the events surrounding a specific atomic test the Bravo Test in the Castle series. The context of the Castle Bravo test reveals the motivations for this change in attitude. The research encompasses an examination of the event and its direct representation in popular culture, revealing a corollary relationship between the two.*

On a quiet atoll in the Pacific Ocean a man-made terror grew out of human control. This horror expanded to unexpected size, emitted radiation, and consumed human flesh. Scientists were sent to study it, and the atoll remained forever marred by its existence. This horror is, of course, the enormous crab beast of the 1957 film *The Attack of the Crab Monsters*. This B-rated movie is one of many films and other media created during the 1950s which addressed the issue of atomic technology both metaphorically and directly.

Issues that are products of the 1950s are often generalized as products of the entire decade. Many of these issues defined the decade: The Cold War, the beginnings of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements, the rise in consumerism, and the beginning of a more mobile society are among a few. Unfortunately, these larger themes are often applied as context for media indiscriminate

of the year they were produced. This attitude causes a great deal of inappropriate generalizations when it comes to cultural manifestations in media. Films and other media are often explained in light of larger trends that the decade encompassed with little contextual analysis. This is especially true in regards to the “paranoia” surrounding the atomic bomb. Media produced in the 1950s is lumped together regardless of the audience or year of creation. In response to these issues the question arose: What was continuous and what changed in the presentation of the Atomic Bomb to children in the 1950s and why?

Research was limited in media that specifically targeted children and young people, or was intended to include youth as part of its audience. Atomic imagery pervaded nearly every form of media during this decade, youth oriented media no exception. What is unique is that media that included young people in its demographic tended to sanitize or neglect issues that were controversial or generally unsavory. The presence of something as serious and menacing as the nuclear bomb in this type of media reveals the gravity this issue had on society. Focusing on children's media exclusively allowed the examination of a large sample size of primary source material that spans the entire decade. Also, trends that emerged in this sample carry more levity, in that atomic issues received mild censorship for their young audiences.

Film in both long and short format composed the largest percentage of sources. These films were sometimes intended for the general movie-going audience, or alternatively intended for classrooms. Printed works rounded out the research, varying from novels, encyclopedias, and comic books, all intended for young readers. The large sample size ensured that any trends observed could be thoroughly supported by primary source material. Also any assumptions about life in the 1950s would quickly be negated by the numerous sources discounting them and thereby improving the overall conclusions.

The research produced evidence of a trend in the presentation of the atomic bomb during the decade. When media produced early in the decade was compared to media produced later the contrast revealed evidence of severe thematic differences. Immediately after the end of World War II, films depicted atomic technology with hopeful and optimistic overtones. The media of this period portrayed nuclear advancements as a benefit to



humanity and hinted at the possibility of it ushering in a utopian age of science and safety. However, mid-decade, the treatment of the atomic bomb and nuclear technology completely reversed. Technology became a source of suspicion and fear. Issues of contamination, never before linked to nuclear technology, became the basis of any reference to atomics. The hope for atomic age of the early 1950s became the bane of man at the end of the decade.

The severe shift in tone and theme prompted exploration into events which occurred mid-decade as a possible cause of the change in popular media. The source of this shift can be pinpointed to the public relations nightmare that took place in 1954. The United States detonated the first thermonuclear bomb in the Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific.<sup>1</sup> The Bravo test in the Castle series, or Castle Bravo as it would come to be known, twice the amount of fallout expected.<sup>2</sup> Many of the nearby islands had to be evacuated, and a Japanese fishing boat got caught in the fallout cloud.<sup>3</sup> The inhabitants of the evacuated islands suffered from birth defects and many fishing boat crew members became gravely ill, one crew member even dying.<sup>4</sup> Beyond the cost in human lives, the fallout contaminated millions of fish, devastating the Japanese fishing industry.<sup>5</sup> The United States government initially intended to keep this event from the American public. However, the international issue it caused with Japan,<sup>6</sup> along with the Associated Press obtaining a letter from a soldier describing the horror radiation had afflicted on the fisherman, resulted in the event going public.<sup>7</sup>

Both international and domestic outcry forced the United States to take responsibility for the destruction caused by Castle Bravo to the environment, the economy and the people. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jozef Goldblat and David Cox, *Nuclear Weapon Tests: Prohibition or Limitation?*, illustrated edition. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988), 96.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>3</sup> Wm. F. Vandercook, "Making the Very Best of the Very Worst: The "Human Effects of Nuclear Weapons" Report of 1956," *International Security* 11, no. 1 (July 1, 1986): 185.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>6</sup> Goldblat and Cox, *Nuclear Weapon Tests*, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Barton C. Hacker, *Elements of controversy: the Atomic Energy Commission and radiation safety in nuclear weapons testing, 1947-1974* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1994), 148.

American government paid the Japanese two million dollars to compensate for the contamination of fish as well as reparations to the family of the fisherman who died.<sup>8</sup> Castle Bravo shocked and horrified Americans once learning the true nature of the Atomic Bomb. This served as the American public's first exposure to the horrors of nuclear fallout and radiation sickness. Prior to the disaster, the United States government had censored any reports of what occurred in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>9</sup> The Castle Bravo test shifted the depiction of the bomb in children's media from an optimistic yet dangerous technological advancement to a violently destructive contaminator that was beyond the control of modern man.

### ***Historiography***

Unfortunately, the connection between the Castle Bravo test and a shift in the presentation of the nuclear bomb has yet to be explored by many historians. Regarded as a monolithic entity, historians often treat events of the decade as if their dates are interchangeable as long as they came after World War II and before 1960. This tendency ignores the realities of the period, simplifying the decade's events into themes that are easy to comprehend, however, not necessarily representative of the truth. This attitude can be observed in Cyndy Hendershot's article "Darwin and the Atom: Evolution/Devolution Fantasies in 'The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, Them!,' and 'The Incredible Shrinking Man.'" In the article, Hendershot examines three films to trace their overarching theme. Although these films were produced in 1953, 1954, and 1957 respectively, Hendershot treated them as if they were the product of a single cultural movement, known as the "50s." She cited the Cold War and Feminism as major threads found in all three, ignoring the subtle difference in these films that are the direct result of specific events within the period.<sup>10</sup> The "50s" are often criticized for the homogenization of culture, yet some

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<sup>8</sup> Vandercook, "Making the Very Best of the Very Worst," 187.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Hong, "Flashforward Democracy: American Exceptionalism and the Atomic Bomb in Barefoot Gen," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46, no. 1 (2009): 125.

<sup>10</sup> Cyndy Hendershot, "Darwin and the Atom: Evolution/Devolution Fantasies in 'The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, Them!,' and 'The Incredible Shrinking Man,'" *Science Fiction Studies* 25, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 319-335.

historians continue to lump decade's worth of media together regardless of the events that actually occurred in that ten-year period. If one were to examine the year-to-year changes in the 1950s with the same magnifying glass that is often applied to other decades, a deeper understanding of the period could be garnered.

To avoid generalization the Castle Bravo test of 1954 must be explained historiographically. The first mentions of the Castle Bravo test in academic research emerged during the late 1980s. The long gap between the event and any serious examination by historians is troubling. When scholars finally examined Castle Bravo it consisted only of a chronicle of the event. Jozef Goldblat wrote a brief description of the Castle Bravo test to provide context for his work on anti-nuclear actions taken during the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> "Making the Very Best of the Worst" by Wm. F. Vandercook described in detail the effects of the fallout contamination that took place on March 1, 1954, using statistics and public responses.<sup>12</sup> This late 1980s analysis coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union, and perhaps the Cold War's eminent end encouraged the first look into the incident. But historians did not stop their exploration there, and as time progressed, their analysis gained in depth.

The 1990s represented a shift from chronology to the full exploration of the Castle Bravo event. In *Elements of Controversy*, Barton Hacker analyzed the events of Castle Bravo alongside radiation protection standards and attempts by those involved to make the test safer.<sup>13</sup> In "Radiation Safety, the AEC and Nuclear Weapons Testing," Hacker placed Castle Bravo in a larger historical context by comparing it to the nuclear outcry that occurred in the 1970s. It explored how information about the Castle Bravo test reached the general public, and attempts made by the government to improve public relations.<sup>14</sup> One would hope that the Castle Bravo event would garner more attention from the academic community; however the historiography of the topic ended with Hacker in the 1990s.

This trend, however, was broken with the turn of the twenty-first century. In 2005, Nina Tannenwald, conducted an in-

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<sup>11</sup> Goldblat and Cox, *Nuclear Weapon Tests*, 96.

<sup>12</sup> Vandercook, "Making the Very Best of the Very Worst."

<sup>13</sup> Hacker, *Elements of controversy*.

<sup>14</sup> Barton C. Hacker, "Radiation Safety, the AEC, and Nuclear Weapons Testing," *The Public Historian* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 47.

depth analysis of Castle Bravo, claiming it served as the roots of public outcry in the anti-nuclear movement that gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. She explored the attempts to keep the event from the public, and the motivation of government officials to do so.<sup>15</sup> She took a unique position stating that opposition to nuclear testing “crest(ed) in the late 1950s,”<sup>16</sup> instead of focusing on the counter culture movement of the late 1960s early 1970s, as the source of all anti-nuclear protest. Unfortunately, the new millennium does not have a quantity of historians exploring these issues, but the few who are, are producing quality work. The Castle Bravo test deserves more exploration than it has received in the last half century, and such research would improve the general understanding of a Post-World War II America.

The end of the Cold War era promoted research into the Civil Defense Administration by historians. The end of the Cold War allowed historians to reflect on the United States’ contribution to the problems of the last half-decade, and provided room for some self-criticism. JoAnne Brown reflected this in her 1988 article in which she chronicled the change in presentation of the atomic threat to children. Her analysis is unique in that it looked at specific changes from year to year, instead of lumping all the trends together under the guise of “The Fifties.” Like Castle Bravo, civil defense has not been adequately explored by historians, but at least this work helps to see past the divisive issue of propaganda in the United States and examines the motivation and persistent themes.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the focus on the United States’ handling of the Cold War continued. Guy Oakes and Andrew Grossman explored the motivation behind the use of fear by the Civil Defense Administration. They made a fascinating connection between civil defense strategies and those employed by the United Kingdom during the blitz of World War II.<sup>17</sup> They asserted that both were fueled by patriotism, and that Civil Defense used this as part of their strategy to “diminish the perceived danger

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<sup>15</sup> Nina. Tannenwald, “Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo,” *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Guy Oakes and Andrew Grossman, “Managing Nuclear Terror: The Genesis of American Civil Defense Strategy,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 3 (April 1, 1992): 371.

of nuclear war.”<sup>18</sup> According to Oakes and Grossman, the Civil Defense Administration created back up plans and shared them with the general public so the average American could feel prepared for the worst resulting in a feeling of security.<sup>19</sup> Although the fear never truly went away, the title “Managing Nuclear Terror” suggests it was more important to manage the terror, than to eradicate it. The publishing of this article coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union, again aligning end of the cold with more attention to self-reflection.

