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The UVM History Review is an annual publication of the University of Vermont History Department. It seeks to publish scholarly essays written by UVM students and alumni.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear readers,

It is our pleasure to present to you the thirty-first issue of the *University of Vermont History Review*. This annual journal showcases exceptional historical research and writing from undergraduate and graduate students.

This collection of articles follows a common thread of “trouble and change,” to borrow a phrase from one featured piece in this volume. From the tensions of wartime, to economic upheaval, to social transformations within marriage markets, this set of essays showcases the diverse ways people have met extraordinary events with discomfort and resilience. At a time when change confronts us at an unrelenting pace, by looking to the past we discover that trouble and change are not as unprecedented as it often feels.

Facing our own exceptional circumstances in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, our appreciation for our editorial board cannot be stressed enough. Genuinely engaging with and thoroughly editing submissions entirely online, our editors embraced these challenging conditions to make this publication possible. We are also incredibly grateful for our authors, who enthusiastically undertook revisions to produce the quality work you will see in the following pages.

As lead editors, we would like to thank each author and editor for their dedication to this process. Our thanks also extend to Professor Erik Esselstrom for his unwavering guidance and support as our faculty advisor.

We hope you enjoy the 2020-2021 *UVM History Review*.

Sincerely, Sarah Chute and Katie Wynn

9 May 2021

**Memoir of a *Sonderkommando*:
Reading Filip Müller's *Eyewitness Auschwitz***

Megan Gamiz

Holocaust memoirs occupy a special field within the genre of first-person narratives (such as diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies) because they are highly sensitive and shed light onto a period of history that is sometimes lacking in surviving evidentiary materials. Some were written during the war years and published as early as 1945 while others were written and published decades later. Almost every author survived the war to tell their story; a well-known exception is Anne Frank, whose diary was published by her surviving father after its pages were found hidden in their apartment.¹ Reasons for writing these narratives have ranged from working through the trauma the survivors experienced to helping ensure a tragedy like the Holocaust does not happen again. Whatever the motive for writing may be, Holocaust memoirs enhance our understanding of this dark moment in human history. Non-German government records can provide numerical values for the grand scope of lives affected and lost—telling us everything from how many lives were lost at Treblinka to the pounds of human hair that was

¹ Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, translated by B.M. Mooyart-Doubleday (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1952). Other notable memoirs published posthumously include Moshe Ze'ev Flinker's *Young Moshe's Diary: The Spiritual Torment of a Jewish Boy in Nazi Europe* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1965); Polish head of the Warsaw Ghetto Jewish Council Adam Czerniaków's *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniaków: Prelude to Doom* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979); and Dawid Rubinowicz's *The Diary of Dawid Rubinowicz*, trans. Derek Bowman (Edmonds, WA: Creative Options Pub., 1982).

removed and repurposed for the German war effort—and surviving German documents can reveal the thinking and planning behind their actions. Holocaust memoirs, however, are an essential addition to studying the Holocaust because they revive the human aspect of this atrocity. These narratives remind us that there were real people who bore witness to the attempted destruction of humanity itself.²

Certain survivors of the Holocaust who wrote memoirs received notoriety and fame; Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* are perhaps most well-known.³ These texts appeal to wide audiences because they are well written in digestible prose and describe the horrors the authors witnessed. Importantly, however, these authors never intimately witnessed the worst parts of the death camps. It is not easy to read any story originating from this area of history and not everyone wishes to do so. As hard as they may be, those stories are still important to read and are worthy of being known. One such story

² For relevant reading on the incorporation and credibility of Holocaust survivor testimony and memoirs in historical research, see Aaron Beim and Gary Alan Fine, "Trust in Testimony: The Institutional Embeddedness of Holocaust Survivor Narratives," *European Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 1 (2007): 55-75; Jeremy Hawthorn, "History, Fiction, and the Holocaust: Narrative Perspective and Ethical Responsibility," *Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 17, no. 2 (June 2019): 279-298. On the challenges of using narratives in historical research, see Nora Strejilevich, "Testimony: Beyond the Language of Truth," *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (August 2006): 701-13; Jay Winter, "Foreword: Historical Remembrance in the Twenty-First Century," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, *The Politics of History in Comparative Perspective* (May 2008): 6-13. On using narratives in historical teaching, see Jeffrey C. Blutinger, "Bearing Witness: Teaching the Holocaust from a Victim-Centered Perspective," *The History Teacher* 42, no. 3 (May 2009): 269-279.

³ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, translated by Stuart Woolf (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Elie Wiesel, *Night*, translated by Stella Rodway (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

is that of *Sonderkommando* member Filip Müller, the only survivor who worked intimately with the extermination process for three years. Though lesser known, Müller's story is worthy of just as much attention as Wiesel's and Levi's. Filip Müller's memoir *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*⁴ provides a synthesized version of his experiences and testimonies that scholars took note of in his postwar trial testimonies and his oral interviews in Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah*.⁵ What makes this memoir exceptional, especially compared to the more widely known *Shoah* interviews, is its historical and emotional narrative of which Müller had the greatest level of control. Additionally, Müller's memoir provides an unparalleled look into one of the darkest corners of humanity by an individual who lived to share all that he witnessed.

Who was Filip Müller?

Little is known about Müller's personal life prior to being deported. Filip Müller was born on 3 January 1922 in the town of Sered' in southern Czechoslovakia.⁶ At the age of 20, Müller was deported to the Auschwitz Main Camp as part of one of the first transports of Slovak Jews. As punishment for a minor crime which Müller describes at the beginning of his memoir—he was found drinking from tea vats—he was assigned to the *Krematoriumskommando* (crematorium work unit) where he

⁴ Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*, literary collaboration by Helmut Freitag, edited and translated by Susanne Flatauer, foreword by Yehuda Bauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999).

⁵ *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann (Hollywood, California: Paramount Home Video, 1985).

⁶ The area was referred to as the First Czechoslovak Republic, or Czechoslovakia, from 1918 to 1938. Today, the area where Müller was born lies in Slovakia.

would stay for the rest of his time at Auschwitz. From April 1942 to January 1945, Müller worked intimately with the extermination process and carried out an unimaginable amount of orders given by Nazi soldiers. Surviving the camp's evacuation in January 1945 and subsequent death march, Müller remained at the subcamp of Gunskirchen at Mauthausen until its liberation by American forces in May 1945.⁷

The first recorded testimony by Müller dates back to 1946. The summary of his experience was included in a book first printed in Czechoslovakia and then reprinted 20 years later in English.⁸ Müller's postwar years can be described as a series of attempts to deliver his story to receptive audiences while also facing severe backlash for his testimonies, eventually leading to his retreat from the public eye. Little is known about Müller's personal life during the postwar years, but he was unable to work immediately after the war; it was not until 1953 that Müller began working as an auditor in Prague where he reportedly remained until he moved to the German Federal Republic in 1969. It was at this point when Müller's writing was no longer subject to censorship and he could, potentially, speak and write more freely.⁹

⁷ Peter Davies, *Witness Between Languages: The Translation of Holocaust Testimonies in Context* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), 166-7.

Müller's liberation is described in Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 170-1.

⁸ For the 1966 English publication, see Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, *The Death Factory: Document on Auschwitz*, translated from the Czech by Stephen Jolly (Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 1966).

⁹ Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, cover page; Andreas Kilian and Peter Lande, "Obituary: In Memoriam: Filip Müller," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 348-350. Kilian and Lande reference censorship as a reason why Müller did not publish until after the 1960s but the article does not elaborate on it further.

In 1964 Müller provided oral testimony for the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials.¹⁰ In the 1970s filmmaker Claude Lanzmann recorded a series of oral interviews with Müller in which he described his experience working in the gas chambers. Müller is perhaps best known for the distribution of these interviews in Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah*. In 1979, after recording these interviews for Lanzmann and prior to the release of the film, Müller published his memoir *Sonderbehandlung: drei Jahre in den Krematorien und Gaskammern von Auschwitz*. This memoir later became *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* which was translated into English in 1999.¹¹ It was for this final piece of writing, or testimony, that Müller had the greatest level of control and why it is arguably the most comprehensive and representative object of history in which he shares the experience of his three years spent working in the gas chambers. After roughly thirty years of living away from public attention, Filip Müller passed away on 9 November 2013.¹²

Historical Background

¹⁰ Müller's first trial testimony was provided at the Kraków Auschwitz trial in 1947 but his testimony was never published. See Peter Davies, *Witness Between Languages*, 167.

¹¹ The original publication was Filip Müller, *Sonderbehandlung: drei Jahre in den Krematorien und Gaskammern von Auschwitz* (München: Steinhausen, 1979). The first English translation was Filip Müller, *Auschwitz Inferno: The Testimony of a Sonderkommando* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). According to email correspondence with historian Peter Davies, whose work is referenced in this paper, Müller never actually approved of the English translation of his book. The English translation used in this paper is the 1999 publication *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* that was published in association with the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum.

¹² Nothing more is publicly known about Müller's private life than what has been offered in this paper.

Before reading *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers*, it is important to understand the history Müller describes. Müller's story begins in the spring of 1942, but the larger history of the Holocaust and the Final Solution began much earlier. On the evening of 9 November 1938, Stormtroopers and other Nazi activists engaged in acts of terror against the German Jewish community. These acts included but were not limited to the torching of synagogues, the vandalization and destruction of Jewish property, and physically assaulting Jews in their homes. This night became known by Nazi leaders, and others since, as *Kristallnacht*, or the 'night of broken glass'. Although antisemitism already existed in communities across Europe, many scholars declare *Kristallnacht* to be the definitive beginning of the Holocaust in Europe. Historian Doris Bergen notes that the displays of disapproval for *Kristallnacht* prompted the Nazis' decision to move blatant attacks against Jews further away from the public eye, eventually culminating in Einsatzgruppen shootings and deportations to death camps.¹³

Attacks against Jewish communities continued, and after the declaration of war against Poland on 1 September 1939, violence against Jews only escalated. It was self-evident to the Nazis that Jews were a subhuman race and the 'Jewish Question' needed to be addressed. Formed in 1939, the Einsatzgruppen was tasked with carrying out mass shootings and torturing Jews and other political enemies in Eastern Europe. Although the Einsatzgruppen was responsible for the deaths of countless victims, there were flaws in this method of extermination. Its operation was heavily dependent on material resources, it was unable to carry out executions as quickly and massively as the Nazi state wanted, and it had traumatic effects on the individual

¹³ Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc: 2009), 84-7.

men carrying out these executions. Historian Christopher Browning provides an exceptional case study of police battalion 101 (one specific group of the Einsatzgruppen) and the psychological tolls that these killings took on the men who carried them out.¹⁴ Though systematic, these mobile killing squads were soon replaced by another systematic process of extermination: gas chambers in death camps.¹⁵

The official start of the Final Solution, as it became known, within the history of the Holocaust may be traced back to the Wannsee Conference. High-ranking Nazi officials gathered on 22 January 1942 to discuss the creation and implementation of a new systematic and deliberate approach to eliminating European Jews. Certain preparations were made prior to January 1942: in late September 1941, Hitler had authorized the use of railroads to transport German, Austrian, and Czech Jews to concentration camps in eastern Europe where their murders were to be carried out. The main purpose of the conference was to discuss how best to implement the measures formulated by Reinhard Heydrich to carry out the “Final Solution,” and to ensure cooperation between different groups and forces in Germany and in occupied territories. One area that was most impacted by decisions stemming from this conference was the concentration camp system. More importantly, it was the Wannsee Conference that marked the turning point for concentration camps to predominantly shift from work camps to

¹⁴ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, revised edition (New York: Harper Collins, 2017).

¹⁵ For more information about the Einsatzgruppen, see Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1945*, abridged by Orna Kenan (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 153-6; see also Alexander Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 10-3.

death camps. A key example is the concentration/work camp Auschwitz and its transition to the state's most powerful killing machine with the addition of Birkenau in the fall of 1942.¹⁶

Müller's story begins at Auschwitz in April 1942 on the eve of this transition. Müller's perspective is unique because his assignment to the *Sonderkommando* predated the addition of Birkenau, meaning he witnessed the killing operations from their beginning through to their most intense and destructive, and everything in between. It is important to remember that Auschwitz concentration camp was not always a systematic extermination site. On 27 April 1940 Hitler decided to create the camp and subsequently appointed former head of Dachau, Rudolph Höss, as its head. By mid-June, the camp's first transport of prisoners arrived from Galicia. By the spring of 1941, the German war effort desperately needed to prioritize the production of synthetic rubber and gasoline; by April 1941, plans were finalized to have a new I.G. Farben plant built on the grounds of Auschwitz with cheap labor supplied by prisoners and Polish citizens in surrounding areas. By sheer coincidence, Holocaust historian and survivor Saul Friedländer argues, it was also discovered around this time that the pesticide Zyklon B had the power to kill not only animals but also humans. The first testing against humans occurred in September 1941 at Auschwitz.¹⁷ It was also around this time that planning for the extension of Birkenau began.¹⁸

During the summer of 1942, Müller witnessed the increase in killings at Auschwitz. Following a visit from Himmler

¹⁶ Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 223; Adrian Weale, *Army of Evil: A History of the SS* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2010), 325-37.

¹⁷ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 250-1.

¹⁸ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 300.

in July, the Nazis sent orders for the unearthing and absolute destruction of the camp's mass graves, a task Müller describes in horrifying detail.¹⁹ At this point in the war, Jews were being sent to Auschwitz from the western European states of the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. This was in addition to the transports arriving from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Earlier that spring, an influx of Slovak prisoners arrived to assist in the building of Birkenau. By the fall of 1942, Auschwitz-Birkenau was transformed from a "slave labor camp where sporadic exterminations had taken place" to "an extermination center where the regular flow of deportees allowed for the selection of constantly expendable slave laborers."²⁰ By building Birkenau in a secluded area separate from the Auschwitz Main Camp, murders could be carried out with greater secrecy and without drawing much attention from the main camp's prisoners. In effect, the addition of Birkenau enabled more efficient and covert killings of transported Jews without returning them to the original gas chamber at Auschwitz.

From the summer of 1942 to the spring of 1943, Auschwitz-Birkenau played an increasingly steady and important role in the extermination of European Jews. Once the death camps of Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibór were shut down in March 1943, Auschwitz-Birkenau moved to the forefront and became the central location of the Holocaust. It is difficult to imagine or conceptualize the horrors that Müller describes in his account as the killings reached their height. Müller recalls the burnings of mass pits in incredible detail as the SS struggled to accommodate all the bodies that were stacking up before the crematoriums were completed at Birkenau; historians Saul Friedländer and Nikolaus

¹⁹ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 319-20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 356.

Wachsmann corroborate this in their respective research.²¹ Müller's accounts of individuals, specifically Hauptscharführer Moll, who was tasked with the disposal of bodies, are also verified by scholars.²² Although some of Müller's details and statistics are a bit off, as Yehuda Bauer notes in his foreword, the testimony has stood the test of time and remains a historically accurate and sound account of the extermination process at Auschwitz-Birkenau.²³

The Memoir

What it meant to be Jewish during the Holocaust is a question that has consumed many scholars, mainly because the Nazi government redefined Jewish identity, or at least attempted to so to serve their own purposes. Jewish identity was no longer defined by purely cultural distinctions, just as it was no longer defined by religious practice. The lines between cultural and religious (or orthodox) Jews blurred as more Jewish mandates were declared that defined Jews in strictly racial terms, thus encompassing both cultural and religious groups. When looking back on the history of the Holocaust, it can be difficult to place earlier distinctions upon these groups; it is not always, if ever, clear when looking at statistics exactly how many culturally-identifying Jews versus religiously-defined Jews were murdered. Perhaps the best instrument historians have for understanding this better, and returning some of those distinctions to the lives that were lost, is through reading survival testimonies.

²¹ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 401; Wachsmann, *KL*, 316-8; Weale, *Army of Evil*, 377-8.

²² Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, student edition (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1985), 251.

²³ Yehuda Bauer, foreword to *Eyewitness Auschwitz* by Filip Müller, ix-x.

In *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, Müller offers readers an ambiguous observation of the religious identities and practices of Jews at Auschwitz. Although it really only involves the people with whom Müller directly interacted, the variety of encounters he recounts offer valuable, first-person insight into the larger Jewish religious experience at Auschwitz. First, Müller speaks very little about his own religious beliefs. In fact, Müller never directly tells the reader anything about his own faith. This may be explained in two ways; first, Müller does not identify as a religious Jew; or, second, Müller did not wish to distract from telling the histories of people who did not survive. Given that Müller does not convey much personal emotion, aside from small interjections along the way, until almost the very end when he recounts his closest near-death experience, it is quite possible that Müller's purpose for writing this book was less about himself and more about making sure that the histories of individuals who did not live to see another day were kept alive. In any event, Müller does offer some reactions to the religious practices by those around him, and those reactions may also tell us a bit about Müller's faith.

The most common religious practice that Müller observes in his fellow prisoners is prayer. After his first long day working with the *Sonderkommando*, Müller describes the prayers that another inmate, Fischl, gives as their small group consumes the day's rations. Muttering prayer after prayer, which Müller recognizes as the Kaddish (prayer for the dead), Fischl reacts angrily toward his fellow prisoners who consume the food without praying for the lost lives that provided it. Müller recalls Fischl's last words before sleep: "Man differs from animals in that he believes in God... It's prayer which makes you a human being." Although Müller and the other members never fully joined Fischl in prayer, they eventually offered the occasional "Amen" to recitations of the morning prayer. Here we get a small

glimpse into Müller's faith at this point in time: "To me it seemed sheer madness to pray in Auschwitz, and absurd to believe in God in this place. In any other situation and in any other place I should not have taken Fischl seriously. But here, on the borderline between life and death, we obediently followed his example, possibly because we had nothing else left or because we felt strengthened by his faith."²⁴ Müller offers his final observation of Fischl as he prayed over loot collected from murdered prisoners:

And this foreman...never once in his innermost soul renounced the faith of his fathers. At this moment he must have been alone among Jews all over the world to praise God's name in a place where that name was desecrated in the vilest possible manner. To me Fischl seemed a creature from another world...solely ruled and embodied by a God whom I sought in vain to comprehend in Auschwitz.²⁵

Here we see Müller as a man without strong religious conviction in the face of such horrors as Auschwitz, but also a man who wanted to understand the faith that his fellow prisoner clung onto so deeply.

As circumstances grew increasingly grim, Müller appears to shy further away from belief in the power of God. However, he describes others around him who did appear to believe. When Müller is assigned to work in Crematorium 3, he observes orthodox Jews who were permanently assigned to the work detail of cleaning and drying hair that had been removed from deceased prisoners. He describes disagreements between orthodox Jews and their Dajan (a rabbinical student) about how humanity could still exist in a place like Auschwitz and how it is possible that a

²⁴ Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, 27-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

God would allow these atrocities to happen. Müller observes that although not everyone believed what the Dajan told them, they were at peace with and calmed by his words. Müller, however, remains skeptical and writes “[t]hey had no influence in the *Sonderkommando* for the simple reason that they had nothing to offer for survival but God. And that was not enough.”²⁶

Finally, Müller discusses religion and prayer as a means of prisoners accepting their fate. He tells of prisoners being directed toward the gas chamber bellowing, in Hebrew, prayers of confessions. He describes the scene as hugely emotional but that these people were not in despair; rather, they were in a state of “deep religious emotion.” As Auschwitz prepared for evacuation, Müller recalls the same Dajan from Crematorium 3 calling out to the small crowd of *Sonderkommando* that remained that the time had finally come for them to submit to their fate. The Dajan exclaimed that they were all condemned to death, and it is here where Müller finally appears to agree somewhat with him. At this moment when Müller no longer believed that he could escape his fate, he appears to find some comfort, or at least agreement, in the religious speech of the orthodox Jew.²⁷ Though Müller’s personal religious identity may be hard to derive, this memoir provides important observations of Jewish faith and religious identity for those who passed through Auschwitz.

Holocaust memoirs bring ‘life’ to this historically dark period and Müller’s testimony is no exception. At the heart of *Eyewitness Auschwitz* lies a remarkable and inimitable story of humanity as Müller reflects on moments where he felt entirely hopeless, places where he and others found peace and solace, and finally times when Müller found the will to live at least one day longer.

²⁶ Ibid., 65-7.

²⁷ Ibid., 70, 74, 161-2.

The first peaceful moment that Müller recalls was the morning of his first full day working in the *Sonderkommando*. As he heard music playing in the distance, he recalls: “I finally put aside my somber thoughts of dying for, I argued, that in a place where Schubert’s Serenade was sung to the accompaniment of an orchestra, there must surely be room for a little humanity.”²⁸ Moments like this, where Müller seemingly experienced genuine peace, occur sparingly through the pages of his memoir. Instead, Müller describes moments when times were incredibly dark and yet he found small ways to gather strength and find solace. As he carried out work in the crematorium, Müller recalls how he found the strength to continue when others could not:

[I] was desperately trying to gather new strength. Among the dead bodies I discovered our three fellow prisoners...They had given up. I, on the other hand, had not *yet* reached that point of despair...I knew with certainty that a dreadful end awaited me. But I was not *yet* ready to capitulate. The more menacing death grew, the stronger grew my will to survive...The heap of dead bodies which I had seen and which I was made to help remove only served to strengthen my determination to do everything possible not to perish in the same way...But if I wanted to survive there was only one thing: I must submit and carry out every single order.²⁹

This excerpt conveys one of Müller’s strongest moments, a moment when despite everything surrounding him and the gruesome work he was tasked with completing, he retained his strength and will to keep living at least one day more. There are

²⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁹ Ibid., 17. Emphasis has been placed by me to convey that the author eventually had a shift in his strength and desire to keep living.

echoes of Müller's surprise or amazement that he has still survived throughout the memoir, but none are quite as profound as this one.

As previously mentioned, Müller seldom expressed his own religious beliefs. However, as he describes the grief of losing his father, he offers the following:

I had come to believe that there were no human feelings left inside me. But while my team-mate recited the Kaddish my soul mourned in pain and grief. As the flames busily devoured the mortal remains of my father, the words of the traditional prayer gave me solace in this hour of sorrow.³⁰

Only once more, when Müller is saved from the brink of death himself, does the reader gain a particularly raw view into Müller's emotional condition.

