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### Cover image:

Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. *Negro going in colored entrance of movie house on Saturday afternoon, Belzoni, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi*. United States Mississippi Belzoni Mississippi Delta, 1939. Oct.?. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017754826/>.

For more on movie theatre segregation, see “Panic at the Picture Show” (p. 4)

## **About the Journal**

*Swarthmore Undergraduate History Journal* is a peer-reviewed, faculty-approved, student run research publication that seeks to encourage undergraduate scholarship on diverse subjects. We uphold publishing ethics and are committed to the integrity of academic research. This journal is also specifically inclusive of historical narratives often overlooked in mainstream scholarship and allows for the submission of interdisciplinary articles so long as the focus remains historical.

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Our review process is a double-blind peer-review by our trained group of student editors. After a submission is approved, individual editors complete their reviews which they then bring to the larger group of editors for approval. After the submission and edits are cleared by the staff and the author, the article is sent to a senior faculty advisor who offers comments and suggestions. Then, the final product is published to our site, and will be included in our cohesive publication at the end of the academic year.

## Meet the Editors

### **Gwendolyn Rak** (She/Her)

*Editor-in-Chief*

Gwendolyn is a junior from northern Virginia studying history and astrophysics. Combining the two, she is particularly interested in the history of science, and she eagerly awaits the day both fields are advanced by the advent of time travel.

### **Emma Gabriel** (She/Her)

Emma is a first year from Mattapoisett, MA studying History and Spanish (prospectively). In her free time, she loves to play the violin in the Swarthmore orchestra and do ballet.

### **Daniel Pantini** (He/Him)

Dan is a senior from Newport, Rhode Island studying History at Swarthmore. On campus, he works as an RA and usually bounces back and forth between Mertz and Underhill so look there if you're ever trying to find him.

### **Ben Schaeffer** (He/Him)

Ben is a senior from Lexington, Kentucky studying history at Swarthmore. Ben enjoys outdoor activities such as hiking and fishing, and he loves dogs.

### **Vir Shetty** (He/Him)

Vir is a senior from Haverford, PA studying Physics and Statistics. In his free time, you can often find him playing Crusader Kings II and insisting that the Fourth Crusade was the dumbest war anyone started, ever.

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José is a junior from Sonoma, CA studying Latin American/Latinx studies and Religion. They are also a RIA and work in the Friends Historical Library as an archival intern.

### **Spencer Watts** (She/Her)

Spencer is a sophomore from Princeton, NJ studying Political Science and History. She is also a member of the women's tennis team and works for the Swarthmore Peace Collection as an intern.

# **Panic at the Picture Show: Southern Movie Theatre Culture and the Struggle to Desegregate**

Susannah Broun  
Swarthmore College

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In High Point, North Carolina, two thousand Black patrons waited for the doors to open for a special midnight showing meant for only Black audience members. These midnight showings, often called Midnight Rambles, were common so that Black movie-goers could attend the theatre after white audiences finished “their screenings” for the day.<sup>1</sup> However, this summer night in 1936, mixed into the large, excited crowd were fourteen white community members coming to enjoy this screening. Why this small group of fourteen chose to attend this screening that was not meant for them is unclear. Perhaps the intrigue of a midnight showing made the movie-going experience compelling and exhilarating. Maybe the theatre was showing the 1936 Oscar-nominated *San Francisco* and the patrons wanted to gaze at Clark Gable, “The King of Hollywood,” even past their typical viewing hours.<sup>2</sup> Or potentially these white movie-goers wanted to cause conflict—asserting their privilege and taking away the sacred leisure time of the Black patrons. The law stated that at any theatre that typically showed pictures meant for white audiences, when the audience was mixed, Black audience members were required to sit in the balcony seats.<sup>3</sup> Therefore the orchestra seats up front were occupied by the fourteen white patrons and the thousands of Black patrons were sent to the uncomfortable, crowded, and poor-visibility seats in the balcony. The balcony at this North Carolina theatre only had 653 seats and so, panicked, the theatre manager rushed to contact four other nearby theatres to rent their balconies. The reels were run over to these four theatres, the balconies were packed, and over an hour late, the movie began. All while the fourteen white movie-goers sat comfortably all alone in the main section.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 158.

<sup>2</sup> “San Francisco,” Advertisement. *Variety*. Vol. 123, No. 5. July 1, 1936, 18.

<sup>3</sup> “800 Negro Theatres in 32 States Point to Growing Demand,” *Motion Picture Herald*, 15 August 1936, 27.

This was the segregated world of the Southern movie theatre— one that left Black movie patrons with a demeaning, confining, and humiliating entertainment experience. The story of the High Point midnight showing reveals the situations, experiences, and conditions that were desperately fought against through the battle for movie theatre desegregation.

Throughout the South, Jim Crow laws segregated the physical space of movie theatres and often required separate screening times of films for different races. Movies were a highly regulated part of social life, including what was shown on the screens, how movie theatres were spatially set up, and who attended the theatres. Movie-going experiences varied throughout the South during the long battle for desegregation. As the High Point story indicates, there were segregated theatres with separate sections for Black patrons, while Black-owned movie theatres offered alternative viewing experiences for Black audiences rather than subjecting them to the undesirable balcony seats.<sup>4</sup> The work of movie theatre desegregation meant a shift away from both of these experiences and a pivot instead toward fully integrated theatres. That civil rights struggle involved sit-ins, demonstrations, and legal battles and varied based on the type of theatre.

Historians recently have acknowledged the critical need to study the Civil Rights movement through the lens of gender and sexuality. The battle for civil rights is unavoidably intertwined with concepts such as sexual violence and struggles for freedom of sexual expression. This paper seeks to fit into this new shift in scholarly discussion by identifying how movie theatres were viewed as sexual spaces and therefore were delayed in their integration. Recent writings on civil rights indicate how connected anxiety of sexuality and racial politics were. In her book *At the Dark End of the Street*, Danielle McGuire asserts that African American women's struggle against sexual violence should be the foundation on which the story of the Civil Rights movement is told. She explains that the battle for "bodily integrity and personal dignity" marked racial politics and African American lives during the modern civil rights movement. Furthermore, she explains how sexuality was a part of the segregation conversation as it was used as a weapon by segregationists to attack integration supporters as "sexual fiends."<sup>5</sup> McGuire and other scholars point out that sexuality was weaponized through sexual violence against and exploitation of Black women, making issues of gender and sexuality crucial to the Civil Rights movement. Additionally, Susan Cahn's work, *Sexual Reckonings*, provides an example of a historian articulating how sexuality was always at the forefront of social, political, and racial conversations. Cahn's work makes the case of studying southern history through the lens of teenage sexuality and argues that the roots of segregation trace back to anxieties around sexually active young women.<sup>6</sup> She writes about the history of adolescent girls as a way to investigate the web of connections between coming-of-age experiences and societal hierarchies

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<sup>4</sup> Charlene Regester, "From the Buzzard's Roost: Black Movie-Going in Durham and Other North Carolina Cities during the Early Period of American Cinema," *Film History* 17, no. 1, (2005): 117.

<sup>5</sup> Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Susan K Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 309.

and political, cultural, and racial tensions. This paper's discussion of movie theatre desegregation builds on the historiography that recognizes the powerful link between sexuality and civil rights.

Movie theatres highlight the conflicts, anxieties, and fantasies of the society that creates and consumes entertainment. Therefore, they are particularly interesting to look at how both policymakers and citizens viewed them as racially divisive spaces. This paper will analyze how movie theatres were viewed distinctly as public spaces in the process of desegregating the southern United States. Movie theatres stand out in the movement to desegregate, and this was due primarily to the harsh reaction towards the perceived sexuality of these spaces. Movie settings varied, including both drive-in theatres and indoor theatres. Both of these venues must be examined to understand conceptions of simultaneous public displays of entertainment and private interactions at the theatres. As recent historiography has shown, the Civil Rights struggle should be studied as inexorably linked to gender and sexuality. The specific battle for movie theatre integration reveals a key relationship between the history of racial tensions and the worry over sexual expression. The darkness of movie theatres and their connection to a new dating culture linked them with concerns about unsupervised sexual encounters and intrigue. This study of southern movie theatres' unique complexity in integration reveals how regulations of youth dating culture in the postwar period and the fears of interracial intimacy produced an especially prolonged and complicated process of desegregation.

The battle for desegregation in the United States was complex—spanning decades, involving many different methods of organizing, and reaching staggered successes. It is important to understand one key element of this struggle: the segregation and restriction of leisure. Leisure in this context is a broad term, referring to both amusements and entertainment along with romantic relationships and sexuality. In order to understand the fight for movie theatre desegregation, it is essential to recognize how much of the reasoning for segregation was centered on a stated fear of different races interacting together in spaces that replicated the privacy of the home. For example, the railroad was a highly contested space of segregation in the nineteenth century. The danger of interracial intimacy dominated the discourse involving segregation, particularly involving transportation. Edward Ayers claims, “The sexual charge that might be created among strangers temporarily placed in intimate surroundings, many whites worried, could not be tolerated in a racially integrated car.”<sup>7</sup>

The forms of entertainment along with the spaces of amusement were strictly segregated, especially in the southern United States, in order to regulate the intimacies of leisure that they produced. Mamie Garvin Fields spoke about how in South Carolina there were specific time slots when white people would stay away from the town in order to not interact with Black people entertaining themselves in the town. She said, “Really, certain whites didn't like to think you had leisure to do anything but pick cotton and work in the field.”<sup>8</sup> Leisure must be

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<sup>7</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140.

<sup>8</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 133.

understood historically as a privilege that faced regulations and policing. Through constrictions of leisure, white supremacy and privilege were maintained and potential social and sexual interracial interactions were thwarted. An understanding of the sentiments surrounding leisure and sexuality for Black Americans is a key background to analyze the work towards desegregation. Desegregation activists battled harmful stereotypes and unfair rules, regulations, and laws by employing methods such as protests, demonstrations, legal battles, and boycotts.

As with the American student movement of the 1930s and 40s, young people's participation has always been essential to the fight for civil rights. According to historian Robert Cohen, "The movement encouraged students to identify with the working class rather than the upper class, to value racial and ethnic diversity instead of exclusivity, and to work for progressive social change."<sup>9</sup> Before the *Brown v Board of Education* decision in 1954, which said that segregation in schools was unconstitutional, youth and student branches of major activist groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), worked diligently for civil rights. They organized boycotts about segregation of transportation systems, fought for workers' rights, formed Black community spaces, led anti-lynching campaigns, and fought tirelessly to end segregation in schools.<sup>10</sup> "We have rejected the concept that youngsters should not participate in civil rights demonstrations," James Farmer, chair of the Congress of Racial Equality stated, "They are not being forced to do anything against their will. In fact, most of the motivation for the Civil Rights struggle has come from the youth."<sup>11</sup> This youth activism continued to push desegregation efforts forward, even after the *Brown v. Board* decision.

Youth activism was particularly crucial to the organizing around movie theatre desegregation. Student groups led demonstrations throughout the South, some ending in mass arrests.<sup>12</sup> In 1961, Edward B. King Jr, a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), stated "We have called for stand-ins at theaters throughout the South as our first move in the second phase of the student protest movement." Often these stand-ins involved setting up "revolving lines" at box offices so each time a Black patron was denied a ticket they would go to the end of the line and ask again, making it so white patrons could not get tickets.<sup>13</sup> These protests were waged throughout most of the southern states. In Greensboro, North Carolina there was a student-led boycott of movie houses in 1957 after a Black minister had been sent to balcony seats during a viewing of "The Ten Commandments."<sup>14</sup> Then later, in 1963, hundreds of Black college students from A&T College in Greensboro were arrested for

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<sup>9</sup> As quoted in Thomas Bynum, *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936-1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>10</sup> V.P. Franklin, *The Young Crusaders* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021), 17-34.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin, *The Young Crusaders*, 143.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Feagans, "Atlanta Theatre Segregation: A Case of Prolonged Avoidance," *Journal of Human Relations* 13, no. 2 (1965): 208.

<sup>13</sup> "Students Launch Drive to End Dixie Theatre Bias," *Tri-State Defender*, 17 February 1961, 8.

<sup>14</sup> "Negroes in Boycott: Act Against Movie Houses in Greensboro, NC," *New York Times*, 30 April 1957, 23.



attempting to enter segregated theatres and protesting outside of them.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in Nashville, Tennessee, Black student groups had staged a series of “stand-in” demonstrations at theatres in 1960. Over a year later, through discussions between theatre managers and leaders of student groups, Nashville decided to grant “selected Negroes” admission to four downtown theatres.<sup>16</sup> In Louisville, Kentucky, students organized “open theatre” demonstrations that ended in violence and mass arrests as protesters called for the end of segregated theatres.<sup>17</sup>

It is evident that youth organizing focused specifically on the desegregation of public venues because many public spaces were essential to youth culture of the 1950s and 60s—including schools, restaurants, and recreational facilities such as movie theatres. While these spaces were meant for all generations, the newfound dating culture in the postwar era meant that young people were particularly invested in entertainment spaces. What’s more, as we will see, movie theatres were important spaces for developing youth fantasy both with on-screen depictions and in audience interactions.

In the 1950s, the new postwar dating culture emphasized “necking and petting before marriage.”<sup>18</sup> This dating culture existed alongside the push to define “normal” sexuality and control the performance of youth sexuality.<sup>19</sup> There was an imperative to promote a heteronormative ideal of American citizenship during the Cold War era, often manifested through regulations of teenage interactions. Heterosexual skills were encouraged to be practiced within regulated environments that discouraged any homosexual or interracial relationships, such as chaperoned school dances.<sup>20</sup> Scholars such as Mary Louise Adams argue that positioning teenagers as “the future” and those that would continue America’s progress made them targets of “interventions meant to maximize normality and therefore maximize stability.”<sup>21</sup> Sex and sexuality were the focus of this intervention. Sexuality was viewed as fragile and, more than anything else, as having the ability to be “abnormal.” Adams points out that “dance halls, ‘hamburger restaurants’ and other unchaperoned and ‘disreputable’ commercial establishments were thought to provide the type of unsavory moral climate that would lead to sexual delinquency.”<sup>22</sup> Movie theatres, especially any theatre with an integrated audience, would have fallen into this category of morally questionable spaces for teenage interaction.

During the Cold War period, the term containment was used to reference the foreign policy of preventing the spread of communism abroad. Domestic containment was a term that referred to efforts enforcing conformity of gender and sexuality to fit values closer to the

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<sup>15</sup> “150 in Greensboro Held in Protest: Negro Students Gather At Cafes and Theatres,” *New York Times* 16 May, 1963, 24.

<sup>16</sup> “4 Nashville Movies Drop Color Bar on Experimental Basis: Agreement is Reached by Theatre Managers, Student Officials,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 2 May 1961, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 208.

<sup>18</sup> Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 118.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 87.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, *The Trouble with Normal*, 95.

<sup>21</sup> Adams, *The Trouble with Normal*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Adams, *The Trouble with Normal*, 94.

Victorian Era of “traditional” family roles.<sup>23</sup> These postwar sexual discourses stood in for fears about “changes in the global balance of power, about the changing shape of the family, about the effects of the new prosperity.”<sup>24</sup> Historian’s writings on the emphasis on enforcing heterosexuality and the desire to regulate postwar dating culture to promote “normalcy” in youth sexuality allow for an understanding of the pressures on postwar youth and the cautious lens with which the social spaces of movie theatres were viewed by those fearful of unregulated intimacy. Young people pushed back against the control over their romantic lives by finding unsupervised locations for intimacy, such as movie theatres. Additionally, many of these young people worked towards desegregating these public spaces to create more open sites for leisure.