Deeper exploration of the Civil Defense Administration arose in the early 2000s. The article “Between History and Event”, by Tracy Davis explored in detail civil defense strategies used during the 1950s. She cited multiple case studies, eyewitness accounts, and detailed statistics, to describe the manner in which the Civil Defense Administration prepared the public for an atomic attack. She argued that “the persuasiveness of rhetoric depended crucially on a campaign of performance”<sup>20</sup> and this performance reinforced how necessary and important anti-communist actions were to the public. Davis cited the wide variety of preparatory activities the Civil Defense Administration employed, and the lengths they would go to insure as much realism as possible in these practices. Civil Defense Administration did not inform the public of all the dangers of an atomic blast (specifically radiation sickness), but did go to great lengths to ensure populations were familiar with escape routes in the target cities.<sup>21</sup> The specificity of information Davis synthesized to support her thesis represented a shift towards valuing small changes within the Post War period.

Another 21<sup>st</sup> century historian, Bo Jacobs, looked at an alternative aspect of civil defense strategies in the article “Atomic Kids.” He examined films like *Duck and Cover* for their implicit and explicit messages to determine what effect they had on their young audience.<sup>22</sup> Instead of providing in depth analysis of the Civil Defense Administration drills like Davis, Jacobs combined his analysis of film with first-hand accounts to create a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>20</sup> Tracy C. Davis, “Between History and Event: Rehearsing Nuclear War Survival,” *TDR (1988-)* 46, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>22</sup> Bo Jacobs, “Atomic Kids: Duck and Cover and Atomic Alert Teach American Children How to Survive Atomic Attack,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 28-32.

comprehensive visual of what life for a child during this period was like.<sup>23</sup> The new millennium promoted detailed analysis of Civil Defense practices and programs, and some historians took this further to better understand the cultural attitude of the period. Civil Defense is a difficult issue, with its less-than-truthful tactics often reeking of propaganda in an attempt to control hysteria. However, when examined in extreme detail their motivations are revealed to be less malevolent and more the result of fear.

The twenty-first century produced the most research conducted on atomic bomb propaganda in the United States. Historians explored this issue prior to 2000, but never with the fervor as in recent years. It is no accident that initial works about the government deceiving its people were published in 2003. This may have been prompted by the issue of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the rise of the sentiment in America that the entire event was the product of American propaganda. This is only one of many explanations, but could be the antecedent of the influx of academic research. The book *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion* attempted to compile a record of all major works of propaganda in the last 500 years. It contained a brief section on the Civil Defense Administration and compared it to its English cousin, the FCDA, describing how both worked to reduce paranoia about a nuclear attack after World War II.<sup>24</sup> Andrew L. Yarrow published an article in 2009, "Selling a New Vision of America to the World," which focused on the shift from general patriotism to the concept of "people's capitalism."<sup>25</sup> He found that this shift occurred because by focusing on the high standard of living one's political system produced is "apolitical and (an) upbeat message that could unite Americans, patching over the bitter social divisions."<sup>26</sup> Yarrow examined the motivation behind propaganda in their historical context, instead of merely assuming a malicious attitude from the government. Greg Barnhisel researched the origins of American propaganda in "Cold Warriors of the Book" and discovered the "cultural tension" between the Soviet Union

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>24</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert, and David Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 81-82.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew L. Yarrow, "Selling a New Vision of America to the World: Changing Messages in Early U.S. Cold War Print Propaganda," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 4 (2009): 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20.

and the United States existed long before it physically manifested in the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> The historiography of American propaganda created for the Atomic Bomb is, again, limited but varied enough to provide differing perspectives on the entire issue.

Like Castle Bravo and the Civil Defense Administration, the issue of media and the bomb were only explored academically after the Cold War. In 1987, Chon Noriega published "Godzilla and the Japanese Nightmare." Noriega detailed social issues in the Japanese creature-feature *Godzilla*, and their comparison to those in American creature-features like *Them* and *The Beast of 20,000 Fathoms*. Noriega concluded *Godzilla* maintained a very different message by being uniquely Japanese in style and theme. Japan's direct experience with the horrors of nuclear destruction differentiated it from American creature-features, created for an audience made ignorant of these realities due to government censorship.<sup>28</sup> Yet again, the imminent end to the Cold War allowed for limited examination of this topic. However, Noriega's work is specifically a Japan-centric exploration, revealing only a tangential criticism of American nuclear policy. The paper's familiarity with, but continued removal from the major issue of the period possibly allowed Noriega more freedom to objectively explore his research questions.

The 1990s represented an expansion in the exploration of nuclear technology's representation in film. In 1992 "Master Mechanics and Evil Wizards" by Glen Scott Allen continued Noriega's assertion that fear of the atom bomb could be traced back to Hiroshima and Nagasaki,<sup>29</sup> and he used this as a launching point for the rest of the work. Allen explored the failure of nuclear science to meet expectations and the backlash it garnered.<sup>30</sup> Allen examined how this disappointment manifested in film. He cited the resulting characteristics, varying from the hope of a nuclear-fueled utopia,<sup>31</sup> alien invasion standing in for a real invasion,<sup>32</sup> and the

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<sup>27</sup> Greg Barnhisel, "Cold Warriors of the Book: American Book Programs in the 1950s," *Book History* 13 (2010): 186.

<sup>28</sup> Chon Noriega, "Godzilla and the Japanese Nightmare: When "Them!" Is U.S.," *Cinema Journal* 27, no. 1 (October 1, 1987): 99.

<sup>29</sup> Glen Scott Allen, "Master Mechanics & Evil Wizards: Science and the American Imagination from Frankenstein to Sputnik," *The Massachusetts Review* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 1992): 505.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

ultimate acceptance of the nuclear bomb as a thing of terror.<sup>33</sup> Cyndy Hendershot also examined film in *Darwin and the Atom*. She noticed trends that persisted through three films, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *Them!*, and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, and examined them in light of the larger social issues. She found that radiation and feminism were connected as sources of fear within the context of Post-War America. Continuing this trend towards context, Jerome Shapiro explored the entire genre of the Apocalyptic Narrative in the article “Atomic Bomb Cinema.” He concluded that this genre is not unique to the 1950s but part of a larger trend of society's obsession with ending it all,<sup>34</sup> as a hope of “cleansing the world of evil.”<sup>35</sup> He too examined 1950s films that encompassed these themes, two films were American and two were Japanese. Rebirth was the major trend that continued throughout these works. After the fall of the Soviet Union, historians used the changing societal events to examine a few films in light of their larger Cold War context, revealing a more complex situation than merely the fear of communism.

The new millennium contained fewer attempts to explore atomic bomb imagery in media by historians. Yet, Tristan Abbot broke this trend in 2008 with the article “Bomb Media, 1953-1964.” Abbot continued the 1990s tradition of examining films to answer larger questions. The films Abbot examined are unique in that instead of being explicitly about the armament race, or nuclear technology, they are about Soviet spies and antagonists attempting to attain the “nuclear mystery.”<sup>36</sup> He provided a detailed analysis of the plots and characters of these films, and connected them to issues present in the early 1950s. Abbot concluded that these films served a dual purpose, “to keep the public aware of the constant danger of nuclear war” and “to underplay the actual danger...to make it look survivable and manageable.”<sup>37</sup> Abbot discovered that the goals of the Civil Defense Administration were often reflected in Hollywood films. Some films occasionally broke outside the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>34</sup> Jerome F. Shapiro, “Atomic Bomb Cinema: Illness, Suffering, and the Apocalyptic Narrative,” *Literature and Medicine* 17, no. 1 (1998): 128.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>36</sup> Tristan Abbott, “Bomb Media, 1953–1964,” *Postmodern Culture* 18, no. 3 (2008), [http://muse.jhu.edu.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v018/18.3.abbott.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.libproxy.lib.csusb.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v018/18.3.abbott.html).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



norm and preached an anti-nuclear message.<sup>38</sup> The 2000s contained fewer explorations into this issue, but did encourage examining the issue in different ways, by employing different research material. Film and the atomic bomb have been examined for the last 30 years, but differing forms of media are only now serving as a source of historical information.

Comic books are unique in that they were specifically created for a youth audience and their interpretation of the political climate is especially revealing. However, this perspective on comic books was not always acceptable by academics. In 1958 Paul Blakely wrote an article in which he refers to comic books as a “gaudy products”<sup>39</sup> and concludes that “objectionable” comics were “read with appreciable frequency.”<sup>40</sup> There existed an unfavorable view of comic books as harmful during this period. Yet as time progressed and comic books took up the mantle of folklore for the postmodern era, singular characters and their impact on society began to be explored. For example in the 1980s James Van Hise wrote a book concerning the evolution of Superman with chapter headings such as “The Importance of the Legend.”<sup>41</sup> This terminology revealed that these works of fiction traveled beyond a child's amusement and left a relevant impact on American culture. Finally in the 2000s comic books took their place as a source of historical information. This is the entire purpose of Charles Hatfield's article written in 2006, “Comic Art, Children's Literature, and the New Comic Studies.” Hatfield even argued that the non-historical view of comic books had “sorely impoverished the field.”<sup>42</sup> To avoid this pitfall, comics are incorporated as a primary source, and they continue to reveal a great deal about the period in which they were created.

The area most closely related to the atomic bomb's representation in child media may be that of media and the bomb. A disturbing trend persisted through all the historical research regarding this topic, the fact that the historians only observed a few films, and rarely examined other forms of media. The research in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> W. Paul Blakely, “Reading of Comic Books by Seventh-Grade Children,” *The Elementary School Journal* 58, no. 6 (March 1, 1958): 326.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>41</sup> James Van Hise, *Comics file magazine spotlight on the Superman files* (Canoga Park, CA: Heroes Pub, 1986), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Hatfield, “Comic Art, Children's Literature, and the New Comic Studies,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 30, no. 3 (2006): 361.

this study contrasts with this trend, in that it is composed of about 50 primary source materials. Also very few historians examined a wide variety of media, with the exception of Bo Jacobs,<sup>43</sup> for his research incorporated both film and print, and the many forms those two can manifest in. There are elements in the historiography of the Castle Bravo test that come close to the answering the overall question, yet they do not reveal what effect this test failure had on media from this period, and do not trace the change over time. The research contained here is unique and I will provide the basis for future exploration. Media representation of the atomic bomb for children took a unique form in the early part of the 1950s; however in 1954, after the Castle Bravo test, the themes and attitudes concerning the bomb quickly changed to mirror those of the newly informed public, shaping the way media represented the bomb to young audiences for the remainder of the decade.