What this memoir does extraordinarily well is depict the battle facing these members of the *Sonderkommando* between remembering and forgetting. Müller insinuates that it was the act of forgetting that helped him survive this experience. He argues that ignoring reality—a form of 'forgetting' itself—is what kept him, and others, alive best. As he recalled the proximity of crematoriums between Auschwitz and Birkenau, the never-ending deaths that were adding up within them, and the undeniable reality that it meant civilization and humanity was coming to an end, Müller still insisted on forgetting about that reality: "...whoever wanted to stay alive had to ignore the

³⁰ Ibid., 47-8. Müller encounters his father a few times while working in the *Sonderkommando* and talks about the uncomfortableness of having to face his father while carrying out such unthinkable tasks. He describes his father's sickly appearance and, eventually, shares of when his father's body appeared in a trolley coming from the hospital and Müller and his team-mates were tasked with burning the body in the crematorium.

detestable reality and the conditions under which he was forced to live, however violently he loathed them.”³¹ He offers stories of men who found solace in remembering loved ones they left behind or had lost and also men who found solace in forming relationships with women; conversely, he also tells of men who could only carry on if they forgot about those losses and relationships.³² Another means of retaining solace and the will to live was through believing that if the outside world knew about their fate, then perhaps survival was possible. This ultimately failed and attempts at escaping were seldom successful—the one exception being the escape of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler which Müller discusses in the memoir.

Müller’s story reaches its climax as he details the moment when he completely lost the will to live and was saved only by the words of a young woman about to be executed and the advice of a fellow prisoner whom he trusted. On the evening of 8 March 1944 about 3,700 Czech Jews arrived from the Family Camp for execution at Birkenau. Müller describes the chaos that ensued when these people realized their fate—husbands and wives shielding their children from the blows of SS men and the bites of guard dogs—and then the voice that began singing out the Czechoslovak national anthem and the Hebrew song *Hatikvah*. As Müller describes, “[t]o be allowed to die together was the only comfort left to these people. Singing their national anthem they were saying a last farewell to their brief but flourishing past.” It was at this moment that Müller lost any remaining will to live. He considered what it meant to continue living when he had seen so much hurt and loss, when he was the only survivor from his family, and finally what might happen if he were to run into a Nazi in the postwar years: “[a]t that moment I felt quite free from

³¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

³² *Ibid.*, 63

that tormenting fear of death which had often almost overwhelmed me before. I had never yet contemplated the possibility of taking my own life, but now I was determined to share the fate of my countrymen.”³³

If religious identity was not as important to Müller as it was to others, cultural and national identity certainly were. We learn that Müller’s attachment to his Slovak identity, and his subsequent connection to this particular transport of Czech Jews, some of whom were from his hometown of Sered’, was perhaps most important to Müller’s sense of belonging and will to live. What changed were the pleas from a fellow prisoner who was about to be killed, asking Müller to get out of the gas chamber and begging him to live so that he could keep their memories alive. Once removed from the chamber, Müller encounters a fellow *Sonderkommando* prisoner, Kaminski, who similarly tells him that he must not die: “You would not want to please our tormentors by not putting up a fight.” Müller recalls that it was this advice that returned his will to live for at least one more day and to have hope that one day he may be free.³⁴ However, it is not until the very end of his memoir, when he is finally close to freedom and rescue, that he truly feels gratitude to the woman and Kaminski for saving his life that day.

The final subject Müller writes on is the prominence of community versus isolation for members of the *Sonderkommando*. At various points in the text Müller mentions that being in the *Sonderkommando* required its members to keep their daily activities a secret from other camp prisoners. This was facilitated by separate living quarters for the *Sonderkommando*, keeping them isolated from other parts of the camp. Particularly when Birkenau was being built, Müller describes how there were

³³ Ibid., 110-1.

³⁴ Ibid., 114.

periods of time when he did not see any prisoners outside of those in his work detail. He discusses how this isolation, though difficult, allowed the *Sonderkommando* to feel as though they were part of a community that, Müller argues, had bonds that were stronger than any others. There was solidarity amongst these prisoners who were forced to spend every day working in the darkest corners of Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, Müller also describes the relief that came along with joining a larger community of survivors after Auschwitz was evacuated and he arrived at Mauthausen. Finally, Müller describes feelings of isolation from the outside world (beyond Auschwitz) and frustration that the rest of the world did not seem to help.³⁵

Reception of Testimonies

Upon researching Filip Müller and *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, it is surprising to learn that little scholarship has been published in response to this book. Müller's testimony provides a unique and unparalleled perspective into the Holocaust and the extermination process at Auschwitz-Birkenau from 1942 to 1945.

³⁵ Ibid. 30, 36-7, 91, 106, 166. For more on the experiences of the *Sonderkommando*, see Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005). Greif's text incorporates the testimonies of six survivors of the *Sonderkommando* but does not include mention of Müller, likely because it was published long after Müller retreated from the public eye. It is important to note that although these survivors witnessed similar things to Müller, none were part of the *Sonderkommando* work detail for as long as Müller. For relevant reading on Holocaust survivors and trauma, see Michael Nutkiewicz, "Shame, Guilt, and Anguish in Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *The Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2003): 1-22; see also Thomas Trezise, "Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *History and Memory* 20, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008): 7-47.

This was the longest period of time that any one person worked in the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* and had survived to share their story, and yet this memoir has not received adequate recognition. Rather, greater attention has been given to Müller's testimony in the postwar Frankfurt Auschwitz trials and his oral interviews in Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah*.

The main problem with Müller's testimonies at Frankfurt in 1964 was the issue of translation and circumstance. Historian Peter Davies argues that testifying in a courtroom as a means of witnessing puts incredible pressure on the individual being interviewed, especially when that individual does not speak fluently the language in which the trial is being held. Davies describes several discrepancies between Müller's words in Czech and their translation into German. He argues also that Müller had, at times, to make compromises with the way he was telling his story in order to tell it in a way that would fit the context that the judge and others instilled in the courtroom.³⁶ Müller had little control over how his testimony was recorded; however, that did not prevent others from heavily scrutinizing the details of his story.³⁷ It is important to note here that the worst of his scrutiny came not from scholars but from popular non-academic sources and revisionists.³⁸ However, that did not exempt it from having a profound effect on Müller.

³⁶ Davies, *Witness Between Languages*, 180-6.

³⁷ It is not uncommon for testimonies given in a legal setting to be manipulated by factors beyond control of the individual providing testimony, such as the manner of questioning and recording of responses. For additional reading on differences between legal testimony and testimony provided in a first-person narrative, see Shonna Trinch, "Risky subjects: narrative, literary testimonio and legal testimony," *Dialectical Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (June 2010): 179-204.

³⁸ The observation about the source of Müller's unpopularity is my own. No scholarly criticisms of his testimony have been found but, instead, several non-academic websites. The criticism and hate that Müller received in

In the 1970s, filmmaker Claude Lanzmann conducted a series of oral interviews with Müller. Lanzmann was interested in hearing Müller's testimony about working in the *Sonderkommando* and witnessing the extermination process up close for his upcoming film on the extermination of European Jews. In total, Lanzmann collected 4.8 hours of interview footage with Müller but only a fraction made it into the final cut.³⁹ Although *Eyewitness Auschwitz* was written and published in 1979, the release of Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah* eclipsed Müller's personal memoir and captured wider attention across the world. Research into Müller suggests that he is perhaps best known for his interviews in the film.⁴⁰ He is remembered for his initially stoic and "stentorian" voice and demeanor as he describes what his job in the *Sonderkommando* entailed. However, as the documentary continues, his overwhelming emotions are what audiences remember most as he discusses the moment he tried to join his fellow Czech Jews inside the gas chamber.⁴¹

It should be noted that Müller's testimonies in *Shoah* are not exactly true to how Müller remembered his experience, nor are they closely related to the interviews he gave before the film's

postwar years explains his retreat from public eye, and why we don't know much about him, but this paper will not be engaging with these non-scholarly and non-reputable sources.

³⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archives, "Claude Lanzmann *SHOAH* Collection – Outtakes" <https://www.ushmm.org/online/film/docs/shoahstatus.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Nearly every search result for "Filip Müller" yields something about *Shoah*.

⁴¹ Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando: Testimonies, Histories, Representations* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 222. See also Claudia Card, "Surviving Long-Term Mass Atrocities: U-Boats, Catchers, and Ravens," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 85, no. 2 (November 2011): 18-9.

editing process began. Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams argue that Müller's interviews were sped up and slowed down and his words chopped and rearranged to fulfill a specific purpose. Müller had purportedly requested that Lanzmann remove the part of his interview in which he loses composure but as we know now, it was not removed. Müller's interviews resulted in an influx of death threats against him and his family and led to Müller's immediate and permanent retreat from the public eye.⁴² Between 1946, when he offered his first published testimony of his experiences in a version of *The Death Factory*, and 1964, when he participated in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, Müller tried to be the politically active voice he promised fellow prisoners he would be. The writing and publication of *Eyewitness Auschwitz*, translated in collaboration with Helmut Freitag, was perhaps the most honest representation of Müller's experience in Auschwitz and was overshadowed by Lanzmann's *Shoah*. Throughout every medium, Müller was a near constant subject of criticism for what may be described as microscopic inconsistencies in historical details of the gas chambers—Yehuda Bauer notes that Müller may have been wrong about certain statistics and diagrams—but overall his descriptions accurately portrayed the *Sonderkommando* experience.⁴³ Additional scholarship on trauma and historical memory—especially work done by historian Christopher Browning—has proven that although minor details may fade over time, the general memory of the experience

⁴² For information about the film's editing process, see Chare and Williams, *The Auschwitz Sonderkommando*, 223-37; For information about the film's impact on Müller's personal life, see Davies, *Witness Between Languages*, 168.

⁴³ Bauer, foreword to *Eyewitness Auschwitz* by Filip Müller, ix-x.

holds up well and should still be taken seriously, regardless of how much time has passed since the events took place.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Filip Müller's *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* is an extraordinary and devastating testimonial account of life working in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and it is unfortunate that it has not received the praise and recognition that it deserves. Müller witnessed things beyond imagination and survived precisely so that he could share the stories of all that he witnessed. Why, then, has this book not been more widely read or discussed in public and academic circles? One could speculate that the graphic nature of Müller's descriptions is too uncomfortable for popular audiences. Though certainly challenging and heartbreaking in their own ways, books like Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* are undoubtedly easier to digest. An argument could also be made that oral interviews presented in a film are more captivating than reading similar testimonies in text form; *Shoah* was a groundbreaking success in the film industry and reached audiences around the globe. Another important piece to acknowledge is that readers have not always welcomed testimonies from former *Sonderkommando* members. Primo Levi, a renowned Holocaust survivor, infamously discredited their testimonies in his early career and only recently acknowledged that they may indeed have a place in Holocaust narrative.⁴⁵ Why, then, read *Eyewitness Auschwitz*?

⁴⁴ For information about trauma and historical memory, see Christopher Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ Levi argued that *Sonderkommando* members were not victims and should be held responsible for their cooperation and collaboration with the Nazi's

Read it because Filip Müller’s story about the Holocaust cannot be found by any other literary source. Müller’s account matters precisely because it is devastating and gruesome and unparalleled—he was the only individual to have witnessed all that he did, for as long as he did, and survived to tell the world about it. Read it because Müller’s oral interviews in *Shoah* and published testimonies in postwar trials do not provide the complete picture. What makes this memoir exceptional is its historical and emotional narrative, of which Müller had the greatest level of control. This is the story Müller wanted us to remember. Finally, *Eyewitness Auschwitz* appeals to readers beyond those purely interested in Holocaust Studies; it offers a tale of how faith and humanity are tested in the most trying ways, yet they can still persist even in the darkest corner of humanity.

efforts to exterminate Jews. The following article sheds light on this controversy and argues that just because the *Sonderkommando* aided in the extermination process, it does not mean that their testimonies should be discredited: Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, “Auschwitz and the Remains of Theory: Toward an Ethics of the Borderland,” *symplokē* 11, no. 1/2 (2003): 23-38. See also Adam Brown, “La ‘Zona Grigia’: The Paradox of Judgment in Primo Levi’s ‘Grey Zone,’” in *Judging ‘Privileged’ Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the ‘Grey Zone’* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013): 42-75.

Work-Creation Programs, Consumer Goods, and the People's Community, 1933–1939

William Gansle

Introduction

Perhaps more than any other period, World War II looms in popular consciousness. Yet this fascination often lies solely in the military aspects of the conflict; students of the discipline have often neglected to consider the more mundane, everyday aspects of living under an authoritarian regime, despite scholars insisting that these areas deserve equal study. These tangible aspects included the government programs and products that had direct impacts on the day to day lives of Germans, such as work-creation programs, highway systems, cars, and refrigerators. Military rearmament was undoubtedly a priority for Germany. Fresh off the heels of World War I, Germany sought to reclaim its place among the militarized industrial nations of the world. However, of more import to most non-academics and students of the discipline are aspects of everyday life in the Third Reich.

The idea of living under a repressive regime is altogether foreign to many modern observers. Although total domination of the German political sphere was integral to Nazi ambitions, it did not proceed in a logical, straightforward manner. The Nazis built upon ideas first promulgated by Ferdinand Tönnies, Friedrich Nietzsche, and others to forge the idea of a homogeneous “people’s community,” or *Volksgemeinschaft*. Central to this ambition was fostering the perception of “otherness” and subordinating the needs of the individual to the needs of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Despite emphasizing community over the individual, the Nazis nonetheless recognized that they needed to balance their community building efforts with limited deference to humans' individual desires. To the Nazis, the post-World War I and the Weimar years represented nothing less than the absolute debasement of Teutonic pride. The inclusion of the "war guilt clause," a provision that laid exclusive blame for World War I on Germany, therefore was a thorn in Germany's side and provided the impetus for the Nazis to consolidate their rule and proceed with rearmament on a scale hitherto unseen.

Elevating the living standards of the German people was central to restoring national pride. Post-war inflation wreaked havoc on the country. Life savings were wiped away, working and liquid capital almost entirely froze, and life expectancy declined. Unemployment also skyrocketed, as most industry grounded to a halt and people necessarily had less income to support independent craftsmen. This was clearly not a situation befitting the "master race" descended from the noble Aryans that once plied the Eurasian steppe. The Nazis therefore embarked on a campaign to both harness the power of modern industrial production for the people and reduce unemployment. These measures, it was hoped, would enable Germany to reclaim its place among the great industrial nations of the world and restore national pride in the face of the absolute humiliation rendered upon it by World War One.

Although rearmament was undoubtedly a priority—serving as a real example of the projected power of the German state and its industries—it necessarily did not filter down to those not directly involved in the armed forces. To elevate the military above the needs of civilians would run counter to everything a truly united *Volksgemeinschaft* stood for. The Nazis therefore created a variety of programs to improve standards of living on the home front. Work-creation programs and consumer goods

were inherently propagandistic because in tandem they demonstrated to the German people that the government was harnessing the power of modern capitalism to work in service of, not against, the *Volk*.

This paper aims to demonstrate that the particular brand of managed capitalism the Nazis employed served two primary ends: placating the working classes while diverting money towards the industrialists who enabled these programs and improving the living standard of the German people through work-creation programs and limited consumer-goods production. The Strength through Joy and *Volksprodukt* programs attempted to elevate the living standard of Germans to one more appropriate for the supposed master race. Work-creation programs, although undoubtedly of utility for ordinary people in that these programs provided citizens with jobs and more disposable income, also represented a boon for industries even tangentially involved in their incorporation. I shall therefore begin with a discussion of the various factors affecting Weimar Era Germany.

The Post-Great War and Weimar Years, A Retrospective

If there is success in solving this question, we have created for the new system such a situation that the government can realize step by step its other goals.
Work! Work!

– Hitler on unemployment¹

The situation in the Weimar Republic following World War One was hampered by a variety of factors, including social deterioration. Social deterioration coupled with a new form of representative democracy produced a situation that made it

¹ Quoted in Richard Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 38.

difficult for any one group to gain significant power. This in turn created a power vacuum that many groups attempted to fill with varying degrees of success. Germans had not been told that they were losing the war until late in the conflict when it became apparent that this fact could not be hidden any longer. Many were stunned by this defeat and could not fathom how the tide could change so rapidly and with such severity. Accordingly, they placed the blame for their loss at the feet of communists, insurrectionists, and the “November Criminals” who were accused of accepting the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in order to humiliate Germany.

Saddled with a debt burden of astronomical proportions and forced to give up a sizable share of its military strength, Germany became weak and impotent. Aside from the issues that were affecting Germany as a whole, the deeply personal tragedies of the war were paramount in people’s minds: a whole generation of children grew up without fathers, women lost their husbands, and many soldiers returning from the front were permanently disfigured as a result of the conflict. The Weimar Republic was also viewed by many as a haven for degeneracy in all its forms; prostitution, gambling, and “degenerate art” were but a few aspects that the Nazis saw fit to blame in their bid for power. The Nazis advocated a return to traditional German society, explaining that although the strength of a modern nation was influenced by its military power a more important factor was a unified populace committed to upright and moral conduct.

The economic situation created by World War I is equally important, and ultimately necessary, to explaining the success of the Nazi Party. Inflation first began to appear as early as 1919 but only became a true crisis in 1923.² Inflation fundamentally altered

² Claude William Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany from 1933 to the Incorporation of Austria in March 1938*, 2nd ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1972), 1.

the structure of German society as people's entire life savings were wiped out overnight and working and liquid capital almost entirely disappeared.³ The inability to secure a foreign loan to stay afloat compounded this issue. It is doubtful that Germany could have secured a lender given the scale of reparations payments already owed. Given the severity of the inflation and the economic hardships that faced the German people in the years ahead, the government quickly moved to institute reforms to bring the situation under control. The government introduced the *rentenmark* at the rate of one *rentenmark* to one million *Reichsmarks*. Based on a mortgage of German industry and not tied to the gold standard, the *rentenmark* brought with it the withdrawal of various substitute currencies from circulation and a relative stabilization of real wages and other money incomes.⁴

Though stopgap measures such as the *rentenmark's* introduction succeeded in at least partially restarting the economy, this short-term stabilization proved finite. The decline in inflation rates led to a massive increase in unemployment—increasing to approximately 1.5 million by 1 January 1924⁵—and sharp increases in interest rates, with government-backed loans hovering around 35 percent. Currency devaluation also led to increased imports of necessary goods which severely impacted agriculture and heavy industry and led to their weakening *vis-à-vis* foreign exporters and firms. The *Reichsbank* thereafter introduced credit rationing and other restrictions which resulted in yet more bankruptcies and seemingly ever-increasing interest rates. Unemployment seemed to be under control at least for a short while, declining to approximately seven-hundred thousand by April 1924.⁶ Despite these short-term difficulties, these

³ Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany*, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

measures did succeed in at least partially restarting the economy, as Germany recorded declines in unemployment throughout the 1920s until the Great Depression began in 1929.

Rampant inflation is the other side of the unemployment coin. The Great Depression was especially unequal in its treatment of Germany. The number of Germans in full-time employment in 1929 was approximately 20 million and declined to 11.4 million in January 1933—a full two-fifths, or 40 percent, of Germans were out of work by 1933.⁷ This is due at least in part to the strain on industry that demobilized soldiers presented, and due to a high pre-war birth rate. Many young Germans were seeking work in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and 25 percent of unemployed workers were from 14-24 years of age.⁸ This unemployment included seasonal workers in the agricultural sector, so it was naturally subject to increases and decreases with the seasons. The total collapse of the German credit sector in 1931 created a liquidity crisis with the value of exports falling by two-thirds from 1929 to 1932.⁹ This in turn exposed the structural peculiarities of the German system. Highly dependent on exports, shortages of capital led to a dearth of investment and growing losses. To combat this devastating situation the government raised taxes and reduced incomes. The increased taxes were used for unemployment relief measures.¹⁰ The government was especially keen on such measures and took steps to reduce unemployment in this manner because it feared political pushback from detractors in the government.¹¹

Weimar-era social dislocations and their corresponding economic woes were central to Hitler's worldview. In a speech

⁷ Overy, *War and Economy in The Third Reich*, 38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

on 1 February 1933, two days after his appointment to the Chancellorship, he spoke of his determination to “overcome the disintegration that had resulted from Germany’s surrender in November 1918 and the ‘Communist’ revolution that followed” – some fourteen years after the fact.¹² Clearly this era represented the debasement of the German spirit in Hitler’s eyes, which he took measures to combat. He thereafter promulgated his first Four Year Plan to rescue the German peasantry from poverty, overcome unemployment, and “reform the German state apparatus and to bring order to the ramshackle division of labor between the *Reich*, states, and local authorities.”¹³ Promoting work and the economy would therefore insulate against any “danger to [the German] currency.”¹⁴

Military rearmament was certainly a priority for German economic recovery, both in real terms and in its psychological value. But while military might no doubt projected the power of the German state, rearmament necessarily did not filter down to those not directly involved in the armed forces. Military rearmament therefore needed to be balanced with investment in the public sector, both in terms of infrastructure and consumer goods. The first true windfall for Third Reich propagandists came in 1933 when the United States left the gold standard. Devaluation of the dollar to *Reichsmark* ratio reached 30 percent, which reduced debts owed to the United States and its World War I allies by a commensurate amount.¹⁵ Propagandists quickly seized this opportunity, pointing to the increased value of the *Reichsmark* relative to the dollar as a sign of the new regime’s

¹² Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of The Nazi Economy* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006), 37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

trustworthiness.¹⁶ Despite being mired in the depths of the Great Depression, the Third Reich did not subscribe to Keynesian¹⁷ economic policies for an extended length of time—until the Reinhardt Plan was unveiled in 1933.

The Reinhardt Plan was a one-billion-mark work-creation package aimed at getting the country back on its feet. Money was primarily allocated to road works and housing projects, which appealed to a wide variety of social classes and opinions. However, there remained the belief that credit-financed work-creation programs would inevitably lead to inflation. Given the efforts of Weimar politicians to avoid actions that could in any way be construed as courting inflation, this would seem a rather counterproductive move. The essential fear was that the inflation produced by these programs would act as a hidden tax on productivity; however, “the game need not be zero sum.” As Tooze explains:

For the advocates of work-creation, this argument was based on a misunderstanding. If the economy was fully employed—with every worker and every factory at full stretch—new credit creation might well lead to inflation...But if labor and machinery were lying idle, the game need not be zero sum. Under conditions of mass unemployment, government spending financed by new credit would result in greater demand, greater production and employment rather than inflation. The art of economic policy was to provide the correct dose of credit-financed stimulation, sufficient to restore full unemployment, but not an excessive amount that

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷ “Keynesian” refers to ideas developed by British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynesian economics generally advocates government investment in, and regulation of, the economy.

would push the economy beyond the limit of full employment and create an inflationary free for all.¹⁸

Given the six-million or so unemployed workers and the fact that economic productivity in many factories hovered below 50 percent, striking this balance was not particularly challenging.¹⁹ With the stage thus set for economic recovery, Germany embarked on its campaign. This process is all the more interesting given that the Nazi government decried the immorality and decadence of modern industrial society while at the same time harnessing the power of industry and mass mobilization to their own ends. This futural dynamic of the Nazi regime was to become one of the most important factors in the continued success of the Nazi party.²⁰ As Griffin explains, “[fascists often proclaimed the belief] that they are charged with a mission to overcome the atomization, decadence, and materialism of the modern world by creating a new type of nationalist regime, one rooted in a heroic past but embracing a dynamically transformational future.”²¹ These programs were the vehicle by which a transformed future could be obtained.