Often the youth groups working towards integration goals were consolidated in church groups. V.P. Franklin argues that “religious beliefs provided cultural justification for social engagement.”<sup>25</sup> For example, in Atlanta, Georgia, the Young Adult Group of the United Liberal Church was involved in specifically working toward movie theatre desegregation. The United Liberal Church was an integrated church that was a part of the national Unitarian Church but the group conducting one particular survey was all white.<sup>26</sup> On the evenings of October 11th and October 12th of 1961, the Young Adult Group conducted a survey in order to investigate the reaction of movie theatre audience members to desegregation. This survey took place a month after the completion of successful protests to desegregate all lunch counters in Atlanta.<sup>27</sup> The survey asked the following questions to the patrons of two different theatres: “Why do you come to this theatre?”, “Are you aware of the desegregation of lunch counters in Atlanta?”, “How do you feel about lunch-counter segregation?”, and “How would you feel about Negroes coming to this theatre?”<sup>28</sup> For each question, they offered options to select from in order to gauge reactions to the questions posed. They polled 136 people between the two theatres and the results provide a small snapshot into what the conversations around desegregation in Atlanta looked like in the early 1960s. The survey results indicated that most people attended the theatres because of what pictures were being shown. They also showed that practically everyone surveyed knew about lunch-counters being desegregated and around 72% accepted or didn’t care about this change. In terms of the potential for movie theatre desegregation, the percentage of those that would accept integration of the movie theatre was only slightly lower than those who accepted desegregation for lunch-counters.

The results of this survey provide key insights into popular opinion surrounding the desegregation of different public spaces in the South. The fact that this youth group chose to compare lunch counters and movie theatres, indicates that perspectives on desegregation could not be addressed as a uniform opinion. The question posed was not, “How do you feel about

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<sup>23</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books 1988), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, *The Trouble with Normal*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> V.P. Franklin, *The Young Crusaders* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021), 23.

<sup>26</sup> “Query Filmgoers On Race Bias.” *Variety*. Vol. 234, No. 8. October 18, 1961.

<sup>27</sup> “Movie Patrons Given Integration Views,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 12 October 1961, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 213-216.

segregation?” but rather there was a deliberate distinction based on the type of space in question. Therefore, one must look at what the specific battle for desegregation looked like for movie theatres in order to understand the unique tensions regarding this sort of environment.

In Atlanta, the process to achieve movie theatre desegregation was drawn out through extended periods of protests and attempted negotiations with theatre managers. In 1961, the Committee on the Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR) first approached theatre owners in Atlanta asking them to desegregate their theatres. This committee was formed in 1960 by a group of college students focused on organizing demonstrations for civil rights. They were consistently rebuffed by the theatre managers even when they were joined by the NAACP and Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations (GACHR).<sup>29</sup> The survey conducted by the church youth group took place in the midst of these failed negotiations. The managers expressed anxiety based on alleged reports that business was lost when white patrons were “afraid to come downtown” after desegregation demonstrations occurred at theatres.<sup>30</sup> This fear of “loss of white patronage, and therefore, income” had been proven to be baseless from the examples of other successes of desegregating public facilities, such as the public library, the transit company, and the lunch counters.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it wasn’t until a second meeting in December of 1961 with eight theatre representatives, four members from civil rights protest organizations, the mayor, and the chief of police that a decision regarding the desegregation of Atlanta movie theatres was made.

Still, from that point, desegregation moved along at a snail’s pace. The Metropolitan Opera was set to appear before a desegregated audience in May 1962 and so it was decided that they were going to wait until this example had been set before any further desegregation work was done.<sup>32</sup> There would first be a “cooling off period” during which there could be no attempts at desegregation. Then there would be a “control period” between May 6th and June 1st. During this time, at least two Black patrons per week were allowed at the four downtown theatres. At the three suburban theatres, the control period was set for an indefinite time but “within sixty days these theatre representatives were to meet with the students.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the theatre desegregation process in Atlanta was highly regulated and stalled. The survey conducted by the young adult group importantly highlights how even though almost three-fourths of those surveyed were okay with desegregation, theatre segregation did not begin to occur in Atlanta until over a year later. Even on the second day of surveying, theatre managers were anxious about questions being asked about desegregation. The surveyors were “told that they would not be allowed to come back after their conduct of the evening.”<sup>34</sup> Janet Feagans describes Atlanta theatre desegregation as a “case of prolonged avoidance,”<sup>35</sup> prompting a further investigation into what stalled movie

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<sup>29</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 210.

<sup>30</sup> Janna Jones, *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall, and Resurrection* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2003), 27.

<sup>31</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 212.

<sup>32</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 211-212.

<sup>33</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 212.

<sup>34</sup> “Theater Bars 7 Integration Poll Takers,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 13 October 1961, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 208-218.

theatre integration more than other public spaces and why there was heightened anxiety regarding this specific issue.

Atlanta was not alone in this trend of delayed and prolonged movie theatre integration. The Carolina Theatre in Durham, North Carolina only allowed African Americans admission to strictly segregated areas— up 97 steps to the balcony section known as the “Buzzard’s Roost.”<sup>36</sup> This section was uncomfortable, overcrowded, had terrible visibility, and “assigned the viewers to an arena that connoted public humiliation.”<sup>37</sup> The discomfort of the Buzzard’s Roost was part of what motivated the formation of Black theatres to fit the needs, desires, and expectations of a black movie-going population. Eventually, however, Black theatres that had once provided a comfortable sanctuary for Black audiences were no longer enjoyable because of the limited screen offerings.<sup>38</sup> Black theatres lacked financial resources and facilities which meant major Hollywood productions were not being shown at these theatres. Instead, “race movies” made by Black production teams and featuring Black actors were shown. Charlene Regester explains that “race movies were made with a limited and unstable amount of capital; they were distributed in a limited market to theaters catering exclusively African American audiences; and their appeal as entertainment was less than that of the more technically sophisticated Hollywood pictures.”<sup>39</sup> A perspective not explored within this paper is an investigation into the opinions surrounding theatre desegregation held by independent Black theatre managers and those who supported Black theatres as community spaces. An interesting concept for additional future research would be to compare these reactions with the push by so many Black moviegoers to desegregate theatres rather than attend Black theatres. Those working towards desegregation were seeking to create what they viewed as the best experience for Black audiences.<sup>40</sup>

In February of 1962, the Durham Youth Chapter of the NAACP petitioned Durham’s city council to desegregate the government-owned Carolina Theatre. Following this, the Durham Sun reported that theater management said “the integration question is ‘not negotiable now.’”<sup>41</sup> A large-scale protest followed in 1962, during which 200 demonstrators continuously asked for tickets, not stopping even when they were refused, and they eventually rushed into the lobby to continue the demonstration.<sup>42</sup> Later into the summer, eight students filed a suit in US Middle District Court aimed at ending racial discrimination at the city-owned Carolina Theatre.<sup>43</sup> In the suit, they asked for the barring of all policies and practices of racial segregation. Over a year later, the Carolina Theatre was finally desegregated.

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<sup>36</sup> Regester, “From the Buzzard's Roost,” 114.

<sup>37</sup> Regester, “From the Buzzard's Roost,” 115.

<sup>38</sup> Regester, “From the Buzzard's Roost,” 119.

<sup>39</sup> Charlene Regester, “The African-American Press and Race Movies, 1909–1929” in *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era*, ed. Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>40</sup> Janna Jones, *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall, and Resurrection* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 49.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, *The Southern Movie Palace*, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Jones, *The Southern Movie Palace*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> “8 Students Ask Court to Desegregate Theatre: Workshop Precedes New Drive,” *The Afro-American*, 28 July 1962, 3.

In other southern states, such as Tennessee and Arkansas, movie theatre desegregation also occurred only after other public spaces had been integrated. In Nashville, it was announced in 1961 that “selected Negroes are being admitted to the four downtown motion picture theatres on an experimental basis.” This was after the city had ended segregation of the municipal transit system, public schools, lunch counters, and department stores.<sup>44</sup> In Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in 1963, the decision to desegregate five movie theatres only came after lunch counters, schools, and parks had already been negotiated to be integrated.<sup>45</sup>

That movie theatre desegregation in the South was drawn out and delayed past the integration of other spaces was directly due to the perceived sexuality of movie theatres. Returning to the survey conducted in Atlanta, patrons were asked what brought them to the theatre. However, audience members were only offered pre-written options as answers instead of them getting to explain their own reasons. The options given were that patrons attended theatres for: the type of movie shown, the comfortableness of the theatre, the proximity of the theatre to their homes, or the attractiveness of the theatres.<sup>46</sup> The patrons were not given the option to say that they enjoyed going to the theatre because it was, for example, a good spot for a date or to spend romantic time with a significant other. Had this question been more open-ended, I believe that it would become evident how movie theatres operated as spaces for both active socializing and romantic intimacy.

With the darkness and the proximity of the seats, the theatre was an ideal spot for intimate private exchanges. Lauren Rabinovitz explained that for movie theatres since their inception “peril lay in the venue’s capacity for unsupervised heterosexual interaction.”<sup>47</sup> The theatre was a space that emphasized fantasy. Through on-screen fiction and adventures, movies presented the opportunity to envision a different future for oneself and for the collective group experiencing the film.<sup>48</sup> The theatre spaces were designed to create social exchange and pleasure, except in segregated theatres which were specifically set up to avoid these dynamics by having Black patrons in the balconies.<sup>49</sup>

From their earliest conception, the movie theatre as an entertainment space has been shrouded with concerns of immorality and obscenity. Nickelodeons in the early 1900s were popular spaces for immigrants and the working class to attend, due to the cheap ticket prices and the unsupervised nature of the theatre. In the early years of the nickelodeon, it was said that the theatre “occupied a kind of urban liminal space that resisted dominant culture.” Additionally, the nickelodeon was considered a site for “a newly ambiguous commercial relationship between the

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<sup>44</sup> “4 Nashville Movies Drop Color Bar On Experimental Basis: Agreement Is ...” *Philadelphia Tribune* 2 May 1961, 5.

<sup>45</sup> “Pine Bluff Opens Parks, Schools, and Movies to Negroes,” *The Tri-State Defender*, 10 August 1963.

<sup>46</sup> Janet Feagans, “Atlanta Theatre Segregation,” 213.

<sup>47</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Rutgers University Press, 1998), 112.

<sup>48</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> Cara Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 65.

sexes.”<sup>50</sup> The resistance to heterosocial interactions in the new mass culture amusements of the twentieth century indicated anxiety surrounding the ongoings within the theatre. *American Magazine* wrote about the dangers of darkness arising from the “indiscriminate acquaintance” and “foul air in the theaters” that darkness covered for.<sup>51</sup> Regulations frequently focused on censorship of on-screen content, but this did not always recognize or reform conditions within the theatre space. From their origins, movie theatres provoked anxiety of illicit sensual experiences in dark, intimate settings.

Especially in the southern United States, the theatre was depicted as a morally corrupt place, specifically for young children. Gypsy Smith, an evangelist preacher, spoke in Macon, Georgia preaching on the topic “Christians and Their Relation to the Amusements of Today.” He declared, “I believe the people in our churches— I won’t call them Christians, for they are not—who are theatergoers, who dance and who play cards, are doing more to damn the life of the churches than all the harlots and saloons in the world.” While this preacher was also talking about stage plays at the theatre along with motion pictures, his stance was clear—the theatre was “no place for a person of delicacy and refinement.”<sup>52</sup> Fundamentalist Protestantism in the early twentieth century rejected the new modern culture of amusement, a trend best exemplified in the concerns surrounding moviegoing.

Similarly, in Lexington, Kentucky, the Board of Education characterized the movies in 1916 by saying they are often “immoral, degrading and injurious in the extreme to the welfare of the people, especially the young.”<sup>53</sup> Concern for the younger generations attending theatres was common as the movies were presented as a dangerous, unmonitored, and morally ambiguous social space. In New York, there was a city-wide campaign to stop unescorted children younger than sixteen from attending the movies. This drive was launched by the police department’s Juvenile Aid Bureau and headed by Byrnes MacDonald. MacDonald argued that “The physical hazard presented by large groups of children gathering unprotected by adult supervision is a danger that cannot be easily overlooked. Fire, stampede or panic among young unsupervised children might cause great loss of life, and the morals of our children must be protected from the vultures who prey upon the youth within the dark confines of these public gathering places. Therefore, until some adequate provision for adult supervision of children within our public places is provided by law, it is my intention to enforce the present statute as completely as possible.”<sup>54</sup> Even before movie theatres were more of the mass entertainment phenomenon they would become in the 1950s and 1960s, they were depicted as spaces of moral concern and anxiety-inducing sites of youth engagement.

The fear of intimate social interactions between the races was terrifying to many white southerners. Susan Cahn writes that the “mixing” of races “threatened the core beliefs and social

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<sup>50</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure*, 106, 120.

<sup>51</sup> Steven Joseph Ross, *Movies and American Society*, 2nd ed. (Malden: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2014), 28.

<sup>52</sup> “Church People Who Play Cards, Dance and Attend Theater Raked over Coals. ‘Doing More to Damn Life of Church,’” *Macon Telegraph*, 15 January 1916.

<sup>53</sup> “Lewd Movies Condemned by Board of Education,” *The Lexington Herald*, 29 February 1916.

<sup>54</sup> “59 Theatres Caught in Police Drive to Bar Young Children at Movies,” *The New York Times*, 5 January 1936, 6.

hierarchies that white southerners clung to as the basis of their “way of life.”<sup>55</sup> When speaking about concerts, school classes, and dances, Cahn mentions a “heterosocial youth culture beyond the control of adults.” The fear of these shared physical spaces and the potential sexual “mixing” that could occur was clearly present in the struggle for movie theatre desegregation. Movie theatres were consistently pushed to the end of the list of spaces allowed to be integrated. Clearly, southern whites desperately tried to avoid the creation of shared intimate spaces that had such a specific focus on dating culture.

To understand how this anxiety of the theatre venture presented itself later on in the 1950s and 60s it is helpful to briefly examine perspectives on another form of amusement popular among postwar young people: rock ’n’ roll. This form of music allowed for sites of interracial interaction on the dance floor and at concerts. Whites’ anxieties about rock ’n’ roll were based on fears of sexual relationships between races. As Cahn explains, “with rock ’n’ roll in their midst and school integration looming on the horizon, white adults faced the stark reality that it was their own emboldened daughters who might well initiate sexual “mixing” or “integration” in choosing boys to date or marry.”<sup>56</sup> The popularity of rock music along with the integration of schools created deep concern in the southern United States. With teenagers having all of these newfound opportunities to interact with other races, many white adults felt that the social order of the South was being threatened. Movie theatres presented yet another source of potential corruption for southern youth.

When examining reactions to the space of the movie theatre, the complexities of drive-in theatres further the argument that the sexuality of movie theatre spaces was a contentious and divisive topic in the South. Drive-in theatres, known also as “ozoners” for their open-air atmosphere, were starkly different physical spaces than the traditional “hardtop” theatres and so present a distinct conversation regarding racial dynamics at the movies. Drive-in theatres first proliferated in the 1950s and peaked in the 1960s in connection with the postwar baby boom and the increased motorization of America. In 1960, around 5,000 drive-ins operated in America, compared to 13,200 conventional theaters, and *Variety* reported that this contributed 23 percent of annual box office gross.<sup>57</sup>

To begin with, one can look at the popularity of ozoners as opposed to hardtops in terms of attendance. It is difficult to have an exact measurement of how many people attended drive-ins versus indoor theatres. However, many surveys have attempted to present this data. In a well-publicized study published in *Look Magazine*, Alfred Politz claimed that 23,600,000 people attended a motion picture during one week in February of 1957. Albert Sindlinger— who specialized in gathering film industry statistics— claimed that “when people are asked if they attended a motion-picture show, they refer only to a four-wall theatre.” Sindlinger explained that since the public viewed the drive-in as its own space, distinct from the movie theatre generally,

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<sup>55</sup> Susan K Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 308.