### ***Pre-Castle Bravo***

Prior to the media disaster that followed the Castle Bravo test, atomic technology represented a dangerous yet viable option for future progress. There was hope this new technology would improve modern life and protect the United States position as a world power. The government ensured that American public knew little about the true nature of the nuclear bomb.<sup>44</sup> The population relied on the government's optimism regarding the technology's potential to shape their own opinions. This resulted in ignorance about radiation, helping to shape the perception of its danger. The government emphasized the importance for citizens to prepare for a possible atomic attack. It was important for the public to know, if the United States was attacked, they were willing to retaliate. The view of atomic technology before the Castle Bravo test, was naive and overly hopeful, with a generalized warning about its dangers.

The anticipated expectations of atomic technology's potential manifested itself in children's media. It was assumed that new rocket advancements would run on hydrogen, and everyone from astronauts<sup>45</sup> to aliens<sup>46</sup> employed this technology. The rocket

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<sup>43</sup> Bo Jacobs, "Atomic Kids."

<sup>44</sup> Christine Hong, "Flash forward Democracy," 126.

<sup>45</sup> Kurt Neumann, *Rocket ship X-M* (Image Entertainment, 1950).

in *Rocket ship XM* ran entirely on hydrogen, which fictionally served as an abundant source of energy. In *XM* a space voyage intended for the moon, which is only a few hundred thousand miles away, is readjusted for a journey to Mars, tens of millions of miles away, the amount of fuel never an issue.<sup>47</sup> In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* there is an interesting exchange in which the alien Kaatu encouraged a young boy, that nuclear technology is not just for bombs, but can allow for inter-planetary travel.<sup>48</sup> The general attitude assumed that new nuclear advancements would allow for unhindered space exploration. Although, these assertions were fanciful, and not grounded in reality, they did reveal the enthusiasm and confidence surrounding nuclear technology.

The optimism that accompanied nuclear technology was not solely applied to space exploration. In a General Electric short film entitled *A is for Atom*, cartoon characters explain radioactivity, and how it could be useful in a variety of fields. Atomic technology was personified as the warrior, the healer, the farmer, and the scientist, because of its uses in the military, medicine, agriculture, and science.<sup>49</sup> The film made the assertion that all this is possible because technologies “are within man's power, subject to his command.”<sup>50</sup> The film claimed that future generations would be dependent on humanity's “wisdom (and)...firmness in the use of that power.”<sup>51</sup> This is an example of optimism evolving one step further into hubris. The public not only hoped that nuclear technology would bring about a better world, but that it was their mandate to be the guardian of such nuclear technology.

The mystery surrounding nuclear advancements can be observed in the nearly surreal way they were presented to children. In 1951, Jack Coggins and Fletcher Pratt wrote a children's book entitled *Rockets, Jets, Guided Missiles and Space Ships* in which new technological advances were explained at a level presumed to be understandable to children. When the issue of inter-ballistic missiles arose the authors explained the “(m)ost of the military

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Wise, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (20th Century Fox, 1951).

<sup>47</sup> Neumann, *Rocket ship X-M* (1950).

<sup>48</sup> Wise, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951).

<sup>49</sup> *A Is For Atom* Vintage Atomic Film, 1952,

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi-ItrJISQE&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi-ItrJISQE&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

results have been kept secret because they concern one of our newest and best weapons.”<sup>52</sup> The government did not inform the public of the advancements they were making so the authors had to reassure their young audience that this was for the best. The assumption was, experimentation with radiation and nuclear bombs would improve society, and everyone was expected to entrust this technology to its guardian, The United States government. This can be construed as a form of patriotism and went unchallenged.

Despite the hope brought by atomic technology, the public was not so naïve to ignore the extreme danger it represented. The public may not have known the extent of the human suffering radiation caused, but they did know that the atomic bombs forced had Japan to surrender. This can be observed in some of the previously mentioned works. In the climax of *Rocket ship XM* the main characters learned that a grand society that existed on Mars destroyed itself during nuclear war. The astronauts then worked to ensure that the people of earth learn this as well, before their rocket is destroyed in Earth's atmosphere.<sup>53</sup> *The Day the Earth Stood Still* depicted the fear surrounding nuclear decimation as well. The main plot point in this film concerns an alien police force noticing the earth's nuclear capabilities and experimentation in rockets. Kaatu is sent to warn the earth and is accompanied by an indestructible robot, meant to exterminate the human race if they ever threaten other planets.<sup>54</sup> Both of these films contain a transparent message: nuclear war has the potential to destroy the earth. After the first Soviet atomic tests that occurred in 1949, the concern about mutually assured destruction emerged.

The Soviets were not the only source of atomic threat. According to some works of media, the United States was its own worst enemy. In the film *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, atomic testing in the Arctic awakens a prehistoric beast that goes on a rampage in New York City.<sup>55</sup> Instead of warning about the potential for nuclear war, this film illustrated that even experimentation with nuclear technology can have dire consequences. This point is rendered somewhat mute in that the

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<sup>52</sup> Jack Coggins, *Rockets, jets, guided missiles and space ships*, First edition. (New York: Random House, 1951), 33.

<sup>53</sup> Neumann, *Rocketship X-M*.

<sup>54</sup> Wise, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

<sup>55</sup> Eugène Lourié, *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (Warner Home Video, 1953).

monster is destroyed by shooting it with a radioactive-isotope-tipped missile.<sup>56</sup> Although the message might seem mixed, the fundamental theme is that precaution must be maintained when nuclear technology is concerned; however, this does not mean the end of advancement in the field.

Some media created for children in the 1950s pessimistically observed the consequences of nuclear destruction. For example, in 1950 Bowman Gum Company produced a series of trading cards, one of which was entitled "Atomic Doom." The card first warns of the possibility of nuclear war, a standard fear of the period. However, this card goes on to state that this "(e)xplosion might cause a chain reaction destroying the earth, or rendering it so barren it could not support human or animal life."<sup>57</sup> The image on the card is that of the earth exploding. Perhaps what is most astonishing is that the destruction of earth was marketed to children, and included with a stick of gum.

Gum companies were not the only ones purveying doom to children. Looney Tunes produced a Daffy Duck and Marvin the Martian cartoon in 1953 entitled *Duck Dodgers in the 24 ½<sup>th</sup> Century*. In this cartoon Duck Dodgers, on orders from the Earth's authority, travels to Planet X to claim the planet and attain a rare element that is vital to the production of shaving cream. Upon arrival he finds that the martians have also sent their best, Marvin the Martian, to do the same thing. They exchange comical blows which culminate in both attempting to blow the other up, resulting in a nearly complete destruction of the planet.<sup>58</sup> On the surface, this is an amusing cartoon, but when all the gags are stripped away, it represents the presumed results of an atomic conflict. The result being even worse than that depicted on the "Atomic Doom" card, for all that is left of the planet is a small sliver.<sup>59</sup> Children's media was not immune from the fear of destruction the permeated the decade, but there were some that intended to lessen some dread for this specific audience.

Preparation manifested as a focus of films shown in schools in attempts to counter the pessimism expressed in other media. *Duck and Cover* was the best example of this. Produced by the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Chuck Jones and Margaret Selby, *Chuck Jones - Extremes and In-Betweens, a Life in Animation* (Warner Home Video, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Civil Defense Administration in 1951, its purpose was to encourage young people to be prepared for an atomic attack by explaining what should be done in case of such an event. Through the use of a cartoon turtle, children were encouraged that if a bomb were to go off, they are to “duck and cover.”<sup>60</sup> Done through song, this reveals another attempt to lessen the frightening nature of the subject matter. The assumption *Duck and Cover* functions on is that if a child is prepared for a disaster, they will be less fearful of it in their daily lives. The film *Invasion U.S.A.* maintained a similar message. After all the characters realized that the horrors they experienced were a mixture of mass hypnosis and foresight, they leave to take up government contracts and donate blood to the Red Cross.<sup>61</sup> The message in this film asserted that common people could prevent nuclear destruction by being prepared. Both works espoused the virtues of preparation to make the public feel more comfortable in the (false) knowledge that being prepared for an attack will protect one from destruction.

The final theme that permeated the Pre-Castle era was an attitude of righteous retaliation. In *Invasion U.S.A.*, after an implied Soviet enemy decimated the entire west coast with atomic bombs, a character reassures the group that “for every bomb they drop (in the United States)...three are dropped” in their nation of origin.<sup>62</sup> This bravado reveals the public's willingness to employ atomic technology in battle. It was acceptable for the United States government to drop exponentially more atomic bombs on their enemy after the United States had been attacked. This film shows that even though Americans feared the use of the bomb on themselves, they were more than willing to use it on an enemy.

This element of retribution was not exclusive to film. Between 1952 and 1953 Ace Comics produced a series entitled *Atomic War!*. The series speculated on events that might occur if the United States engaged in armed conflict with the Soviet Union. The first issue's cover depicts New York City destroyed by a mushroom cloud, and preceding comics depicted the United States engaged in retaliation.<sup>63</sup> The most blatant illustration of this

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<sup>60</sup> *Duck And Cover* (1951) Bert The Turtle Civil Defense Film, 2009, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>61</sup> Alfred E. Green, *Invasion USA* (Synapse Films, 1952).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Aaron A. Wyn, *Atomic War!* Number 1 (Ace Comics, Springfield, 1952).

retaliation is expressed on the cover of *Atomic War* #3 in which pilot detonates an atomic bomb, shouting that this will “avenge what the Reds did to New York, Chicago and Detroit...BOMBS AWAY!”<sup>64</sup> EC Comics also produced comics that espoused the principles of retaliation. In *Weird Fantasy* No. 11, published in 1950, a wife punished her abusive husband by using radiation to shrink him to the size of a doll.<sup>65</sup> Both of these comics promoted atomic technology as a means to enact revenge, justified by the terrible actions of the antagonist. These comics revealed that revenge was acceptable as long as it could be justified as a response to an attack or abuse, and this message was specifically geared towards children.

The elements previously described established the post-World War II attitude about the bomb. The American public anticipated the ways in which atomic technology would improve their life. The public also knew the danger associated with the bomb, they were just unaware of how dangerous it could be. People were encouraged to be prepared for a possible attack, in hopes of relieving some of the fear they felt. People were generally willing to use atomic technology in retaliation for these presumed attacks. Optimism, apprehension, preparation, and retaliation all worked together to create a tense yet balanced attitude concerning nuclear technology but these would soon be reformed by terrible reality.

### ***Post-Castle Bravo***

After the disaster of Castle Bravo, themes like preparedness, retaliation, and optimism for the new technology soon gave way to fear of what man had created. Issues that were only briefly mentioned in previous forms of media now became the focus of entire works. These works adopted a more pessimistic tone that would come to dominate for the remainder of the decade. Ultimately the Castle Bravo test caused immense change to themes explored in the media; however, superficial elements of characterization remained the same with few outliers.