The driver for fascism was the longing for purpose in a changing world, and the Nazis co-opted this belief to implement policies that ostensibly improved their constituents’ lives. Although military rearmament was undoubtedly a priority, its advances and gains did not filter down to the common people who had very real concerns about their own economic solvency. Investment in work-creation programs and consumer goods production, although containing a propaganda value in and of

¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

²⁰ See Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 12.

²¹ Griffin, *Fascism*, 54.

itself, played a key role in explaining the success of the Nazi party throughout the 1930s. These work-creation programs gave people jobs and thereby increased the Nazis' social capital. Consumer goods production was yet another way to create a standard of living befitting the supposed "master race." These programs, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the post-war inflationary years and the Great Depression, reinforced the Nazi image of modernity and dynamism in the eyes of their constituents.

Primacy of the Peasantry: Nazi Agricultural Modernization and Its Propaganda Effects

Work-creation programs were one of the most important ways that the Nazis helped German economic recovery. As there is relatively little literature providing a comprehensive delineation of the consumer goods side of the economy, it has proved useful to develop a classification system for this essay. Sectors of work-creation and consumer goods can be broadly broken down into three categories: sustenance, entertainment, and transportation. This tactic is effective for elucidating the nature of each sector on its own terms and how they relate to one another within the mind of the average German citizen. Agricultural programs were paramount to Germany. Many vividly remembered the Weimar years when hyperinflation drove the cost of food essentials sky high, and as a growing industrial nation Germany needed to feed its ever-increasing numbers. Crucial to this course of action was the use of the military in pursuit of *Lebensraum*.²² Germany, it was believed, needed living space to colonize and spread its influence throughout Europe. If

²² *Lebensraum* literally means "living space," and specifically refers to land which was obtained by conquest and would later serve as area to be colonized by ethnic Germans.

increased agricultural productivity was the goal, the military would not have been far behind in securing the land to make it a reality.

Within Germany proper, however, there existed a variety of campaigns designed to increase agricultural productivity and efficiency. The first Four Year Plan was enacted in 1933–34 and completely restructured agriculture under the Food Estate (*Reichsnährstand*). It brought together “all landowners, tenants, cultivators, and agricultural workers, [all] wholesale and retail traders in agricultural products and foodstuffs, all manufacturers...all agricultural cooperative societies and the new associations created for marketing.”²³ Extant organizations were either dissolved completely or integrated under the banner of the *Reichsnährstand*. Marketing associations (*Marktverbände*) were organized further under both horizontal and vertical integrative strategies. Vertical integration is the process by which a company creates a wholly owned supply chain that comprises all precursor products necessary to the creation of a final end product, whereas horizontal integration involves purchasing competitor enterprises at the same point in the production chain thereby creating a pseudo-monopoly. These tactics were vigorously employed by the Nazi government which had a vested interest in reducing waste and encouraging greater industrial productivity.

The *Hauptvereinigung*²⁴ regulated the entire productive cycle of plowing, seeding, and harvesting while the overall industry was grouped into various *Wirtschaftliche Vereinigungen*, which were “in effect compulsory cartels, with powers, *inter alia*, of licensing the creation of new undertakings or the enlargement of existing ones...but they differed from the

²³ Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany*, 57.

²⁴ Vertically integrated arm of the *Marktverbände*, tasked with regulating the farms and producers of necessary farming implements themselves and not the distribution of their products.

industrial cartels in being an integral part of the marketing associations and completely subordinated to the latter in matters of policy.”²⁵ Another administrative body, the *Reichstellen*,²⁶ was given complete control over imports and exports. Guillebaud asserts that these bodies exercised a large degree of control over internal food prices since they “controlled the amounts of, and prices at which foreign foodstuffs were sold in Germany, as well as the rate of accumulation of stocks in the country or sales from stocks.”²⁷

The effects of this Four-Year Plan were on the surface rather contradictory. It resulted in the reduction of production costs and a rise in prices, which should have had the effect of driving down popular support for the party. However, due to agricultural cartelization and the degree of control that the *Marktverbände* exercised over prices, the net cost to consumers was minimal on a per capita basis, especially given the concomitant reduction of unemployment and increase in real wages.²⁸ In any event, the program proved a success in its espoused goal of increasing agricultural productivity: returns for fiscal year 1934–35 increased by 20 to 30 percent relative to 1932–33 levels, and interest rates and taxes were effectively reduced by about 6.5 percent over the same period.²⁹

Autumn 1936 saw the introduction of the aptly named Second Four Year Plan to foster a culture of greater agricultural modernization and increased efficiency. Aimed at making

²⁵ Guillebaud, *The Economic Recovery of Germany*, 57-58.

²⁶ Horizontally integrated division of the *Marktverbände* that regulated overseas trade in foodstuffs and their derivative products, comprised of all companies engaged in import and export on German soil.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

Germany totally self-sufficient in terms of foodstuffs, it was organized along several facets:

1. Allocation of 1 Billion *Reichsmarks* for land reclamation projects, such as draining swamps, clear cutting forests, and installing irrigation equipment
2. Price reductions of artificially produced manures to stimulate more intensive soil cultivation
3. Fostering a culture of greater efficiency and less wasteful farming practices
4. Encouraging production of old staples, such as potatoes and sugar beets
5. Mandatory quotas under strict penalties to produce cereal grains and rye to replenish stocks lost to a poor 1936-37 harvest season.³⁰

The program's results met with mixed success. It produced 75 percent of all needed flax in fiscal year 1937 compared to ten percent in 1934, but more serious were the shortages of critical fats and livestock supplies created by an outbreak of foot and mouth disease that hit in 1938. Despite this, butter production increased—452,000 tons were produced in 1935 compared to 521,000 tons in 1937.³¹ Bans on the use of cereal grains to feed pigs and other livestock were also “a severe blow to the most profitable side of agriculture—animal husbandry— though this [was] not necessarily a permanent measure.”³² By 1937 wages were rising along with costs, which led to diminishing returns. Although mechanization and use of modern technologies were on the rise, many functions still required manual labor. Seasonal shortages of itinerant workers were therefore the most significant

³⁰ Ibid., 138-139.

³¹ Ibid., 140.

³² Ibid., 141.

constraint, as the programs designed to introduce more extensive use of mechanical cultivation and fertilizers had succeeded.

The Hereditary Farms Law of 1939 further increased agricultural productivity. Farms greater than 309 acres were declared “entailed.” Farmers could not mortgage their land, though they could still take credit on a personal basis. These measures operated in conjunction with agricultural restructuring programs to ensure the economic viability of these enterprises, as underproductive or nonproductive farmers could find themselves stripped of their land which would then be passed to new tenants.³³

The beneficial aspects of Nazi agricultural policies must be weighed against their deleterious effects. These agricultural policies were largely effective in increasing the food supply available to Germany, as well as ensuring the economic viability of existing farms and their employment of new technologies. Solvency and food production were thus inseparable from overall economic revitalization, both in real terms (if people are needed for work, they necessarily cannot go hungry) and overall share of the gross domestic product. Overall, this period was characterized by increased production of industrial crops at the expense of foodstuffs—although, given the increased levels of mechanization and farming efficiency the Nazis promoted, this impact was relatively insignificant.³⁴ For all the positive effects these programs had on food production, Germany remained heavily dependent on imports to feed its growing population. Although advances in technology created higher production levels, overall productive capacity improvements remained minimal, with a seven percent increase in volume from 1933 to 1936.³⁵ Unfavorable harvests in the early 1930s combined with

³³ Ibid., 60-61.

³⁴ Ibid., 138.

³⁵ Ibid., 97.

rising incomes (and by proxy increased food consumption), leading to shortages of meats and fats by 1936.³⁶

These programs' propaganda value was immense, despite their relatively modest economic impacts. Higher levels of production could, at least in propaganda, be linked to the futuristic and forward-thinking self-conception that the Nazis tried to create for themselves. They could point to increased mechanization and soil cultivation techniques as harbingers of a new time characterized by promotion of technology in a certain vein of modernist anti-modernism. These programs also served as a very real means of reinforcing the perception of the *Volksgemeinschaft*—the idea that all occupations were in the end supposed to be in service of the People's Community, which is exactly what these programs represented.

Additionally, land reclamation projects were an outwardly visible means by which the Nazis could communicate their devotion to development—what could possibly serve as a better example than clearing wilderness in devotion to producing foodstuffs for the People's Community? Although by no means a homogeneous group, these measures may have ended up harming the urban lower classes that comprised a sizable portion (though by no means a majority) of Nazi Party supporters. The lower classes did not live in close proximity to farms and thus were unable to barter for foodstuffs and at the mercy of the *Marktverbände* in terms of price and did not benefit from the job creation aspects of these programs. These programs represented a mixed bag in their tangible, real-life impacts, but they had significant propaganda value for the simple fact that they were a physical embodiment of modernity and progress.

³⁶ Ibid., 97.

*The Physical Means of Connectivity:
The KdF Wagen and the Autobahn*

Germany rapidly developed in the early twentieth century. Long a center of engineering and industrial production, it nonetheless did not develop an organic culture of car ownership like Britain or the United States. Germans were much more likely to own a bicycle or motorcycle than an automobile because they were relatively limited to luxury marques such as Audi, Mercedes-Benz, DKW, Horch, and Wanderer. Import restrictions on foreign brands and the exorbitant cost of the above marques priced them well out of reach of the average German consumer. Of the 486,001 licensed vehicles in Germany in 1932, a sizable portion of these were owned for business rather than for personal use.³⁷ Barriers to entry were not limited to the purchase price of vehicles: upkeep and fuel costs were further limiting factors. Assuming a driven distance of ten-thousand kilometers per year, the minimum cost of operation per month was roughly 67.7 *Reichsmarks*, which comprised almost all of the average family's disposable income.³⁸ New regulations that required the addition of domestically produced ethanol drove up fuel prices to twice the normal levels in some cases – indeed, taxes on gasoline comprised 421 million *Reichsmarks* in 1936, one third of the total tax revenue for that fiscal year³⁹ which reflects the growing economic importance of regulating petroleum products.

Bearing the above considerations in mind, and ever aware of public opinion, Hitler embarked on a program to develop a car of thirty brake horsepower (comparable to many other economy cars of the period), roomy enough for a family of four, and capable of sixty-two miles per hour—the maximum speed

³⁷ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 149.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

permitted on the *Autobahn* system at the time. The car was to be priced at 1,000 *Reichsmarks*; although a sizable investment, it nonetheless was a real improvement over the various luxury brands and was one that the average family could afford. First announced at the 1934 Berlin Auto Show, the project was led by Ferdinand Porsche working with teams of engineers from Daimler-Benz and Auto Union, which was formed by a merger of Audi, DKW, Horch, and Wanderer in 1932.⁴⁰

Problems with the design quickly became apparent. Internal communiqués priced the vehicles somewhere around 1,200 *Reichsmarks*, which was not much better than a competitive design by Opel that carried established brand recognition and a reputation for quality. These issues quickly made their way to Hitler. Intriguingly he took aim not at Porsche or the teams of engineers working on the project, but rather at the whole German car industry, which he accused in a December 1936 speech of taking an elitist view of vehicle ownership that was unbecoming of a truly united People's Community. The project thereafter slipped out of the hands of the private sector and under government direction. It was then suggested that the government develop the car on a not-for-profit basis, with the savings being passed along to the consumer in the final price.⁴¹ The first public exhibition of the *KdF Wagen* was in 1936 and was met with critical acclaim.

Aware of the vehicle's relatively high purchase price of 1000 *Reichsmarks*, the German government enacted a payment plan to get cars into consumers' hands. A program was instituted in 1938 that involved weekly deposits of five *Reichsmarks* into an account held by the *DAF*, the German Labor Front. Once the balance of this account reached 750 *Reichsmarks* the customer

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

was entitled to take delivery of a car as soon as it was produced. These accounts paid no interest, thereby saving the government 130 *Reichsmarks* per account. Purchasers were also required to take out a two-year insurance contract for 200 *Reichsmarks* which could not be discharged except in death or mortal injury. Despite these relatively restrictive terms, the program was an unqualified success: some 270,000 people had signed up for the program by 1939, and enrollment grew to 340,000 by 1945. The deposits in these accounts totaled some 275 million *Reichsmarks*—all of which was promptly lost in post war inflation.⁴²

Despite these efforts, there remained fundamental issues with the program that could not be resolved. Part of the problem lay in the sheer magnitude of the undertaking; Porsche envisioned a massive factory constructed in three stages that in its final form could produce 1.5 million cars per year, far outstripping the productive capacity of Ford's River Rouge plant.⁴³ The total cost of this complex was estimated at 200 million *Reichsmarks*, of which the initial construction sum of fifty million *Reichsmarks* was financed by sale of buildings and other liquid assets seized on 1 May 1933.⁴⁴ An already insurmountable sum for a country involved in wholesale military rearmament, it was compounded further by the inherent difficulty of the 1,000 *Reichsmark* target price. To sell the cars at 1,000 *Reichsmarks*, the factory had to produce roughly 450,000 cars per year which far outstripped domestic demand. Even assuming an optimistic production figure of 250,000 cars per year, the vehicles had to be priced at 2,000 *Reichsmarks* to break even—leading to a loss of 1,000 *Reichsmarks* per car for the manufacturer, since they were bound

⁴² Maxine Y. Woolston, *The Structure of the Nazi Economy* (New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1968), 57-58.

⁴³ William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, reissued 2011), 235-236.

⁴⁴ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 155.

to the 1,000 *Reichsmark* retail price.⁴⁵ These difficulties, combined with issues securing raw materials, led to no cars actually being delivered to a consumer during the Third Reich.

The development of the *KdF Wagen* was intimately linked to the *Autobahn* system. Hitler himself said, “If one formerly attempted to measure the standard of living of a population by the number of kilometers of railway line, in [the] future one will apply the kilometers of roads suitable for motor traffic.”⁴⁶ The development of an interconnected highway system served two ends: first, job creation measures would put people back to work and provide them with more income, thereby increasing monetary velocity⁴⁷ and second the provision of a physical representation of connectivity to complement the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The government hoped that a highly interconnected transit system would foster ideals of Teutonic exceptionalism and Germanic pride that would induce Aryans to get out and see their country for themselves. Construction began on the *Autobahn* system in winter 1933, typically in areas of high unemployment where it would do the most to benefit economic revitalization. Work typically employed little machinery outside what was needed to transport material to the worksite in order to soak up the most labor possible.⁴⁸ Some forty-thousand workers were on the job by 1934; this number peaked at 126,000 in 1936. Far more significant than the 3,000 kilometers of new roads constructed

⁴⁵ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁷ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, *Velocity of M2 Money Stock [M2V]*, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/M2V>, April 7, 2021. Monetary velocity is the “frequency at which one unit of currency is used to purchase domestically- produced goods and services within a given time period.” If more people can make purchases at a given time, the velocity of money has increased.

⁴⁸ Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich*, 85.

were the 3,000 new bridges constructed and 17,000 kilometers of existing roads resurfaced; the construction of the *Autobahn* therefore went hand in hand with the more general infrastructure updates that the Nazis promised.⁴⁹

The development of the *KdF Wagen* and the *Autobahn* was important for a variety of reasons. First, the appeal of these programs superseded class lines. Working at a car factory or building a road provided jobs for people of lower social classes, in addition to laid-off civil and structural engineers, mechanical engineers, equipment operators, and the like. The birth of the German car industry proved a boon for companies even tangentially related, as well. IG Farben was heavily invested in research synthetic fuel production, the returns of which found benefit in increased car ownership and a more interconnected highway system. Other key industries that were needed for car production included asbestos mining operations for brake components, copper mines for wire, steel for body panels, textile producers for interior upholstery, and rubber manufacturers for tires. There were very few industries that did not benefit in some form from increased car ownership. The *Autobahn* also further reduced transit times and led to increased industrial efficiency.⁵⁰

Ever aware of the inherent propaganda value of these programs, the Nazis and their constituents viewed them as an outwardly visible sign of the prosperity of the time relative to the Weimar era, and reflected the Nazi mission to reinforce its propaganda through material objects. The *KdF Wagen* was also a technologically advanced vehicle for the time. Take, by comparison, the first iteration of Ford's Flathead V8. Introduced in 1932, it was the first widely available mass produced V8,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 86.

producing sixty-five horsepower from a 3.6-liter engine.⁵¹ The *KdF Wagen* produced thirty horsepower from a 1.1-liter engine. To produce half the usable power from an engine one-third the size was an impressive feat of engineering and allowed the Nazis to claim that they were beating the Americans at their own game. The primary benefit of the *Autobahn* and the *KdF Wagen* lay in advancing the Nazi's propaganda goals by providing a physical means of connectivity to further develop the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and further reinforce their image as a regime characterized by modernity and forward-thinking practices.

*Products for the People:
The Volksprodukt Program and Its Inherent Propaganda Value*

One cannot determine theoretically whether one propaganda is better than another. Rather, that propaganda is good that has the desired results, and that propaganda is bad that does not have the desired results. It does not matter how clever it is, for the task of propaganda is not to be clever – its task is to lead to success. I therefore avoid theoretical discussions about propaganda, for there is no point to it. Propaganda shows that it is good if over a certain period of time it can win over and fire up people for an idea. If it fails to do so, it is bad propaganda.

–Joseph Goebbels⁵²

⁵¹ Ken Gross, “Ford’s Fabulous Flathead,” *Autoweek*, August 13, 2007: 28-29. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uvm.edu/magazines/fords-fabulous-flathead/docview/218891654/se-2?accountid=14679>.

⁵² Joseph Goebbels, “Erkenntnis und Propaganda,” *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 Ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels* (Munchen, DE: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1934), 28. <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb54.htm>

Elevating the German people's living standards was an integral part of Nazi power consolidation efforts. Hitler repeatedly stressed as much, and therefore embarked on a campaign of producing low-cost consumer goods to improve the lives of his constituents. It is, however, naïve to assume that this would be achieved through production of consumer goods alone; the "real instrument for the attainment of American-style consumer affluence was the newly assembled *Wehrmacht*, the instrument through which Germany would achieve American-style living space."⁵³ The *Volksprodukt* program was the indicator of a new future of consumer affluence, carefully molded and modified for its particular time and place. The *Volksprodukt* program was designed to produce cheaper but equally effective versions of consumer technologies just making their way into homes in the early 1930s, such as radios and refrigerators. Unlicensed use of the word "volk" in marketing literature became such a problem for the *DAF* that it outlawed unlicensed use of the term in 1933.⁵⁴ Clearly these products retained a special place in the mind of the average German consumer.

Of the various items produced under the umbrella of the *Volksprodukt* program, by far the most influential was the *Volksempfänger*, the "People's Radio." As Birdsall describes, the essential foundation of a German listening community was a "restricted definition of community belonging."⁵⁵ Ferdinand Tönnies, an influential German sociologist of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developed an influential theory of society as *Gemeinschaft* (community and family life) and *Gesellschaft* (public opinion and legislation). Following the 1933

⁵³ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 162.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁵ Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology, and Urban Space in Nazi Germany, 1933-1935* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 110.

takeover, the Nazis quickly moved to incorporate these two disparate spheres under the banner of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and thereafter promoted the radio as the key means of uniting the *Volk* based on notions of shared “Aryan” heritage and language commonalities.⁵⁶ Jews and other outgroups identified by the Nazis were banned from owning radios which represented a very real means of increasing their perceived distance from the *Volksgemeinschaft* and further reinforced their otherness relative to native-born “Aryans.” This exclusionary aspect is the key to explaining exactly why the radio was such an effective medium for uniting the people.

Change was rapid at this juncture. It was not at all uncommon to see both horse-drawn carts and motor vehicles simultaneously plying city boulevards, zeppelins and propeller aircraft occupying the airways, and hearing voices crackle over the airwaves. This era also saw the birth of a strong German visual culture which the Nazis employed to great effect; images of the Nuremberg Rallies and other party processions were part and parcel of the fantastical and fanatic image they sought to create for themselves and cultivate in the minds of their followers. Yet as discussed above, most Germans could not afford to travel to these rallies or afford the most basic consumer goods. The *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy) program was born out of this conundrum.

The Strength through Joy program was designed to facilitate the idea of a “racial community,” to borrow Baranowski’s translation of *Volksgemeinschaft*. In 1933, DAF leader Robert Ley announced the program to “[make visible] the ideal value of work over and above its mere ‘material’ or

⁵⁶ Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*, 111.

‘technical-material’ worth.”⁵⁷ Specifically, the program would “provide a solution that presupposed, indeed underscored, the inseparability of labor and leisure. Organized recreation would cultivate character while relaxing body and soul, and as a result, workers would derive satisfaction from their work, abandon their inferiority complexes, and become more productive.”⁵⁸ The overall organization was twofold: one aimed at providing low-cost tickets to museums, cultural events, and trips abroad, and the other focused on increased consumer goods production to facilitate a standard of living befitting the supposed “master” race. This also carried with it an inherent exclusionary aspect as a means to further consolidate the *Volksgemeinschaft*: Jews and other outgroups were barred from participation, thereby increasing their perceived distance from the People’s Community and further underscoring their lack of belonging in the eyes of their countrymen.

The *Volksempfänger* VE-301 was born out of the latter goal of the *KdF* program. The Nazis recognized early on the utility of the radio in the mass dissemination of propaganda, and therefore embarked on a campaign to make radios affordable to the average German family. The various products produced by the *Volksprodukt* program were propagandistic because they represented modernizing aspects of Nazi rule and played a key role in facilitating a sense of shared Germanic culture and pride among those that owned them. These products were often barred to persecuted groups; radio ownership by Jews was made a capital crime during the war years.

The *Volksempfänger* was introduced in 1933, the same year that the Nazi party came to power. Germany had only 4.3

⁵⁷ Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 40-41.

⁵⁸Baranowski, *Strength through Joy*, 40-41.

million radio receivers in a country of some sixty million people when Hitler came to power, which was an untenable situation for a regime so fixated on creating a modern image for itself in the minds of its constituents.⁵⁹ The regime came to an agreement with the radio manufacturers to design an easily mass-produced radio that made use of pre-existing off-the-shelf parts, constructed primarily of Bakelite to keep costs down. The first *Volksempfänger* produced, the VE-301, was by the standards of the time a reasonably well constructed radio. Although only able to receive transmissions from Germany proper it was reliable enough for daily use and found its way into many homes.