<sup>56</sup> Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 244.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Doherty, “The Segregated Past of Drive-In Movie Theaters,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/segregated-past-drive-movie-theaters-guest-column-1300306/>. Accessed on 29 October 2021.

they needed to be asked specifically about outdoor movie attendance. Based on this conclusion, Sindlinger estimated that during the time frame that Politz was looking at, over 5 million people attended drive-in theatres. Sindlinger explained that many drive-ins are open even in February in the South and that in the North the drive-in theatres were open during the colder months because of in-car heaters.<sup>58</sup>

In Kerry Segrave's work on the history of drive-ins, she publishes the *Film Daily Year Book's* report on monthly film attendance by type of theatre. This charts attendance from 1952 to 1954 and indicates how in the summer months the attendance numbers at indoor and outdoor theatres were very close. In July of 1952, according to this report, 36.3 million people attended indoor theatres and 28.5 million went to drive-ins. Similarly, in August of 1952 it was said that 39.6 million and 40.9 million attended indoor and outdoor theaters respectively.<sup>59</sup> Drive-ins, then, must be understood as an essential component to movie-going in the 1950s. Their popularity warrants an examination into audience demographics, social tensions, and desegregation conversation of drive-ins.

Some argue that the drive-in theatre was seen as an inclusive space, "appealing to those who felt excluded from indoor cinemas."<sup>60</sup> A drive-in theatre meant that patrons could watch from the comfort of their own cars, could converse with those who they went with, and could move about more freely. In 1945, the president of a group of drive-in theatres wrote that "the drive-in audience consisted largely of those who had not been in the habit of going to the cinema, including: mothers with small children (about 80 percent); laborers and factory workers who, coming from a hard day's work in old clothes, did not want to go to the bother of dressing but wanted to relax in the open air; stout people who found the average theatre chairs uncomfortable; elderly people; people in ill-health; cripples and other shut-ins."<sup>61</sup> A *Variety* article explained that many attendees were there so that if their small children had a teary outburst it would be less embarrassing. It was concluded that 70% of the audience at a drive-in theatre would not go to a regular indoor movie venue.<sup>62</sup> The drive-in presented a new way of watching a movie, which was less physically restricting in its open-air setup.

Along with the new drive-in audience made up of those who did not typically go to the hardtop theatre, sometimes drive-in theatres were depicted as drawing more Black patrons than indoor theatres. An article from 1949, titled "Ozoners' Big Negro Draw," reported that "in many sections of the South where segregation in regular houses is strictly enforced, the rule is not applied to the ozoners. Because of this, Negroes flock to the open-air theatres which are attractive de-luxe affairs as compared to the second-rate flickeries generally available to them."<sup>63</sup> There could be no architectural separation of the races in the same way that there was with

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<sup>58</sup> "Politz vs Sindlinger Ticket Count." *Variety*. Vol. 207, No. 5. July 17, 1957.

<sup>59</sup> Kerry Segrave, *Drive-In Theaters: A History From Their Inception in 1933* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 1992), 237.

<sup>60</sup> Guy Barefoot. "My Search for 'Passion Pits with Pix': Cinema History and 1950s Drive-In Audiences," *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 16, no 1. (May 2019): 824.

<sup>61</sup> Barefoot, "My Search for 'Passion Pits with Pix'," 833.

<sup>62</sup> "Ozoners' Big Negro Draw." *Variety*, Vol 175, No. 8. August 3, 1949.

<sup>63</sup> "Ozoners' Big Negro Draw." *Variety*.



indoor theatres' balcony sections. However, as will be discussed later, this did not mean the drive-in was free of racial segregation.

One reason for this emphasis on an inclusive outdoor theatre was that it constituted an attempt to switch up the narrative of drive-ins as “Passion Pits with Pix.” This term was used frequently to describe the sexual nature of drive-in theatres, specifically among teenagers. The drive-in theatre provided both a public and a private space. It offered an informality and privacy closer to the experience of watching TV at home. However, there was also a socializing element to drive-ins that contradicted this notion of privacy. It was ‘this element of forbidden mixing’ that ‘led to the perception of drive-ins as “passion pits”, places of illicit contact.’<sup>64</sup> Drive-ins’ label as “passion pits” came with the understanding that they “drew the romancers,”<sup>65</sup> meaning the teenagers who were more interested in hook-ups in the privacy of their personal vehicles rather than the on-screen entertainment. Ladies Home Journal, in a special ‘Profile of Youth,’ interviewed eighteen-year-old Maxine Wallace from Mississippi, on her dating life. She pointed to a new drive-in theatre as a place where “everybody is too busy necking to watch the movie.”<sup>66</sup> The romantic and sexual possibilities of the back rows of a drive-in brought hordes of teenage couples to their local “passion pits.” All night drive-ins that operated from “dusk to dawn” were said by a committee made up of Theatre Owners of America to be “putting back the bad label drive-ins have fought to get rid of.” One member of this group explained his disdain for the late hours of the drive-in by pointing to complaints of troublemaking and immorality. “We cannot feel that one or two nights of a temporary jump in the gross is worth such an aftermath,” he explained.<sup>67</sup> Drive-in theatres hoped to avoid the label of unscrupulous sexual playgrounds but nevertheless, teenagers looking for private intimate spaces represented a large portion of their patrons and secured the title of “Passion Pits with Pix” for the venues.

Along with being sites of teenage sexuality, drive-ins were also spaces of fraught racial tension despite their presentation as a more inclusive theatre space. While it was initially difficult to plan for segregation at drive-ins because there was not the same architectural ability to create a Buzzard’s Roost, drive-ins soon had their own method of segregation. Black patrons were either turned away entirely and denied entrance, or they were restricted to special sections of the parking lot. To protest this segregation, across the South there were similar “stand-ins” of continuous rotating ticket buying that occurred at indoor theatres. These were known as “drive-ins” at the drive-ins. The form of protest involved driving up and blocking the entrance until one was sold a ticket. In 1960 in Winston-Salem, nine cars went to each of the three segregated drives-ins in town. They were refused admission at each turn, so they just continued to back up and cycle back through, inhibiting any other patrons to get through.<sup>68</sup>

Drive-ins were not only segregated but as a venue, they also posed unique dangers for provoking racial violence. In a two-sentence newspaper article from 1957, the following was

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<sup>64</sup> Barefoot, “My Search for ‘Passion Pits with Pix,’” 834.

<sup>65</sup> “‘Passion Pits with Pix’ in Danger of Revival Via All-Nite Drive-Ins.” *Variety*. Vol 192, No. 9. November 4, 1953.

<sup>66</sup> Barefoot, “My Search for ‘Passion Pits with Pix,’” 828.

<sup>67</sup> “‘Passion Pits with Pix’ in Danger of Revival Via All-Nite Drive-Ins.” *Variety*.

<sup>68</sup> Doherty, “The Segregated Past of Drive-In Movie Theaters.”

reported: “A five-foot-high wooden cross was set afire recently in front of Springs Road Drive-In Theatre in rural Catawba County. “Island in the Sun” (20th), with a mixed white and Negro cast, was current at the ozoner.”<sup>69</sup> Thomas Doherty explains that the “open-air nature and nighttime schedule of the venues proved particularly incendiary — and inviting — to the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>70</sup>

Eventually, around 1962 drive-ins began to slowly desegregate similarly to indoor theatres. Black moviegoers were first admitted during low attendance matinees, then to nighttime shows on weekdays, and eventually also on weekends. There was no advanced publicity of this integration in order to avoid the inevitable protests.<sup>71</sup> Just as was the case with indoor theatres, this desegregation occurred throughout the South long after other public spaces had been integrated.<sup>72</sup> Despite drive-ins’ attempt to market themselves as a more inclusive space fit for “shut-ins” and families with young children, they remained deeply segregated, creating similar racial tensions of the hardtop theatres. The label of drive-ins as “passion pits” meant that they had an association with sexuality that was even more amplified than the indoor theatre. I assert that it is precisely this sexuality that prolonged the desegregation of the drive-in just like the traditional movie venues.

To better understand the sexualizing of desegregation and why it is so connected to the movie culture of the South, one must also look at tensions regarding on-screen interracial content. As seen from the Ku Klux Klan’s cross-burning at the drive-in theatre, interracial depictions on-screen created volatile reactions. The film being shown at the drive-in on that occasion was *Island in the Sun*, a story of interracial romance set on the fictional island, Santa Marta. The reactions to this film indicate how movies involving interracial relationships were treated in the southern United States. A photograph from Charlotte, North Carolina in 1957 visualizes the racial tension over movies. The photo shows cloaked Klan members holding signs that read “We protest the showing of this integrated picture “Island in the Sun” in N.C.” and then Ku Klux Klan is written at the bottom of the sign.<sup>73</sup> *Variety* reported that 20th Century Fox was dealing with the repercussions of an almost total southern boycott of *Island in the Sun*. The production company discussed either editing the film or putting out a special southern edition of the movie so that southerners who were furious at the presentation of interracial interactions on-screen would agree to put their money towards buying tickets to see the film. The article states that 20th Century Studios was “questioning the wisdom, in the current precarious market, of making “provocative” films that, by their very nature, alienate a good section of the badly needed domestic audience.”<sup>74</sup>

*Island in the Sun* was far from the only film that faced southern boycotts and bans based on reactions to interracial interactions on-screen. Another prominent example is the film

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<sup>69</sup> “Cross Burning at ‘Sun’.” *Variety*. Vol. 208, No. 5. October 9, 1957.

<sup>70</sup> Doherty, “The Segregated Past of Drive-In Movie Theaters.”

<sup>71</sup> Doherty, “The Segregated Past of Drive-In Movie Theaters.”

<sup>72</sup> Barefoot, “My Search for ‘Passion Pits with Pix,’” 833.

<sup>73</sup> “KKK pickets Charlotte’s Visualite Theater for showing ‘Island in the Sun,’” Photograph. Charlotte, North Carolina, 1957, <https://www.cmstory.org/exhibits/african-american-album-volume-2/1958-kkk-pickets-visulite-theater>. Accessed on 31 October 2021.

<sup>74</sup> “Racial Romance in ‘Sun’ Upsets the Neighbors.” *Variety*. Vol 207, No. 1. June 5, 1957.

*Brewster's Millions* which was banned in Memphis, Tennessee. Lloyd Binford, chairman of the Memphis Board of Motion Picture Censors, spoke adamantly against the film explaining that it depicted too much familiarity between the races and was "inimical to public welfare." He stated, "the movie has Rochester, the Negro comedian, in an important role. He has too familiar a way about him and the picture presents too much social equality and racial mixture. We don't have any trouble with racial problems down here, and we don't intend to encourage any by showing movies like this." The board ruled that there would be no "mixed" pictures anywhere in town but films with all-Black casts could be shown at Black movie theatres.<sup>75</sup> In almost every racial ban Binford imposed he used the phrase "social equality" as his rationale to ban the film. Sociologist Gunnar Myrdal studied the widespread use of the phrase in the South and explained that aversion to "social equality" must be "understood as a precaution to hinder miscegenation." Ellen Scott explained how "social equality" —as understood in the South— threatened to bring miscegenation and "further threatened to undermine the racial hierarchy."<sup>76</sup> A careful study of Binford's rulings on films reveals that each decision he made banning a film came down to anxieties around interracial relationships.<sup>77</sup>

Binford wrote a response from the censor board about the film *No Way Out* (1950). The film starred Sidney Poitier who played a Black doctor treating a racist white criminal, all while there is tension of near race riot. Binford could have written about how the film might have inspired race riots, a topic that had "ostensibly mandated his entire racial policy." Instead, he chose to link the film to miscegenation. "Do our white people and especially the actors have to be so dumb that they cannot comprehend the subtlety of this communistic plot of mongrelization to destroy them!" wrote Binford. "We are having a rash of so-called socialites marrying negroes or hybrids," he continued. "The most extreme penalty of the law should be applied" to those who "violate the racial integrity and purity of both races, in these miscegenation [sic] matings."<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Pastor M.E. Moore stated at the Jackson Heights Missionary Baptist Church, that *Brown v Board*, "makes possible the mongrelization of the white and negro races."<sup>79</sup> This sentiment, along with Binford's statements from the censor board, indicates a clear sexual reading of integration, both on-screen and in the public. Regulations on movie content and the segregation of spaces occupied by young people, such as schools and theatres, indicate the desire to control and monitor sexuality as a key dimension of the Jim Crow South.

The Memphis Committee on Community Relations eventually worked to desegregate theatres without any publicity so as to not cause turmoil and bad press. After downtown stores and local schools had been integrated, movie theatres in Memphis followed in 1962.<sup>80</sup> Censorship of films did continue beyond this point of desegregation. However, censorship was

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<sup>75</sup> Philip T. Hartung, "Trillions for Brewster," *The Commonwealth*, Vol. 42. May 11, 1945.

<sup>76</sup> Ellen C. Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 6.

<sup>77</sup> Whitney Strub, "Black and White and Banned All Over: Race, Censorship and Obscenity in Postwar Memphis," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (2007): 694.

<sup>78</sup> Strub, "Black and White and Banned All Over," 695.

<sup>79</sup> Strub, "Black and White and Banned All Over," 697.

<sup>80</sup> Strub, "Black and White and Banned All Over," 696.

viewed critically by many who were horrified by the banning and editing of movies across the South. The Motion Picture Association of America stated that “To censor movies is tantamount to denying freedom of the press. We contend it is much worse than that. Movie censorship based upon racial prejudice is totalitarian bigotry; it is a vicious form of thought control.”<sup>81</sup> Films were being banned for depictions of “social equality” or for fair treatment of Black characters in the southern United States. Prejudice and pressure from the South influenced Hollywood’s film policies as John McManus and Louis Kronenberger explained “it may be stated fairly that the white, Southern film audience, totaling at the most one-eighth of the total American film audience, is responsible for Hollywood’s wary policy on treatment of the Negro in films.”<sup>82</sup> The Supreme Court attempted to regulate how films would be censored by creating a clearly delineated test of obscenity. On June 24th, 1957, *Roth v. U.S.* was decided and it was said that obscenity consisted only of material “utterly without redeeming social importance,” and that “all ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance” were protected. Nevertheless, a week after the *Roth* decision, the Memphis Board of Censors declared *Island in the Sun* obscene, ignoring the Supreme Court ruling.<sup>83</sup>

It is undeniable that Southern movie censorship was connected to anxiety around interracial relationships. This fear of miscegenation, as it is presented in the form of censoring on-screen content, was a crucial factor behind the prolonged desegregation process of movie theatres in the South. I argue that this fear of intimacy, specifically between races, is precisely the reason that movie theatres had a uniquely extended desegregation timeline. From the movie theatre’s earliest stages as nickelodeons, their darkened private indoor settings generated fear of immorality and dangerous situations for young moviegoers. The fear of “mixing” in nickelodeons was present since there were not the same regulations of separated social classes within the theatre as there was expected to be in society outside the cinema. Later on, with the rise of entertainment such as rock ‘n’ roll, interracial mixing in amusement and leisure became a central fear for white southern adults. They were terrified of what these shared entertainment spaces and interests between different races would mean for the youth of the day. Movie theatres amplified these fears by taking the same anxieties about intimacy and adding a private darkened environment associated with teenage dating culture.