A major new theme introduced post-Castle Bravo was that of contamination. It manifested in a variety of ways, depending on

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<sup>64</sup> Aaron A. Wyn, *Atomic War!* Number 3 (Ace Comics, Springfield, 1953).

<sup>65</sup> Jack Kamen, *Weird Fantasy: Shrinking from Abuse* (EC Comics, 1950).

who or what was being irradiated and how, yet all being negative for human beings. Occasionally there was direct reference to the Castle Bravo test, but never by name and extremely rare. Contamination seemed to pervade the culture so much, that in some media, radiation was obviously the source of mutation, but is not mentioned. The shift from a positive view of nuclear technology was evident. The entirety of this shift can be traced to the Castle Bravo incident. Contamination remained in the public consciousness and shaped the way the atomic bomb was depicted to the American public.

The most intimidating form of contamination expressed in the media was that enacted on the environment. In some works it laid the foundation for the action, like *Day the World Ended*, in which six people survive a nuclear holocaust because of the luck of being in a particular lead filled valley, unable to leave the valley because of the fallout that consumes the earth.<sup>66</sup> This film explored the nature of man at his most desperate and primal, with the only goal being the fight for survival in the face of utter destruction caused by contamination of his fellow man.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, much like a bad horror movie, all the other characters were killed except for the main protagonist and his love interest. The world also cleansed itself of the fallout with rain, although completely scientifically inaccurate, allowed the protagonist and his bride to leave the canyon and repopulate the earth.<sup>68</sup> This film was produced in 1955, only a year after the Castle-Bravo incident. Its message of preparation and rebirth are holdovers from the pre-Castle period. The new fear of contamination reshaped these old themes into a far grimmer view of what the future had in store.

Film was not the only medium touting the newly found dangers of atomic war and fallout. In *The Magician's Nephew*, written by C.S. Lewis in 1955, one section is essentially a veiled metaphor for the nuclear arms race. In chapters four and five, the children enter a world completely devoid of life. They are met by the Queen who explained that the destruction was all caused by a conflict between herself and her sister. She had resorted to the "secret of the deplorable world" in order to end the war.<sup>69</sup> This spell destroyed every person in the world except the person who

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<sup>66</sup> Terence Gross, *The Day the World Ended* (Sony Pictures, 1955).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: HarperCollins, 1955), 30.



spoke it, the Queen. These chapters are an attempt by C.S. Lewis to inform his young audience of the dangers of nuclear war. Lewis used fantasy as a thin screen for his social commentary. The author used his platform to comment on recent events and communicate with his young audience. The environment in this section of *The Magician's Nephew* is so lonely and bleak, it is meant to reinforce the shift from optimism to pessimism concerning the bomb.

Radiation not only harmed the environment in works of fiction, animals also fell victim to mutation from radiation in media. This mutation took two forms, that of direct radiation resulting in growth, and that of indirect contamination of the food supply by nuclear fallout, which also resulted in growth. These two manifestations reflect the events of Castle Bravo, by re-imagining the effect nuclear fallout had on the Marshallese and the Japanese fishermen, and the contamination of the fish population caused by the blast. The overall message being that nuclear technology is destructive in unexpected and unforeseen ways, and thus should be harnessed before more harm occurs.

*Godzilla* represented the earliest use of radiation actually creating a monster. Not introduced to America until 1956, the Japanese original reflected the issues brought up by the Castle Bravo test. *Godzilla* initially attacked a fishing boat and a small island greatly resembling the destruction caused by the radiation fallout of Castle Bravo. The filmmakers avoided this comparison by asserting that *Godzilla* manifested because of the Hiroshima bomb, but the similarities and timing are undeniable.<sup>70</sup> *Godzilla* soon moved on to destroy the city of Tokyo and the rampage only stopped when a terribly dangerous weapon removed all the oxygen from the water in Tokyo Bay.<sup>71</sup> This film also grappled with the issue of the morality of such a scientific advancement that can cause such destruction. *Godzilla* contained, though the veil of fiction, a harsher critique of nuclear technology than any American works.

In contrast, characters in *The Attack of the Crab Monster* discuss the Castle Bravo test more directly, yet refer to it as the “first big H-bomb test.”<sup>72</sup> Characters mentioned how it completely

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<sup>70</sup> Terry Morse, Gojira, *Godzilla* Deluxe Collector's Edition (Classic Media, 1955).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Roger Corman, *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (Allied Artists Classics, 1957).

irradiated the islands and the sea, “blanketing the island with hot ash.”<sup>73</sup> The film revolved around the more stupendous results of radiation. According to the film, Castle Bravo caused the growth of ocean crabs to an enormous size and provided them with the ability to absorb tissue by eating it. After they eat the brains of a group of scientists, the crabs become sentient. These crabs attempted to kill scientists on the island and are eventually killed by electrocution. This film represented the fear of mutation caused by radiation, as a result of the Castle Bravo incident.

Not all films fall in the category of giant lizards and crabs took place in the eastern Oceans. *Them!*, a film about huge radioactive ants, grew because of nuclear testing in Nevada.<sup>74</sup> After an attempt to destroy the colony, two queen ants escape to Los Angeles. The protagonists finally corner the remaining ants and destroy them with flamethrowers, but on reflection of their victory the characters wonder what other horrors the numerous nuclear tests may have caused.<sup>75</sup> This poignant scene left the audience to wonder and fear what terrors man brought on himself in the name of science, protection, and progress. By observing the events of the Castle Bravo test, one can sympathize with the audience’s fear of death and destruction.

Another form of direct radiation took place in the media that did not have a connection to actual events. This can be observed in the film *The Giant Behemoth* in which nuclear testing is referenced as the origins of the monster, but no specific test is cited as the cause. The Castle Bravo test is mentioned, only in that the burns observed looked similar to those caused by the nuclear fallout.<sup>76</sup> In *The Killer Shrews* a scientist intentionally irradiated shrews for non-governmental scientific experiments, causing their enormous size.<sup>77</sup> The characters’ only escape method was to evacuate the island and let the shrews starve to death.<sup>78</sup> *Earth vs. the Spider* contained enormous arachnids produced by unnamed nuclear testing that are destroyed only when they are blown up with dynamite. These films were all produced towards the end of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Gordon Douglas, *Them!* (Warner Home Video, 1954).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Douglas Hickox and Eugène Lourié, *The Giant Behemoth* (Warner Home Video, 1959).

<sup>77</sup> Ray Kellogg, *The Killer Shrews* (Alpha Video, 1959).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

the decade, whereas the films that explicitly name the tests had production dates in 1954 and 1955. The difference in production date may reveal that initially after Castle Bravo, testing took the forefront of the collective American mind, and as time passed, specific names and dates faded from memory, but the horror of mutilation by atomic radiation still remained.

Although direct radiation poisoning scared the American public in works of fiction, contamination of the food supply also sprang up in media. For example, in 1955 the film *It Came from Beneath the Sea* a monster octopus left its deep trench home due to the irradiation of its food supply. The monster turned his attention to nuclear subs but the characters destroyed it with a radioactive tipped missile.<sup>79</sup> In *The Beginning of the End* giant grasshoppers grew from eating irradiated vegetables and proceeded to attack Chicago.<sup>80</sup> Unlike *Beneath the Sea*, the protagonists worked to destroy the grasshoppers without the use of atomic bombs. Instead they used high frequency sound to lure the beasts into Lake Michigan.<sup>81</sup> In *Attack of the Giant Leeches* a presumably atomic source caused leeches to grow to the size of a man.<sup>82</sup> In *The Giant Gila Monster* elements in the water transferred to plant life and then to animal life causing the exponential growth of the title creature.<sup>83</sup> Explosives were used to destroy both the leeches and the Gila monster. Just as Castle Bravo contaminated the Japanese fishing supply, the American public feared a similar situation would occur at home. This fear was especially great because it could not be remedied with money. The fact that contaminated resources manifest as such an integral part of the plots reveals that the American public feared the larger implications of atomic testing, recognizing that it may destroy or mutate their means of survival.

Although radiation affected animals and the environment in films created after the Castle Bravo incident, the effects of radiation on humans received the most attention in the media. Mutation served as the general theme that continued throughout all

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<sup>79</sup> Richard Schickel and Robert Gordon, *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (Sony Pictures, 1955).

<sup>80</sup> *Beginning of the End* (Anchor Bay, 1957), videocassette.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Bernard L. Kowalski, *Attack of the Giant Leeches* (Rhino / Wea, 1959), videocassette.

<sup>83</sup> Ray Kellogg, *The Giant Gila Monster* (Miracle Pictures, 1959).

these works. Sometimes this mutation manifested physically. In other films, it caused mental abilities. Bodily possession in regards to nuclear experimentation and technology occurred in multiple films. And finally, the intention to do good with this technology, resulting in negative outcomes, arose as a theme over and over again. The public feared the cost of atomic radiation on their environment and wildlife, but they were especially fearful of the ways radiation might affect them personally, and this manifested frequently in the media after 1954.

General mutation, as a theme, sprang up in the most films, killing and disfiguring human beings. In *Queen of Outer Space* these mutations are shown in the most realistic sense, illustrating that exposure to atomic radiation caused terrible burns,<sup>84</sup> the villainess' face terribly deformed by them. But burns showed up frequently in other films with an atomic element. Characters suffered mortal burns in *Day the World Ended*,<sup>85</sup> *Godzilla*,<sup>86</sup> and *The Giant Behemoth*.<sup>87</sup> The fear of death by the scorching heat of an atomic blast materialized in these films as a result of nuclear testing. Yet, characters also suffered non-life-threatening, but equally disfiguring, burns in *Day the World Ended*,<sup>88</sup> *The Amazing Colossal Man*,<sup>89</sup> and *Behemoth*.<sup>90</sup> The American public feared the disfiguring power of their new weapon. Burning from a nuclear blast was a fear grounded in reality, unlike some of the other mutating powers the public assumed radiation to have.

Fiction also endowed radiation with the ability to transform a human into a human-beast hybrid. In *Attack of the Sun Demon* the main character was exposed to deadly amounts of radiation in a lab. He remained unaffected until his doctors exposed him to the sun's rays, at which point he "evolves backwards" becoming a human lizard.<sup>91</sup> His rampage only ended when his humanity briefly won over his animalistic urges and he threw himself off of a building. *The Day the World Ended* also contained this element of human mutation. Any person caught outside the safe valley

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Bernds, *Queen of Outer Space* (Warner Home Video, 1958).

<sup>85</sup> Gross, *The Day the World Ended* (1955).

<sup>86</sup> Morse, Guiro, *Godzilla* Deluxe Collector's Edition (1955).

<sup>87</sup> Hickox and Lourié, *The Giant Behemoth* (1959).

<sup>88</sup> Gross, *The Day the World Ended* (1955).

<sup>89</sup> *The Amazing Colossal Man*, videocassette.

<sup>90</sup> Hickox and Lourié, *The Giant Behemoth* (1959).