Despite its relatively low purchase price of seventy-six *Reichsmarks*, this still represented a sizable investment in a country whose average disposable income hovered somewhere around seventy *Reichsmarks* per month. It was nonetheless a relative bargain considering that most radios were priced north of one hundred *Reichsmarks*. Like the payment plans developed for the *KdF Wagen*, payment plans were also developed for the *Volksempfänger*. The customer would make an initial payment of 7.25 *Reichsmarks* followed by eighteen monthly installments of 4.40 *Reichsmarks* each.⁶⁰

However, by 1935 a speculative bubble had formed which threatened the stability of the market. The cost to produce the VE-301 had fallen to thirty-five *Reichsmarks* and production had far outstripped demand. It also could not escape notice that one could purchase a better made (i.e.: American) radio for a competitive price elsewhere; consequently, few radios were sold abroad. To combat these negative effects the German government entered into an agreement with Telefunken, the main German radio manufacturer, to produce the *Deutscher Kleinempfänger* for

⁵⁹ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 148.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

thirty-five *Reichsmarks*. This temporarily revived the German radio industry and led to yet more radios being placed in German homes.⁶¹

The association of the *Volksempfänger* with the radio boom made it the model for future *Volk* products. The most important of these were undoubtedly the *Volkskühlschrank* (people's refrigerator) and the *Volksgasmaske* (people's gas mask). The People's Refrigerator is perhaps best represented as yet another half-baked attempt on the part of the German government to introduce low-cost versions of modern consumer technologies, as no refrigerators were delivered to consumers,⁶² but it was nonetheless crucial to Nazi propaganda efforts. Although the form did not belie the intent, as a refrigerator in and of itself has no propaganda value, the implicit message was that German technical superiority once again reigned supreme in contrast to the economic defilement experienced after World War One. The *Volkskühlschrank* went hand in hand with campaigns to reduce food spoilage and increase efficiency, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the Nazis propaganda goals.

The *Volksgasmaske* was another key component of the *Volksprodukt* program. Air war had become a standard feature of life by the end of World War One. Recognizing its inherent potential to inflict wholesale destruction, the Nazi government realized that it had an opportunity to reinvent itself through technological means. The air age therefore called for more thorough societal organization to prevent the dissolution that had plagued Germany at the end of World War One. As Fritzsche explains, "the Third Reich's extensive civil defense efforts thus

⁶¹ Ibid., 149.

⁶² Harald Schreiner, Der Volkskühlschrank, in *Arbeitstorm: Kampfblatt der Nationalsozialistischen Arbeiter Deutschösterreichs* (18 June 1938): 20, <http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?apm=0&aid=abs&datum=19380618&seite=20>

acknowledged that the fundamental brittleness of civilian morale was a serious breach of national security. Once the harsh world of things had been mastered, however, the Reich looked forward not simply to defensible borders but also to a new social compact and a revitalized imperial will.”⁶³ The *Volksgasmaske* was a tangible way to increase civilian preparedness in the event of an air attack, and once again served to develop the *Volksgemeinschaft* along martial lines. Although less efficient than a military gas mask, it provided some protection in the event of an attack.

The overall propaganda value of these products is, in some cases, difficult to quantify by simply looking at the material object. The *Volksempfänger* was undoubtedly the most significant of these products because of its inherent ability to unite the *Volk*. The *Volksempfänger* was vigorously promoted to create the perception of a homogeneous People’s Community. The communal aspect of radio ownership allowed a sense of solidarity among geographically disparate populations during the war years. The government broadcasted its concerts from Berlin, and soldiers stationed on the Eastern Front could send in song requests to be read aloud, thus providing a sense of community membership for those advancing the territorial ambitions of the Reich abroad. Again, the *Volksempfänger* also served to reinforce this sense of membership through its exclusionary aspects; Jews and other outgroups were barred from radio ownership, leaving them without a crucial source of information and furthering their perceived distance from the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The refrigerator and gas mask both served much the same purpose, though by different means. The refrigerator was significant more for its emotional impact, in that it served as a

⁶³ Peter Fritzsche, “Machine Dreams: Airmindedness and the Reinvention of Germany,” *American Historical Review* 98 (1993): 700.

potent symbol of the might of a reborn industrial Germany and furthered the image of the Reich as acting in service to the demands of its *Volk*. The production of gas masks, although certainly of military value, went further than most others in demonstrating the powerful strain of managed capitalism that the Nazis employed and created the perception that even people on the home front played an integral role in defending the National Community from its enemies. The various *Volk* products that were produced helped to create a vision of modernism and dynamism in modern politics that stood in stark contrast to the staid image of the Weimar era and the Wilhelmine era before it.

*Conclusions from the Propaganda Techniques
of the Third Reich*

The sense of modernism engendered by Nazi propaganda is one of the keys to explaining the broad cross-class appeal of the various programs the Nazis enacted. Germany's loss in World War One acted as a massive shock to the system, and fostered the perception that things needed to change in a tangible, direct manner. The Weimar government was widely demonized and scapegoated, accused of allowing the senseless loss of many young German men. Germans widely felt that a new, fresh perspective was needed to guide the country out of its internal strife.

The Nazis were masters of propaganda. Central to their propaganda was reinforcing the perception of a homogeneous People's Community. This People's Community was necessarily exclusive of those not deemed "Aryan," given the centrality of biological absolutism to Nazi theory and practice. For those that were members of the "Aryan" race, however, there existed a remarkable variety of opportunities for advancement. To be sure, the Nazis encountered a difficult situation upon assuming power

in 1933: mired in the depths of the Great Depression, they had to act quickly to shore up their hold on power and prove the legitimacy of the regime. That this power consolidation relied on a particularly virulent strain of biological absolutism should come as no surprise, as scapegoating of persecuted groups is one of the most important factors in explaining the broad cross-class appeal of the Nazi regime. Fostering the perception of outgroups (i.e. Jews, Roma, homosexuals) made native born “Aryan” identification with the Nazis that much stronger and increased the Nazis social capital.

Financing work-creation programs such as the various land reclamation projects and the *Autobahn* was a way for the new government to directly interact with its constituents and prove its dedication to the advancement of its mission. Germans wanted to reclaim the prestige they felt had been lost by the end of World War One. The Autobahn system was a point of national prestige, especially considering that the United States did not have an interconnected highway system until the 1950s, some twenty years after Germany.

The overall propaganda effects of the Nazis require some elucidation as to their more implicit factors. One would be hard pressed to assert that a radio or a refrigerator in and of itself is an object of propaganda; they are simply objects, with no inherent value outside what humans attach to them. But it was precisely the value that Germans attached to these goods that was the most important aspect of owning these items. The personal attachments and emotional impact that came with owning a radio were far more important to the regime than any material benefits they provided to the *Volk*. Radios and refrigerators meant much more than being able to listen to *der Führer* live or keeping some *wurst* cold—they were symbolic representations of a reborn Germany, a Germany that could finally ascend to its rightful place among the nations of the world. The *KdF Wagen* paralleled this idea—

cars were important for their utility in conducting business and trade, but far more significantly they were symbols of potent American-style consumerism and everything that came with it.

These programs were all designed to foster the perception of a new government committed to visibly improving the lives of its constituents. The social dislocation and damage wrought by World War One was still fresh in Hitler's mind when he ascended to power in 1933, and indeed provided one of the main frameworks he used to conceptualize his plans for the country. Recognizing the inherent need to protect against this same social disintegration, the Nazi party embarked upon a variety of campaigns to put the people to work and elevate their living standards. Agricultural projects extolled labor's role in changing the world to better fit its occupants. The *KdF Wagen* and the *Autobahn* provided a physical means of connectivity to reinforce the population's conception of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and radios and consumer goods were created with the express purpose of propaganda dissemination in mind. Each of these programs was designed to operate in conjunction with the others—if one was removed, the others fell as well. Such was the depth and force of Nazi propaganda, one of the most significant driving factors in the incorporation—and demise—of the most murderous regime the world has yet seen.

Standing Out by Fitting In: Navigating the Marriage Market of the Edwardian London Season

Sophia Trigg

For an upper-class Englishwoman during the Edwardian age, marriage was the most important transaction of her life. A young lady aiming to increase her value on the marriage market needed to deploy all the weapons in her arsenal to achieve that goal: manners, good taste, and, of course, fashion.¹ The Season was an event centered on display, and a lady, without even talking, was speaking volumes about her preparedness for entering Society through the way she wore her clothing. For young ladies from families already embedded in upper-class Society, following the latest fashions and “fitting in” was a skill developed through childhood. Those trying to enter society from a bourgeois background, however, had to learn how to fit seamlessly into the upper-class world. Impressing the highest-ranking members of London Society was the key to unlocking access to the highest-quality bachelors, and good fashion sense, effortless style, and proper comportment were the tools used to secure invitations to the events containing the best merchandise.

The London Season was the venue where most upper-class marriage negotiations took place. The Season, in some form, has always existed because the problem to which it provides a solution has always existed: where else but in a controlled market could rich people guarantee equally wealthy partners for their children? The earliest iteration of a formal English aristocratic “marriage market” was created by Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603), who insisted upon official “presentations” of eligible

¹ I will be using the term “lady” to denote debutantes and those past girlhood but not yet married. This is in keeping with contemporary usage as calling an unmarried lady a “woman” would not have been appropriate.

young ladies within her court as a way to find them husbands that would assist in the consolidation of wealth within England.² By the end of the Georgian period (1714–1830), the London Season solidified into a form we would now recognize: a span of three or four months each year in which the aristocracy descended upon the city for the purpose of matchmaking. While it is true that there have always been more “fashionable” times to come to London—doubtless when one’s peers were also in town—the official Season followed the legislative schedule of Parliament when Lords and their families were guaranteed to be present.³

In a social hierarchy that was entirely based on status, marriage allowed a girl to “level-up” into the next chapter of life. As laid out by Leonore Davidoff, from the age of five to seventeen or eighteen (when she entered Society), there was no status change for a young girl; her wealth, level of influence, and her style of dress did not change. Marriage allowed her to increase her social power through enlarging her sphere of influence by taking on the responsibilities of motherhood or of mentoring a young sister or family friend.⁴ Once she did marry, she would often become a hostess of Society events and wield the power to influence others’ marriage matches, get involved with her husband’s political life, and act as her new family’s social representative.

Given that England operated under a patriarchal system of government during the Victorian era, it is often assumed that the

² For a full history of Queen Elizabeth I’s marriage market and its perpetuation into the Georgian era, see Kristen Richardson, *The Season: A Social History of the Debutante* (Waterville, ME: Thorndike, 2020).

³ For more on the history of the London Season from an almost contemporary perspective, see *Fifty Years of London Society, 1870—1920* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1920).

⁴ Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Cresset Library, 1986), 50-1.

Season also functioned as a microcosm of that all-too-familiar structure. But, within the confines of this system, women actually held the largest share of power when it came to creating marriage matches and acting as “arbiters of social acceptance or rejection” for newcomers to Society.⁵ At first reluctant to invite these *nouveau-riche* families into their social groups, Victorian Society women created strict structures of exclusion. In cities like London, elaborate rules of etiquette, largely enforced by women, ensured that connections were not accidentally made with “undesirable” people. Leaving calling cards, adhering to a strict hierarchy when making introductions, and requiring formal invitations for dinners and parties restricted access to approved persons only.⁶ By controlling the Season’s social events and enforcing the vast Victorian webs of etiquette, Society women were able to vet their children’s interactions with potential partners.⁷ Typically, these interactions stayed within the confines of the family’s own class, following the traditional purpose of the marriage market: consolidating wealth. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, “only the most enormous landed

⁵ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 16.

⁶ Cas Wouters, a sociologist, gives a detailed explanation of the rules of Victorian etiquette in his article “Etiquette Books and Emotion Management in the 20th Century: The Integration of Social Classes,” *Journal of Social History: Oxford* 29, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 107.

⁷ The strict etiquette of the Victorian era grew out of the eighteenth-century ideals of courtesy, good character, even temperament, accomplishment, self-confidence, and maintaining good habits, morals, and manners. Instead of championing superior personal conduct, the Victorians instead focused on policing the conduct of others. Under this system, those not adhering to the rules of etiquette were branded as “rude,” and were not thought to have the “necessary qualifications” to be a part of the upper class. For more detail on the transition between Georgian and Victorian manners, see Cas Wouters, “Informalization: Manners and Emotions since 1890,” *Theory, Culture & Society* (2007): 23; and Wouters, “Etiquette Books and Emotion Management,” 108.

aristocratic fortune could remotely compete with [the wealth] of a middling industrialist,” and eventually, newly rich families began to gain access to the Season through its public events.⁸ This was the dawn of a new era for the marriage market.

The Edwardian era moved at a faster pace than the Victorian era; more could be done in a day than could be done in a week without the aid of trains or cars. Public events like Ascot (a prestigious horse racing event), attending the opera, and the summer regattas, allowed for more mingling between classes. These factors gave rise to a marriage market that included more opportunities than ever, yet the sheer number of young people involved meant that it was harder to make an impression during large social events.⁹ Thankfully, hostesses still threw private house parties, balls, dinners, and galas that were accessed by invitation only and took on new importance in this more public era.¹⁰ But how did a young lady make enough of an impression to get an invitation to these smaller events? And upon whom should she aim to make it? The Edwardian marriage market hinged primarily on the opinions of those who could make or break a young lady’s Season: established Society women.

One of the largest benefits of being “in Society” was having access to vast networks of information about jobs, investment opportunities, and political decisions. But in an ironic loop, in order to gain access to these networks, a woman already had to have access to one of the most important: that of fashion,

⁸ Kristen Richardson, *The Season: A Social History of the Debutante*, (Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press, 2020), 152.

⁹ Mrs. Cornwallis West, “Social London: Past and Present. Part II,” *The Gentlewoman* 34, no. 881 (May 25, 1907): 718.

¹⁰ But some of these events, like the masked balls that the Prince of Wales reintroduced in the 1890s, were meant to incorporate many categories of guest without promising them true social acceptance or later invitation. Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 17; 67.

style, and upper-class etiquette. The London Season created a soft economy where people who were already “in the know” about these rules acted as gatekeepers to the rest of the network.¹¹ For those who were just entering this system—newly rich families—learning the rules of fashion, style, and etiquette became the only way to engage with Society. More than simply owning the correct clothing, women were also expected to know how to *style* those pieces to appear *fashionable*, an ephemeral quality that strikes the difficult balance between over and underdressing. Any hint of “trying too hard” was a sign that one had to *work* at being elite and therefore could not possibly be. Richardson states, “young women from newly rich families studied how to behave like aristocrats and tried to mirror their effortless. In doing so, they hoped to conceal their bourgeois origins well enough to marry into the aristocracy without causing real embarrassment to themselves or their new husbands.”¹² While it was important to impress, it was also important to avoid going too far and inadvertently broadcast one’s misunderstanding of taste to one’s peers and superiors. There was a fine line between garishness and respectability in dress.

Overall, Edwardian fashion between 1905 and 1908 was extremely elaborate and highly decorated. Society women and, most prominently, Queen Alexandra were often at the forefront of fashion and helped to set trends in England.¹³ Young debutantes and matriarchs alike eagerly awaited reports on the Queen’s fashions in women’s magazines and newspapers.

¹¹ Richardson, *The Season*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 267.

¹³ The Queen was mentioned in many articles throughout *The Gentlewoman* as being exquisitely dressed. From the accounts included, she was clearly held up as a leader in fashion.



Fig. 1: The title page of the 1908 Season Edition of *The Gentlewoman* showing Queen Alexandra and the Princess of Wales as the "First Gentlewomen of England," indicating their status as the ideal Society women. "The First Gentlewomen of England," *The Gentlewoman* 36, no. 929 (April 25, 1908): 549.

In 1905, a young debutante writing in *The Gentlewoman*, an upper-class women's magazine, described the Queen's fashion at the opera as "so much better than many of the over-dressed women I saw! Just with a high aigrette in her lovely hair, and a deep collar necklace of great pearls and diamonds round her graceful slight throat, and then the simplest of square-cut black gowns, with just a bunch of Malmaison carnations pinned on it."¹⁴ At a garden party in 1907, she was reported wearing a white gown and white "Eton straw sailor" and was described as looking "absurdly young" and was praised for her "grace and simplicity," traits, alongside effortless, that were highly prized in the social sphere.¹⁵

¹⁴ An "aigrette" was a headdress made of white egret's feathers. "A Week in the London Season: Letters of an American Debutante," *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 538.

¹⁵ "Cosy Corner Chat," *The Gentlewoman* 34, no. 876 (April 20, 1907): 519.

The most luxurious items in a woman's wardrobe came from Paris, or at least from Parisian designers. Based on the frequency of words like "French" and "Parisian" in fashion descriptions, the more French the fashion, the better. Descriptions in *The Gentlewoman* and the *Lady's Realm* included: "the lingerie there everyone knows; it is famous for its daintiness and Frenchness"; "the hats there are every season better and better, more absolutely chic, it positively brings Paris to our doors"; "French fashions rule in this famous millinery atelier"; "the cunning of Paris has perfected the blouse-bodice"; "the West End of London vies with Paris in being the happy hunting ground for the searcher after the useful and beautiful feminine attire"; "I wonder if these Parisian folks dream hats!"; and, most dramatically, "I believe some of those Paris folks are endowed with witchcraft."¹⁶ *The Gentlewoman* also ran a regular feature titled "Paris Fancies and Fashions" to bring the latest innovations to its English readers through reviews of the fashions seen in plays and at French Society events. The 1906 Season edition of *The Gentlewoman* covered the revival of a comedy on the Paris stage: "from a point of view of fashion this revival is particularly interesting, as the dresses worn by these charming artistes have been specially created by three of the leading Paris couturiers."¹⁷ The article then went on to describe in detail the outfits worn by the actors and how they would be incorporated into the Season.

¹⁶ "A Colonial Belle Goes a-Shopping," *The Gentlewoman* 34, no. 876 (April 20, 1907): 520; "The Moods of Fashion," *The Gentlewoman* 36, no. 929 (April 25, 1908): 577; Mrs. Eric Pritchard, "London and Paris Fashions," *Lady's Realm* 20 (May-October 1906): 413; "Spacious Millinery and Outfitting Salons," *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 575; "The Twins Go a-Shopping," *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 568; "A Review of the Dress World," *The Gentlewoman* 32, no. 824 (April 21, 1906): 600.

¹⁷ "Paris Fancies and Fashions," *The Gentlewoman* 32, no. 824 (April 21, 1906): 605.

Although some French designers opened shops in London, the strong emphasis on French fashion meant that some women were at a disadvantage when it came to acquiring appropriate garments.¹⁸ It was customary for Society women to travel to France each year just before the Season (usually in March or April) to scope out the latest styles and do some shopping.¹⁹ However, some young ladies, like Heather Firbank, a London Society woman featured in the book *London Society Fashion*, were not able to go to Paris to shop. According to the book's authors, "As a single woman it would not have been easy for her to make trips abroad."²⁰ Accessing Parisian Society networks was often only possible through the connections of a woman's husband or father. Firbank had neither during her time in Society. Likewise, a woman in the lower half of the upper-class income bracket may not have had the means to travel to Paris every year for the sole purpose of shopping. Women in these situations risked committing a fashion *faux pas* by wearing London-made gowns to the most formal events.

The largest change in fashion from the Victorian to the Edwardian era was the silhouette of women's clothing. The S-bend, or straight-front, corset was invented as a way to relieve pressure on the lungs and improve overall health. Ironically, the newly re-shaped corset actually increased the pressure on the

¹⁸ The "Cosy Corner Chat," in the April 15, 1905 edition of *The Gentlewoman* noted the large number of French establishments popping up in London for the ease of shopping.

¹⁹ For more on the timeline of the Season see Cassie Davies-Strodder, Jenny Lister, and Lou Taylor, *London Society Fashion, 1905-1925: The Wardrobe of Heather Firbank* (London: V&A Publishing, 2018).

²⁰ Lister and Taylor, *London Society Fashion* 30.



Fig. 2: An advertisement in a 1900 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* shows the difference between the Victorian and Edwardian silhouettes. "Coronet Corset Co." *Ladies' Home Journal and Practical Housekeeper* 17, no. 11 (October 1900): 44.

groin and resulted in back pain for some women.²¹ The S-bend corset pushed the hips back and the bust forward, creating the eponymous S-shaped figure when viewed from the side.²² Compared to the Victorian corset, the new corset ended lower on the chest and provided much less support for the bust, creating a mono-bosom ("pigeon-breasted") effect. Larger women would often augment the minimal support offered by the S-bend corset with an additional bust bodice. For smaller women, padding out a bust bodice and adding ruffles or two to three layers of ruched ribbon to their corset covers helped to create the desired shape.²³

²¹ See more in Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

²² By 1908, the waistline of most dresses resembled a combination of the Empire waist of the Georgian era in the back, with a swoop downward to princess style in the front (waist seam closer to the natural waist). For more, see "The Transition of the Waist," *The Gentlewoman* 36, no. 929 (April 25, 1908): 558.

²³ Hip padding could also be added for women who were more top-heavy or who were thin overall to create a fuller hourglass figure and achieve ideal

This style, while more easily observed in the high-necked morning or afternoon dresses, was less noticeable in eveningwear and ball gowns where the necklines were lower and the dress bodice more form-fitting. Women used the S-bend corset and personal augmentation to achieve the ideal Edwardian proportions: the waist circumference ten inches smaller than the bust, and the hip circumference fifteen inches larger than the waist. On top of the corset and padding, women wore at least one petticoat to fill out their skirts and further modify their proportions.

In contrast to men's understated and uniform fashions, Society women's fashions in the Edwardian era were exquisitely decorated with lace, embroidery, applique, ribbons, and flowers.²⁴ To express their youthfulness and to stand out in a crowd, young ladies used softer, simpler fabrics in whites and soft pinks. Men were highly critical of women's fashion during this era, especially of the number of accessories required. As was noted in "A Caricaturist on Woman and Her Dress" in the 1905 London Season edition of *The Gentlewoman*, "the holding up of a long gown in walking, the holding of a hat in a high wind, the holding on to the parasol, purse, and handkerchief, require such tact and cleverness that few can perform these feats without inviting the moderate ridicule of man."²⁵ Also noted in the same issue, "the middle-aged man, except those who live to make a splash in society, or purely for outside impression, prefer the wife

Edwardian proportions. For more about Edwardian undergarments and their construction, see Bernadette Banner's re-creation of the above Symington bust bodice in her video, Banner, Bernadette, "Achieving That Classic Edwardian Shape: Reconstructing a 1902 Bust Bodice," April 16, 2020, video, <https://youtu.be/CbzaBr4W4kk>.

²⁴ To get a sense of this contrast, see the photos and illustrations in Valerie Cumming's *The Visual History of Costume Accessories* (New York: 1998).