Drive-ins, with their label as “passion pits”, further solidified the reputation of movie culture being connected with youth sexuality. While not the same intimate indoor space, the privacy of automobiles, and their association with dating, not to mention their ubiquity in American life, meant drive-ins were a hub for sexual and romantic relationships. It is impossible to separate sex and intimacy from a discussion of movie theatre culture and it is this connection that makes the desegregation of this public space uniquely situated. Theatres were perceived as bringing community members together “across class and gender lines into common spaces that

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<sup>81</sup> L. Baynard Whitney, “Vicious Censorship-.” *Arkansas State Press*, 16 May 1952.

<sup>82</sup> John T. McManus and Louis Kronenberger, “Motion Pictures, the Theater, and Race Relations,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 244, no. 1 (1946): 152–158.

<sup>83</sup> Strub, “Black and White and Banned All Over,” 697.

were constructed for the purpose of social interaction and pleasure.<sup>84</sup> It was exactly this capability to create an environment that promoted pleasurable, intimate interactions that generated such deep anxiety in white southerners.

Desegregation generally throughout the South was a long grueling process that did not resolve entirely when laws were passed. De-facto segregation continued long after decisions such as *Brown v Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, as this paper indicates, movie theatres in particular were desegregated at a slower pace, long after other public spaces in the South, such as schools, lunch counters, and public parks, and at a slower pace.

The discussion of movie theatre integration reveals broader concerns of sexuality as a part of the Jim Crow South. Young people's sexuality was highly regulated during the postwar culture of domestic containment and motivated by the desire to maintain sexual "normalcy." As dating culture became more widespread in the 1950s so did the urge to regulate spaces of leisure that had sexual connotations. With the future of American prosperity and stability at stake, white southern adults were terrified of their teenagers finding entertainment in dark movie theatres where there could be unsupervised intimate interactions, including potential interracial relationships. The regulation of the on-screen content at movies reveals that fear of miscegenation dominated the anxiety of the South, highlighting the sorts of worries that prolonged movie theatre integration. The recent acknowledgment that sexuality must be studied as a critical component of civil rights history adds to the discussion of movie theatre integration. This struggle was one that involved youth culture, the importance of leisure, regulating sexuality, and racial tensions throughout the South.

Finally, returning to that disastrous midnight showing in High Point, North Carolina, it is evident that the battle for movie theatre desegregation was a struggle for the privilege of leisure and respect in entertainment spaces. As fourteen white patrons sat comfortably in the orchestra seats, white supremacy prevailed as the privilege to enjoy leisure was forcibly taken away from thousands of Black moviegoers. Black Americans fought to move out of the Buzzard's Roost and away from underfunded theatres to appreciate movies from a comfortable and accepting space. Entertainment culture presents desires, fantasies, and displays key social dynamics of the world around it. Through a study of the spaces that allow for entertainment to exist, a window is opened to assess the larger tensions of the society that enjoys the content. The distinctly complex struggle to desegregate movie theatres paints a powerful picture of the anxieties that plagued the southern United States.

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<sup>84</sup> Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom*, 65.

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# Why Africa?

## Towards a Materialist Understanding of Racism and the Slave Trade

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Two letters, written centuries apart, both concerning the morality of African slavery stand in remarkable opposition to each other. The first, a letter probably addressed to King Philip II of Portugal, took objection with Portuguese enslaver's moral justifications concerning the capture and sale of Africans. The unnamed author wrote in 1612:

These acts of enslavement are together the cause of great scandal, and they are the source of very great sins on the part of the heathens and Moors of those places. Seeing that the Portuguese deal in the merchandise in every way they can, they also take up that life, robbing and tricking men, women, and children in order to sell them, and they search for other tricks with which to make their profits.<sup>1</sup>

The second, a letter written in 1823, addressed to a Portuguese-language newspaper in London, *Correio Brasiliense*, responded to anti-slavery arguments from the era. This author, much unlike the first, rationalized African slavery under the premise that Africans were created by God for the sole purpose of trans-Atlantic slavery:

When the author of Nature drew from nothing the previous continent of Brazil, it seems through an act of His special Providence he also created just opposite Brazil in the interior of Africa men who were deliberately constructed to serve on this continent; men who in the heart of summer, when any European would want to envelop himself in snow, seek out the sun and gather about a fire to warm themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: a Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 11. See, *Proposta a Sua Magestade sobre a escravaria das terras da Conquista de Portugal* Document 7, 3, 1, No. 8, Seção de Manuscritos, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 429-30. See, *Diario do Governo* (Rio de Janeiro), April 22, 1823.

What is most striking about these two letters is the shift of ideological terrain upon which the authors state their case. The first author argues from a position that does not take the institution of slavery for granted, placing moral burden on the slave merchant to prove the integrity of his trade. Arguing against such, the letter contains a scathing critique concerning the supposed grounds for enslaving Africans, observing that in many cases the basis for enslavement – religious conversion, war captivity, debt peonage – was not only unjust, but often outright falsified on the part of the merchant in service of acquiring more human capital.

And yet the second letter, written two centuries after, not only defends the institution of slavery, its author also argues that the entire continent of Africa was created for that very purpose. Hence, for our second author the ideological terrain upon which his argument was to be constructed had changed to a point where enslavement could not only be presented as morally permissible; but it was now also possible to frame the horrid condition as a natural state of affairs set in motion by a divine creator.

Examining both letters can help sharpen our understanding of the past insofar as the development of Atlantic ideologies is concerned. Indeed, many historians have taken up the challenge, attempting to understand better how such a grim practice – that of the trans-Atlantic slave trade – came about in an era that would simultaneously be characterized by strong advancements in the arena of human rights. But despite a massive amount of scholarship on the subject, notable gaps exist within our current understanding of Atlantic slavery.

What I'd like to do in the following pages is answer a simple historical question: *Why Africa?* Or, perhaps more pointedly: Why was the continent of Africa chosen as the prime source for the Atlantic slave trade? Common understandings of the subject posit that Africa was chosen as a site to source slaves because of its inhabitant's stark phenotypical differences to Europeans, thus: *African slavery was first justified because of European racism*. But upon even quick reflection on the historical record, this claim begins to stumble. As our first letter indicates, the moral substance to African slavery was not present in the fifteenth century, made clear in the author's closing remark:

All the other provinces of Europe are shocked by us, saying that the Portuguese, who look upon themselves as pious and devoted, commit such extraordinary acts of injustice and inhumanity.<sup>3</sup>

The overtly racial basis for African slavery, like those expressed in the second letter, were not the preselected ideological positions for Europeans, rather they were developed over time in response to changing material circumstance. The following argument differs in that it approaches the question *Why Africa?* with a firm materialist approach, arguing that African slavery was put into motion not by nascent racial attitudes of Europeans, nor was it the result of distinct cultural differences or religious opposition between continents, but simply *because it was profitable to do so*.

My answer to the question might seem like a truism to some. And yet it might also outrage others with its close focus on the economic motives for slavery. So it is in the footsteps

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<sup>3</sup> Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 15.

of historians like C. Vann Woodward that I follow, in which one dissects carefully “the great impersonal forces in history” that granted great riches to some at the cost of terrible suffering to others.<sup>4</sup> This historical thread should by no means diminish the quite real effects produced by the racist and barbarous delusions of European colonists. One needs only a cursory glance at the historical record to see the multitude of racism’s evils, the cruelty of which need no elaboration here. Let me hasten to add then, that it is perhaps through the very process of unraveling the tangle of ideology and economy that one can elucidate the character of both while diminishing the significance of neither.

In the following pages, I attempt to bridge the chasm between truism and affront upon the steady platform provided by careful historical analysis. I examine the developing Atlantic world-system throughout the past half millennium, taking particular focus on (1) the rise and fall of Atlantic empires, (2) the plantation system of agricultural production, and (3) the rise of the Atlantic working classes (and accompanying erasure of the American indigenous populations). I conclude with some observations regarding the formation of *race* as an ideological tool for exclusion; and a brief corrective for future historical inquiry that emphasizes the importance of subject-observer distance.

## **Empires & The New Atlantic**

In presenting a causal account into the origins of African slavery, a summary concerning the development of empire and trade in the Atlantic helps provide a backbone to any historical examination of changing political-economic relations of the era. Further still, if we are to characterize Atlantic slavery as a phenomenon spanning the final years of the thirteenth century up until the late nineteenth (1492-1888), then its general contours changed greatly from beginning to end.

Upon encountering the American continents, the original divisions of labor took cruel advantage of the local indigenous populations, often with the acquisition of precious metals as a central focus.<sup>5</sup> At this time, the empires of the Atlantic – Spain, England, France, and Portugal – had great stake in the accumulation of wealth as a means to finance military conquest, a widespread means of trade domination at that time. Warfare in the age of Atlantic slavery, as the historian Charles Tilly has shown, was inexorably linked with the expansion of intercontinental trade. Moreover, the great influx of capital from the Americas would prove to be lucrative to the trade empires; so much so that within two decades of Columbus’s first voyage, Spain had firmly established trading colonies in the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> In light of such rapid economic drive, we can confidently say that the new world was immediately seized upon by the Atlantic empires as a

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<sup>4</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Commemorative ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9-11.

<sup>5</sup> The historian Robin Blackburn characterizes this epoch of Atlantic slave economic development as *baroque* given its focus on the primitive extraction of silver and gold. See, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights*, (London: Verso, 2011), 33-36. See also, his more focused treatment of this epoch, *The Making of New World Slavery: from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 2010), 20-25.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, (Cambridge, Mass. USA: B. Blackwell, 1990), 91-95.

site for capital accumulation. Put more concisely: the strong hand of political economy was the guiding hand of colonial development in the Americas; slavery – both indigenous and African – ultimately in service to such ends.

But the nascent trade outposts and first colonies did not first turn to Africa as a primary location to source slaves. And they most certainly did not have a codified system of slavery that clearly defined who was free and who was not. It is important here to assert that the system of chattel slavery that we are accustomed to in traditional (particularly Anglo-American) historic depictions of indentured labor was the product of centuries of development, and even still varied massively across continents. In short, the African slave trade was *built*. And it was a trade that required two sides.

Before the Spanish were foraging around the islands of the Caribbean in the late fifteenth and early fourteenth century (1450-1500), the Portuguese were beginning to establish a series of trading centers along the western flank of Africa. The outposts were not made with grand designs of a future African slave trade in mind, they were simply extensions of a trading empire that sought to maximize capital accumulation. These Portuguese dependencies – Madiera, Azores, and São Tomé, to name a few – were early experimentation in the development of what would eventually become a thriving Atlantic plantation economy (subject matter of which I will return to later). Moreover, these initial sites of Atlantic commerce maintained several key characteristics that can help us pin down the origins of the African slave trade and ideologies that accompanied it.<sup>7</sup>

The opening Portuguese trade ventures into Africa were only possible because of careful political balance of power shared between the Portuguese traders and their local hosts. Initial mercantile relationships did not seek to create a mass slave export industry, but rather developed as time went on, morphing in keeping with the demands of the Atlantic economy. These first trade relationships mostly dealt in the exchange of precious metals and spices – seldom in slaves, and when slaves were traded the exchange was often internal, not trans-Atlantic.<sup>8</sup> At this time (1450-1550) the economic demand for trans-Atlantic slavery simply had not developed; thus it is unlikely that the first Portuguese traders in Africa knew what hideous turn their profession would take.

And across the Atlantic, principal Spanish and Portuguese settlements maintained the direct purpose of capital accumulation, not the xenophobic domination of differing populations. As follows, if we are to accept that the development of these new colonies followed the morbid logic of political economy – *not* ur-racial discrimination – then the creation of the African slave trade warrants a historical examination of the changing economic circumstances and imperatives of the era. Hence, our causal arrow begins not by examining prejudice, but rather the plantation.

## **The Plantation**

Crucial in understanding the origins of the slave trade is a clear grasp of the purpose of slaves themselves and the economic underpinnings that warranted the massive scale of the

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal, *Slavery in Brazil*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 2009), 5-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

Atlantic slave trade. The aforementioned developments on the Atlantic islands of São Tomé and Cape Verde were key first steps in what would eventually become perhaps the most important division of labor in human history.

And yet, it is perhaps necessary to first answer the question of why slave labor was needed in the first place. A simple cost analysis is not sufficient. I find convincing the hypothesis advanced by historian Evsey D. Domar, who's influential essay, *The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis*, presents a historical framework for understanding the development of slave and free labor in different societies. Domar sees the emergence of slavery as a response to specific political-economic formations in which there was an abundance of *land* and a dearth of available non-coercive *labor*.<sup>9</sup>

What could be a better example of such circumstance as sixteenth-century Brazil? Land was in great abundance, but labor – especially European labor – was in short supply. Brazil, much like the initial Portuguese ventures into Africa, was not settled with advanced economic development plans beyond midway trading outposts in the path to Asia.<sup>10</sup> The plantation system in Brazil gained its substance throughout the sixteenth century, in which a number of important developments occurred pertaining to the African slave trade. First would be the outlaw of indigenous enslavement in 1570, which itself was never a sustainable source of labor. Second would be its relative explosion in terms of scale: by the end of the century Brazil would be the foremost producer of sugar in the world, aided by its abundance of natural resources (flat land, good soil, and lots of water). But perhaps most important was its relationship with Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The eastern edge of Brazil was one of the best sites to send slaves from Africa. Slave voyages from Angola to Brazil during this period had much lower rates of slave mortality, and were thus much more cost effective. Existing Portuguese developments on the western African coast – Luanda and São Tomé – also aided by provided staging grounds for the mass exportation of slaves.<sup>12</sup> As such, returning to Domar's formulation on the emergence of slavery, a synthesis of the land/labor model with period historical developments between Brazil and Africa can shed light on why economic momentum started to develop around the African slave trade and American plantation systems. In short, a strong hypothesis can be posited that characterizes the emergence slavery from a lack of free labor and abundance of land; Africa being the prime target to ameliorate the former, given the twin combinations of indigenous erasure and preexisting trans-Atlantic trade infrastructure.<sup>13</sup>

The rise of Dutch power in the Atlantic would mark a decisive shift in trajectory of the Atlantic slave trade. Seizure of Portuguese northeast Brazil in the mid-seventeenth century would give Dutch merchants a taste of the massive profit margins reaped by the previous overseers, a structure of capital accumulation the new masters were keen to retain and expand.

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<sup>9</sup> Evsey D Domar, "The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis," *The Journal of Economic History* 30, no. 1 (1970): 18–32.

<sup>10</sup> Philip D Curtin, "Capitalism, feudalism, and sugar planting in Brazil" in *The rise and fall of the plantation complex: essays in Atlantic history*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 46-57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 51-2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 53-5.

<sup>13</sup> This should not be taken as an iron law of slave-labor development, but rather a possible explanation for why such practices could emerge in the context of the developing capitalist world.