<sup>91</sup> Robert Clarke and Tom Boutross, *The Hideous Sun Demon* (Image Entertainment, 1959).

transformed into a flesh-eating monster.<sup>92</sup> The audience assumed that the entire irradiated population took the form of a horned, clawed beast. Rainwater killed all the monsters, and cleansed the world of radiation.<sup>93</sup> This fanciful envisioning of the effects of radiation represented a fear that nuclear technology would strip away one's humanity and leave them a beast. These assumptions grounded themselves in fantasy, but played into deeper fears that the bomb was a sort of boogiemer. This element in media revealed a fear that radiation would accompany the end of civilization and the rise of brutality as the new world order.

The final representation of radiation causing physical mutation resulted in a change in size. In *The Amazing Colossal Man* a soldier participating in a nuclear test in Nevada, was left exposed when the bomb detonated and received a great deal of radiation.<sup>94</sup> Initially, radiation covered his body in second and third degree burns, but overnight they healed, and he began to grow. The exposure to atomic radiation caused his cells to over repair, and he eventually grows to sixty feet in height. This process is only stopped when doctors injected him with more radiation, but this merely stopped his rapid growth, and did not reverse it. Madness drove him to rampage, and the military shot him with a bazooka causing him to fall off of the Hoover dam.<sup>95</sup> Conversely, in the 1957 film *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, a man absorbed too much radiation from an atomic test while on his boat and began to shrink.<sup>96</sup> He eventually shrunk to the size of a doll, but came to a more profound understanding that despite his size he still "meant something too" and that he "still existed."<sup>97</sup> The man, who grew as a result of exposure, fell into madness and destruction, the man who shrunk found his place in the universe. *The Amazing Colossal Man* reflected the fear of unhindered progress, whereas *The Incredible Shrinking Man* restored man to a comfortable place, where he must accept his lack of control. These two films demonstrate fanciful fears that revolved around atomic

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<sup>92</sup> Gross, *The Day the World Ended* (1955).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *The Amazing Colossal Man*, videocassette.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Jack Arnold, *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Universal Studios, 1957), videocassette.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

technology, each representing a different response to the issue: one of unchecked power, and the other of acceptance and humility.

Although *Shrinking Man* ends poignantly, it's a rare gem in the world of child's media concerning the bomb. Many more works included the disastrous results of atomic experimentation and the unforeseen consequences. For example "Fiend without a Face" revolved around a scientist who attempted to give a physical presence to thought.<sup>98</sup> He accomplished this by siphoning energy from a military establishment, using a nuclear reactor to power experimental radar. These thoughts soon attacked the local population, and through a spike at the nuclear plant, can be seen visually. They are only stopped when a soldier shuts down the nuclear reactor, and the monsters disappear.<sup>99</sup> Other creatures come to life on far away planets because of alien technology. In *Forbidden Planet*, a nuclear powered intelligence booster did exactly that, for a scientist who lived alone on the planet with his daughter. Unfortunately, it also provided his id with a physical presence and this uncontrolled id rampaged invisibly throughout the planet.<sup>100</sup> The rampage ended with the scientist's death, allowing his daughter to flee with her new love.<sup>101</sup> Both of these films include a scientist who intended to use nuclear power to increase his knowledge, but ultimately released an invisible evil into the world. Comparisons can easily be made between the issues that arose in these films and the invisible terror unleashed on the world in the form of nuclear fallout.

Nuclear energy, at least in the world of fiction, allowed superior, non-physical beings to possess the body of a human. In *Brain from the Planet Arous* and *Kronos*, alien entities assume the bodies of unsuspecting victims in order to bring about their own dominance. In *Arous* an alien creature attempted to establish himself as ruler of the world by possessing a nuclear scientist and revealing a new and more powerful form of atomic bomb. The lead female character stopped the alien by acting on information given to her by an alien police force.<sup>102</sup> In *Kronos* an alien force also inhabited the body of a nuclear scientist to ensure he gave the

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<sup>98</sup> Arthur Crabtree, *Fiend Without a Face* - Criterion Collection (Criterion, 1958).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Fred M. Wilcox, *Forbidden Planet* (Warner Home Video, 2006).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Nathan Juran, *The Brain from Planet Arous* (Image Entertainment, 2001).

alien ship atomic energy. After the American government mistakenly detonated an atomic bomb on their ship, the aliens happily absorbed it as energy. However, the protagonist covered the ship with radiation, and it began to devour itself.<sup>103</sup> These films have many similar elements and reveal a distrust of science and scientist that coincided with fears about nuclear testing. Audiences could accept the imagery of a possessed scientist more easily, than the fact that the destruction caused by Castle Bravo resulted from ignorance and human error.

There are some consistencies that persisted heavily throughout the entire decade, occurring in nearly every primary source. These largely superficial trends visualized as images used or the character archetypes that pervaded each work. The shift in theme was so significant that a connection in message and attitude cannot be made between the early and late parts of the decade without resulting in extreme generalizations. However, these are not accurate measures of consistencies since they were the perimeters of my research. The superficial aspects do persist throughout the decade and warrant noting.

One visual consistency that existed throughout the decade was the use of stock footage of atomic tests in these films. For example, Hollywood produced *Invasion U.S.A.* and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* in 1952 and 1953 respectively. Yet they contained some of the same stock footage used in *The Giant Behemoth* (1959) and *Fiend without a Face* (1958). The low quality visual effects of the period encouraged practicality of using footage from nuclear testing to represent the detonation of an atomic bomb. Films used test footage prior to Castle Bravo, despite the fact that the true nature of the bomb was kept largely from the public. This superficial consistency helps to describe more about the limitations of the time for filmmaking than the presentation of the atomic bomb, but still is a revealing aspect of this medium.

These films consistently employed the archetype that transformed into a stock character for the genre of creature-features. The first form of characterization was the foreign scientist. The films characterized this scientist sometimes as benevolent, other times as malevolent, or occasionally merely misguided. He was always the most intelligent person in the entire

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<sup>103</sup> Kurt Neumann, *Kronos* (Image Entertainment, 2000).

film and he was always foreign. Most British or Canadian films as well exploited this archetype as well. Prior to Castle Bravo the foreign scientist character was present in *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Rocket ship XM*, and *Invasion U.S.A.* After Castle Bravo a foreign scientist appeared in *The Killer Shrews*, *Fiend without a Face*, *Them!*, *Bride of the Monster*, and many others. The United States imported scientists prior to and during World War II, and this may serve as a fictional representation of those actions. Their presence provided support or antagonism for the main protagonist and to explain the “science” behind the plot.

Another character that played prominently before and after the Castle Bravo incident was the female scientist or scientist assistant. Her intelligence was often overshadowed by her role as a love interest for the protagonist. In the 1950s, with a woman’s place being in the home, these characters contradicted this stereotype. These women played a significant role in bringing about the resolution of the plot, and their acceptance in the scientific realm was sometimes included. Female scientists showed up in *Rocket ship XM* and *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* prior to 1954 and are seen in *Them!*, *Queen of Outer Space*, *Fiend without a Face*, *Kronos*, and numerous other films. The role of a female scientist may have served as an easy way to include a beautiful woman and love interest in stories that were dominated by men. Yet, the presence of these women refreshes the modern observer, along with the competence attributed to them.

There are a few outliers that either because of date or theme do not fit perfectly into my thesis. First, there are those films that have nuclear imagery but no mention at all of radiation. These films are *Fly*,<sup>104</sup> *Attack of the Puppet People*,<sup>105</sup> *The Blob*,<sup>106</sup> and *Donovan's Brain*.<sup>107</sup> These films sometimes included references to civil defense<sup>108</sup> explicit images that looked very similar to the depictions of atomic technology,<sup>109</sup> or shared themes with atomic narratives that were too close to just be ignored.<sup>110</sup> So I thought it

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<sup>104</sup> Kurt Neumann, *Fly* [VHS] (20th Century Fox, 1958).

<sup>105</sup> Bert I. Gordon, *Attack of the Puppet People* (MGM, 1958), videocassette.

<sup>106</sup> Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr and Russell S. Doughten Jr, *The Blob* [VHS] (Gaiam, Inc., 1958).

<sup>107</sup> *Donovan's Brain* (MGM, 1953).

<sup>108</sup> Yeaworth and Doughten, *The Blob* (1958), videocassette.

<sup>109</sup> Gordon, *Attack of the Puppet People* (1958), videocassette.

<sup>110</sup> Neumann, *Fly Donovan's Brain* (1953), videocassette.



important to mention that even when media was not addressing atomic issues directly, many of the elements persisted, blending into other works. Secondly, I stumbled across a book that on the surface contained a pre-Castle attitude, but was published in 1959. *The Bookshelf for Boys and Girls Encyclopedia*, specifically its section on “Atoms,”<sup>111</sup> explained how atoms work and the scientific history behind the research into the atom, culminating with an explanation of the atomic bomb's use during WWII. It asserted “(f)ortunately, there are other ways to release this vast energy than in bombs.”<sup>112</sup> This optimism very much resembles the attitude prior to Castle Bravo, however upon further inspection; one can see that it is not quite the same. This section goes on to describe the duality of the decision humanity must make concerning atomic energy, the only “limit is man's own judgment.”<sup>113</sup> Prior to Castle Bravo, children's media made no mention of judgment, prudence, or responsibility; this is a very post-Castle attitude. These outliers would seem to hurt the validity of the thesis but they actually bolster it in their own unique ways.

## Conclusion

In researching these many primary documents I found a mid-decade event changed the attitude and presentation of nuclear technology. Upon further exploration, I deduced that a media nightmare, the Castle Bravo disaster, exposed the American public to the realities of the hydrogen bomb, thus changing its representation in media. I chose to examine children's media because that specific genre simplified major issues to their least complex themes, better encompassing acceptable norms for the period. Through the use of various primary source materials, I tracked the elements that remained consistent in a specific year and consistencies that lasted the decade entire. I also explored the changes that sprang up suddenly in 1954 and shaped the way

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<sup>111</sup> The Editorial Board of the University Society, *The Bookshelf for Boys and Girls: Volume VII - Nature and Science* (New York: The University Society, Inc., 1959), 356.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 369.

nuclear technology was represented by media outlets for the rest of the decade.

The issue surrounding the atomic bomb and fallout stood reached their most promising and most terrifying during the 1950s. The Castle Bravo test did not cause the loss of life and general destruction brought about by the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The American government unintentionally caused Castle Bravo, creating minimal human casualties, in comparison to the severe loss of human life in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet, because of Castle Bravo's exposure in mass media, this accident turned perception of nuclear technology on its ear. Media followed this shift, and changed themes and messages to fit the new attitude of its audience. Media serves as a both a barometer and time capsule, capturing the fickle nature of the viewing public. The unique way attitudes changed in 1954 reinforce the assertion that the attitudes transformed throughout the decade. Their attitude truly changed, disproving the prejudice that Americans only cared for homogenization and status quo. When major events became public knowledge, even the most "innocent" form of media changed. The children of the 1950s experienced this shift which then laid the foundation for future concerns for atomic technology.