²⁵ Harry Furniss, "A Caricaturist on Woman and Her Dress," *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 532.

who does not dress over much, his idea being that the best dressed women are those whose dress one never notices at all.”²⁶ Women’s fashion choices related to marriage and matchmaking have traditionally been described as mating tactics: dress to impress the man of one’s dreams. But men were not overly concerned with a woman’s clothing unless it was deemed absurd by their standards of societal comportment.

Because the minutiae of fashion went generally unobserved by men, impressing other women by displaying an intimate knowledge of the systems of Society helped a young lady prove and maintain her market value. Society women were the key to accessing the parties, dinners and balls that would include the best bachelors. Likewise, forging a relationship with a well-connected hostess meant that a debutante and her mother might one day dine with royalty, be introduced to a bachelor within the



Fig. 3: Men’s outfits in the Edwardian era were uniform and relatively unadorned compared with women’s fashion. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Victoria and Albert Museum Online Archives. Fashion Plate.

²⁶ Furniss, “A Caricaturist on Woman and Her Dress,” 532.

hostess's own family, or make a political or financial connection between her husband and theirs. Dressing fashionably and correctly indicated that a woman was "in the know" and was either born of upper-class rank or rich enough to hire someone to teach her how to fit in. As noted in *The Gentlewoman* in 1905, "the English above all other people had the power of 'fitting in.' Without this faculty what we know as the London Season would never have had an existence."²⁷ Because of the complex hierarchical system present in London Society, impressing the *right* powerful women was the only way to make the best possible marriage.

The line between underdressing and overdressing was extremely thin, and any whiff of trying too hard could negatively affect a young debutante's marriage prospects. New debutantes lived in fear of committing a fashion *faux pas* yet were encouraged to stand out to impress the matriarchs of Society. One of the key purposes of the strict dress code imposed upon young debutantes throughout the Season—that of being acceptably understated, yet lavish—was to fully advertise her market value, but still show that she was capable of being fashionable and therefore fit in with Society's idea of an understated yet effortlessly elegant woman. Young ladies put so much effort into looking understated that it became a skill in itself; a girl who overdid it was seen as a less-skilled potential member of Society. As stated in a modern, yet relevant study of debutante balls undertaken in Australia in 1993, "the 'natural' look is not one that comes 'naturally.'"²⁸ One article in *The Gentlewoman*, noted the futility of imitation without understanding, "nothing is more

²⁷ "Evolution of the London Season," *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 550.

²⁸ Lyn Harrison, "'It's a Nice Day for a White Wedding': The Debutante Ball and Constructions of Femininity," *Feminism & Psychology* 7, no 4 (November 1, 1997): 512.

easily detected than affectation, and nothing so quickly transforms one into an unmitigated bore.”²⁹ Closely monitored by women in power, those who dressed in a garish manner, styled the “right” fashions incorrectly, lacked deference, or who were identified as faking it in any way, were politely disinvited from participation in the events of the London Season.

Being effortless in one’s style was key to fitting in. Most women spent hours with their milliners and dressmakers attempting to design exclusive garments that were at once completely unique and adherent to current fashion trends, while also trying to maintain the illusion that they were not trying to outshine other women.³⁰ It was important to show that one had enough money to create one-of-a-kind custom pieces but also to look humble enough to make a good and conscientious woman of Society.

Throughout a typical day during the London Season, women were required by social custom to change their clothing at least three times. As chronicled by a young American debutante in London in 1905, costume changes were necessary for each activity: breakfast, riding in the park, luncheon, afternoon visits to friends, dinner, and evening events such as a ball or a visit to the opera.³¹ Likewise, for each hallmark event attended during the Season, a unique outfit would be required. Some garments could be reused, if necessary, but for more formal events, or events that would be attended by the public, it was imperative that a woman not be seen in a repeated costume. As noted by Davies-Strodder, Lister and Taylor, “for each different event there was a specific

²⁹ “The Gentlewoman’s Opinion: On the Power of Personality,” *The Gentlewoman* 34, no. 876 (April 20, 1907): 512.

³⁰ David Bond notes the immense amount of time it took to create most garments in *The Guinness Guide to 20th Century Fashion* (Enfield, UK: Guinness Superlatives, 1981), 10.

³¹ “A Week in the London Season,” 537.

style to be worn and it was crucial that these showed an awareness of current trends and changes in fashion.”³² However, since each garment was generally bespoke, the Season’s fashions were determined by what was “in” during the months of February, March, and April in the given year. As noted in the London Season edition of *The Gentlewoman* printed in April 1905, “the fashions are determined, have long been determined. *There will be nothing newer than what we can buy now.*”³³ It was necessary for women to order their dresses and accessories well ahead of time to have them made and delivered by the start of the Season. As also noted in *The Gentlewoman*, “later on we shall be overdone with orders and unable to supply our customers so quickly. To order then *at once*, that is the thing to do.”³⁴ Every woman aiming to participate in any Season event thus placed her orders in March and April and eagerly awaited delivery in early May, just before events began increasing in frequency.

Of the activities conducted daily, there were few as well attended as riding or walking in Rotten Row. “The Row,” as it was sometimes called, referred to the broad track that ran along the southern edge of Hyde Park used as a fashionable place to ride horses, walk, and socialize with peers. According to a book titled *Fifty Years of London Society*, published in 1920, “it is there that you meet your friends and are introduced by them to their acquaintances; it is the recognised resort and you must ‘show yourself.’”³⁵

³² Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 27.

³³ “Cosy Corner Chat,” *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 529.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The Row was an important place to make connections, and while debutantes did enjoy some freedoms, young ladies would often be accompanied by their mothers or by a chaperone on this journey—aunt, sister, etc.—so that proper introductions could be made. *Fifty Years of London Society, 1870-1920* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1920), 58-9.



Fig. 4: A day dress designed by Maison Rouff in a collection of fashion plates from 1901. V&A Department of Prints and Drawings. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Victoria and Albert Museum Department of Prints and Drawings and Department of Paintings Accessions 1957–1958. Color lithograph. 1901. London: HSMO, 1964.

The Row was often the first place where a woman would dress to impress and one of the few *public* fashion displays she would enjoy regularly. According to the 1906 London Season edition of *The Gentlewoman*, “if you want to study the fashions an object lesson may be learnt at the right hours in the Row for modish walkers. I know that Mme. Y., one of London’s most sought-after dressmakers, often seeks her inspirations there instead of going to Paris.”³⁶ Morning, or “day” dresses were characterized by lighter fabrics and could either be one piece or a connected bodice and skirt meant to be layered over a

³⁶ “Young Married Women in Society,” *The Gentlewoman* 32, no. 824 (April 21, 1906): 559.

blouse.³⁷ Other common styles included “tailor-mades,” matching jackets and skirts made of wool serge and worn with blouses that were based on men’s tailored riding habits. Tailor-mades soon became a hallmark of London-made fashion.³⁸ The Row was one of the places where mothers and young ladies would play the complex game of introductions between acquaintances. If they dressed well, they were more likely to catch attention and make an advantageous acquaintance that could later result in an invitation to a Society event.

After a quick rush home from Hyde Park to change, a woman of the Season might again set off for an afternoon of “calling” or visiting acquaintances and friends. Morning calls were also common but were shorter and considered the most formal of visits; it was in the morning that one would pay calls to one’s social superiors. For morning calls, it was expected that outdoor clothing (including hats and gloves) stay firmly in place for the duration of the visit. Afternoon calls generally happened between the hours of three and six p.m. These were visits between social peers and could include visits between sexes—if both parties were married. Also in the afternoon, “ceremonial” calls would take place between women who were acquainted, but not close friends. Calls between friends happened later in the afternoon, between five and six o’clock. Sunday visits were reserved for the closest of friends and family.³⁹ As noted by

³⁷ For beautiful photos of extant dresses of this style, see Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 31

³⁸ Redfern of London was a popular designer of these frocks. Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 31. Often, “picturesque” French fashions were held up as the antithesis of London “tailorisms” or tailor-made garments. “The Twins Go a-Shopping,” 570.

³⁹ Young and unmarried men also paid their calls on Sundays. This practice was sometimes called ‘sowing seeds’ alluding to the potential for further development of the relationship at other events. For more see Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 43-44.



Fig. 5: An afternoon dress from 1903 by Jeanne Halleé. It was common for afternoon dresses to be darker in color to reduce the amount of washing needed after being out and about in London. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Frederick H. Prince, Jr., 1967. Accession Number: 2009.300.430a–c.

Davidoff, afternoon calls were when “wives made the contacts which led to dinner invitations which in turn might mean entry into important houses” and when women “could collect useful information about the social network.”⁴⁰ Afternoon dresses were more structured than morning dresses and were often unique in shape depending on the designer. They were typically made of muslin or cotton and had long sleeves and high necklines to complement an elaborate hat.⁴¹ It was common for afternoon dresses to be darker in color to reduce the amount of washing needed after being out and about on the streets of London.⁴²

⁴⁰ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 44.

⁴¹ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 51; “The Cost of the London Season,” *The Gentlewoman* 36, no. 929 (April 25, 1908): 551.

⁴² Dresses and skirts meant to be worn outside would also be fitted with either an additional layer of protective fabric or a strip of bias or hem tape at

Luncheon, and the later afternoon meal called “tea,” acted as a supplement to morning calls. Luncheon could occur at someone’s house, but according to *The Gentlewoman*, “it is, however, the fashion in these days for the highest society to show itself more in public than was the case generations ago” and it had become much more common to eat at a hotel or restaurant in the fashionable West End neighborhood of London.⁴³ Due to its public nature, a luncheon’s dress code was similar to that of an afternoon call. Tea, on the other hand, was almost exclusively taken at home amongst close friends and called for a looser fitting garment over a looser corset, or no corset at all; it was a time for a woman to let her guard down and gear up for an evening of social activity. If a woman had no afternoon calls to undertake, she might skip afternoon dress and change straight into her tea gown from her morning garments. Regardless of the level of familiarity with her guests, a woman’s tea gown was highly decorated and was meant to express wealth, leisure, and luxury.⁴⁴ In the Edwardian era, when men more commonly kept “business hours,” tea was almost exclusively a women’s event.⁴⁵ Dressing appropriately to attend all of these less formal social events helped maintain a woman’s social status and improved her chances of receiving an invitation to a more prestigious event.

the bottom edge. This was to protect the actual skirt fabric from dragging on the street and fraying.

⁴³ “A Famous Home of Rank and Fashion,” *The Gentlewoman* 36, no. 876 (April 20, 1907): 524.

⁴⁴ Some common fabrics and styles of teagowns, along with photos of extant garments, can be found in Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 50.

⁴⁵ For more on the transition of business hours for men, see Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 36.



Fig. 6: An evening dress design from 1901 by Ernest Raudnitz heavily decorated with sequins, ruffles, and applique leaves. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Victoria and Albert Museum Department of Prints and Drawings and Department of Paintings Accessions 1957—1958. Color lithograph. 1901. London: HSMO, 1964.

Dinner, the next event in a woman's day, was considered the most important event for making good impressions and sparking connections between young people. According to *Fifty Years of London Society*, "the majority of people seldom dine at home in the season unless they are entertaining friends."⁴⁶ Like introductions, invitations to dinner existed in a strict hierarchical system, and, in the Victorian era, were usually written at least two weeks before the event. The introduction of the telephone in the Edwardian era began to supplant written invitations.⁴⁷ But regardless of the method of invitation, evening dress was much

⁴⁶ *Fifty Years of London Society*, 59.

⁴⁷ "Social London: Past and Present. Part II," 18.

more formal than afternoon dress. Evening dresses were made of luxurious fabrics like silk and chiffon and featured elaborate decoration, often including materials that reflected light.⁴⁸ Mid-length or short sleeves and low-cut necklines were also expected for evening events.⁴⁹ For debutantes and young girls, dinner parties were an opportunity to talk with adults outside their family and make connections with other young people. Many young ladies made lifelong friends during their Seasons that could be called upon to help make advantageous connections among future children.

Balls, which could occur up to several times weekly, required ball gowns and a display of the family's best jewelry. Ball gowns were full-length with a slight train, had off-the-shoulder necklines and lacy, almost nonexistent sleeves. Chiffon, silk flower decorations, and elaborate embroidery helped secure the ball gown as the Edwardians' most luxurious outfit. According to *The Gentlewoman*, "after Court dress, ball gowns form the most expensive item, especially for a girl who dances a great deal, and whose clothes in consequence want a great deal of renovating."⁵⁰ Ball gowns were also sometimes accompanied by a *sortie de bal* or an "opera cloak" to cover young ladies as they entered or left the venue. Debutantes wore lighter colors and used simple jewelry to broadcast their marital position. A full *parure* (a set) of matching heirloom jewelry pieces was only worn by married women for the grandest events such as royal balls or

⁴⁸ The most famous Edwardian evening gown expressing this quality was arguably Lady Curzon's "peacock dress" worn to the 1903 Delhi Durbar in India, which was completely covered by gold and silver embroidery in the shape of peacock feathers with reflective beetle wings at the eye of each feather. It can be seen at Kedleston Hall in the George Nathaniel Curzon collection.

⁴⁹ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 51.

⁵⁰ "The Cost of the London Season," 552.



Fig. 7: A debutante in her ball gown designed by the Ney Sisters shown in a 1905 edition of the Sphere. The caption noted the use of tulle, Venetian lace sleeves, and a sky-blue satin belt. "Women's Sphere." Sphere 21, no. 278 (May 20, 1905): iv.

coronations. The jewelry was passed down from mother to eldest son and worn by his wife, and it was common for each generation to alter the jewelry to match the latest style.⁵¹ Young debutantes, not yet in possession of a *parure*, wore simple jewelry and light-colored, "delicate" dresses that advertised not only their status among women, but also their availability as a marriage prospect. This non-verbal communication of marital status was duly noted both by older women playing matchmaker, but also by young men who, in the Edwardian era, began to attend and dance at balls more regularly.

⁵¹ A *parure* consisted of a tiara, large matching necklace, a hair ornament, elaborate matching earrings, and bracelets. Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 56.



Fig. 8: A dust-coat advertised in the 1907 Season edition of The Gentlewoman. "The Claremont" The Gentlewoman 34, no. 876 (April 20, 1907): xxxi.

With the widespread introduction of motor cars in the early Edwardian era, travel became easier and faster, and many young people took advantage of this convenience to venture farther afield. Women, to protect their dresses from oil, wind, and rain, wore "dusters," also called tourist coats, dust-cloaks, or dust-coats, made of an easily washable linen or cloth on their drives. These coats were invented in the mid-Victorian era for train travel but were adapted throughout the years to follow the silhouette of women's clothing. Early iterations were more poncho-like and did not allow the woman to raise her arms very high. In the Edwardian era, however, dusters became much more like modern coats and allowed for a broader

range of motion in response to the increased number of women drivers. Women also wore silk "motoring scarves" to protect their hairstyles.⁵²

Many unmarried women would go to visit the country houses of relatives or friends on long weekends for dinner parties, fancy-dress balls, hunting, shooting, sightseeing, or garden parties. According to some social commentators, marriage connections were more likely to happen in these more private

⁵² "A Review of the Dress World," 600.

dwelling than in the thick of London events.⁵³ By examining the experience of these women, and by looking at their packing lists, we can get a sense of the amount of time and care put into dressing appropriately. Cynthia Asquith, a young English socialite who participated in the Season around 1909, noted,

A large fraction of our time was spent in changing our clothes, particularly in the winter, when you came down to breakfast ready for church in your ‘best dress,’ made probably of velvet if you could afford it, or velveteen if you couldn’t. After church you went into tweeds. You always changed again before tea, into a ‘tea gown’ if you possessed that special creation; the less affluent wore a summer day frock. However small your dress allowance, a different dinner dress for each night was considered necessary.⁵⁴

Cynthia’s packing list for a single weekend away included one set of “Sunday best,” two tweed coats and skirts with appropriate shirts, three evening dresses, three garments suitable for tea, her best hat, other hats and caps for outdoor activities, riding habit, billycock hat (for riding), several pairs each of indoor and outdoor shoes, boots, gaiters, petticoats, shawls, scarves, and some

⁵³ According to the author of “Are Marriages Made in London?” in *The Gentlewoman*, the short time that debutantes and bachelors were allowed to be with each other at dinners and dances in London was not enough time to make a true connection. She posits that the country provides more opportunity and activities that they can attend together without raising suspicions of impropriety. She concludes by saying that even if marriage proposals happen during the Season in London, it is likely that the couple actually met at a country house before the Season began. “Are Marriages Made in London?” *The Gentlewoman* 30, no. 771 (April 15, 1905): 333.

⁵⁴ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 60. Cynthia was the daughter-in-law of the British Prime Minister H. H. Asquith (1852-1928), a writer, and author J. M. Barrie’s secretary.

ornamental hair combs and wreaths.⁵⁵ Shorter “destination” events, like the fancy-dress balls that took place at larger venues outside London like Stafford House or Warwick Castle, also necessitated a large amount of luggage. As noted by Pullar, “the railway platform would be piled with mountains of roofed boxes, for changing was an occupation which occurred at least four times a day.”⁵⁶ Maintaining good fashion sense, even when out of one’s element, played into the aristocratic ideal of effortlessness cemented by Victorian etiquette. As the amount of travel increased during the Edwardian era, short visits to the country for balls, sporting events like Ascot and Newmarket, and for holidays like Whitsuntide (Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter) became more popular and the amount of time spent in London proper decreased.

Royal Ascot was perhaps the most important public social event of the Season. Occurring every year in August, securing tickets and admission to the Royal enclosure was one of the best ways to display wealth and status; the only way to gain admission was to be sponsored by someone who already had tickets. In the Edwardian era, Ascot lasted a week and most families rented out a house in nearby Windsor in order to easily attend the event and host parties in their rented accommodation. Dressing for Ascot was one of the highlights of the Season. Since the public was able to attend, and thereby take note of who was seated in the royal enclosure, most women used this event to display their most fashionable pieces. Most outfits were similar to formal afternoon dresses but were heavily trimmed so that they resembled eveningwear.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁶ Philippa Pullar, *Gilded Butterflies: The Rise and Fall of the London Season* (London: 1978), 149.

⁵⁷ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 30.



Fig. 9: An Ascot dress designed by Jeanne Paquin from 1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Victoria and Albert Museum Department of Prints and Drawings and Department of Paintings Accessions 1957-1958. Color lithograph. 1901. London: HMSO, 1964.

Each woman required a different dress for each day, “except perhaps on the Friday, when sometimes a toilette that has appeared early in the week will pass muster.”⁵⁸ If the debutante and her chaperone were lucky enough to be invited into the Royal enclosure, which was closer to the race track, they would also require dust cloaks to protect their clothes from flying dirt.

Hats were the focal points of Ascot fashion. Unlike previous eras, there was no one stylish Edwardian hat shape, but it was expected that one’s hat would match one’s dress either in color or decoration.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ “The Cost of the London Season,” 550.

⁵⁹ Pritchard, “London and Paris Fashions,” 414.

Popular decorations included chiffon, tulle, feathers, and flowers. These hats would often be supported by *bandeaux* covered with ribbons and flowers, and “full hairstyles, sometimes assisted by ‘transformations’ (false hairpieces) and a battery of long, decorative hat-pins conspired to create the illusion of hats floating upon the head rather than being worn.”⁶⁰ Choosing a hat to wear was a ceremony in itself. Most milliners and stores had lavish display rooms with snacks and drinks available as women shopped, further demonstrating the importance of hat selection. As tempting as it was for women to go over the top with their hat decoration, it was still expected that hats should not take “originality beyond the empire of good taste.”⁶¹

The most public formal event a young lady would ever participate in, her presentation at court, required an elaborate, fashionable look. Most court gowns consisted of layers upon layers of fine white silk, a long trailing train, a long white veil, long white gloves, and a headdress, often containing an ostrich feather for decoration.⁶²

Court presentations were tracked incredibly closely by the hostesses of the Season through newspaper reports and Society gossip. Because this event often launched the Season in May, any lady showing promise at her presentation would be tapped for the most exclusive parties later that summer. Given the stakes, and her own inexperience, a young girl was not left on her own to determine her outfit. A debutante’s court outfit would go through many stages of planning and approval before seeing the outside of her house. Davidoff explains the scrutiny a debutante was under from her entire household: “on the day itself, when she was finally dressed and ready, the girl was admired by the whole

⁶⁰ Valerie Cumming, *The Visual History of Costume Accessories* (New York: 1998), 127.

⁶¹ “A Review of the Dress World,” 600.

⁶² Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 52.

household circle of relatives and servants whose differential approval added to her feeling of importance.”⁶³ Presentation dresses were almost never bought “off the rack” and required multiple planning meetings and fittings between the young girl, her mother or sponsor, and the designer.

A young lady’s family would often shell out a small fortune just for her court presentation dress, and the overall cost of participating in a London Season could be astronomical. In an extremely effective gatekeeping strategy, economizing during the Season was seen as unfashionable and could have a more detrimental effect on a young lady’s social position than not participating at all. Ladies’ magazines did not offer any cost-saving advice and encouraged spending on fashion and luxurious fabric for the sake of the Season at any cost: “economise if one must in the autumn, but spend in the spring-time and the summer-time, that are worthy of the dainty petticoats and dainty shoes, the lacey frock, the muslins, the taffetas, the voiles.”⁶⁴ This expectation of expenditure was essentially a young lady’s entrance fee to the Season. If it were clear that she had not spent enough, which could be easily detected through her fashion choices, she would not be expected to be successful in the marriage market.

In an article aimed at families considering participating in the Season, *The Gentlewoman* examined the total monetary cost of a single London Season to an average upper-class family living outside of London.⁶⁵ The article included average prices for renting a house, mansion, hotel, and car, as well as estimated prices for clothing, entertaining one’s friends, attending the opera or theatre, and more. All estimated costs averaged, a three-month London Season could cost a family around £1,000 (£120,000 in

⁶³ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁴ “A Review of the Dress World,” 600.

⁶⁵ “The Cost of the London Season,” 550.

2020) in addition to their regular expenses such as domestic staff wages, food, consumer goods, non-Season clothing, international travel, excursions, etc.⁶⁶ By far the most costly portion of the Season was clothing for the young debutante and her chaperone; at least £233 (£28,213 in 2020) for the debutante and at least £155 (£18,768 in 2020) for her chaperone.⁶⁷ For an average family of the upper class, or perhaps one that was on the cusp of middle and upper class, spending this amount would have seemed worthwhile if it meant their daughter had the opportunity to marry well.⁶⁸ If, as was extremely common, the family participated in multiple Seasons, or if they had multiple daughters, the Season could be a constant drain on their finances, making an advantageous yet prompt match all the more essential.