But to keep the plantation machine running and profitable, a reliable source of human capital was required. African slaves had played a major role in the northeast Brazilian plantation economy for over a century prior to Dutch control, and the Portuguese had developed a trans-Atlantic trade network that could upkeep an African slave population in which more died than were born.<sup>14</sup>

And so it followed that the Dutch would need to wrest control over the strategic Portuguese trade entrepôts on the western edge of Africa if they were to mirror the extreme profit margins of the Portuguese. Capturing a trade fortification on the African Coast, while not an easy task, was not as difficult as a full-scale territorial invasion. No European power was willing to maintain a permanent sizable force in Africa until the eighteenth century, and so the trade fortifications were the constant site of capture and re-capture by varying European powers, each seeking the advantage of a trade foothold in Africa.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch would start this pattern of conquest when they captured the Portuguese ports of Luanda and Elmina in 1641 and 1637.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to understand here that these European trade castles were literally just that – coastal fortifications – the existence of which was entirely dependent on both enslaved African service labor (castle slaves) and the maintenance of cordial mercantile relationships with local African hosts. It is not as if the Europeans had unbroken control over the African Gold Coast, they absolutely did not; and their predicament should be described in the language of precariousness rather than domination. These entrepôts and their operative structure bespeak the purpose of the whole order itself: *trade*, downstream of which was the accumulation of capital and the means granted by such.<sup>17</sup> Had the purpose of Atlantic slavery instead been racial domination, it is hard to understand why Europeans would have put up with such an arrangement, let alone sail to African shores in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

The proceeding “sugar revolution” of the seventeenth century can largely be seen as an outgrowth of the maturing Brazilian slave-labor plantation model across the Caribbean and into North America. The Dutch, after the conquest of Brazil, would swiftly arrive in the French Caribbean selling African slaves, the know-how on sugar plantation operation techniques, and even offered their ships to transport the finished product back to Europe.<sup>19</sup> New technological developments in maritime trade and a more complex new-world division of labor also allowed for the plantation to model to spread and adapt to new circumstance more quickly. And following in the footsteps of the Portuguese, African slaves were sought out for their supposed

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<sup>14</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa; Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 100-109.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 102-4. See also, Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade; a Census*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 226-21.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Burdon Ellis, *A History of the Gold Coast of West Africa*, (London: Chapman and Hall, Ld, 1893), 41-47.

<sup>17</sup> Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 36-53.

<sup>18</sup> The historian Herman L. Bennett has provided an excellent account into the fascinating trade relationship intricacies between the first Portuguese traders on the Gold coast and the African ruling class. The dynamic between the two would seem to run counter to common understandings of precolonial contact between Africans and Europeans. See, chapter "Histories" in *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 85-107.

<sup>19</sup> Curtin, "Trade Diasporas Overseas" in *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 101.

tropic resilience against the environment, a fiction, but one that helped generate economic imperatives for the expansion of the African slave trade.<sup>20</sup>

## The Making of the Atlantic Working Classes

It is during this time that the material circumstance of much of Europe's working classes were changing in dramatic fashion. In England's agrarian regions, primitive accumulation of capital by a wealthy landowning elite created new imperatives that would fundamentally change the direction of economic development in the Atlantic.<sup>21</sup>

The way of life for much of the European peasantry would transform in keeping with English developments, albeit in different manners. The process of *enclosure* of public lands – the *commons* – in effort of increasing agricultural production was met with great protest from much of the English population. The peasantry was effectively erased as a new bourgeois class emerged. But not only that. This is also when the political consciousness of the European working classes began to articulate itself in force.<sup>22</sup> Historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have explored this history at length in their wonderful book *The Many-Headed Hydra*. They outline the "Curse of Labor" in the second chapter of the book:

We argue that the many expropriations of the day – of the commons by enclosure and conquest, of time by the puritanical abolition of holidays, of the body by child stealing and the burning of women, and knowledge by the destruction of guilds and assaults of paganism – gave rise to new kinds of workers in a new kind of slavery, enforced directly by terror. We also suggest that the emergence of cooperation among workers, in new ways, and on a new scale, facilitated new forms of self-organization among them, which was alarming to the ruling class of the day.<sup>23</sup>

The Atlantic working classes from Africa, Europe, and America would all take part in this new division of labor, one that, as Linebaugh and Rediker note, was "enforced directly by terror". Thus the political-economic formations of the early Atlantic were built upon a punitive foundation, one that kept threats to capital in line. But the continental working classes would not bear equal share in the struggle.

The blunt truth is that it would be the European empires – and them alone – that colonized and then exploited the Atlantic world. This new balance of power created a fundamental partiality regarding political entitlement among the working classes. The English working classes, as historian Barbara J. Fields has outlined in her important essay *Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America*, "did not enter the ring alone", rather, they had the benefit of drawing from "company with the generations who had preceded them in the struggle; and the outcome of those earlier struggles established the terms and conditions of the latest

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<sup>20</sup> Curtin, "The sugar revolution," in *The rise and fall of the plantation complex*, 73-81.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 2017), 113.

<sup>22</sup> See the great work of Peter Linebaugh for more on the political consciousness of the emergent working classes, "The Commodity and the Commons" in *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 46-68.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, "Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water" in *The Many-Headed Hydra: the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 40.

one."<sup>24</sup> We can likewise extend the same analytic base framework – with some variations – to the Portuguese, Spanish, and French working classes who populated the Americas. They also did not enter the ring alone.

The indigenous populations of the Americas shared a similar predicament with African slaves, and historian Patrick Wolfe has pushed the boundaries of Barbara Fields's ring analogy a little further in his book *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*:

Unlike the enslaved Africans in the Americas, Natives did not enter the ring alone. Their reinforcements were not oceans away. Nevertheless, their histories had equipped them with resources that were not tailored to the unequal confrontation that settlers' endless renewability set in train. Natives' finite local stock was no match for imperialism's global elasticity. Rather, they were reduced to relying on a shrinking pool of resources whose reproduction had been severely hampered by settler encroachments.<sup>25</sup>

Wolfe continues, making creative use of the concept of preaccumulation in regard to colonialism's edge:

Eurocolonial society arrived in Native country *ex nihilo* (or perhaps *ex machina*) and ready-made, condensing the power and expansive violence of the long run. This profundity, a plenitude that is relatively resistant to local determinations, is colonialism's primary competitive advantage. . . . When Europe was piecing together its imperial-industrial-capitalist hegemony, there was no prior Europe already riding on its back. Arriving in Native country, on the other hand, capitalism already contained its own global preaccumulations – including, Russian-doll-like, capitalism itself – along with strategic resources such as the enslavement of Africans.<sup>26</sup>

The European working classes and the indigenous population of the Americas would both retain means or occupy circumstance by which mass enslavement could be somewhat averted. The same was not true for Africans. Resistance against enslavement was much more difficult for those African slaves who found themselves in a foreign land with no clear means by which to free themselves except outright rebellion. And their continental kin would almost certainly occupy the same bottom rung of the social ladder, making resistance that much harder to mount. The European dominant classes understood this partiality – even if only implicitly – and would act upon it accordingly when they constructed the political-economic order of the era. They no doubt observed that horrible conditions under which the Atlantic plantation complex operated would always be met with resistance on the part of those who toiled in the fields, refineries, and storehouses of the cruel system. And so an economic equation in which resistance was least potent and profit highest was to be constructed. Africa was the solution of such equation.

With this treatment we can determine – almost by process of elimination – why Africa would continue to be the continent from which slaves were sourced. The flight of Muslims from the Iberian peninsula, the rise of the Ottomans and Turks in the east (which effectively closed off slave trade routes to eastern Europe), and the increasing universalism on the part of the Catholic

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<sup>24</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race And Ideology In The United States Of America." *New Left Review* 181, no. 181 (1990): 95–118.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016), 21.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



church in the sixteenth century set Europeans sights on Africa.<sup>27</sup> Coupled with an analysis of the plantation economic model, a political-economic understanding of *Why Africa?* begins to emerge. What is left, is the thorny question of race.

## The Invention of Race

Previous sections have avoided explicitly identifying the role of racism in the development and maintenance of the African slave trade. Given the direction of my argument, this treatment is purposeful.

I am of the belief that any historical analysis regarding *racism*, or its more digestible twin *race*, must thoroughly seek to understand both the origins and substance of the phenomena before identifying a place within any causal account.<sup>28</sup> Otherwise, by misidentifying the object of study, historians drink from a poisoned well: the consequence being corrupt analysis. Hence, both those who see race as a tool of human differentiation with a coherent biological basis *and* those who believe racism to be an ever-present fault of human cognition are equally destined to produce erroneous historical accounts. In short, we must identify what race and racism *are*, and the precise historical circumstance they are *from*.

Much of my analysis draws from the invaluable work of historian Barbara J. Fields, who has gracefully dissected our current understandings of race and racism, taking a path counter to the work of many contemporary historians. In her seminal essay *Race and Ideology in American History*, Fields lays out the substance of racism quite clearly, by rooting its substance in that of ideology, observing:

For the moment, let us notice a more obvious consequence of recognizing race to be an ideological and therefore historical product. What is historical must have a discernible, if not precisely datable, beginning. What is ideological cannot be a simple reflex of physical fact. The view that Africans constituted a race, therefore, must have arisen at a specific and ascertainable historical moment; and it cannot have sprung into being automatically at the moment when Europeans and Africans came into contact with each other.<sup>29</sup>

Note that Prof. Fields identifies the origin of race *not* when Europeans first encountered Africans, but at a later time. The passage continues, unraveling the threads of race further still:

To treat race as an ideology, and to insist upon treating it in connection with surrounding ideologies, is to open up a vast realm of further complications. Ideologies offer a ready-made interpretation of the world, a sort of hand-me-down vocabulary with which to name the elements of every new experience. But their prime function is to make coherent – even if never scientifically accurate – sense of the social world.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Klein, *Slavery in Brazil*, 14-5.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara J. Fields has written about this subject at great length, including the distinction between *race* and *racism*. See, Barbara J. Fields, "Of Rogues and Geldings," *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003): 1397–1405.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in C. Vann Woodward, J. Morgan Kousser, and James M. McPherson, *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 151.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

Accordingly, we can understand race as an ideological construct, one that makes available a language that aides in the interpretation of social reality. With such framework as our analytic foundation, it becomes clear that race serves a specific purpose, a role that can be better defined by examining its historic origins.

Historian Jean-Frédéric Schaub has shed light on this subject in his new book *Race is About Politics*. As the title indicates, Schaub sees the race as an inherently political construct, pertaining specifically to social exclusion. Schaub writes of two central operations that race performs:

Identifying individuals' specific features in terms of which groups they belong to and then asserting that those traits are transmitted from generation to generation.<sup>31</sup>

Following Schaub's analysis, we can pin down more accurately the role that racial ideology in the African slave trade. The structure provided in *Race is About Politics* is also similar to the work of Adolph Reed Jr., who has identified race as an *ideology of ascriptive difference*. These are mechanisms of hierarchy that, in his words, "sort populations into categories of classification that are in principle set off from one another by clear, uncrossable boundaries."<sup>32</sup>

Here I posit a synthesis of the frameworks provided by both Fields, Schaub, and Reed; one that pertains specifically to the practical circumstances in which African slavery developed in Atlantic world:

*Race* is an ideological construction, a fictive categorical distinction produced by *racism*, that ascriptively sorted populations into differing groups based off of ancestry; and in the context of the Atlantic world, offered the slave-holding elite with a vocabulary and structure to justify a political-economic formation underpinned by the mass enslavement of Africans. Its origins are not time immemorial, but rather a response to elementary moral considerations against social exclusion.

The above synthesis grounds both the *origin* and *substance* of racial ideology in the realm of historical circumstance, not pseudobiology nor ontology. Insofar as my broader argumentation is concerned, I place the origin of the ideology as a response to moral challenges of the era. Thus racism was not an initial western reflex triggered by encounters with Africans, but rather a response to period ethical considerations.<sup>33</sup> Following this logic, it is worth pointing out that a medieval society – in which indentured labor was not considered anachronistic – would have had little use for racial ideology; a need arises when slavery itself comes into question. This means that its birth required two elements: hierarchical domination – in this case the extremes of the Atlantic slave trade – *and* a widespread belief in some form of universal suffrage or common

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *Race Is About Politics: Lessons from History*, (Princeton University Press, 2019), 156.

<sup>32</sup> Adolph Reed, Jr, "Unraveling the Relation of Race and Class in American Politics," *Political Power and Social Theory* 15 (2002): 271.

<sup>33</sup> Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," 152.

condition of man. Hence, racial ideology would have little use in pre-capitalist society, and can certainly be discounted as the driving engine of trans-Atlantic slavery.<sup>34</sup>

The unique political and economic nexus of the nascent Euro-colonized Americas would provide fertile ground for racism to flourish. The "Creole Pioneers" that Benedict Anderson examined brilliantly in his seminal work *Imagined Communities* were, in some sense, acting upon a similar impetus that the Atlantic racists would as they sought to solidify their new order.<sup>35</sup> Both nationalism and racism provided a strong ideological tonic with which the common turbulences of the era could be subdued. Without these divisive tools, the dominant classes would have found themselves atop a political order burning from the ground up – a glimmer of which could be seen when Nathaniel Bacon, joined by a motley crew of European indentured servants and enslaved Africans, set Jamestown alight.<sup>36</sup>

The motive becomes clear if we return more carefully to the two letters concerning Atlantic slavery we began with. Our first letter – its ideological position against slavery notwithstanding – makes no reference whatsoever to the racial inferiority of Africans; and also when discussing the various rationalizations of slave traders never brings up racial attitudes on their part – their justifications, while certainly spurious, were not racial in nature, rather they concerned debt peonage, war capture, and religious conversion. This letter was written at a time (1612) when the massive plantations of the new world were beginning to require increasing numbers of slaves to upkeep their immense levels of production, an equation that could not be satisfied by American indigenous labor alone. A new source was needed, along with justifications to satisfy the moral concerns of the era.<sup>37</sup>

Our second letter (1823), sent to a newspaper in effort to advocate a pro-slavery argument, contains much different ideological baggage. The author puts forth an argument dripping with extant racism:

African slaves are generally rude, soft, and lascivious. Only the goad of slavery can rouse them from the profound inactivity in which they live. Free from that goading, they will return to their natural apathy.<sup>38</sup>

What changed in this period was not the openness by which Europeans express their racism, nor was there a dramatic shift in cultural "attitudes" in the Atlantic; rather, there was a fundamental rearrangement of the material circumstance of everyday life. These new circumstances would engage in a slow epistemic advance – influencing in the most subtle of ways – the ideologies of the era, providing a robust buttress to the new divisions of labor that relied so heavily on African chattel slavery. The Atlantic ideologies may have been rife with internal contradiction; and indeed it only takes a cursory glance to reveal the inconsistencies; but

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<sup>34</sup> I have been influenced quite heavily by the writings of David Byron Davis, whose work explores the confluence of morality and enslavement – the problem – throughout history (with a modern-period focus). See his magisterial work, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Creole Pioneers" in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), 47-65.

<sup>36</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: the Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, (New York: Norton, 1975), 328-44.

<sup>37</sup> Conrad, *Children of God's Fire*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 429.

what is important is not their logical consistency – a quality human beings often lack – it is their *function*.<sup>39</sup>

Consequently, any causal account that places racism as the ignition mechanism to the African slave trade will begin to struggle when confronted by the historical record. Racial ideology provided a skeleton key to the Atlantic slaveholding elite that allowed them to maintain contradictory enlightenment beliefs in the face of their own hideous treatment of Africans. The slave trade – not initial reflexes against phenotypical difference – gave it substance. Thus historians that look to racism as principle cause of African slavery weave histories that tell us much more about their own ideological predispositions than that of their subjects; an error that results from not adequately distancing the present from past.