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### **Author Bio**

Bethany Underhill graduated California State University San Bernardino in 2011 with a B.A. in History. While at CSUSB Bethany participated in the annual student research conference. This involvement gave her a real love for the research and presentation process in the academic community. She currently is in the History Master's Program at University of Nevada, Reno, and continuing research in the area of American cultural history. While in the Master's program, Bethany has contributed to the Oral History program at UNR, interviewing members of the community for the Fourth Street Project. Upon completing her academic program Bethany hopes to teach within higher education. Yet, her recent involvement in the Fourth Street Project has also given her a taste for public history, and she hopes to better the community in the future with more incorporation of history directed at the general population.





# Travels Through History

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## Burning Paper: Cultural Connections in China

By Melissa Fitzgerald



Figure 1: Incense burning outside a small Buddhist temple in Huarong, Hunan (华容, 湖南). Photo by author.

When embarking on a journey to better understand a foreign culture, it is difficult to know where to begin. When looking for cultural continuity it is best to search for common customs, values, and beliefs within a population group. In a globalized world, beliefs tend to cross-geographic boundaries and values shift, potentially away from the spiritual and toward material success. While this may make understanding a particular culture more challenging, one can rely on a study of life's most vital moments,

birth, love, and death, for clues to a culture's connection with its traditional past. During my experience living and teaching in China, I was fortunate to observe cultural practices firsthand. These observations led me to recognize a link between funeral rites and ancestor reverence that connects traditional Chinese culture to modern day China.

While China continues to develop at a rapid pace, both socially and economically, the special attention paid to the customs of death show that pieces of ancient tradition still thrive within modern Chinese life. While much of the ritual has changed form, the ideological connection to death can still be seen. Funeral customs point to a Chinese belief that there is a real connection between this world and the next. Indeed, how one conducts his affairs while living can affect his ancestors in the world beyond. The rich tradition built-in to death and ancestor rituals in China provides cultural continuity in a rapidly changing modern Chinese society. Practicing these ancient traditions allows Chinese people an intimate link with the historical past and a source for social unity in a culturally amorphous present.

Ancestor worship has long been a facet of Chinese society. Indeed, there is recorded history of ancestor worship going all the way back to the Shang dynasty (1600-1045 B.C.E). The diviners of the Shang used the scapulas of cattle and turtle plastrons to write predictions on matters ranging from harvest to birth. They then heated a bronze instrument to crack the shell and the markings were interpreted by a diviner as either auspicious or pointing to imminent disaster. "The bones were a means of communicating with the unseen world, including passing messages to ancestors of the royal family."<sup>296</sup>

In Chinese tradition, when one experiences good fortune in life it is a reward from the ancestral spirit world, thus the opposite can be implied that disaster in life is punishment for bad behavior. In this belief there is a close connection between the world of the living and the spirit world of the ancestors. Not only are the ancestors paying close attention to your behavior; they can directly influence the course of your life. Ancient tradition ritualized the imperative to both care for and keep your ancestors happy. To this

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<sup>296</sup> Peter Hessler, "Restless Spirits," *National Geographic*, January 2010: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/01/chinese-afterlife/hessler-text> (accessed February 4 2011).

end, sacrifices are made to keep ancestors comfortable and prosperous in their afterlife.

When studying Chinese religious and philosophical traditions, one gets the impression that the “other world,” or life after death, is in many way similar to the world of the living. Like the living realm, there is a clear sense of order and hierarchy: “In ancient times the vision of the next world tended to be pragmatic, materialistic, even bureaucratic.”<sup>1</sup> Archeological discoveries show that bodies were often buried with useful tools, pottery, and, in some cases, jade and bronze vessels. Royal tombs were even more elaborate—a shrine to the importance and wealth of the person while they were living. The best example of this is the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of a unified China. While contents of Emperor Qin’s tomb still remain an unexcavated mystery, many people know of the archeological marvel, the terra-cotta soldiers. Emperor Qin’s afterlife army was discovered in modern day Xi’an and is estimated to contain roughly 8,000 replicas of Qin soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally speaking, the material trappings of one’s earthly life follow him beyond the grave. The next natural step is to assume that the funeral of a person is a hugely important, if not the most important, event in one’s life. In fact, a proper burial helps to ensure that your soul continues on to the next world, not doomed to travel as a hungry, poor spirit, either in this world or in between the two worlds.<sup>3</sup> Over time funeral rites became firmly established to transition a man from this world to the next. According to fourth century B.C.E. Confucian philosopher Xunzi, “Funeral rites are those by which the living adorn the dead. The dead are accorded a send-off as though they were living. In this way the dead are served like the living, the absent like the present. Equal attention is thus paid to the end as well as the beginning of life.”<sup>4</sup>

Historians point to a series of rites to be immediately started after a person’s death. It was believed that if any of these steps were performed incorrectly the fate of the dead person’s soul would be in danger, even lost. However, so long as the acts were

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamars, *Funeral Customs the World Over* (Milwaukee: Bulfinch Printers, Inc., 1963), 6.

<sup>4</sup> WM. Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition Vol. 1*—1<sup>st</sup> edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 110.

accomplished in the approved sequence, there was room for variety of ritual expression. The rites, according to James Watson in *The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites*, are ordered as follows:

- Public notification of death, particularly through orchestrated wailing of women.
- All mourners dress in white clothing.
- Ritualized bathing of the corpse.
- Offerings (food, the burning of paper objects such as wreaths and money, as well as the burning of incense) presented to the dead.
- Preparation and installation of a written tablet to serve as a domestic alter, and a funeral specialist employed to “safely expel” the spirit from the community.
- Music played to settle the spirit.<sup>5</sup>
- Sealing the corpse in an airtight coffin.<sup>6</sup>
- An elaborate funeral procession performed to symbolically sever the link between the dead and the living community.

While some changes in funeral custom changed from dynasty to dynasty, most prominently between the Song and the Tang dynasty, the order of rites remained generally the same until the end of imperial rule under the Qing dynasty.<sup>7</sup> During the period after dynastic rule, funeral rites changed dramatically. In the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), memorial meetings replaced traditional format but managed to conform to ancient culture due to people’s strong belief system surrounding death and the afterlife.<sup>8</sup> “In spite of the transformation of funerary rites and their new messages, much of the ideological domain of funerals persists... which helps to give meaning to the disposal and care of the remains of loved ones” suggesting an “obligation between generations.”<sup>9</sup> In modern China, particularly in urban centers, the practice of cremation has become popular. This practice is not in

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<sup>5</sup> James L. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites,” in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15-18.

<sup>8</sup> Martin K. Whyte, “Death in the People’s Republic of China,” in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 306.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 316.

line with traditional custom, but it is common to see special attention paid to the placement of ashes or to find an alter made around the ashes.

It is important to note that many diverse religious traditions and their corresponding views of death and the afterlife have existed and continue to exist in Chinese society. For example, Confucius, perhaps the most influential Chinese thinker, was suspicious of excessive attention to the spirit world and particularly critical of ostentatious imperial tombs. “11:11 Jilu [a student] asked about serving spiritual beings. The Master said, ‘Before you have learned to serve human beings, how can you serve spirits? When you do not yet know life, how can you know about death?’”<sup>10</sup> Yet even with skepticism of death rites and ancestral worship, remarks about the importance of filial piety can be seen throughout the Confucian philosophical tradition. Sacrifice to the ancestors may not have been immediately comprehensible to the Confucian scholar, but the noble person was required to perform grieving in correspondence with ritual tradition. “Only when a child is three years old does it leave its parents’ arms. The three years of mourning is the universal mourning everywhere under heaven.”<sup>11</sup> Even as other religions gained popularity and influence in China, “the Chinese continued to worship their ancestors,”<sup>12</sup> holding strong to the basic Confucian tenets of filial piety and the ancient custom of ancestor reverence.



Figure 2: Burning paper prayers, lighting incense and fireworks at Mt. Hengshan Temple in Hengshan, Hunan (衡山, 湖南). Photo by Teresa Lin.

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<sup>10</sup> WM. Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition Vol. 1 From Earliest Times to 1600*-2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>12</sup> Hessler, 2010.

The most obvious evidence that ancient tradition concerning matters of death and the afterlife still exists in modern China comes to us during Chinese traditional holidays. While, perhaps not practiced with the same rigid orthodoxy of previous centuries, traditional holidays often see greater attention paid to ancestors and taking care of them in the afterlife. *Qingming Jie* (清明节), or “Tomb-Sweeping Day” is probably the most popular holiday directly related to the care of one’s ancestors. At this time, families visit the gravesite of ancestors, cleaning the site and offering sacrifice. I noticed the trappings of the holiday in April 2010 when makeshift stalls suddenly took over the street outside of my home, appearing from nowhere to provide paper money, firecrackers, and incense for this auspicious day. Throughout the year, especially on days of special occasion, families burn paper sacrifices in the form of wreaths, money, incense, boats, and other articles. The burning of these objects symbolically sends these goods to the ancestral world, so that the ancestors can remain fed and prosperous.



Figure 3: Tomb-Sweeping Day: paper lanterns discarded after offerings in Huarong, Hunan (华容, 湖南). Photo by author.

Typically these offerings are on auspicious days, like the first day of the Chinese New Year, when thoughts of the future and hopes for prosperity are at their highest point. In these times, more than any other, we see the close link between deceased ancestors and their living descendants. While the extent of belief is always debatable, the spiritual faith in an ancestor’s ability to positively affect the lives of his living descendants prevails in

modern China, from this author's experience living and working in the country. Perhaps, the practice of burning paper can be better understood (at least from a Western perspective) as a form of reverent prayer, and a hope that things will be prosperous in the future.

Ancient Chinese traditions, including traditions surrounding death, have been attacked throughout Chinese history. Confucius was opposed to ancient, mystical beliefs involved in ancestor worship, but still supported elaborate funerary rites. Fifth century B.C.E. philosopher, Mozi argued these rites to be elitist in their expense and irrational in their partiality: "The Confucians corrupt men with their elaborate and showy rites and music and deceive parents with lengthy mourning and hypocritical grief. They propound fatalism, ignore poverty, and behave with the greatest arrogance..."<sup>13</sup> Zhuangzi, an influential Daoist philosopher in the sixth century B.C.E, argued that excessive grieving is unnecessary because life and death are merely two parts of the heavenly cycle. To grieve excessively is to be discontent with the way things are, which he describes as the "crime of hiding from Heaven."