Keeping an expensive fashionable image in an effort to gain entry into Society for the purpose of maintaining one's wealth may seem like a frivolous, insular cycle. So why should historians care about the spending habits and marriage rituals of Edwardian aristocrats? In addition to providing a fascinating display of gendered power structures and social expectation, the Season greatly affected London's overall economy. If not for the scores of upper-class families utilizing London's service industry and the women enforcing strict fashion requirements and hosting

⁶⁶ For comparison, the average *yearly* wage in 1908 of a lady's maid was between £10 and £20; £180,000 is \$222,600.

⁶⁷ The most expensive item for a young debutante was her court dress and accessories, which would run her about £30 (£3,600 in 2020). Combined, the other fifteen dresses she would need for a Season cost about £150 (£18,000 in 2020). Additionally, a young woman's hats totaled about £27 (£3,200 in 2020), with hats for Ascot being the most expensive at £5 each. For more detail, see "The Cost of the London Season," 552.

⁶⁸ For a family at the lower end of the upper class, this could mean finding her a rich husband to support her after marriage. For a family at the higher end of the upper class, this could mean finding her a husband with a title to solidify her social rank.

expensive social events, the retail landscape of the city would have developed very differently. According to Richardson, the Season “launched the careers of fashionable dressmakers, hairdressers, makeup artists, designers, florists, and dancing masters. It created markets for women’s magazines and gazettes that were the prototypes of today’s fashion magazines. It provided steady work for painters, photographers, and musicians, and for the social secretaries who were the forerunners of publicists, the gatekeepers of today’s social scene.”⁶⁹

When considered in toto, the impact of an entire Season’s worth of aristocratic expenditure amounted to enough activity to float some industries. The Season’s spending typically began in March or April with the ordering of dresses, hats, and accessories in the latest fashions. If, as was noted in the *Norfolk Eastern Weekly Leader*, the Season’s weather was mild after a cold winter, “the demand for light summer gowns, hats, toques, and capes [would be] almost unprecedentedly large.”⁷⁰ In 1908, *The Gentlewoman* published an article that hoped for a “good” Season that would make up for the “bad” winter: “the shops have had a very bad winter season; a good spurt of gaiety might pull them round again. ... And as it is with the shops, the dressmakers, the florists, so is it with many other classes of the community. Much depends on a gay London Season.”⁷¹ Once the Season started, total Society expenditures on various social events were

⁶⁹ Richardson, *The Season*, 174.

⁷⁰ “The London Season,” *Eastern Weekly Leader*, August 3, 1895, 5.

⁷¹ “The Coming Season,” *The Gentlewoman* 36, no. 929 (April 25, 1908): 554. In a specific example from 1894 in the *Hampshire / Portsmouth Telegraph*, “the less said about the season that has gone the better. It was disappointing, discouraging, unmistakably bad, and according to an article in the special autumn number of the *Drapery World*, a season that defied resuscitation, and refused to respond to the many-sided enterprise of the drapery trade.” “The ‘New Woman’ and the Season,” *Hampshire/Portsmouth Telegraph*, October 20, 1894, 11.

enormous: £600,000 (£72 million in 2020) on theatres and concerts, £2,900 per minute of actual racing at Ascot, and £50,000 each at Henley Royal Regatta (a rowing race) and the annual varsity cricket match between Oxford and Cambridge.⁷² In 1908, London Society collectively spent £2 million (£242 million in 2020) above its normal, off-season expenditures, during the London Season.⁷³

As young ladies shopped for Season outfits, they were exploring their new lives as adults. Attending parties, socializing in Hyde Park, crafting one-of-a-kind outfits, and making new friends were incredibly enjoyable experiences that Edwardian ladies looked forward to for their entire childhoods. But simply purchasing and wearing the correct clothing to the right events was not enough to secure them Society marriages. Wearing the fashions appropriately—toeing the fine line between standing out and blending in—demonstrated that they could embody the Edwardian ideal of Society womanhood. It was the combination of these two displays, one material and one performative, that opened the door to further social advancement through marriage.

The most important choice of a woman's life was her choice of husband. A good choice meant that her wealth was protected, that she would be able to level-up in Society, and carried the hope that she would be, if not in love, at least happy within her new family. A successful debutante spent her Seasons searching for a husband with the aid of older Society women she met along the way. The tools in her arsenal—manners, taste, fashion, and connections—if used correctly, allowed her to gain entry to the best parts of the marriage market and, hopefully, find her a “happily ever after” that would bolster her status in Society.

⁷² Harold MacFarlane, “L: S: D of a London Season,” *Lady's Realm* 26 (May-October 1909): 71.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 71.

The Edwardian Season acts as a microcosm of the matrimonial economy of the upper class. By studying this small section of the population, to whom marriage and power mattered so much, we are able to understand some of the vast gendered and class-based power structures that existed in the early twentieth century. Society women held immense power over the marriage market by controlling access to events and facilitating meetings between eligible bachelors and interested debutantes. By weeding out unworthy entrants to the London social scene by reinforcing upper-class, gendered expectations of style, effortless, and comportment, Society women were able to keep their wealth intact. If committing a social faux pas or possessing an air of “trying too hard,” were all that kept a family from making it into the upper-class marriage market—and therefore into upper-class society—then the gatekeepers of that system had power indeed.

Trouble and Change in the Green Mountain State: The Great Depression's Impact on Vermont

Nick Wendell

Ever since the days of its renowned son Ethan Allen, the state of Vermont has widely been perceived as a place of immense hardiness and enduring self-sufficiency. In many ways, Ethan Allen embodies the brand of stoicism that the nation as a whole has come to associate with Vermont. After all, Allen was a farmer and fighter by trade, as well as a spirited advocate for the independence of the state. His defining principles, and eventually those of the state itself, are probably articulated nowhere more clearly than in the following statement. In this quote dating to 1781, the leader of the storied Green Mountain Boys states, “I am as resolutely determined to defend the Independence of Vermont as Congress are that of the United States and rather than fail will retire with hardy Green Mountain Boys into the desolate caverns of the mountains and wage war with human nature at large!”¹ The famous quote has since been emblazoned on the Vermont State House in Montpelier.

Not only do Allen’s words make reference to the rugged terrain that influences common characterizations of Vermonters, they also speak to the stubborn independence and willpower thought to define the essence of the state. More than a century later, U.S. president and Vermont native Calvin Coolidge echoed these sentiments in a speech of his own. Speaking before a crowd in Bennington in 1928, the president declared, “I love Vermont because of her hills and valleys, her scenery and invigorating climate, but most of all because of her indomitable people... If the spirit of liberty should vanish in other parts of the Union it

¹ Henry Hall, *Ethan Allen: The Robin Hood of Vermont* (Norderstedt, Germany: Hansebooks, 2017), 105.

could all be replenished from the generous store held by the people of this brave little state of Vermont.”² It is little wonder then that Vermonters, unflinching in the face of a bitter climate and gritty lifestyle, are understood as impervious by nature. Part of this characterization is also rooted in the resourcefulness required to make such an existence possible. As author and activist Dorothy Canfield Fisher once said, “Vermont is the only place in America where I ever hear thrift spoken of with respect.”³ This presumption of extreme resourcefulness, coupled with the state’s small, stagnant population and agricultural history laid the foundation for widespread belief in the state’s immunity to external pressures.

When the Great Depression eventually hit in 1929, historians were inclined to believe that the diminutive state tucked far up in the north hardly felt a thing. As historian Sara Gregg explains,

Legend has it that residents of the hills of Vermont were slow to notice the Depression during the early 1930s: These already-depressed towns initially suffered little from the widespread food shortages and industrial failures. In fact, the subsistence farming that was common in many hill towns was touted by some as a long-range solution to the economic troubles of

² Calvin Coolidge, “Vermont Is a State I Love.” Speech, Bennington VT, September 21, 1928.

³ Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Tourists Accommodated; Some Scenes from Present-day Summer Life, Written by Dorothy Canfield Fisher out of Experiences, Cheerful and Otherwise, of Her Neighbors in the North District of Arlington, Vermont...*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), 10.

the Depression and as evidence of the security of farms.⁴

This viewpoint is substantiated by the work of Walter Hard and others, who argued that the social structure of Vermont produced people who were uniquely qualified to cope with the Depression. According to Hard, “The entire community placed the highest value on personal and household self-sufficiency. From the earliest childhood they were taught the old-fashioned values of thrift and frugality, along with practical skills of making do with little.”⁵ In other words, Vermont’s familiarity with struggle allegedly protected the state from harms associated with the depression. A more concise and recent version of this viewpoint is provided by Vermont historian Mark Bushnell in his book, *It Happened In Vermont*. Bushnell summarizes this commonly held viewpoint by stating, “People like to say that Vermonters were so poor before the Great Depression that they never noticed its arrival.”⁶ Historian Richard Judd compares Depression-era Americans outside of Vermont with Vermonters to arrive at a similar conclusion:

All of the memorable figures of the 1930’s, the stricken bankers and stockbrokers, the displaced Okies of the dust bowl and the mortgage ridden one crop farmers of the plains, the sit down strikers and dispirited relief workers, the enthusiastic brain trusters and willing young bureaucrats, seem far removed from

⁴ Sara Gregg, “Can We ‘Trust Uncle Sam’? Vermont and the Submarginal Lands Project, 1934–1936,” *Vermont History* 42, no. 1, 202.

⁵ Walter Hard, “Vermont—A Way of Life,” *Survey Graphic*, vol. 68, (July 1932), 301.

⁶ Mark Bushnell, *It Happened in Vermont* (Guilford, Connecticut: Globe Pequot Press, 2009), 35.

the thrifty Vermont farmer, working with axe or scythe
in his hillside sugar bush or mowing.⁷

Here we see one of the foremost authorities on the topic casting still more doubt on Vermont's proximity to the effects of the Great Depression. And, in keeping with the standard assessment of the situation, the state's humble agricultural roots are once again to blame.

While the historical record may have deemed Vermont indifferent to the disastrous effects of the Great Depression, the truth is that the Great Depression was a landmark occurrence in Vermont. Just as it did in the rest of the country, the Depression brought a multitude of varied and severe consequences for the Green Mountain state which were felt deeply by its residents. Ultimately these consequences shook the state to its core and can today be observed along political, economic, and social lines. The state's twin economic engines, manufacturing and agriculture, were ravaged. The Depression also ushered in a state-wide political reevaluation marked by increasing acceptance towards progressive ideology. Such changes impacted individual lives and livelihoods irreversibly, leading to a number of diverse outcomes among the very inhabitants of the state itself. In the following pages the nature of these impacts will be explained in more detail. This argument will serve to reconfigure predominant understandings of the time period as they appear in mainstream historical consciousness.

The Great Depression announced itself in America on October 29, 1929, a day now remembered as Black Tuesday. As this fateful Tuesday came and went, so commenced a ten-year period now remembered as one of the greatest catastrophes in American history. All told, the market had lost 50 billion dollars

⁷ Richard Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont, Its Impacts and Aftermaths* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1979), 10.

in the nine days leading up to October 29, and 15 billion on the 29th alone.⁸ According to historian James D. Horan, the nine-day period of loss corresponds to an equivalent sum of 250 to 500 billion dollars in today's money.⁹ With this, the bull market bubble had officially burst and America was quickly sliding into unbridled economic freefall. Less than a year later, 26,000 businesses had failed, and another 28,000 went bankrupt in 1931. For those still in operation, it was not unlikely for workers to see wage reductions between 40-60 percent.¹⁰ In the manufacturing sector in Ohio alone, wage earners saw a 25 percent decline in their incomes from 1929 to 1930. This was followed by another loss of 21 percent the next year and a further 17 percent in 1932, totaling out at a reduction of 65 percent in wages in three short years.¹¹

Economic historian Michael Bernstein estimates that at the height of the Depression, 13 million Americans were unemployed, accounting for 25 percent of the country's labor force. Bernstein also maintains that from the stock market collapse in late 1929 until the middle of the 1930s, the physical output of goods and services contracted by 33 percent.¹² Indeed, by the end of 1931, the nation's volume of manufacturing was only 54 percent of what it had been before the crash. In Chicago alone, officials reported that of the city's 125,000 registered tradesmen, only about 10,000 had worked regularly in the last two

⁸ Don Nardo, *The Great Depression* (Detroit, Michigan: Lucent Books, 2008), 19.

⁹ James D Horan, *The Desperate Years: A Pictorial History of the Thirties*, (New York: Bonanza, 1962), 10.

¹⁰ Nardo, *The Great Depression*, 61.

¹¹ David Shannon, *The Great Depression* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1960), 6.

¹² Michael Bernstein, *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 48.

years leading up to 1933.¹³ From a national perspective, the gross national product was nearly a third less in 1933 than what it had been prior to 1929. General optimism had all but been extinguished as the country reeled from a knockout blow dealt to income, employment, and value.

American farmers were particularly vulnerable. Even before the events of 1929 transpired, farmers had been hard pressed by the expansion of overseas production, rising costs, and new tariffs. According to John Baumann, author of *In the Eye of the Great Depression*, “Experts dated the beginning of the rural depression from 1921, when the index of farm purchasing power plummeted to 75, using the halcyon years 1907–1914 as the base of 100. Although the index had climbed to 90 in 1929, by 1932 it had plunged to 56.”¹⁴ Farmers were plagued by plummeting prices, and between 1925 and 1929 nearly every agricultural commodity traded in world markets fell in price.¹⁵ Farmers in 1933 were also heavily indebted compared to their fellow Americans. Agricultural mortgage debt was 270 percent of personal farm income, and there were nearly 100 foreclosures per 1,000 mortgaged farms, compared to just 13.3 for every 1,000 mortgaged non-farm structures.¹⁶ During the two-year period between 1931 and 1932, one county in Iowa reported that twelve and a half percent of its farms had gone under the hammer, and

¹³ Nardo, *The Great Depression*, 19.

¹⁴ John Baumann, *In the Eye of the Great Depression: New Deal Reporters and the Agony of the American People* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), 118.

¹⁵ John Garrity, *The Great Depression* (San Diego, California: Harcourt Publishers, 1986), 52.

¹⁶ Tyler Smith, “As Farmers Go, So Goes The Nation,” American Economic Association, last modified March 25, 2019,

<https://www.aeaweb.org/research/farmer-recovery-great-depression>

that almost 25 percent of mortgaged farm real estate was foreclosed.¹⁷

In terms of economic suffering, Vermont was no exception to the rule seen nationally. Yet once again, Vermont's woes have been misjudged thanks to its reputation as a sleepy northern state sheltered—rather than endangered—by its bucolic way of life. As one commissioner of forestry once erroneously described the state, “Though most of the residents live on farms, few cultivate more than an acre of land. They prefer to earn their living at road work and odd jobs. The whole philosophy of life in the town is not ‘to get on’ but ‘to be content.’ Its charm is expressed in the words of one of its citizens, ‘There is no hurry here. It is always afternoon.’”¹⁸ Though the commissioner's words undersell Vermont's economy as comatose and positioned to lose very little at the hands of the Depression, the state was in fact at the forefront of industry in the years leading up to the Depression, specifically with regard to manufacturing.

Details of the might of Vermont industry can be found in a radio address broadcasted by Governor Stanley Wilson on June 6th, 1931. Governor Wilson prefaces the broadcast by addressing misguided notions about the state's economic vitality that persist to this day. “I do not want you to get the idea,” the Governor stresses, “that Vermont has no standing as an agricultural state. My state is properly classed as agricultural, and our industries take creditable positions when compared with other states.”¹⁹ Wilson's assessment is modest for a state that was home to the Granite Capital of the world in Barre as of 1929. The city earned its title by powering the state to become the largest producer of

¹⁷ Shannon, *The Great Depression*, 21.

¹⁸ Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Forestry of the State of Vermont for the Term Ending June 30, 1932 (Montpelier, 1932), 46.

¹⁹ Stanley C Wilson, “Vermont's Place in Industry,” Station WBZ, Massachusetts, June 6, 1931.

monumental granite in the entire country. In 1928 quarries in Barre alone were producing a total of 252,232 tons of granite to be used in finished memorials.²⁰ Vermont also led all states in the country in the production of marble. According to Wilson, the state supplied about 60 percent of all monumetary and statuary marble and 29% of the building marble used in the country. Slate was another important raw material in Vermont, of which the state produced double the amount quarried by all other states in the country. In 1925, the total value of these products exceeded 20 million dollars.

Wilson's report also shows that there was a total of 1,790 manufacturing establishments in 1925, employing 32 percent of the state's workforce and accounting for 132,269,861 dollars in total manufacturing revenue. A wide range of manufactured goods were produced all across Vermont in the years before the Depression. Early 20th century St. Johnsbury, for instance, was home to the largest scale factory in the world. At the same time Winooski boasted the largest screen factory in the world. The city of Burlington was the global leader in the production of portable ovens, brush fiber, package dyes, and butter color. A plant in Weathersfield led the world in its variety of soapstone products, and one in Brattleboro had the largest pipe organ factory in the world. Vermont also had a robust textile industry responsible for manufacturing 17,523,106 dollars' worth of woolen, worsted, and cotton goods.²¹ With Vermont's manufacturing sector playing such a significant role in the economy, much of the state's financial livelihood was in jeopardy on the eve of the Depression. And, in keeping with the rest of the country, the Depression showed little mercy towards the factories and workers of Vermont during its reign of terror.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

The granite capital of the world declared bankruptcy in 1933, becoming a bellwether of the fortunes that would befall the rest of the state. According to numbers put forward by Mark Bushnell, the overall revenues of Vermont manufacturing would be more than halved by the end of the same year, dropping from 133 million dollars per annum to just 57 million. Likewise, the number of industrial workers in Vermont fell from 27,000 to 15,000.²² Needless to say, the wages of those workers who still retained employment would have dropped considerably as well. Total wages from industry fell from 33,809,987 dollars in 1928 to 12,456,113 dollars in 1933. Vermont plants were devastated during this period. The Depression had left a measly 530 factories in its wake, a far cry from the nearly two thousand establishments counted in 1925.²³ In the words of Bennington textile mill worker Arthur Cardinal, “The mills closed down; nobody worked. Where they could they normally ran two shifts, maybe worked a little part time. But they were working for twenty or thirty cents an hour.”²⁴ Gone were the proud days of industrial prowess advertised by Governor Wilson, and in their place stood a saddening reminder of the Depression’s capacity for destruction in Vermont.

Agriculture comprised the other part of Vermont’s economic motor in the time prior to the Depression. Fluid milk was by far the state’s most important agricultural product and Vermont functioned as the heart of New England’s milk supply,

²² Bushnell, *It Happened in Vermont*, 35.

²³ Woodsmoke Productions and Vermont Historical Society, “Vermont in the Great Depression, 1929,” *The Green Mountain Chronicles* radio broadcast and background information, original broadcast 1988-89.

<https://vermonthistory.org/vermont-in-great-depression-1929>

²⁴ Arthur Cardinal, interview by Mary Kasamatsu, “Green Mountain Chronicles” Oral History Transcriptions, 1981-1989, Vermont Historical Society, August 16, 1988.

producing at a rate of one and a quarter billion pounds of milk annually.²⁵ Not long after 1929 though, the prices that Vermont farmers could get for their milk were driven down by a dearth of interest from their main consumer base in the Boston area (a region that had consumed 11 million quarts of whole milk no later than 1931).²⁶ Serious competition had also begun to emerge from midwestern dairy farmers who were capable of producing and transporting milk at lower and lower price points. Neighboring Canada, with whom the state government had sanctioned reciprocal trade agreements, also became a major threat as conditions worsened stateside. Income from the sale of fluid milk consequently dropped by more than half from 1929 and 1933. In some places, the price of fluid milk reached 2.67 cents per quart—far less than the cost to the farmer for feed and equipment. Decline in demand for agricultural products that farmers had once used to supplement their incomes, such as potatoes and lumber, further reduced agricultural workers’ purchasing power to its lowest level since 1877.

Commissioner of Agriculture E.H. Jones acknowledged the many troubles facing the Vermont dairy industry in his biennial report for 1932 and 1933. Jones plainly stated that the biennial period had been an “extremely trying time” for Vermont farmers. He pointed to steadily increasing delinquent taxes and unpaid interest and wrote that “The general banking situation restricted local farm credit to such an extent that dairymen have found it impossible to purchase the usual supply of commercial feeds and fertilizers.” He continued, stating that a “Lack of parity between prices of equipment and supplies farmers purchased, and the price of commodities which they sell, have continued to be a

²⁵ Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont*, 10.

²⁶ Stanley C Wilson, “The Dairy Industry of Vermont,” Station WBZ, Massachusetts, June 6, 1931.

tremendous handicap.”²⁷ According to Governor Aiken, two thirds of the state's dairymen were forced to run their farms on less than fifty dollars a month by 1937.²⁸ Many Vermont farmers were forced to sell out, ending generational traditions of tending to the land and livestock. More than 1,500 farms went out of business in the decade following 1929. This put much of the land out of cultivation, and by 1930 the proportion of unimproved farmland had risen to 60 percent. The total number of Vermonters employed in agriculture during the same period declined from 27 percent to 22 percent of the total work force.²⁹ Clearly Vermont was not simple backwoods fortified against and oblivious to national economic downturn, but rather a once-robust industrial and agricultural powerhouse that did in fact have much to lose with the onset of the Great Depression.

Another indication of the Great Depression’s outsized impact on Vermont can be observed from a political perspective. Historically, Vermont had identified as a Republican state priding itself on old fashioned Yankee policy and conservatism. A great deal of the state's political activity took place at the local level, overseen by the patriarchal leadership of hill town chieftains. In this respect very little had changed since the first settlers had come to the Green Mountain state and wedded themselves to the classically New England town-hall-based system of political organization. The essence of this system had its roots set in a fundamental wariness of the federal government. Vermonters had long felt that the government was incapable of catering to the state or its inhabitants' best interests and so watched their every move with distrust. The longevity of this system was initially supported

²⁷ Vermont Department of Agriculture, Seventeenth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the State of Vermont, 1933-1944, 5.

²⁸ Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont*, 10.

²⁹ Woodsmoke Productions and Vermont Historical Society, “Vermont in the Great Depression, 1929.”

and later critically reassessed with the coming of the Great Depression.

In a number of ways, the Depression represented a perfect storm for the reflexively Republican state. At once, the state was faced head on by a Depression, the looming threat of large-scale democratic government intervention, and the awakening of a progressive movement. The response to the depression proposed by the federal government was of course none other than Roosevelt's famous New Deal, one of the most famous examples of progressive public spending legislation in American history. Vermonters were antagonistic to the New Deal and its progressive flavor, and many of its regulations and projects were met with opposition from the state. Vermonters decried the Green Mountain Parkway project (which was ultimately defeated), the Mansfield and Norris Bill (which sought to acquire submarginal land for government purposes), and the National Industrial Recovery Act (which was denounced for allegedly raising operating costs). Complaints were also directed at the Connecticut Valley Flood Control project, which Vermonters saw as a matter better handled by the state than a federally supervised cooperative.³⁰ Skepticism and resistance towards federal initiatives and expenditure had always been an integral part of Vermont's political identity, but times were rapidly changing, and forces on the national stage threatened to upend everything the state's voters had previously stood for.