So our question – *Why Africa?* – is best answered by taking a careful examination of the political-economic circumstances of the era. The violent maritime trade struggles of empire, the rise of plantation economies in the new world, the creation of the European working classes, and erasure of American indigenous populations all contributed – like variables in a mathematics equation – to the morbid calculus that turned towards Africa as the primary site to source human slaves.

### **Reading From Present to Past**

The direction of historical reflection is backwards: it starts from the perspective of the present and then proceeds in retrograde to events past. This is a task easier said than done; and one that is quite easily tarnished by our own predispositions and ideological reservations. I would argue that existing historiography on race and slavery in the Atlantic suffers from a blind spot regarding the separation precisely between present and past. An error that is ideological in nature; and thus incredibly difficult for the detached observer to overcome.

And yet, I first pivot to ask: what makes these histories – those that forefront racism as the driving engine of Atlantic history – seem so convincing? Two key operations are at play here. First is the ideological propensity of racism to make itself appear as a real biological part of human life. Second is the difficulty with which one separates the perspectives of the present from those of people past. Both manipulations hinder our understanding of the practical circumstances in which past subjects navigated and understood the world around them, presenting our own hermeneutics as if they were inbuilt lenses through which we have always seen the world. Race, for those who participate in ideological amphitheater of the present, seems very real. But our seemingly reflexive tendency to "see color" is a tragic artifact, or "trace", to borrow from the work of Patrick Wolfe, resulting from centuries of political exclusion.<sup>40</sup> It is not a primordial flaw in human cognition, rather its ideological inertia comes from a constant

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<sup>39</sup> To follow a different historical path, the work of Zine Magubane details quite convincingly the importance of figurative language and colonial imagery in the development of hierarchical mechanisms. See, "Capitalism, Female Embodiment, and the Transformation of Commodification into Sexuality" in *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 14-39.

<sup>40</sup> Wolfe, *Traces of History*, 4-6.

refreshment process conducted in the many arenas of everyday life.<sup>41</sup> Thus we find these histories convincing precisely because of their inability to adequately separate present from past, not despite it.

One consequence of inadequate separation is the shrinking of gaps in our historical sieve to the point that any past method of ascriptive differentiation becomes *racial* in character: an upshot of the seductive and near-imperceptible ability of ideology to compress and transform the past into a more digestible narrative that fits seamlessly with our interpretation of the present. This same genus of trickery is at work when we try to grapple with the awkward detail that a nineteenth-century countryside French peasant would probably not have known what “France” was;<sup>42</sup> and why Aristotle remarked on the “incredibility” of spherical earth theories in the face of its seemingly flat character.<sup>43</sup>

And so we seem, given the new histories of race and capitalism, to run the risk of turning this historical discourse into a strange game, the name of which quickly becomes how far back in history racism can be found. Shapes in the clouds become real flying objects: what was a post-enlightenment phenomenon now becomes medieval, and then what was medieval becomes most certainly a product of antiquity or even prior still. All the while the unconscious slight-of-hand trick is missed: racism has undergone a subtle substance conversion from an ideology into a trans-historical ontology, now practically a preselected attitudinal component of Europeans present from time immemorial; and a treatment somewhat akin to Edward Said’s rather troublesome concept of *latent* Orientalism, a prejudice ostensibly ever-present within the European mind.<sup>44</sup>

I would only add then, that the fact that contemporary debates over the origins of *Race* have provided causal accounts with massively differing chronologies – literally centuries apart – should provide us a clear signal that the theoretical ground upon which we conduct historical analysis is dodgy.<sup>45</sup> It is dodgy in a double sense: that it is of low quality – not adequate for

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<sup>41</sup> I am deeply indebted to the work of Karen and Barbara Fields, who’s masterful work *Racecraft*, has guided my thoughts on the subject. The last two essays within, concerning the work of Emile Durkheim, have provided a mainstay to my understanding on the propagation of, and linkages between race, rationale, and ritual. See, “Witchcraft and Racecraft: Invisible Ontology in Its Sensible Manifestations” and “Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation Between Emile Durkheim and W.E.B DuBois”, in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012), 193-260.

<sup>42</sup> I hesitate to characterize this phenomenon as “presentism” in light of the specificity of the ideological construction at hand. See, Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1976). And for an interesting mention of the *race* subject, see the work of Robert Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640: an Essay in Historical Psychology*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976), 77-82.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, “On the Heavens,” Book II, Chapter 14, in *The Works of Aristotle*, (Oxford University Press), 297-298.

<sup>44</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 102. See also, for a response and bracing corrective, the great essay by Vivek Chibber, “Orientalism and its Afterlives,” *Catalyst* Vol 3, No. 1 (Spring 2019), 10-33.

<sup>45</sup> I provide three examples: Jean-Frédéric Schaub’s aforementioned *Race is About Politics*, which places the origins of racial ideology squarely on the Iberian peninsula the fourteenth-century; Geraldine Heng’s *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* which, as the title implies, argues that the origins of race are earlier still in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries; and lastly, Benjamin Issac’s *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, which traces the intellectual origins back further still. See, Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*

historical foundation; and that it, like a false premise, is exceedingly dangerous. This is not an exaggeration. The stakes are high: racism is real, and it continues to operate in the most pernicious of ways; and without proper ideological elucidation it cannot be overcome.

But nevertheless, it remains extremely tempting to read the woes of our present condition far back into the circumstance of our historical subjects. Thus, a well-trained historian takes their own predicament for granted, looking backwards for shadows on the wall that were never really there. Ideology guides the hand when historical connections become too tenuous to make, drawing lines and connecting dots within the archive that are only significant from the perspective of the present. This is not to say that closeness always taints the historical account: an overly distant analysis can slip into the trap of losing all tethered consideration for what ultimately were the real – and often painful – experiences of past human beings.

The historian Carlo Ginzburg has written at length about the critical importance of balancing such endeavors in his book *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, of which two short passages are included below. The first, at the start of the book, touches on the importance of separation:

It seems to me that defamiliarization may be a useful antidote to the risk we all run of taking reality (ourselves included) for granted.<sup>46</sup>

And the second, in the final chapter, reflects upon the balance between creating distance and maintaining *proximity* to subject:

“Out of sight, out of mind,” as the English say; as the Italians say, “*Fratelli, coltelli*” – where there are brothers, there are knives. . . . Too great a distance gives rise to indifference; too great proximity may awaken compassion, or provoke murderous rivalry.<sup>47</sup>

Do not misunderstand me here: I am not claiming that ideology itself has no place in the archive, nor am I arguing that the ideological presence of racism or any other pernicious ascriptive differentiation mechanism is in any way insignificant. Rather, I am arguing that historians should seek to examine their own position within history more critically, emphasizing the need for analytic distance between historian and subject. I have attempted to do so here: writing a history that is chiefly concerned with the practical circumstances of the developing Atlantic world. A treatment of history that “passes everything through a sieve of doubt” is, to quote the historian Shlomo Sand, “the necessary condition for a more reliable history.”<sup>48</sup> But until then, the tool that historians use to gaze into the past will more resemble a mirror than telescope; and so much more distorted history will be.

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also, Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. (Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 22.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

<sup>48</sup> Shlomo Sand, “Retreating from National Time” in *Twilight of History* (London: Verso, 2017), 236.

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# **An Instrument of Collective Redemption: The Moral Mondays Movement and Grassroots Community Organizing**

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On a hot day in the summer of 2013, 92-year-old Rosanell Eaton addressed a crowd of protestors outside the North Carolina General Assembly in Raleigh. Having personally registered thousands of voters in her 75 years of civil rights activism, Eaton lamented the recent weakening of voting rights in North Carolina:

I have been up against a lot. I was only 18-years-old, finishing high school [when I faced] the voter ID bill that was designed to make it harder to vote. Here I am at 92-years-old doing the same battling. And adding again alongside Republicans' efforts to eliminate and cut early voting... alongside the effort to keep college students from voting by inflicting a heavy financial penalty on their parents if they attempt to vote away from home when they are away at college. And so, we need more, not less public access to the ballot... At age 92, I am fed up and fired up!"<sup>49</sup>

In her speech, Eaton recalled being forced to recite the preamble to the Constitution as a prerequisite for registering to vote during the Jim Crow era.<sup>50</sup> More than seventy years later, Eaton described yet another restrictive voting law in North Carolina: House Bill 589. Eaton saw the bill as an attempt by North Carolina Republicans to disfranchise voters, linking it with her experiences as a young Black woman during the Jim Crow era; she saw both experiences as part of the same history of voter suppression in the state. Eaton was an active participant in the weekly protest movement, vowing to do whatever it took to defend the sacred right to vote. On

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<sup>49</sup> NC Forward Together Moral Movement Channel. 2013. "92 Year-Old Moral Monday Arrestee Fired Up! | Rosa Nell Eaton," July 16, 2013, video, 6:15. <https://youtu.be/6yVdvABN3Hk>.

<sup>50</sup> Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 292.

that summer day in 2013, 92-year-old Eaton was arrested for the first time in her life. Her crime: civil disobedience.<sup>51</sup>

The story of Rosanell Eaton captures the essence of the Moral Mondays movement. Founded in 2013 under the leadership of Reverend Dr. William Barber II and the North Carolina NAACP, Moral Mondays was a grassroots response to the rightward shift of the newly elected Republican supermajority in the state. Although the movement sought to mobilize North Carolinians in opposition to extremist policies by the Republican legislature, it was much more than an oppositional effort. Moral Mondays built and sustained grassroots strength by articulating a vision that drew from religious ideals and a philosophy of ‘fusion politics’ to inspire a diverse group of citizens. Using North Carolina as a case study, this paper will examine the ways that grassroots movements can empower ordinary citizens to engage in the political process. I will use a bottom-up approach to historical analysis to explore the multi-faceted ways that Moral Mondays unified a diverse coalition of demonstrators to inspire faith in an inclusive society and a participatory democracy.

Understanding the formation and evolution of the Moral Mondays movement requires a basic historical overview of North Carolina’s political landscape in 2013. Funded by conservative billionaires such as the Koch brothers, Project REDMAP (Redistricting Majority Project) sought to increase Republican control of state legislatures to enable partisan gerrymandering during the 2010 redistricting process.<sup>52</sup> One of the top targets of Project REDMAP was North Carolina, which saw Republicans gain control of both houses of the state legislature in 2010.<sup>53</sup> After taking office in 2011, the new Republican legislative majority gerrymandered the state to serve its partisan electoral interests. These gerrymandering efforts paid off in the 2012 election cycle, which saw Republicans win supermajorities in both houses of the state legislature.

The 2012 election also saw the victory of Republican gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory; this was the first time Republicans won control of both North Carolina’s executive and legislative branches since Reconstruction. Despite campaigning as a pragmatic moderate who pledged to “bring this state together,” Pat McCrory took a sharp-right turn almost immediately after entering the governor’s mansion in early 2013. With the support of Republican supermajorities in the legislative branch, McCrory began proposing some of the most radical conservative policies in the nation. These policies affected a wide range of issues including voting rights, unemployment benefits, transgender rights, and cuts to education spending.<sup>54</sup>

At the center of efforts to advance this ideological agenda were several influential right-wing think tanks such as the Civitas Institute, the John Locke Foundation, and Americans for Prosperity-North Carolina. After the 2012 election, Republican policymakers appointed

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Kasino, *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook* (American Issues Initiative, 2020), <https://www.riggedthefilm.com/watch-at-home>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell Robertson, “North Carolinians Fear the End of a Middle Way,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2013, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/us/north-carolinians-fear-the-end-of-a-middle-way.html>.

members of these think tanks into high-level positions, allowing conservative ideologues to influence policymaking on myriad issues such as dissuading the state from expanding Medicaid.<sup>55</sup> According to a published document from July 2013, the Civitas Institute supported state legislation on “tax reform,” “election reform,” and a “major statewide school choice program,” all of which were euphemisms for controversial policies that directly impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians.<sup>56</sup> In yet another example of its legislative influence, the Civitas Institute worked to make the infamous North Carolina voter identification bill even more restrictive by urging state legislators to ban student IDs and tribal IDs from the list of valid state identifications.<sup>57</sup> It is hardly coincidental that the policies passed by the state legislature were consistent with the ideological goals of the Civitas Institute; it reflects the rightward shift in state politics after Republicans gained total control of the state in early 2013. At a Moral Mondays protest later that year, Reverend Barber criticized McCrory and Republican legislators for this sudden conservative shift. Barber said, “they’ve drunk all the Tea Party they could drink and sniffed all the Koch they could sniff,” referring to the influence of the Tea Party and the Koch Brothers on the governing party.<sup>58</sup> Outfitted with new electoral maps that strengthened their political advantage and influenced by the policy proposals of conservative think tanks, the North Carolina Republican Party shifted the state’s political landscape considerably to the right in the early months of 2013.

These dramatic policy changes had repercussions for North Carolinians: 900,000 people were affected by the elimination of the earned-income tax credit; 500,000 people were affected by the state’s refusal to expand Medicaid; 170,000 people were affected by the state’s decision to end federal unemployment benefits; 30,000 children were affected by spending cuts to pre-kindergarten programs; and hundreds of thousands of people were affected by proposed new voting restrictions and voter identification requirements.<sup>59</sup> Witnessing the deleterious impacts of these sweeping policy changes on the poor, the elderly, and young families, activists began to vocalize their discontent.

Tyler Swanson was one of the first activists to organize a response to these radical conservative policies. Swanson was a student at North Carolina A&T University, one of the largest historically Black universities (HBCUs) in the country and a site of youth activism during the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>60</sup> Swanson was particularly concerned about Senate Bill 666, which would have eliminated one week of early voting, reduced the number of early voting stations to

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<sup>55</sup> Theda Skocpol and Caroline Tervo, eds., *Upending American Politics: Polarizing Parties, Ideological Elites, and Citizen Activists from the Tea Party to the Anti-Trump Resistance*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>56</sup> Civitas Staff, “North Carolina’s 2013 Legislative Session Recap: Landmark Gains For Conservatism” (Civitas Institute, July 30, 2013), <https://www.nccivitas.org/2013/2013-legislative-session-recap/>.

<sup>57</sup> Theda Skocpol and Caroline Tervo, eds., *Upending American Politics*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> Ari Berman, “North Carolina’s Moral Monday Movement Kicks Off 2014 With a Massive Rally in Raleigh,” *The Nation*, February 8, 2014, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/north-carolinas-moral-monday-movement-kicks-2014-massive-rally-raleigh/>.

<sup>59</sup> Ari Berman, “North Carolina’s Moral Monday Movement Kicks Off 2014 With a Massive Rally in Raleigh,” *The Nation*, February 8, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> “Tyler Swanson – North Carolina NAACP Youth and College Field Secretary,” April 18, 2016, sec. Portrait of a Millennial Activist, [https://sites.duke.edu/pjms364s\\_01\\_s2016\\_tylerswanson/](https://sites.duke.edu/pjms364s_01_s2016_tylerswanson/).

one per county, and eliminated the \$2,500 child tax deduction for young adults who voted at an address different than their parents' home.<sup>61</sup> Swanson and fellow activists at A&T and Bennett College worried these provisions would discourage college students from exercising their right to vote. After the university denied Swanson's proposal to host a protest on campus, he organized a demonstration with the nearby Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and invited Reverend William Barber II, president of the North Carolina NAACP. On April 12, 2013, Swanson gathered with dozens of students and community members for this grassroots demonstration. Derrick Smith, a political scientist at A&T and veteran activist, referred to Swanson and the three other student organizers from A&T and Bennett College as the "Greensboro Four of 2013".<sup>62</sup> On that day in April 2013, in the city where the Greensboro Four launched the sit-in movement more than fifty years earlier, a new protest movement was born.