When Lao Dan died, Qin Shi went to mourn for him; but after giving three cries, he left the room...[Qin Shi] said, when I went in to mourn, I found old men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a son, and young men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a mother...This is to hide from Heaven, turn your back on the true state of affairs, and forget what you were born with...Your master happened to come because it was his time, and he happened to leave because things follow along. If you are content with the time and willing to follow along, then grief and joy have no way to enter in...Though the grease burn the fire passes on, and no one knows where it ends."<sup>14</sup>

Philosophical attacks were often subtle and a source for discourse. At other times, there have been violent, political attacks against ritual traditions, especially in the era of Mao Zedong (1949-1976) and the "Four Olds" Campaign of the Cultural Revolution (1966-

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<sup>13</sup> De Bary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 104.

1976). The “Destroy the Four Olds” was an all-out assault on Chinese cultural relics, specifically aimed to tear down “old thoughts, old culture, old customs, and old habits.”<sup>15</sup> The inherent ambiguity in this label left many sacred Chinese artifacts, libraries, and even tombstones threatened of being destroyed. Red Guards, China’s radicalized youth army, rampaged throughout Chinese cities and countryside confiscating, tearing down, and burning to ashes all that was ancient and once revered in China. Even the resting place of one’s ancestors, one of the most sacred places in Chinese tradition, was not safe from assault. “Red Guard groups in the cities and in some villages broke into homes looking for the ‘four old’ items and confiscating or burning ancestral tablets, god images, and in some cases even the lacquered coffins that were stored in anticipation of death.”<sup>16</sup>

At this same time, perhaps motivated by the potential threat of the extinction of ancient Chinese culture, people organized against the Red Guards to fight back and defend the old. Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), one of Mao Zedong’s most trusted officials, is credited with trying to protect historic sites around China. In defending Buddhist temples, he argued, “You must think about preserving some of the great temples. Otherwise our elders will be resentful of us.”<sup>17</sup> Those with less political pull used cunning methods to hide family heirlooms and cultural treasures. Relics were often buried or concealed for protection.<sup>18</sup> In one example, the village of Yangjiagou covered two large memorial tablets in brick and clay, making a large blank wall in the town. When the guards came through they painted a portrait of Mao Zedong over the bricks, thereby unknowingly keeping the tablets safe from destruction. Today the tablets have been cleaned and “remain a village landmark.”<sup>19</sup> Many more people in this time replaced their traditional family tablets with pictures of Mao Zedong, more out of protection than reverence. However, when Mao died many of his pictures came down and the ancestral plaques were put back to their proper place of prominence in the

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<sup>15</sup> Dahpon David Ho, “To Protect and Preserve: Resisting the Destroy the Four Old Campaigns,” in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Whyte, “Death in the People’s Republic of China,” 300.

<sup>17</sup> Ho, “To Protect and Preserve,” 68.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.



household. Some members of the Cultural Revolution protected tradition by taking them in themselves, not out of altruism but personal benefit. Chen Boda, a member of the Cultural Revolution Small Group, recognized the financial value of many cultural relics and protected them by making his own home collection. While most people would call this action theft of national property, it did save cultural relics from destruction. His intentions may have been less noble than the villagers and Zhou Enlai, but he recognized the value of the ancient and was able to keep priceless Chinese artifacts from being destroyed.<sup>20</sup>

The many examples of people's attempts to protect and preserve the ancient in the "Four Olds" campaign points to a recognition of the importance of tradition in Chinese society. Tradition often defines the value system and inherited legacy of a population group. Violent destruction of cultural tradition may not be so easy. As we see in the "Four Olds" campaign, a people will actively try to protect a heritage they perceive as directly threatened. Often a person identifies himself within a larger cultural narrative; he sees himself inside the tradition, so an attack on the old feels deeply personal. Indeed, tradition can bring order in a time of chaos. Particularly in ritual surrounding death, tradition can give a person a sense of faith that their life will become woven into the narrative of this cultural legacy. In the end, Mao Zedong, the man who fueled the flame to burn down the old, was claimed by tradition. Chinese people and international tourists pay daily tribute to Mao. His modern day tomb lies in Tiananmen Square, Beijing.

While Chinese tradition has managed to survive both philosophical and political attacks, the biggest threat to ancient culture might be Chinese economic development. As societies progress, values inevitably change. With limited space in China, tombstones are often dug up to make room for new roads, factories, and apartment buildings. "China's current changes are anything but conservative, and they are hard on the dead...many traditions simply fade away."<sup>21</sup> This type of change is typically gradual, maybe even happening over generations. Often society as a whole does not notice a shift in values until eventually ancient tradition is something that is fondly remembered but rarely practiced.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>21</sup> Hessler, 2010.

In 2009-10, I lived and worked as an English teacher in Huarong County in northern Hunan province. The town, while relatively rural, is marked with differing stages of industrial development. The hillside behind Huarong Number One Middle School where I lived was often abandoned, however, all save the hundreds of tombstones unevenly distributed amongst the brush. It was rare that I saw another person up there, though I spent many afternoons hiking through the hills, wandering among the aged stones and weeds to escape the noisy town below. One afternoon in late winter I ran into a man sitting on a grave and smoking a cigarette. He started laughing, probably at his luck of spotting the only foreigner in town in such an unusual place.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Just walking,” I replied, “What are you doing?”

“Taking a break”

Ah, I murmured.

“Is this your father or mother?” I said pointing to the tombstone behind him.

“No, no,” he answered, “I like to sit here where it is quite.”

“I understand,” I quietly agreed and walked on.



Figure 4: A well-kept tombstone high on the hillside in Huarong, Hunan (华容, 湖南). Photo by author.

These days Chinese are leaving their rural homes to live in cities. Often they cannot make it home on traditional holidays to pay respect to their ancestors. Some among the younger generation

have given up the practice all together or perform rites just to please their parents.<sup>22</sup> Economic development can even rip the dead right out of the ground.<sup>23</sup> The *New York Times* reported a fast growing practice of exhuming relatives from developing towns in China to rebury them far from home in the U.S. The rapid growth of industry has moved to the hillsides housing ancestral tombs, threatening the sacred space of final rest. It is hard to keep pace in the shifting cultural landscape of China, and yet, the value of ceremony cannot be dismissed so easily. Humans have always been preoccupied with death, perhaps because death inexorably points to the mystery and uncertainty of life. While funeral rites and ancestral ceremonies may not be practiced with the same fervor as ancient times, they still nurture an important connection to the past.



Figure 5: Hillside behind Huarong No. 1 Middle School dotted with tombstones. Photo by author.

As the pace speeds up in China, in some towns a funeral hillside can still provide a quiet place to sit, relax, and reflect. It

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<sup>22</sup> Habenstein, *Funeral Customs the World Over*, 38.

<sup>23</sup> David W. Chen, "Displaced Ancestors Reburied in the U.S.," *The New York Times* 10 Aug. 2003: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/10/world/displaced-chinese-ancestors-reburied-in-us.html> (accessed February 10, 2012).

provides many Chinese people with an opportunity to weave their life story into the long legacy of China's past. One can extrapolate much on the value of the enduring nature of cultural practice and the security one feels by participating in long held traditions. Burning paper in today's China may not carry the same weight it did a few thousand years ago, but it does provide an opportunity for the family to come together to reflect and remember those who came before. In these moments, the individual enters a timeless space, removed from the reality of his or her modern reality to become intertwined with the broad cultural narrative. Perhaps, ancestral reverence, if nothing else, gives Chinese people the opportunity to celebrate their cultural roots and unite over a national shared history.

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## Beauty and Sadness: Experiencing Poland's History and Jewish Heritage

By Jennifer Weed



Figure 1: Town Hall Tower in Krakow, Poland.  
Photo by author.

As a Western student of Holocaust history, my knowledge of Poland before the summer of 2011 was shockingly limited. I knew much about Poland as it existed under Nazi occupation, but after 1945 I understood it as merely one of those mysterious, Communist countries in Eastern Europe. I could certainly find Poland on a map of Europe, but my mental map of the nation itself largely consisted of a vague shape dotted with forbidding names like Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka. This sadly inadequate familiarity with Polish and Eastern European history was the product of both my chosen academic focus and my primary education, which took place under the specter of the Cold War and tended to generalize and de-emphasize the "enemy" nations which lay behind the Iron Curtain. However, after spending nearly a

month in Poland as a fellow of the Auschwitz Jewish Center, I am shocked by my previously myopic view of Eastern Europe. Now I can say from experience that Poland is a fascinating, complex nation that is still profoundly affected by the legacy of the Holocaust.

During the flight from Dublin to Krakow, I honestly expected my trip to consist of Nazi death camps and Stalinist architecture, with a bit of luscious countryside filling in the rest. Though all of these are present, there is so much more history and beauty within Poland that I was thunderstruck. I learned the first day in country that my expectations about Poland had been incredibly mistaken; they had not prepared me for the strikingly beautiful, Old-World European architecture in places such as Krakow. I was in awe of the city's beautiful market square, which is over 700 years old and the largest of its kind in Europe. This awe did not subside when I encountered similar city centers in Łódź, Bielsko-Biała, and Bedzin. Conversely, Warsaw surprised me with its modern, bustling, metropolitan feel—until I remembered that the Warsaw of my education was completely destroyed during and after the 1944 uprising against the Nazis, and was subsequently rebuilt as a modern, Communist city.



Figure 2: Downtown Oswiecim, Poland.  
Photo by author.



In addition to these larger cities, I was privileged enough to visit numerous smaller towns which had sizeable Jewish populations before the war, such as Działoszyce, Chęciny, Chmielnik, Sydlów, Kielce, and Jedwabne. After spending a full week in the small town of Oświęcim, known in German as Auschwitz, it was clear by the defensive stance of the locals that the vast majority of people who visit the concentration camp just a kilometer away have no idea the town even exists, though it has for more than eight centuries. A few of these towns are now infamous, but most of them are simply small settlements that have unused synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, tragic histories, and people living amongst the vestiges of atrocity.

All of the places I visited in Poland were dynamic, living communities missing the crucial Jewish presence that had been central to their functioning prior to the Nazi invasion in 1939. Though we know that more than three million Polish Jews died in the Holocaust, the reality of that loss cannot be conveyed in numbers and text; it must be experienced. Despite knowing much about Nazi crimes in Poland and the ultimate fate of Polish Jewry, I was unprepared for the moment in which the realization was crystallized, and this unexpected experience will forever affect how I understand the Holocaust.



Figure 3: Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark) in Bobowa Synagogue.  
Photo by author.

Having attended the annual Krakow Jewish Culture Festival and wandered around the former Jewish district, Kazimerz, for my first two days in the city, it was difficult to remember that the reason for these events and conservation efforts is the near-total loss of Polish Jews in the 1940's. Once central to Poland as a major segment of the population, Jews and Judaism had become a history to reclaim and a culture to celebrate and memorialize, rather than a living element of the present day. When in cities such as Krakow, I often felt that Poland is continually confronting the enormous gap created by the loss of those three million people, who once made up the vibrant Polish Jewish community. The festivals and museum collections that preserve and celebrate this history make it quite easy to forget that there are a literal handful of Jews living in Poland today, until one is faced with a situation in which attempts to fill this immeasurable gap are unsuccessful in the face of stark reality.