The disorienting political situation that Vermonters found themselves in is well conveyed in an editorial from the *St. Albans Daily Messenger*. In it, readers are reminded of the hour of reckoning that was fast approaching the state. The editorial urged its readers to appreciate the enormity of the decision ahead of them, stating: "What the voter must decide is whether he approves

³⁰ Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont*, 10.

the continuance of the form of government established with the birth of the nation... or whether he approves an unmistakable departure which can only mean, under the present leadership, a government of strong centralization vesting in the executive unlimited and finally dictatorial power.”³¹ In issuing this call to action the *Daily Messenger* put forth an ultimatum that was simple yet crucial to the political identity of the state: did Vermonters want an “un-american” government to supplant its established institutions?

Their answer defied expectation. Being one of only six states to vote for incumbent Hoover in his landslide defeat to Roosevelt in 1932, Vermont was far from infatuated with Roosevelt.³² Yet, albeit timidly, the state began to show a willingness to shake their historic sympathies and increasingly embrace progressive causes. As Richard Judd explains, “Politically, Vermont officials met the agents of the New Deal halfway, in spite of a good deal of partisan reluctance to admit them into the state.”³³ Vermonters reluctantly accepted that even if they did not wholeheartedly endorse the actions of the federal government, it would be wrong to miss out on their fair share of relief. Opinions were also swayed by the success of well-regarded programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which built 20 plus state parks, the Waterbury and Winooski dams, and employed 11,243 Vermonters.³⁴ The CCC was fondly acknowledged as a veritable Green Mountain institution as well as a major boon to the democratic campaign. Comprehensive buy-in was ultimately signaled by the state’s decision to re-elect Roosevelt in 1936.

³¹ Editorial, *the St. Albans Daily Messenger*, November 3, 1936, 6.

³² Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont*, 10.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Casey Seiler, “New Deal’s Best Deal,” *The Burlington Free Press*, March 10, 1996.

Progressive politics gained considerable traction in Vermont now that a shift in political opinion was underway. Judd gives a nod to the origins of this transformation, explaining that “The Republicans remained in power throughout the 30s and 40s, but a progressive Republican wing developed early under the leadership of Senator Ernest Gibson and Governor George Aiken.”³⁵ Senator Gibson in particular became a powerful advocate of social security, labor unions, and other public benefit initiatives, championing important legislation to improve the lives of Vermont’s most vulnerable. In a chapter titled “The Future of Liberalism in Vermont,” Judd encapsulates the spirit of social idealism that was now on the rise, reminding us that “Anti-New Deal sentiments did not impede the states continued progress in cooperation with the Federal agencies, in the fields of social security, relief and unemployment, education, and state planning.”³⁶ The sum of these efforts and initiatives would later become known as the “Gibson New Deal,” which notably included the establishment of social security in Vermont. Out of the federal versus state antagonism generated by the Depression arose a clearer understanding of what was ultimately good for the suffering state. This unique moment of political reckoning was then capitalized on in a way that signaled the reevaluation of age-old political leanings.

Another way that the effects of the Depression in Vermont can be observed is through the experiences of individual inhabitants of the state. With the clarity of their accounts on display, one can witness firsthand how the implications of the Depression played out on a personal level in the state. As Governor Aiken once confidently said, “The fact remains that here we are, most of us healthy and well-nourished, comfortably

³⁵ Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont*, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

warm and self-supporting—‘statistically bankrupt,’ . . . but actually solvent.”³⁷ The following experiences reveal the deceptive nature of Aiken’s words, and the misleading nature of scholarship surrounding Vermont during the Great Depression. One account that is especially useful in understanding the Depression’s impact on the social fabric of the state comes from Arthur Cardinal, the same textile-mill worker from Bennington. Cardinal recalls the conditions of a time so miserable that he and many other Vermonters were forced to give into desperation: “I used to go up a hole in the belfries of the mills. I’d go up at night and get the pigeons, take them home, butcher them, clean them up, and we had pigeon pie.”³⁸ The Cardinal family also obtained food by preparing meals made from head cheese and other discarded animal parts. Similarly, desperate measures were seen in Burlington, Vermont’s main city. As Betty Flynn Mooney, author of *Growing Up in the ‘Old North End’ During the Great Depression* writes, “One of our neighbors could not afford new pants, so his mother would cut off his dad's work pants at the knee. It made them very baggy, and he had to pull his belt very tight to hold them up!”³⁹ Mooney’s recollection provides further evidence of an environment where even the most basic necessities like food and clothing were scarce.

Some Vermonters, like Charles Ballantine of Wardsboro, were more fortunate. In Ballantine’s case, the CCC program birthed by the Depression was responsible for providing a positive experience during these years. Ballantine was given food, a princely salary of 2,000 dollars a year, meaningful

³⁷ Governor George Aiken, interview, March 9, 1937.

³⁸ Arthur Cardinal, interview by Mary Kasamatsu, “Green Mountain Chronicles” Oral History Transcriptions, 1981-1989, Vermont Historical Society, August 16, 1988.

³⁹ Betty Mooney, *Growing Up in the ‘Old North End’ During the Great Depression* (Vermont: Unknown publisher, 1990), 11.

employment, and most importantly, refuge from the misery of a typical Depression-era lifestyle. According to Ballantine, “It was the best time of my life. We learned to be honest. We learned to live together.”⁴⁰ While the experiences of Ballantine and other young men hired by the CCC were undoubtedly positive, they constitute only a small demographic of outliers. But, while small, it is entirely possible that their favorable view of the Depression traveled the farthest in shaping people's perceptions of the event as it occurred in Vermont. To this day the only visible reminders of the Depression are the impressive series of buildings, trails, and dams that were constructed during that time. As such, it can be confidently stated that history's selective memory runs the risk of dwelling on the positive associations that the CCC and experiences like Ballantine's brought with them.

A story that is more representative of the painful costs of the Depression—one that cannot be conveyed by economic statistics or political legislation—is located in visual imagery from the Farm Security Administration's photography project, spanning from 1936 to 1942. One picture taken by FSA photographer Carl Mydans was particularly effective in capturing the dilapidated state of an abandoned farmhouse.

Similar sights would have been ubiquitous in the state during these years, no doubt acting as visual reminders and symbols of the sweeping changes that enveloped the state during the Depression. Mydans' work also illustrates the bleak realities of the rural homeless who were the inevitable casualties of plummeting crop prices and bankrupt farms. As a sobering photo of the mother and two children shows, the rural homeless were forced to make ends meet by squatting on the grounds of an annual fair and trying their best to make it a livable home.

⁴⁰ Charles Ballantine, interview by Sally Pollak, *The Burlington Free Press*, May 9, 1980.



Carl Mydans, Abandoned Farm, Vermont, 1936.



Carl Mydans, Family camping at a state fair in Morrisville, Vermont, 1936.

The two young children in the picture are proof of the generational impact of the Depression, and their mother reminds us of the difficulties of raising children alone and with few resources. An even closer look at the photograph shows a line of cars stretching into the distance, many of them also with a makeshift clothesline signaling their presence. It becomes clear that this small family was not alone, and that homelessness in Vermont was an issue facing more than a few families. Though perhaps most concerning of all is the date to which this picture can be traced. Taken in August, the timing of the picture indicates that the summer months would soon be over and this family and others like it would be met with the biting cold of winter with little more than their car for shelter. The two photographs from Mydans together convey the beleaguered state of rural families in the peak years of the Depression and serve as indisputable evidence of the true toll taken on individual people and the state alike.⁴¹

The Great Depression eventually came to a grinding halt in the closing months of 1939, marking the end of a decade of intense despair for America and its people. During its course, the Depression had shown no discrimination in its destruction, infiltrating every square inch of the American environment and leaving little unscathed. Yet eighty years after this historic event it is obvious that the sands of time have done much to obscure our recollection of the omnipresence of the Depression. This is demonstrated nowhere more acutely than in the case of Vermont, a state dismissed by society and scholarship as numb to the pain of the depression. Whether led astray by the state's associations with thrift and resourcefulness, or preoccupied with its small population, the fact remains that history has left the economic,

⁴¹ Nancy Price Graff, *Looking Back at Vermont: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1936-1942* (Middlebury, Vermont: Hanover, New Hampshire; Distributed by the University Press of New England, 2002).

political, and individual realities of the state in the shadows. Written off as a stubborn bastion of old-world resilience, it is easily forgotten that the Green Mountain state ran the same gauntlet as the rest of the nation. In the process, Vermont saw its flourishing industrial sector hobbled alongside the rest of its devastated economy, as well as political evolution, and diverse and nuanced individual experiences playing out in rural towns and urban centers alike. But, for all these grave challenges, what remains most impressive was the state's ability to rebound. And rebound they did, updating their inward facing political tendencies, adopting a platform more considerate of the needs of all members of society, and ultimately righting the ship to regain their position as one of the country's leading agricultural hubs. Trying times were utilized as an opportunity for growth, and the state is cherished and flourishing to this day as a result. These are the enormous realities ignored by subscribing to unrealistic narratives and prioritizing more high-profile Depression-era struggles over less-heralded ones. In order to combat misinformation, it is necessary to collectively remind ourselves that the story of Depression-era Vermont is told not by the "Thrifty Vermont farmer, working with axe or scythe in his hillside sugar bush or mowing,"⁴² but rather by the impoverished Arthur Cardinal, stranded fairground dwellers, and pioneering political action of Senator Gibson.

⁴² Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont*, 10.

Better Dead than Red: Examining US-China Relations and Cross-Cultural Perceptions in the Korean War

Noah Zhou

One of the defining international conflicts of the Mao Zedong era in China was the Korean War, a struggle in which global and cross-cultural perceptions of the warring states were redefined. The conflict began in June of 1950 when North Korean ruler Kim Il-sung launched an invasion into Southern territory, crossing the 38th parallel that had been established as a boundary following the defeat of Japan in the Second World War.¹ This action was immediately denounced by the UN Security Council, and days later President Truman ordered American soldiers to the front to support the South Koreans.² Under the command of General MacArthur, American forces initiated a northward counter push from the amphibious landing point of Inchon in September of 1950, which saw immediate success. This prompted leadership in the People's Republic of China (PRC) under Mao Zedong to enter the conflict, citing security concerns as the Americans neared the Chinese border, while mobilizing popular support for their communist allies in North Korea.³ As the PRC and the US engaged in direct combat, the tentative alliance formed in World War II to fight against Japan was shattered, leading both sides to

¹ "The Korean War," PBS, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/bomb-korean-war/>.

² "Korean War Fast Facts," CNN, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/28/world/asia/korean-war-fast-facts/index.html>.

³ David Kenley, *Modern Chinese History* (Ann Arbor, MI, USA: Association for Asian Studies, 2020), 60.

generate contrasting public images designed to build support from their respective populations in news media and visual culture. Lost in these idealized depictions was the immense destruction brought to the Korean people and the horrific realities of war as the two sides sought to degrade cultural perceptions of each other, stimulating racial tensions that exist to this day.



Still Image from the 1950 Universal Newsreel: "War or Peace? 1950 Fateful Year, 1950/12/21," Internet Archive, Universal Studios.

In the United States under the Truman administration, American involvement in the Korean War was largely romanticized in various news media outlets and popular visual culture as a noble struggle against the menace of communism. These portrayals sought to uphold the image of US forces as idyllic global protectors in the geopolitically tense realm of the Cold War. To everyday Americans keeping up with the news, media coverage was overwhelmingly in support of the war effort, especially on television. A Universal Newsreel released on December 12th, 1950 presented a broad overview of the conflict and demonstrates the far-reaching effects of American media bias. Narrated by Ed Herlihy—a longtime news television fixture

whose iconic voice immediately elicited the trust of American viewers—the segment decisively painted communist nations and peoples as impediments to “the free world” and characterized them as “sinister” and “brutal,” while describing their actions as “blundering” or “rampaging.”⁴ Before American viewers were provided with any coverage of the war in Korea, they were primed with a barrage of anti-communist messaging, inhibiting the likelihood of questioning military involvement against these enemies. As the reel begins to unveil important events in the war, media bias becomes all the more evident. While Herlihy repeatedly reinforced the stubborn heroism and brilliant strategy of American forces, the North Korean opposition was described as “savage” while the coverage singled out the “ruthless slaughter” of bound American prisoners.⁵ The Universal Newsreel went on to glowingly recount the superiority of American military equipment and air power, noting that “the end of the war was in sight,” before ominously announcing, “Then, it happened,” a phrase meant to signify the entrance of the PRC into the conflict. Over the remainder of the clip, the soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army were referred to as “swarms,” and “hordes,” phrases meant to dehumanize them in the eyes of the public and differentiate them from the “men [who] wondered whether Red China would touch off World War III.”⁶

Television messages had an incredible capacity to influence public opinion by reaching millions of American homes. As a relatively new medium, information disseminated through television was much less likely to be doubted by Americans, especially within the context of the recent Second

⁴ “War or Peace? 1950 Fateful Year, 1950/12/21,” Universal Studios, accessed November 13, 2020, https://archive.org/details/1950-12-21_War_or_Peace.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

World War. Astounding audiences by providing visual windows into events unfolding worlds away, newsreels such as this were highly effective in drawing upon the unshakeable faith in government possessed by Americans following the nation's great victory and emergence as a preeminent world power. This is a theme reflected in public opinion surveys of the time. In the summer of 1950, as America was making its first ventures into the war, 54 percent of people participating in a survey from the Gallup Organization already supported a potential war with Communist China should they join the conflict, compared with a modest 27 percent of those who were not in favor.⁷ As the conflict escalated, American confidence in their government's military actions only strengthened. In a questionnaire issued immediately after Douglas MacArthur's landing at Inchon in September of 1950, an overwhelming 78 percent of participants responded that they would support an American offensive across the 38th parallel even if it meant global war with Communist Russia and China.⁸ It is important to point out that a great degree of bias existed within these surveys. For example, when asked what the main issues of the Korean War were in July of 1950, participants were only given options that justified the war in terms of stopping communist aggression and expansion, blaming the Korean people for instigating civil war, and defending the role of the United Nations in the global theatre. Here, any notion of American

⁷ "Gallup Poll #1950-0459: Foreign Relations [Roper #31087442," Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://ropercenter-cornell-edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll/study/31087442/questions>.

⁸ "Gallup Poll #1950-0461: Korea/Elections [Roper #31087444]," Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://ropercenter-cornell-edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll/study/31087444/questions#051ce0e7-3dda-4c31-a310-3aecd0e818b4>.

military aggression in the war is entirely absent.⁹ Regardless, the extensive efforts made in news media such as television contributed to a political climate that legitimized any and all American military actions to the vast majority of the public. In the case of the Korean War, the US government possessed unyielding support to initiate a large-scale conflict against China—an enemy that was widely characterized as a barbaric threat to the American conception of the “free world.”



*Illustration from Henry R. Lieberman, “Communist China Keeps the World Guessing: While Pressing for U.N. Recognition, She Holds Threat Over Korea,”
The New York Times, September 3, 1950.*

⁹ “Gallup Poll #1950-0458: Communism/Size of Military/Foreign Relations [Roper #31087441], Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://ropercenter-cornell-edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll/study/31087441/questions#3c05490b-1134-425b-8d56-a4791ff7311c>.

American print media from the time further illustrates the disparity between popular perceptions of war with China and the reality of this catastrophe. A period of propagandistic attacks in the mainstream media preceded the PRC's entry into the Korean War, as seen in an article from the September 3rd, 1950 edition of the *New York Times* titled "Communist China Keeps the World Guessing." Following reports of an amassment of Chinese troops in Manchuria, newspapers were quick to decry the Chinese Communist Party. The article continuously undermined the credibility of the Communists in mainland China, claiming that they "have created the rock-bottom basis for reconstruction" in the postwar era and that the embattled Nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-shek "still provides the symbol of resistance on the mainland."¹⁰ Despite direct and increasing American involvement in the Korean War, the article attempted to portray the Chinese as perpetrators of a "war of nerves," claiming that they were instigating tension by reinforcing troop numbers along the border.¹¹ The most striking aspect of the article is its accompanying political cartoon, in which a Chinese soldier was shown watching over the turbulence of the war through a crude wooden shelter, biding his time to attack. The soldier, labeled as a representation of the nation of China as a whole, was illustrated as a Stalin-esque Russian man wearing an ill-fitting Chinese caricature mask over his face, detailed with a contorted gesture of the eyes and bucked teeth.¹² Complete with the caption, "The same old Joe," the reader was meant to understand that the People's Liberation Army was the real source of anxiety on the Korean stage—another barbaric, communist enemy to be

¹⁰ Henry R. Lieberman, "Communist China Keeps the World Guessing: While Pressing for U.N. Recognition, She Holds Threat Over Korea," *The New York Times*, September 3, 1950.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

vanquished. The racist stereotyping of the figure served to dehumanize the people of China as the US braced for an escalation of conflict.



Xu Ling, "The Chinese people absolutely cannot condone the encroachment of other countries, and cannot listen to whatever Imperialist who thinks that it can wantonly encroach its own neighbors without acting," ca.1950, poster, 77 x 106 cm.

When the newly founded People's Republic of China entered the conflict, its prevailing public opinion and media representations presented a contrasting portrayal of the Americans as imperialist aggressors to be defeated by virtue of the sheer and glorious will of the Chinese people; in the Korean War, Chinese Communist Party officials saw a critical opportunity to consolidate political control and garner widespread support. One print that circulated around the year 1950 was a poster designed by Xu Ling. In the image, an American military official, perhaps meant to be Douglas MacArthur, is shown plunging a knife into a pair of infants. On the left-hand side of the composition, a US warplane drops bombs onto an urban center, unleashing a plume of red fire that engulfs

the image. The poster is captioned: “The Chinese people absolutely cannot condone the encroachment of other countries, and cannot listen to whatever Imperialist who thinks that it can wantonly encroach its own neighbors without acting.”¹³ Contrary to the idyllic portrayal of the Americans as global defenders, popular Chinese media represented them as despicable conquerors and destroyers of helpless civilizations.

Alongside this violent image of American forces, Chinese media perpetuated the idea that contributing to the war effort was a path for everyday people to engage with the new government and exhibit virtue. A 1951 poster created by Zhang Biwu shows a lively Chinese family clad in party attire participating in a grandiose celebration intended to send soldiers to the Korean front. Outside their abode, scores of Chinese citizens are on the march, carrying flags and banners of Mao Zedong. The caption reads “It is glorious to take part, to oppose America, support Korea, protect the home and the nation.”¹⁴ The message here is clear: by participating in China’s great mobilization of the people and joining the army, societal advancement and national victory will be achieved.

Many of these propaganda posters from the time signify the Chinese Communist Party’s desire to use the war effort for the consolidation of political control. A 1965 image composed by Chen Xiaoxi and Guo Kekuan portrays a PLA soldier who has speared an M1 US military helmet with Guomindang and

¹³ Xu Ling, “The Chinese people absolutely cannot condone the encroachment of other countries, and cannot listen to whatever Imperialist who thinks that it can wantonly encroach its own neighbors without acting,” (Publisher Unknown, 1950), accessed November 13, 2020, <https://chinese posters.net/posters/e27-169>.

¹⁴ Zhang Biwu, “It is glorious to take part, to oppose America, support Korea, protect the home and the nation,” Landsberger Collection (Haojiu heji huapian chubanshe, 1951).

Japanese flags simultaneously on the end of his bayonet.¹⁵ The caption states that “Imperialism and all reactionaries are all paper tigers,” drawing upon Mao Zedong’s famous slogan to insinuate that all enemies of the People’s Republic of China—including the United States, the Guomindang, and Imperial Japan—could not stand up to the strength of a nation forged by the will of the people. Proclaimed just a year prior to the onset of the Korean War in Mao Zedong’s October 1, 1949 address, the young nation used messages from its leader to reinforce stability and control in China, combatting political dissent by promoting their capacity to stand up to opposing forces, including America’s military, the Nationalists, and Imperial Japan.

As the conflict in Korea unfolded, many Americans and Chinese alike increasingly realized from news reports and firsthand accounts that the reality of the war was entirely different from the glamorized struggle perpetuated by the media. The war was described by many as a “seesaw affair” as the two sides pushed each other back and forth in efforts to advance the front lines, resulting in an overall stalemate. Still, President Truman was steadfast in his commitment to the fighting even as the prospect of a more prolonged war entered the public conscience. In an address given on April 11, 1951, Truman doubled down on America’s stance in the war, stating that “The Communists... are engaged in a monstrous conspiracy to stamp out freedom all over the world,” and that by continuing the fight America was “trying to prevent a third world war.”¹⁶

While drawing on the American principles of promoting freedom and stopping worldwide aggression, Truman also acknowledged the deadlock on the front by leaving the door open

¹⁵ Chen Xiaoxi, and Guo Kekuan, “Imperialism and all reactionaries are all paper tigers,” Landsberger collection, (Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1965).

¹⁶ Harry S. Truman, “Report to the American People on Korea,” (Broadcast from the White House, April 11, 1951).

for a potential peace settlement, but only “if the Communist authorities realize they cannot defeat us in Korea... [seeing] it would be foolhardy to widen the hostilities... they may recognize the folly of continuing their aggression.”¹⁷ Counter to his strong anti-communist wording, Truman also noted his decision to relieve General MacArthur of his duties because the general’s desire to expand the war in Asia did not align with the new suggestion of a peace settlement. The address indicates a critical shift in the outlook of the United States—while Truman, government officials, and media outlets never dropped the national guise of American military superiority to communist evil, divisions began to appear as the country grappled with the idea of an extended conflict in Korea. As the chances of a decisive victory in Korea diminished, public opinion dramatically shifted against continued military involvement. Facing re-election in 1952, Truman was relentlessly attacked for his handling of the Korean War by the Republican party, spearheaded by Dwight Eisenhower, and became tremendously unpopular.¹⁸ By 1954, only 39 percent of Americans believed that the war in Korea was justified according to a survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center.¹⁹

Despite the political downfall of President Truman, the perception of American military might was never tarnished. General MacArthur’s successor James Van Fleet, who provided a number of interviews for the *Los Angeles Times*, referred to the

¹⁷ Truman, “Report to the American People on Korea.”

¹⁸ Chester J. Pach, Jr., “Dwight D. Eisenhower: Campaigns and Elections,” UVA Miller Center, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/campaigns-and-elections>.

¹⁹ “National Opinion Research Center Survey #1954-0365: Foreign Affairs [Roper #31095091],” Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://ropercenter-cornell-edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll/study/31095091/questions#b48af409-3960-4fb5-8509-99073d07907e>.