If the student-led protest on April 12 planted the seeds of the movement, April 29 marked its metamorphosis into a full-fledged organization with a distinct identity and theory of change. On April 29, 2013, a group of approximately fifty protestors marched into the North Carolina General Assembly in Raleigh singing freedom songs. Two of the group's leaders were Reverend Barber and Bob Zellner, a veteran community organizer from the Civil Rights Movement and the first white field secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Just as the Greensboro Four and the 1960 sit-in movement lay the groundwork for the student-led protest on April 12, 2013, so too did the legacy and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement inspire the April 29 protest. The protest was a response to the voter identification bill being debated in the state legislature. The bill sought to transform North Carolina from a state with relatively progressive election laws into a state with some of the most stringent voting restrictions in the country. On the first day of protest, seventeen people were arrested for nonviolent civil disobedience, most of whom were clergy members. Barber and fellow demonstrators referred to the event as a "peaceful pray-in," an intentional description that sought to use a religious allusion to justify the movement's values-based approach to social change. After the demonstration on April 29, the group of clergy members and community organizers began hosting weekly protests event. They called these events "Moral Mondays".<sup>63</sup>

The spring of 2013 saw the rapid growth of the new Moral Mondays movement. Song and prayer filled weekly demonstrations in Raleigh as protestors joined the movement to represent diverse issues of concern to North Carolinians. A *National Public Radio* broadcast from May 22, 2013, interviewed several demonstrators including Larsene Taylor, the vice president of UE Local 150, North Carolina's public service workers union. In the interview, Taylor identified herself as a first-time community organizer who joined Moral Mondays to advocate for labor rights in a state that did not provide strong protections for workers. After being arrested for civil disobedience in a May 2013 protest, Taylor expressed a desire to return to future demonstrations, telling the interviewer, "I'm ready to go back and do it again if it will

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<sup>61</sup> General Assembly of North Carolina, *Election Law Changes*, Senate Bill 666, 2013, <https://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/Senate/PDF/S666v1.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, chap. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

make a difference.”<sup>64</sup> Taylor’s enthusiasm reflects the movement’s broadening appeal as it moved beyond voting rights to galvanize support among various citizen groups with different policy priorities. Like Taylor, many demonstrators joined Moral Mondays in May and June 2013 as the movement grew rapidly and diversified its policy goals.

By the sixth week of protests on June 3, an estimated 1,500 people attended an event branded as the “Mega Moral Monday”. Demonstrators gathered on Halifax Mall in Raleigh to represent a diverse range of issues; among the attendees were public school teachers, environmentalists, feminist activists, clergy members, and union members. Later that day, 150 people were arrested for civil disobedience as they sang freedom songs and delivered speeches in the General Assembly building to highlight the government’s neglect of its most vulnerable citizens.<sup>65</sup> Later in June, researchers studied a Moral Mondays event to better understand the demographic composition of the crowd. Of the 316 people interviewed, 50% were attending their first Moral Mondays protest, indicating the growing popularity of the movement. Additionally, around 90% of those interviewed were white alongside a significant number of African Americans, and the average age of the respondents was fifty.<sup>66</sup> The movement grew more diverse with each week as increasing numbers of young people, immigrants, and Latinos joined the growing demonstrations to represent a broader range of issues.<sup>67</sup>

As the Moral Mondays movement burgeoned in June 2013, so did the backlash against it. High-ranking Republican state senator Thom Goolsby published an infamous op-ed in the *Chatham Journal* titled “Moron Monday shows radical Left just doesn’t get it,” in which he attempted to delegitimize the concerns of protestors and justify the state’s cuts to public services as efforts to eliminate “government waste,” and reduce state budget shortfalls.<sup>68</sup> Goolsby’s claim about this good-faith Republican effort to remain fiscally responsible does not hold up to scrutiny; alongside sweeping cuts to public services, the state legislature passed a major tax overhaul that disproportionately benefitted the highest income earners by eliminating the estate tax and reducing the number of tax brackets.<sup>69</sup> Moral Mondays demonstrators had been protesting against this tax bill, arguing that the bill was regressive because it reduced the tax rate

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<sup>64</sup> Nicole Campbell and Frank Stasio, “Moral Mondays: Modern Day Civil Disobedience In The State Capitol,” *North Carolina Public Radio - WUNC*, May 22, 2013, <https://www.wunc.org/post/moral-mondays-modern-day-civil-disobedience-state-capitol>.

<sup>65</sup> Adam Owens, “More than 150 Arrested at ‘Mega Moral Monday’ Protest,” *WRAL*, June 3, 2013, <https://www.wral.com/-mega-moral-monday-protests-heat-up-outside-legislature/12511141/>.

<sup>66</sup> *Outside Agitators? The Homegrown Roots of the Moral Monday Protests* (EPS Research, June 17, 2013), <http://80pct.com.s3.amazonaws.com/eps-research/MoralMonday.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> Scott Keyes, “The Biggest Liberal Protest Of 2013 In 35 Photos & Video,” *Think Progress*, June 28, 2013, <http://web.archive.org/web/20140731214800/https://thinkprogress.org/justice/2013/06/28/2207851/moral-monday-protest/>.

<sup>68</sup> Thom, Goolsby, “Moron Monday Shows Radical Left Just Doesn’t Get It,” *Chatham Journal*, June 7, 2013, <https://www.chathamjournal.com/weekly/opinion/myopinion/moron-monday-shows-radical-left-just-does-not-get-it-130607.shtml>.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Binker, “Breaking down the 2013 tax package,” *WRAL*, July 18, 2013, <https://www.wral.com/breaking-down-the-2013-tax-package/12678653/>



for wealthy individuals while eliminating tax breaks for childcare, permanent disability and education expenses.<sup>70</sup>

Despite protestors' legitimate concerns about these changes to state policies, Harry Brown, another Republican state senator, echoed Thom Goolsby's contempt for Moral Mondays. Brown explained, "it's my understanding that a lot of these people are from out of state," advancing a common Republican claim that the movement consisted largely of 'outside agitators.'<sup>71</sup> In his first public comment about Moral Mondays in June 2013, Governor Pat McCrory concurred with Brown's assessment, saying that "outsiders are coming in, and they're going to try to do to us what they did to Scott Walker in Wisconsin." McCrory was referencing the mass protests in Madison after Governor Walker and state Republicans passed a 2011 law revoking collective bargaining rights for public sector workers.<sup>72</sup> Notwithstanding Brown and Walker's claims of 'outside agitators', the aforementioned study of a Moral Mondays protest found that only 5 of 316 interviewed protestors (2%) at a June 17 event reported an out-of-state zip code as their primary address.<sup>73</sup> The strong local enthusiasm for Moral Mondays was not surprising; the movement provided an opportunity for ordinary North Carolinians to vocalize their dissatisfaction with the state legislature's unpopular conservative policies. Republican lawmakers felt threatened by the appeal of Moral Mondays as a popular, nonviolent protest movement that allowed constituents to hold the governing party accountable. Consequently, the backlash from prominent state Republicans often contained falsehoods intended to delegitimize the growing movement such as the myth of 'outside agitators.'

As spring turned to summer, the movement saw record-breaking enthusiasm and turnout, and weekly protests drew more than 3,000 attendees. On a Monday in late June, a multi-racial crowd gathered to pray at Pullen Baptist Church before joining the weekly protest. Reverend Barber preached about the immorality of state Republicans' refusal to expand Medicaid. He asked the crowd: "How do you say cutting 500,000 people's health care is the moral thing to do?... [Republican lawmakers] liberally ignore most of the Bible... When you hurt the poor, you are not faithfully executing the constitution."<sup>74</sup> In this speech, Barber evoked faith to advocate ethical policies and justify Moral Mondays protests. This was part of a longer tradition of civil rights organizing that drew on religious values in order to promote a moral policy agenda. As Annie Li argues, Black Christian voting rights activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, and C.T. Vivian "intertwined and synergized [civil rights activism]

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<sup>70</sup> Kim Severson, "Protests in North Carolina Challenge Conservative Shift in State Politics," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2013, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/12/us/weekly-protests-in-north-carolina-challenge-conservative-shift-in-state-politics.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Binker and Amanda Lamb, "Most Arrested in 'Moral Monday' Protests from NC," *WRAL*, June 11, 2013, <https://www.wral.com/most-moral-monday-arrestees-from-north-carolina/12540006/>.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Outside Agitators? The Homegrown Roots of the Moral Monday Protests* (EPS Research, June 17, 2013).

<sup>74</sup> Scott Keyes, "The Biggest Liberal Protest Of 2013 In 35 Photos & Video," *Think Progress*, June 28, 2013.

with their Christian faith.” Rooted in the texts and ethics of the Bible, these Black activists felt a moral obligation to challenge social, economic, and political injustices.<sup>75</sup>

Consistent with Li’s argument about religion as a key characteristic of grassroots organizing during the Civil Rights Movement, many Moral Mondays activists incorporated their own religious values to condemn voter suppression and articulate moral policy aspirations. At the June 23 demonstration, a protest sign criticized cuts to social programs and unemployment benefits by using a short quote from the Bible: “God wants Justice & Compassion for the poor.” Another sign read: “Hey GOP, what would Jesus do? Deny healthcare coverage to more people? Reduce and end help for the unemployed? Suppress voters?”<sup>76</sup> These protest signs reveal the ways in which some protestors synthesized their religious values with concerns about contemporary policies such as cuts to unemployment benefits and refusal to expand Medicaid. This can be interpreted within a longer tradition rooted in the Civil Rights Movement in which activists used religion and faith to highlight injustices and call for political change. In this way, some Moral Mondays activists argued that public policies genuinely rooted in religious values must recognize and honor the God-given humanity of each person.<sup>77</sup>

Before each weekly protest in Raleigh, Barber hosted multi-faith prayer services where he addressed these themes of morality and religious values to express the movement’s unifying vision of human rights. Barber preached: “I want you to know that when hands that once picked cotton join hands of Latinos join hands of progressive whites join faith hands, and labor hands, and Asian hands, and Native American hands, and poor hands, and wealthy hands with a conscience, and gay hands, and straight hands, and trans hands, and Christian hands, and Jewish hands, and Muslim hands, and Hindu hands, and Buddhist hands – when we all get together, we are an instrument of redemption.”<sup>78</sup> This quotation illustrates several key elements of the movement’s philosophy. By framing this portion of his speech around the act of joining hands, Barber advanced the movement’s vision of unifying diverse groups of people in a shared struggle for justice. In particular, Barber’s reference to “redemption” is noteworthy because it contrasts with the common usage of the term in an explicitly Christian context. Rather than using the theme of “redemption” to force his religious beliefs on the movement’s participants, Barber used the term to inspire solidarity and articulate a vision of collective moral renewal across religious, racial, and socioeconomic lines. This is reflective of a larger theme of Moral Mondays: the movement often evoked the ethical teachings of various faith traditions in order to unify demonstrators with diverse backgrounds in support of a shared moral agenda.

As the protests increased in size during the summer of 2013, this public articulation of collective ethics helped the Moral Mondays movement empower a diverse group of North

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<sup>75</sup> Annie Li, “Faith Without Works Is Dead: The Motivations, Convictions, and Limitations of Black American Christian Activists in the Fight for Voting Rights,” *AAS 385W: Voting Rights and Voter Suppression*, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Scott Keyes, “The Biggest Liberal Protest Of 2013 In 35 Photos & Video,” *Think Progress*, June 28, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> William J. Barber and Tim Tyson, “Gird Up, Get Up, and Grow Up: Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II in Conversation with Tim Tyson” (2019), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/733314>.

<sup>78</sup> Dara Kell, *Poor People’s Campaign: How Rev. William J. Barber Uses His Faith To Fight*, YouTube (TIME, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9adyOmZa9M8>.



Carolínians.<sup>79</sup> As journalist and author Ari Berman wrote, “the Moral Monday protests transformed North Carolina politics in 2013, building a multiracial, multi-issue movement centered around social justice... the South hadn't seen since the 1960s.”<sup>80</sup> Representing many communities with diverse policy priorities, Moral Mondays coined the term ‘fusion politics’ to encapsulate its philosophy. ‘Fusion politics’ refers to the blending of disparate political ideologies among diverse communities and organizations to focus on shared values. The movement’s name was itself indicative of this organizing vision; rather than attaching itself to a specific political or social ideology, it identified itself as “moral”, a word that affirms its focus on collectivist values.<sup>81</sup> Crucially, ‘fusion politics’ did not hinder the movement’s ability to support specific policies. As Barber explained in *Revive Us Again: Vision and Action in Moral Organizing*, the Forward Together Moral Movement supported anti-poverty legislation, equality in education, equitable healthcare access, criminal justice reform, voting rights, LGBTQ rights, immigrant rights, and women’s rights.<sup>82</sup> These policy areas reflect the movement’s desire to guarantee equality and justice for all North Carolínians. Forging this inclusive vision of human rights, the Forward Together Moral Movement relied on ‘fusion politics’ to combat the divide and conquer governing tactics of Pat McCrory and Republican state legislators.

Consistent with its values-based approach, the movement used grassroots organizing tactics to promote long-term community engagement. This was part of a longer tradition of strong social ties playing a central role in grassroots organizing during the Civil Rights Movement. Charles Payne’s book, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, outlines the community organizing tradition in rural Mississippi. This tradition emphasized the long-term development of grassroots leadership among community members, and it differed from the community mobilizing tradition that focused on attracting large crowds and media attention for isolated events such as the March on Washington. Payne’s book addresses this tradition of community organizing by detailing the history of grassroots civil rights activism in the Mississippi Delta region. He focuses much of his book on SNCC, an organization known for its bottom-up approach to civil rights activism that helped engage communities across the South.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly given SNCC veteran Bob Zellner’s leadership in Moral Mondays, this community organizing tradition was the most direct antecedent for the 2013 movement. As sociologist Jen Schradie argues, strong social ties were critical to the emergence of Moral Mondays, and these ties were particularly important for sustaining activism beyond the first few months. Schradie contrasts the movement with Occupy Wall Street, which was much more

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<sup>79</sup> Zoë Schlanger, “North Carolina’s Moral Mondays Are Back With Massive March,” *Newsweek*, February 10, 2014, <https://www.newsweek.com/n-carolina-progressive-group-kicks-2014-massive-march-228585>.

<sup>80</sup> Ari Berman, “North Carolina’s Moral Mondays,” *The Nation*, July 17, 2013, <https://www.thenation.com/archive/north-carolinas-moral-mondays/>.

<sup>81</sup> Jen Schradie, “Moral Monday Is More Than a Hashtag: The Strong Ties of Social Movement Emergence in the Digital Era,” *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (February 5, 2018).

<sup>82</sup> Liz Theoharis, R. H. Lowery, and William J. Barber, eds., *Revive Us Again: Vision and Action in Moral Organizing* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2018).