This reality struck me on my second evening in Krakow. I felt the staggering weight of the Polish Jewish tragedy for the first time when we attended Shabbat services at the 16<sup>th</sup> century Remuh Synagogue, now the only operating temple in the city. The uplifted voices of psalms sung in Hebrew, echoing rapturously off the stone walls, temporarily blinded me to the fact that this ritual was not being celebrated all over Kazimerz as it had for centuries before 1939. There were only a handful of people where there should have been tens of thousands, praying in the one small temple offering Shabbat services when there should have been hundreds. Over the course of the day, I had begun to understand that, in what was once the mighty center of Ashkenazi Jewry, one can only find Jewish heritage in ruins, memories, museums, festivals. Finally, reality struck me suddenly as I realized that when I returned a heartfelt "Gut Shabbos!" or "Shabbat shalom!" greeting that evening, the initiator of the exchange was nearly always an American Jew, visiting Poland to attend the Krakow Jewish Festival. This realization laid bare the aching sense of loss that undercuts all attempts to reclaim or celebrate Poland's Jewish history, and I came to understand that the silence of the three million murdered is positively deafening.

# Reviews

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***Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa.* By Tiffany Fawn Jones. (New York: Routledge, 2012).**

Previous studies of mental institutions in apartheid South Africa presented a simplistic historical narrative complete with obvious villains (the apartheid government) and helpless victims (the patients). The apartheid government committed political dissidents to institutions, and mental health practitioners were therefore coercive agents of the state who unquestioningly and uniformly implemented apartheid policies. Mirroring its national discriminatory policies, the apartheid state also institutionalized a disproportionate number of black, female, and homosexual patients. Moreover, patients in South Africa were reportedly subject to abuse by nurses and practitioners while being held against their will and under appalling conditions.

In her book, *Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa*, Dr. Tiffany Fawn Jones critiques and expands upon this narrative. Jones, an assistant professor at California State University, San Bernardino, finds that while many of the aforementioned abuses and discrimination did occur in South African institutions, these were not always the result of a cohesive government strategy implemented by mental health practitioners. Rather, the conditions of South African mental institutions should be viewed as a complex and fluid interaction among several factors, including: changes and contradictions between practitioners' beliefs and government policies; state funding; changes in the class, racial, and gender hierarchies ingrained in African society; international opinion; and patient challenges to psychiatric and state authority. Taking these factors into account, Jones offers a nuanced account of the conditions at mental institutions in South Africa from the late 1930s to the early 1990s.

Jones organizes her study chronologically and topically across seven chapters. The first chapter evaluates the effectiveness of the various progressive changes implemented by South African practitioners from 1939 to 1948. Although psychiatry came to be regarded increasingly as a legitimate and humane medical field

with strong community connections, Jones argues that a higher proportion of white males were institutionalized compared to other groups making up the majority of South Africa's population. Jones concludes that racial segregationist policies caused practitioners to neglect black patients. The second chapter examines government mental health policies and their application in institutions from 1948 to 1973. Jones argues that while state mental health policies were discriminatory, they were not uniformly implemented at the institutional level due to the contradictory nature of the policies, as well as, a lack of funding and qualified staff for institutions. In the third chapter, Jones provides a rare glimpse of psychiatric history from patients' perspectives from 1939 to 1961. Jones emphasizes patients' unexpected connectedness with the outside world, although this freedom diminished as segregation policies gained influence in institutions. Chapter four analyzes attempts made by practitioners to challenge mental health practices from 1948 to 1990. Jones argues that the efforts of mental health practitioners to improve practices led, somewhat unintentionally, to increased fragmentation and segregation of mental health services for black patients. The fifth and sixth chapters respectively examine the psychiatric treatment of homosexuals and the South African government's increased reliance on privatized institutions to perform mental health services from the 1960s to the 1980s. Both chapters conclude that patients and practitioners challenged state psychiatric authority on a limited basis. The seventh chapter illuminates the Church of Scientology's shift from supporters to vocal opponents of apartheid and the subsequent international investigation of South African psychiatric facilities in the 1970s and 1980s.

*Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa* is a much-needed addition to the murky history of apartheid South Africa. Jones presents the disparate and conflicting viewpoints of previously voiceless patients, practitioners and officials to form a more cohesive account of what occurred both inside and out of mental institutions during and after apartheid. This account serves to explain why conditions and ingrained social inequalities have, in many instances, worsened in post-apartheid institutions.

**Chris Moreland**

***Bound Feet and Western Dress: A Memoir.* By Pang-Mei Natasha Chang. (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).**

*Bound Feet and Western Dress: A Memoir* by Pang-Mei Natasha Chang (Anchor, 1999) is the memoir of Chang mingled with those of her great aunt, Chang Yu-i. The memoir offers an intimate insight into the changing role of women in modern China in the early twentieth century mirrored by the transformation of gender roles of Chinese women in modern America. Pang-Mei Chang's struggles echo those of her aunt, who describes her experiences with marriage, education, and obedience in a changing Chinese world. Chang lifts the veil of silence hovering over women by illuminating the depth, desire, and strength of the female half of privileged Chinese culture.

Yu-i, born in 1900, begins her story with an eye opening statement: "In China, a woman is nothing."<sup>320</sup> Females have no individual status in China in the first quarter of the twentieth century and a woman's duties are to tend to her husband's household and to her children. The importance for Chinese women to be obedient and dutiful is clearly demonstrated by Yu-i, as she describes the bound feet tradition.

The tradition of bound feet begins with tenth century Emperor Tong Song's concubine who wrapped her feet to dance for the emperor among lotus petals, which is where the Chinese name for the custom, "lotus petals" or "new moon", originates. Binding makes the foot "beautiful" and "small"<sup>321</sup> as it slowly breaks the bones in the toes and curves the foot in a half moon shape to prevent unwanted growth. Empress Dowager Cixi attempted a reform banning the practice of feet binding in 1902 and this marks the growing transformation of women in China uprooting them from waiting idly in female quarters to an unknown, yet independent future.<sup>322</sup>

Pang-Mei Chang mirrors her great-aunts memoirs by offering her own relatable reality. Through these lessons the reader is able to establish the differences between Confucian customs and modern Chinese customs. Pang-Mei Chang's father,

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<sup>320</sup>Pang-mei Natasha Chang, *Bound Feet and Western Dress: A Memoir*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 6.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 23.

who is the nephew of Chang Yu-i, still shares the belief his daughter should preserve the pure Chinese bloodline, and Pang-Mei Chang does feel pressure to follow these customs, but she has a choice in the matter. Chang Yu-i, a young woman schooled in the teachings of Confucius sixty-five years earlier than Pang-Mei, does not have a choice, and she does not dare assert her opinions.

The difference in education becomes a major theme in the memoirs, and both Pang-Mei Chang and Chang Yu-i express the desire to become educated women. Pang-Mei Chang explains education for her is not only learning from textbooks, but learning to cope with her Chinese-American identity in modern America. Pang-Mei experiences an American school with American pressures to fit in and deal with American standards of beauty. Chang Yu-i is told the opposite because her education is a burden to her parents and her in-laws. Her parents refuse to pay for her schooling until her father realizes it is cheaper feeding her at home.

Pang-Mei Chang, in collaboration with her great-aunt Chang Yu-i, presents a bittersweet evocation of China while illuminating the transformation of the role of Chinese women across the globe. These memoirs help to close the gap between women of all ethnicities and continue pursuing equality for all women, not just women of a specific color. *Bound Feet and Western Dress: A Memoir* offers an eye-opening experience not to be missed by any woman.

**Briana James**

***Warriors: Tombs and Temples***  
**The Bowers Museum, Santa Ana, CA.**

The Bowers Museum, located in Santa Ana, had the rare opportunity to host a traveling exhibit titled, “Warriors - Tombs and Temples: China’s Enduring Legacy,” from October 2011 to March 2012. The museum exhibit was a display of Chinese artifacts discovered in tombs from the Qin, Han and Tang Dynasties. Many of the pieces focus on the differences between the three dynasties, while showing the magnitude of China’s depth of historical significance.

A brief introduction of the Qin, Han and Tang Dynasties give the visitors a window into China’s past. The first artifacts encountered are four of the more than 7,000 Terra Cotta Warriors that were found in the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE). During his reign, he became obsessed with death and forced thousands of Chinese citizens to build his tomb, replicating the world. While the Bowers Museum only displayed four of these Warriors, they were able to display an aerial view of one of these pits along one entire wall to give visitors a better perspective on just how massive this project was. Each Warrior has a distinctively different face that leads experts to believe that some of the Warriors may have been replicated off of real people living during that time period. The Bowers Museum showed about a dozen lit facial portraits so that people can see the differences in some of Warriors.

Moving into the next room, visitors immediately notice a difference in grandeur between the pieces from the imperial tomb compounds of the Han Dynasty emperors, Gaozu and Jingdi, and those from Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb. The Han Dynasty inherited and built upon the Qin unification, institutions and standardization, while softening the harsh laws and instituting the Confucian examination system for hiring governmental officials and the belief structure of living frugally. Reflecting this, the Han exhibit section is done on a much smaller scale than the Qin dynasty, but no less artistically pleasing. Excavated out of Emperor Gaozu’s tomb were many earthenware standing infantry soldiers that were painted just as brilliantly as the Qin Dynasty’s Terra Cotta Warriors. The Terra Cotta Warriors were full size replicas, while the Han Dynasty’s Warriors only measure about 50 centimeters.

The focus of the items discovered in Emperor Jingdi's tomb suggests agricultural economy was peaceful and prosperous. The miniature earthenware animal replicas were about 1 ½ centimeters high. The pieces displayed from the Han Dynasty are not as large as those from the Qin Dynasty; however, it is still astonishing that these artifacts have survived intact for over 2,000 years.

The final section of the exhibition is from the Tang Dynasty (618-907 BCE), which is considered one of China's most glorious ages. One of the pieces is a miniature bodhi tree worked in filigree on a gold sheet with unbelievable detail, considering the tools available over 1,000 years ago. The depiction and placement of a bodhi tree and the four nesting containers (the smallest believed, by Buddhists, to hold Buddha's finger bone) reflect the influence Buddhism had during the Tang Dynasty.

The Bowers Museum, in collaboration with seven leading Chinese institutions, present a truly exceptional display of artifacts from the Qin, Han, and Tang Dynasties; defining eras of Chinese history: periods of unification, military might, enormous territorial expanse, wealth, foundational institution building, advances in culture, art, craftsmanship and technology. The artifacts on display are a beautiful reminder of China's long past and their enduring legacy not only to their own citizens, but to people around the world.

**Brandi Rauterkus**





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