Korean War as a “Blessing to the Allies,” claiming that it enabled the US to flex military power and assert dominance over the Communists.²⁰ While he was installed as a replacement to limit the scope of the war, General Van Fleet later expressed bitterness regarding the outcome of the battle, declaring that if MacArthur was granted the ability to push toward China, then the enemy would have been defeated, “and they knew it.”²¹



Max Desfor, Korean War People, 1950, photograph, AP Images.

Van Fleet’s outspoken persona is representative of the popular American sentiment that nobody could compare to the US army,

²⁰ “Van Fleet Calls Korean War Blessing to Allies,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 1952, 19.

²¹ “Van Fleet Bitter Over Korean War: VAN FLEET TALK,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1953, 1.

and that inferior communist “aggressors” should be stopped at all costs—a perspective that prevailed even considering the mounting losses in Korea. America’s costly and destructive failure in the war was not enough to affect its international image, especially in the eyes of those who had witnessed the nation’s rise as the world’s foremost protector of democratic ideals after World War II.

Overlooked by most amidst the rivaling state efforts to control the narrative of the war was the tremendous devastation and suffering wrought upon the people of Korea. Compared to just over 30,000 American deaths and approximately 180,000–400,000 Chinese killed in action, North Korea and South Korea lost 406,000 and 217,000 soldiers respectively. Vastly exceeding military casualty counts, estimates of the civilian death toll vary from 1.6 million to nearly 5 million.²² In just the first month of operations in Korea, the American Strategic Air Command groups dropped over 4,000 tons of bombs. Famously, Air Force General Curtis Lemay remarked, “we eventually burned down every town in North Korea... and some in South Korea too. We even burned down [the South Korean city of] Pusan—an accident, but we burned it down anyway.”²³

The war in Korea permanently scarred its people, leaving a wake of demolished homes and infrastructure, injuries, and death as cities were bombed in a seemingly indiscriminate fashion—an aspect of the global political struggle between the United States and China that is all but neglected in their contemporaneous popular media representations. Visual evidence of the battle’s horrific nature survives through the work done by

²² “Korean War Fast Facts,” CNN, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/28/world/asia/korean-war-fast-facts/index.html>.

²³ “The Korean War,” PBS, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/bomb-korean-war/>

wartime photographers such as David Douglas Duncan, Max Desfor, and Al Chang. Notably, Desfor received a Pulitzer Prize for his image titled *Flight of Refugees Across Wrecked Bridge in Korea*, depicting hundreds of displaced citizens attempting to cross the Taedong River outside war-torn Pyongyang.²⁴ A lesser-known Desfor image taken on September 30, 1950 is labeled *Korean War People*, where a woman amidst the rubble in Seoul cradles the head of her wounded husband.²⁵ Around the group of figures the destruction of the city is evident, as buildings are reduced to gnarled metal beams, fragments of concrete, and dust.

Representing the other side of the struggle, Al Chang's picture of US soldiers in grief after the death of a fellow infantryman taken in 1950 near the Hakong-ni area in South Korea became one of the enduring images of the war, conveying an element of human suffering that provided Americans with a relatable sense of the war's reality.²⁶ Realist approaches to photojournalism gave the American public points of reference with which they could contrast the starkly different media coverage circulating through the majority of the country's news institutions. Most outlets, whether through television programming, newspaper articles, printed images, or public addresses, sought to portray the war as an idyllic struggle for global political freedom—a narrative that was at odds with the atrocious conditions imposed on the Koreans caught in the middle of the fighting.

US military involvement in East Asian conflicts such as the Korean War, along with the accompanying state efforts to justify them in the public sphere, have made a destructive contribution toward popular racial perceptions on the American

²⁴ Max Desfor, *Flight of Refugees Across Wrecked Bridge in Korea*, 1950, photograph, AP Images.

²⁵ Max Desfor, *Korean War People*, 1950, photograph, AP Images.

²⁶ Al Chang, *Korean War Casualties*, 1950, photograph, AP Images.

home front that lasts to this day. Dating back to the first mass emigrations of Chinese people to America with the mid-19th century Gold Rush, Chinese people have faced racial discrimination, a hardship that has even been sanctioned by the state. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act banned all Chinese people from entering the United States and was later expanded to encompass Japanese, Indians, Filipinos, and Koreans.²⁷ Around the turn of the 20th century, people of Asian descent living in America were subject to segregated “oriental schools” in places such as San Francisco, along with strict residency requirements and the threat of deportation.²⁸ The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1943 with the Magnuson Act, but by then America’s sociopolitical climate was shifting in a new direction.

The onset of World War II marked a new era of anti-Asian racism and stereotyping in the US as the country mobilized against the Japanese, unleashing its mechanisms of propaganda while forcing many Japanese-Americans into internment camps. With the subsequent wars in East Asia, anti-Asian sentiments in the country persisted as Asian peoples continued to experience treatment that marked them as second-class citizens. Today, many expressions of racism fail to differentiate between Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or Chinese heritage, instead lumping them into a blanketed target. One of the most prominent examples of indiscriminate anti-Asian violence was the killing of Chinese-American citizen Vincent Chin in 1982, who was murdered by two white men in retaliation for the loss of jobs to the Japanese auto sector. Tensions have continued to flare during the coronavirus pandemic and presidency of Donald Trump, who

²⁷ Nina Strochlic, “America’s long history of scapegoating its Asian citizens,” *National Geographic*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/09/asian-american-racism-covid/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

has repeatedly mislabeled the virus as the “Chinese Virus,” or “Kung Flu,” despite the terms being condemned by the World Health Organization, playing into popular racial attitudes in an effort to redirect blame on his administration toward China for failing to control the spread of the coronavirus.²⁹ The effects of these efforts from Trump have manifested in a significant uptick in anti-Asian violent hate incidents, 2,120 of which were reported in a three-month span from March to June 2020 as Trump initiated his deflection of accountability for the virus sweeping the US.³⁰

Racist fervor and stereotyping dating back to the introduction of Chinese immigrants in America—propagated by media campaigns during conflicts such as the Korean War—continue to add a dimension of hardship for Asian-American people living in the US. One prominent study in 2004 conducted around an Asian American Racism-Related Stress Inventory found a prevalent, underlying racism-related stress structured on the three-factors defined as General Racism, Socio-Historical Racism, and Perpetual Foreigner Racism—noting that the last item is particularly sustained through representations in popular media.³¹ The history of discrimination faced by Asian Americans

²⁹ Donald Moynihan and Gregory Porumbescu, “Trump’s ‘Chinese virus’ slur makes some people blame Chinese Americans. But others blame Trump,” *The Washington Post*, September 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/09/16/trumps-chinese-virus-slur-makes-some-people-blame-chinese-americans-others-blame-trump/>.

³⁰ Erin Donaghue, “2,120 hate incidents against Asian Americans reported during coronavirus pandemic,” CBS, July 2, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/anti-asian-american-hate-incidents-up-racism/>.

³¹ Christopher T.H. Liang, Lisa C. Li, and Bryan S.K. Kim, “The Asian American Racism-Related Stress Inventory: Development, Factor Analysis, Reliability, and Validity,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 51, no.1 (Jan 2004): 103-114.

is indicative of the many repercussions that American media has had on the country's racial outlooks. To truly understand the nature of events such as America's war in Korea, one must consider cross-cultural contexts and the role of media bias. Irreconcilable with the image of the US military as a heroic and invincible protector against the worldwide threat of communism in the Korean War was the conflict's reality, where millions of civilian lives were destroyed in a prolonged stalemate. To incite the people to support this awful conflict, media outlets in the Truman era upheld longstanding racial stereotypes that continue to impact Chinese-Americans, and Asian-Americans in general, to this day.

**2021 Phi Alpha Theta Inductees
UVM Chapter, Alpha Alpha Psi**

Elizabeth R. Anderson
Isabel Linnea Nash Birney
Sarah Elizabeth Chute
Samuel John Comai
Dorothy Magnolia Dye
Sandor Farkas
Finian James Gallagher
Jonah Benjamin Goldberg
Jake Declan Hession
Liam J. Hilferty
Catherine Elizabeth Zuk Hodges
Tori R. Jarvis
Kristin P. Ketterman
Holly Shea Kuhn
Tyler J. Malone
Michael J. Maloney III
Nicholas J. Mologne
Taylor L. Morgan
Lucas John Newton
Charlotte F. Nicholson
Bridget Mary O'Keefe
Andrew John Pieper
Hellick R. Reiersen
Rebecca Nicole Shames
Emily S. Sheftman
Claire Elizabeth Thibeault
Michael Bayman Tobin
Jeremy D. Wollman
Katherine G. Wynn

Phi Alpha Theta is a professional society, established in 1921, whose 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. There are 860 chapters nationwide and a membership of 350,000. A national biennial convention and thirty-five annual regional meetings held each spring provide a forum for undergraduate and graduate students to present papers and exchange ideas. In addition, over twenty-five scholarships and prizes are awarded annually to both undergraduate and graduate students. The society publishes *The Historian*, one of the most widely circulated scholarly historical journals published in the United States.

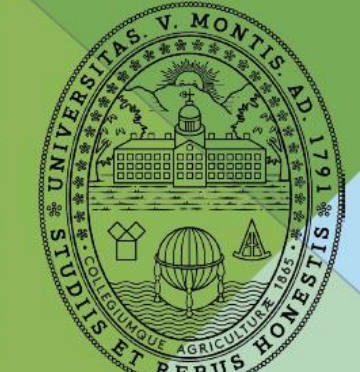
Our chapter at the University of Vermont, Alpha Alpha Psi, was chartered in 1982. Undergraduate students who have completed at least fifteen credit hours in History courses at UVM, with a 3.6 grade point average and an overall GPA of 3.4 are eligible for membership. History master's students are required to maintain a 3.75 GPA in their graduate studies.

Induction ceremonies are held annually in April. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 induction ceremony was held virtually, and inductees submitted portraits for a photo collage.



ΦΑΘ
Phi Alpha Theta
National History Honor Society
2021





History Department Faculty News

Senior Lecturer Andrew Buchanan's research and expertise



focuses on U.S. foreign relations and diplomatic and cultural history. His most recent article, “Domesticating Hegemony: Creating a Globalist Public, 1941-1943” was published in *Diplomatic History* in March 2021.

Buchanan is currently working on a new book project with Bloomsbury Press, provisionally titled “The Long World War II: Revolution, Decolonization, and the Rise of American Hegemony.”

Professor Paul Deslandes is a cultural historian of 19th and 20th century Britain. His recent publications have focused on material culture and the writing of the history of sexuality. His most recent

book, *The Culture of Male Beauty in Britain: From the First Photographs to David Beckham*, will be published by the University of Chicago Press in October. In



April 2021, Professor Deslandes will release a lecture series titled *Notorious London: A City Tour* as part of the Great Courses. In addition to writing a history of modern Europe for Routledge, Professor Deslandes is now working on a new research project that examines architectural and design exchanges between Britain and North America from the late-nineteenth century to the

present. He is also presently teaching a new course called “London: The Global City” as part of the Liberal Arts Scholars Program (Humanities track).

Associate Professor Jonathan Huener’s monograph *The Polish Catholic Church under German Occupation: The Reichsgau Wartheland, 1939-1945* appeared in February with Indiana University Press.



In the fall of this year, he will hold a fellowship at the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, Germany to pursue research on his next book, a history of

the Reichsgau Wartheland, which was a region of Poland annexed by Nazi Germany during World War Two.

Associate Professor Nicole Phelps was on leave in 2020-21 and spent most of the year in her hometown of Rochester, New York helping her parents deal with major medical crises. While there, her work focused on moving her textbook, *Americans and International Affairs to 1921*, through the production process, including working with the publisher to create a number of original maps. As an editorial board member of several journals, including *Diplomatic History* and the *Journal of Austrian-American History*, she reviewed numerous manuscripts for potential publication, and she served as an ad hoc reviewer for several other journals and book publishers. She is currently at work on the updated version of her chapter on “Expansion and Diplomacy, 1865-1914” for the annotated bibliography *The SHAFR Guide Online*, as well as ongoing work on her major research project on the US Consular Service.

Professor Steven Zdatny has published four books and many



articles about the history of modern France, on topics ranging from the politics of the middle classes to fashion and work in the hairdressing profession. In the time of Covid he has

continued to work on his current project: *The Threshold of Disgust: A History of Hygiene in Modern France*. When he is not teaching or writing, Professor Zdatny loves to play ice hockey. He claims to have a wicked wrist shot.

Bryn Geffert is the dean of libraries at the University of



Vermont, with an appointment as a professor in the history department. Bryn's research focuses on Russian social and intellectual history. He is finishing a book for

the University of Notre Dame Press on late-nineteenth-century ecumenism, focusing on negotiations between Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, and Old Catholics—a group that broke away from the Roman Catholic Church following the declaration of papal infallibility in 1871. Other books include *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans: Diplomacy, Theology, and the Politics of Interwar Ecumenism* (Notre Dame University Press, 2010) and *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: The Essential Texts* (Yale University Press, 2016), a history of Eastern Orthodox Christianity told through primary sources.

Professor Robert McCullough is a professor of Historic Preservation and has been a member of the faculty since 1998. He teaches courses in American Architectural



History, History of the Built and Cultural Environments, and Historic Preservation Law. He also writes about American landscapes, and his most current publications are, and his books include *Old Wheelways: Traces of Bicycle History on the Land* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015); *A Path for Kindred Spirits: The Friendship of Clarence Stein and Benton MacKaye* (Chicago: Columbia College–Chicago and Center for American Places, by University of Chicago Press, 2012). His current writing projects include: “Cycling’s Symhony of Place,” in *A Companion to Cycling*, Glen Norcliffe, ed. (Milton Park, Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, forthcoming), *Old Wheel Works: Cycling’s 19th Century Industrial and Commercial Architecture*, and Introduction to the republication of Benton MacKaye 1921 article "An Appalachian Trail. A Project in Regional Planning," together with "The Forgotten Columbia Valley Cross-Section Study.

Professor Alan E. Steinweis is nearing completion of his general



(but brief) history of Nazi Germany, which will be published by Cambridge University Press. He looks forward to a sabbatical semester in spring 2022, during which he

will work on his next project, a study of the November 1939 failed assassination attempt on Hitler by the German cabinetmaker Georg Elser. He devotes time to his responsibilities as a member of the editorial board of the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* and as a member of International Advisory Board for the document publication project *The Persecution and Murder of the European Jews by Nazi Germany*, a 16-volume German-Israeli project. He wrote two pieces for publication: “Kristallnacht and the Reversibility of Progress,” in *Die Zukunft der Erinnerung: Perspektiven des Gedenkens an Nationalsozialismus und Shoah*, edited by Stefan Vogt, forthcoming from De Gruyter, and “Kristallnacht,” in *The Cambridge History of the Holocaust*, vol 1., edited by Mark Roseman and Dan Stone, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press. He published a book review of *New Perspectives on Kristallnacht: After 80 Years, the Nazi Pogrom in Global Comparison*, edited by Wolf Gruner and Steven J. Ross, in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*. The Holocaust Education Foundation of Northwestern University awarded Steinweis its Distinguished Achievement Award, which was supposed to be conferred at the biennial conference of the organization at the University of Ottawa in November 2020, but which has been postponed to November 2022.

Author Biographies

Megan Gamiz is a graduate student in the Master of Arts in History program. Her primary areas of research are modern French history and the Holocaust, with a particular fascination in studying how the memory of the Holocaust has evolved in postwar France. This past year Megan was honored to have her research paper on German scientific and intellectual innovations on display at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair selected for publication in Tufts University's Historical Review. Prepared to graduate this spring and enter the exciting and terrifying world outside academia, Megan credits her success at the University of Vermont to the remarkably supportive faculty and staff in the Department of History. Without their encouragement and guidance, her graduate experience would not have been the same, and she will forever cherish the time spent fostering relationships and learning alongside so many wonderful scholars. Thank you.

William Gansle graduated from the University of Vermont in December 2020 with a B.A. in History with a European concentration and a minor in microbiology. He is interested particularly in mid-20th century Germany. He plans to take a gap year followed by architecture school, a decision he largely credits to his upbringing in an early-1900's Dutch Colonial style home on the North Shore of Long Island, New York. An avid outdoorsman, he enjoys fishing, camping and exploring all the natural beauty Vermont has to offer. He can often be found playing the cello or exploring Burlington on foot. He is also a shadetree mechanic and is currently working to restore a 1991 Chevrolet K/5 Blazer.

Sophia Trigg is a graduate student studying Victorian and Edwardian British cultural history. Her primary areas of research are historical dress and cultural identity. Originally from Williston, Vermont, she earned her B.S. in secondary education with a concentration in history and social studies from the College of Education & Social Services at UVM in 2014. While completing her master's degree, she works full time at the College of Arts & Sciences at UVM to bring work- and place-based learning to undergraduate students as the Experiential Learning Coordinator.

Nick Wendell is a twenty-year-old sophomore History major and Studio Art minor. He grew up in New York City and has loved all types of history ever since he can remember. He has always had a special affinity for ancient civilizations as well as more modern time periods like the Civil War and the World Wars. He hopes to be a history teacher someday. He also love art, ultimate frisbee, reading, and listening to rock and pop music. Here at UVM, Nick is a member of the Ultimate Frisbee team as well as a tutor at the Writing Center, and you can see some of his artwork in the Gist.

Noah Zhou is a visual artist dedicated to the investigation of US-China relations and the nature of Chinese-American cultural identity. With an interdisciplinary process that encompasses painting, photography, language, and found-object sculpture, he aims to illuminate issues surrounding human rights and anti-Asian racism. Noah has exhibited his artwork throughout Burlington, notably at his first solo exhibition in 2020 at the University of Vermont's Colburn Gallery. He is also committed to sharing his creative perspective through curation and teaching. Having spent several years working in public schools, museum education programs, and Burlington City Arts, Noah

plans to receive his BSAE for Teaching Licensure from the University of Vermont. Next year, Noah will move his practice to New York City to attend the Parsons School of Design, where he hopes to receive his MFA.

Editor Biographies

Sarah Chute is a second-year master's student studying the history of slavery in North America and the Atlantic world. In 2019, she received her B.A. in history and French at Western Washington University with a minor in Canadian/American studies. Her M.A. thesis examines how slavery tied the Canadian Maritimes to the West Indies through economic and biographical connections. This year at UVM, in addition to serving as a co-executive editor for the *History Review*, Sarah has worked as a research assistant for Professors Harvey Amani Whitfield and David Massell and as a teaching assistant for Professor Dona Brown. Next year, she will attend the University of Toronto to pursue her PhD in history.

Katie Wynn is a junior from Hawthorn Woods, IL completing a B.A. in History and Political Science. Her research interests focus on the intersection between cultural and women's history, and in the spring of 2020, she was awarded the Best Undergraduate Essay by the UVM History Department for her paper titled *Forging the Female Monarch: Cultural Redefinition of the Monarchy in the Victorian Era*. This year, Katie will begin research for her honors thesis on gender, power, and mass media in modern Britain with Professor Paul Deslandes. In addition to serving as a co-executive editor for the *History Review*, Katie works as a research assistant for Professor Melissa Willard Foster in the Political Science department. In her free time, she enjoys playing on the UVM Women's Club Ice Hockey team and taking her boxer Brody for long walks.

Tom Anderson-Monterosso is a master's student with interests in American architectural, landscape, and book history.

Originally from Connecticut, he earned his B.A. in biology with a minor in environmental studies from Oberlin College in 2006. While there, he provided research assistance for Carol Lasser and Gary Kornblith's book *Elusive Utopia: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Oberlin, Ohio* (LSU Press, 2018). Since moving to Vermont in 2015, he has edited textbooks and scientific journals, as well as text for an exhibition at the Henry Sheldon Museum. At UVM, he has supported Professor Ergene's Ottoman research, Professor Buchanan's Global Environmental History course, and the Silver Special Collections Library. During summer 2020, Tom assisted the Vermont Architects Oral History Project of the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and the Vermont Folklife Center. His thesis will examine regionalist publishing in Vermont in the 1920s and 1930s.

Isabel Bailey is a senior graduating in May 2021 with a B.A. in European Studies, and a minor in Russian. Focusing on art history within her interdisciplinary major, she is primarily interested in the transnational intersections of twentieth century avant-garde movements. She works specifically on Russian avant-garde art of the 1920s. Her honors thesis examines the Russian avant-garde's influence on the organization of The Museum of Modern Art in New York upon its founding in 1929. Isabel will begin her master's in the history of art at The Courtauld Institute of Art in the Fall.

Isabel Birney is a junior currently completing a B.A. in History and a B.S. in Music Education. In addition to her work on the History Review she is an active member on the Lawrence Debate Union and frequently researches topics of gender, race, and equality. Next year she will begin the history department's Accelerated Master's Program, and she looks forward to another year of Vermont snow.

Dan Brainerd is a senior at UVM from Dalton, MA, set to graduate with a B.A. in history and psychological science in May 2021. His key historical interests are 20th-century extreme right-wing movements, such as Nazism and Fascism, as well as medieval European history, especially medieval religious figures. Dan was a lead in the University Players' production of *Arcadia* during his freshman year and has since written and edited a book on the history of the UVM Alumni House and had a role as a Resident Advisor. Dan plans to go on to work as an editor or psychological counselor.

Theo Cutler is a senior from Newtown, Pennsylvania graduating in May 2021 with a B.A. in political science and history with a concentration in European history and political economy. He is currently completing an undergraduate thesis on the intellectual legacy of Carl Schmitt, a controversial German legal scholar and political philosopher who later became a member of the Nazi Party. In addition to the life and work of Carl Schmitt, his academic interests include the history of Nazi Germany, American political theory, and public policy, and he worked in the Vermont Legislative Research Service directed by Professor Anthony Gierzynski in the spring of 2019.

Emma LaRose is a senior graduating in May 2021 with a B.A. in political science and history. In addition to serving on the editorial board for the *History Review*, she interned at the UVM Alumni House spring semester of her sophomore year and at Kieloch Consulting in D.C. spring semester of her junior year. She was also an Undergraduate Course Facilitator (UCF) for the sustainability learning community during the fall semester of her junior and senior year. This year, Emma is completing her honors thesis on the history of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s.

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Emma enjoys baking, writing short stories, and photography. She is looking forward to attending law school in the fall.

Bridget O’Keefe is a second-year graduate student focused on post-1945 American gender and cultural history. She has a bachelors in American Studies and likes to bring an interdisciplinary approach to her historical research. Her current work is a digital project on *The Real Housewives* franchise that borrows scholarship from media studies, soap opera history, fan and audience studies, and gender history. In her free time, Bridget likes to cook, play with her cats, and do pilates.