<sup>83</sup> Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

dependent on weaker digital ties and relied heavily on the spontaneity of social media. She argues that Moral Mondays lasted longer than Occupy Wall Street because it used social ties rather than digital ties to recruit and engage its participants.<sup>84</sup>

College students like Tyler Swanson used their social networks on campus to register voters and recruit other young people to join Moral Mondays protests.<sup>85</sup> Despite the charismatic leadership of Reverend William Barber II – sometimes referred to as this generation’s Martin Luther King Jr. – the weekly protests strived to highlight grassroots participation rather than top-down leadership. Weekly demonstrations in Raleigh provided a platform for affected community members to address the crowd of protestors and make their concerns heard.<sup>86</sup> The homepage of the Forward Together Moral Movement website emphasized that community leaders should “inform *their own grassroots campaigns* [emphasis added] to fight injustice and oppression that their communities face.”<sup>87</sup> This explicit reference on the Moral Mondays website to the importance of home-grown leadership confirms that the movement understood itself as part of a tradition of grassroots social change. Inspired by SNCC’s community organizing tradition during the Civil Rights Movement, Moral Mondays centered the voices of local community leaders and activists.

One of the many home-grown leaders in Moral Mondays was Rosanell Eaton, the 92-year-old North Carolina native who joined the movement to fight for voting rights.<sup>88</sup> While Eaton marched in Raleigh on June 23 to protest voter suppression in North Carolina, the Supreme Court was in the process of dismantling the most powerful legislative achievement of the Civil Rights movement: the Voting Rights Act. In a 5-4 decision on June 25, 2013, Chief Justice John Roberts and the four conservative justices ruled that Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional. The majority opinion in the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision invalidated the formula created in 1965 that required federal oversight in specific states with the worst history of voter discrimination. Following this landmark Supreme Court decision in June 2013, North Carolina no longer required federal oversight to change its voting laws.<sup>89</sup>

The *Shelby County v. Holder* decision prompted a speedy legislative response by Republican lawmakers and their conservative backers in North Carolina. By mid-August, the state legislature passed House Bill 589, one of the country’s harshest voting laws. In one stroke of Pat McCrory’s pen, North Carolina instituted strict voter identification requirements, rolled back early voting, ended same-day voter registration, eliminated preregistration for teenagers,

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<sup>84</sup> Jen Schradie, “Moral Monday Is More Than a Hashtag: The Strong Ties of Social Movement Emergence in the Digital Era,” *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (February 5, 2018).

<sup>85</sup> “Tyler Swanson – North Carolina NAACP Youth...,” April 18, 2016, sec. Portrait of a Millennial Activist.

<sup>86</sup> NC Forward Together Moral Movement Channel. 2013. “NC Attack on Voting Rights | Moral Monday 12,” YouTube (July 24, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCMPFYeT2e8>.

<sup>87</sup> “Forward Together Moral Movement” (Forward Justice, n.d.), accessed September 30, 2020, <https://forwardjustice.org/movement/forward-together-moral-movement/>.

<sup>88</sup> Barry Yeoman, “Can Moral Mondays Produce Victorious Tuesdays?,” *The American Prospect*, January 19, 2015, <https://prospect.org/api/content/251b1c6e-f9c0-5569-b816-689d45c5407e/>.

<sup>89</sup> Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, chap. 9.

and banned the counting of votes cast in the wrong precinct.<sup>90</sup> The law had a decisive impact; it made it much harder for North Carolinians to exercise their constitutional right to vote.<sup>91</sup>

Amidst this legislative rollback of voting rights in North Carolina, Moral Mondays exploded in popularity. Weekly protests in the summer of 2013 attracted thousands of demonstrators. Each week, volunteers wore green arm bands to indicate their intention to get arrested; for many, this was their first time participating in acts of civil disobedience.<sup>92</sup> In a telling sign of the movement's popularity, the police often brought empty buses to Moral Mondays protests in anticipation of a large number of arrested protestors.<sup>93</sup> By mid-July, 838 people had been arrested since the weekly protests began on April 29. Inspired by the nonviolent civil disobedience tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, these protest strategies were effective; Moral Mondays was becoming a mass movement.

One of the most remarkable displays of the movement's grassroots strength was the Moral March in early 2014. Although a similar annual march had taken place for several years under the leadership of the Historic Thousands on Jones Street People's Assembly Coalition, the event on February 8, 2014 was historic and record-breaking.<sup>94</sup> Building on momentum from the previous summer, the Moral March attracted approximately 80,000 people, making it the largest civil rights rally in the South since the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.<sup>95</sup> On the day of the event, nearly 100 buses transported people to Raleigh from across the state. Demonstrators began their march at Shaw University, the place where SNCC was founded in 1960.<sup>96</sup> The location of the Moral March was not accidental; by choosing to begin the march at Shaw University, Moral Mondays reaffirmed its connection to the Civil Rights Movement. It was a powerful allusion to a generation of SNCC activists who inspired the community organizing philosophy of the Moral Mondays movement.

The Moral March brought together North Carolinians with a broad range of concerns and policy priorities. Instagram posts depict protestors braving a chilly winter day in Raleigh as they marched with signs demanding women's reproductive rights, voting rights, LGBTQ rights, a minimum wage increase, and an end to the influence of money in politics. Notably, the Moral March exuded fun and optimism; social media video clips show groups of protestors dancing and finding joy in democratic participation.<sup>97</sup> The light-hearted nature of the march helped the movement engage a diverse group of participants and advance its vision of 'fusion politics'.

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<sup>90</sup> Adam Liptak and Michael Wines, "Strict North Carolina Voter ID Law Thwarted After Supreme Court Rejects Case," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/us/politics/voter-id-laws-supreme-court-north-carolina.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Anne De Mare, *Capturing The Flag* (Bullfrog Films, 2018), <https://docuseek2-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/cart/product/1677>.

<sup>92</sup> Ari Berman, "North Carolina's Moral Mondays," *The Nation*, July 17, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Scott Keyes, "The Biggest Liberal Protest Of 2013 In 35 Photos & Video," *Think Progress*, June 28, 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Jaime Fuller, "80,000 people protested in NC this weekend. Here's why," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/02/10/why-tens-of-thousands-of-people-were-rallying-in-raleigh/>.

<sup>95</sup> Zoë Schlanger, "North Carolina's Moral Mondays Are Back With Massive March," *Newsweek*, February 10, 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Ari Berman, "North Carolina's Moral Mondays," *The Nation*, July 17, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Zoë Schlanger, "North Carolina's Moral Mondays Are Back With Massive March," *Newsweek*, February 10, 2014.

In his speech, Barber introduced the next chapter of the Moral Mondays movement: "This Moral March inaugurates a fresh year of grassroots empowerment, voter education, litigation and nonviolent direct action," Barber told the energized crowd. 2014 was, in fact, an important year of growth for Moral Mondays. The movement gained national attention as Barber travelled across the country making appearances on television programs and talk shows. The summer of 2014, dubbed the "Moral Freedom Summer," saw an effort by the Moral Mondays coalition to register new voters across North Carolina. The name was an allusion to the Freedom Summer of 1964; in a political landscape defined by the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision and subsequent voting restrictions in North Carolina, the Moral Mondays movement sought to tie the contemporary struggle for voting rights with past efforts to fight Black voter disfranchisement during the Civil Rights Movement. Tyler Swanson personally registered 115 voters that summer. Although the work wasn't flashy, activists like Swanson did the heavy lifting of democracy, registering approximately 5,000 new voters in one summer.<sup>98</sup> Propelled by its popularity during the first year of grassroots organizing, Moral Mondays developed a sustainable framework for long-term impact in 2014 and beyond.

As a grassroots movement founded less than a decade ago, the historical significance of Moral Mondays is due to its remarkable victories in a relatively short period of time. Leaders and activists in North Carolina crafted a multi-faith movement that uses religious traditions and 'fusion politics' to unify various communities in a diverse coalition. On a rhetorical level, the movement has, at least to a certain degree, reclaimed the rhetoric of religious values from the Evangelical right; drawing on the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, some activists within Moral Mondays use the language of religion and faith to highlight social injustices and call for political change. By articulating a shared, values-based agenda, Moral Mondays has made religion and faith a source of inspiration for many members of a diverse coalition without alienating others.

In addition to its rhetorical achievements, Moral Mondays has seen important legislative and public relations victories. In July 2016, the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down North Carolina's strict voting law as unconstitutional. The Court ruled that the law had been "targeting African-Americans with almost surgical precision," by excluding photo identification held disproportionately by African Americans and eliminating a week of early voting that Black churches typically used for 'souls to the polls' events.<sup>99</sup> While Moral Mondays cannot be directly credited for the court's decision, the weekly protests raised awareness about the effects of voter suppression by amplifying the voices of North Carolinians who were targeted by these strict voting laws; Rosanell Eaton, the 92-year-old voting rights activist who spoke at

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<sup>98</sup> Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, chap. 10.

<sup>99</sup> "Federal Appeals Court Strikes Down North Carolina's Restrictive Voting Law" (American Civil Liberties Union, July 29, 2016), <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/federal-appeals-court-strikes-down-north-carolinas-restrictive-voting-law>.

Moral Mondays protests, became one of the plaintiffs in the case against the state of North Carolina.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, efforts by North Carolina Republicans to delegitimize Moral Mondays among the general population were largely unsuccessful as the movement gained public support. A poll conducted by Elon University in September 2013 found that approximately 60% of North Carolinians had heard of Moral Mondays, and 48% of those who were familiar with the movement had a favorable opinion of it. In other words, approximately 30% of the state's population supported Moral Mondays just five months after its founding. This was a major achievement for a grassroots movement, especially one that formed just five months earlier because of student activism by Swanson and other members of the 'Greensboro Four of 2013'. The same poll found that disapproval of Governor McCrory skyrocketed from 25% to 46% by September 2013.<sup>101</sup> Given the number of unpopular conservative policies that McCrory signed into law during his first eight months in office, it is impossible to attribute his rising disapproval solely to the rise of the Moral Mondays movement; nonetheless, the movement certainly played a role in highlighting McCrory's failures and swaying the tide of public opinion against him. While reputable public opinion data about the movement is not available after September 2013, 80,000 citizens attended the Moral March in February 2014, suggesting that the movement continued to gain public support over time.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, the Moral Mondays movement succeeded in effecting change at the ballot box, albeit not immediately. The 2014 election did not lead to the outcome many protestors had hoped; Thom Tillis, speaker of the House of Representatives in North Carolina, won the U.S. Senate race, and Republicans remained in control of state government. By 2016, however, North Carolinians voted to unseat Republican governor Pat McCrory in favor of Democrat Roy Cooper. This was in spite of rampant voter suppression efforts during the 2016 election that targeted Democratic voting blocs in North Carolina such as African Americans and college students.<sup>103</sup> Cooper's victory proves that Moral Mondays was not just a popular social movement; it was also effective at amassing political power to unseat an influential governor.

Lastly, the movement grew nationally by highlighting the effectiveness of a values-based 'fusion politics' philosophy and reaffirming the importance of grassroots organizing tactics in a participatory democracy. Barber articulated this vision in an interview; he explained that "some people think a movement is national because you have a march in Washington, or... an address in Washington. Selma became national because you nationalize a local movement.... Movements don't come from D.C. down. They come from Birmingham, Greensboro and

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<sup>100</sup> Barry Yeoman, "Can Moral Mondays Produce Victorious Tuesdays?," *The American Prospect*, January 19, 2015.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Schulson, "North Carolina Went Red in 2016. But Can It Be a Model for Democrats?," *POLITICO Magazine*, February 4, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/02/north-carolina-went-red-in-2016-but-can-it-be-a-model-for-democrats-214736>.

<sup>102</sup> Zoë Schlanger, "North Carolina's Moral Mondays Are Back With Massive March," *Newsweek*, February 10, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Kasino, *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook* (American Issues Initiative, 2020); Anne De Mare, *Capturing The Flag* (Bullfrog Films, 2018).

Montgomery up. And that's something we've got [to] recapture.”<sup>104</sup> In the years after 2013, chapters of the Moral Mondays movement developed in states such as Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. In more recent years, Reverend Barber founded two national organizations inspired by the local successes of Moral Mondays.<sup>105</sup> These organizations, Repairers of the Breach and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, joined the Moral Mondays coalition, each addressing a different constituency to help expand the movement's unifying moral values and 'fusion politics' on a national scale.

In the backdrop of the rightward shift in North Carolina and the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, the Moral Mondays movement grew as a site of resistance against the extremist policies and democratic backsliding in the state. Informed by veteran activists and inspired by strategies used during the Civil Rights Movement, Moral Mondays used tactics of nonviolent civil disobedience to gain media attention and attract more people to join the movement. Grassroots organizers galvanized popular support and built a sustained movement by articulating a positive vision of a shared moral agenda that encompassed many different communities. The Moral Mondays movement offers a blueprint for successful community organizing around a values-based vision of 'fusion politics.' By taking an inclusive approach to grassroots organizing, movements can unite a diverse group of citizens around a shared moral agenda to effectively bring about positive social change.

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<sup>104</sup> Michael Schulson, "North Carolina Went Red in 2016. But Can It Be a Model for Democrats?," *POLITICO Magazine*, February 4, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Schulson, "North Carolina Went Red in 2016. But Can It Be a Model for Democrats?," *POLITICO Magazine*, February 4, 2017.



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**Solidarietà Sotto la Terra:**  
**Italian American Community Building and Ethnic Strife**  
**in the 1913-14 Copper Country Strike**

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On July 23, 1913, the copper miners in the Copper Country of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula led by the radical Western Federation of Miners (WFM) struck against the mining companies in the region, including the three largest: the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company, the Quincy Mining Company, and the Copper Range Company. The workers did not strike against the mining companies for purely economic reasons such as higher wages and shorter working hours. The workers and the WFM made specific demands including the abolition of the one-man drill, improved working conditions, and especially official representation of workers by the WFM. Additionally, the WFM took advantage of the infrastructure built by the "new" Eastern and Southern European immigrant communities, which were motivated to reconcile the ethnic divisions between themselves and the "old" Western European immigrants through the strike.<sup>1</sup>

Italian immigrants, and more generally the divisions between the "new" and "old" immigrant groups and their respective relationship to the mining companies, are critical to understanding the story of the 1913-14 strike. Initially, before 1890, the first wave of immigrants to the mines was dominated by Cornish, Irish, English, Scotch, French-Canadian, and Finnish immigrants.<sup>2</sup> After 1890, Eastern and Southern Europeans arrived in the largest numbers. The

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<sup>2</sup> Although Finnish immigrants arrived in the first wave of immigrants, they were grouped with the new Southern and Eastern European immigrants due to racial and ethnic discrimination. Therefore, references to the new Southern and Eastern European immigrants in this article will include the Finnish immigrants.

new immigrant groups included Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Italian, Bulgarian, Greek, Polish, and Russian immigrants among others. The new immigrant groups took the low-paying and unskilled jobs in the mines often working as trammers who pushed carts of rock to the mine shaft to be hoisted to the surface. New immigrants were rarely promoted to skilled labor positions as miners, managers, and captains, which were dominated by Cornish, Irish, Scotch, and English immigrants. Therefore, as unskilled trammers, the new immigrant groups occupied the bottom rungs of the underground labor hierarchy. In addition to the position of new immigrant groups at the bottom of the underground hierarchy, they were also at the bottom of the social hierarchy above ground since they were largely excluded from the companies' paternal benefits, including company housing.

This article adds to the strike's scholarship by focusing on the story of the Italian community and its relationships with other immigrant communities. Italians were the second largest of the new immigrant communities behind the Finnish community, and, although difficult to quantify, one of the most socially, culturally, and economically active in the Copper Country. Therefore, it is an ideal community to study to understand the development of new immigrant communities and the ethnic strife with the old immigrant communities that were central to the 1913-14 strike. The critical question this article addresses is: what role did the Italian community play in organizing labor for the 1913-14 Copper Country Strike? The answer I find is not completely straightforward. That is, the Italian community empowered Italians who were excluded from company paternalism, which, in turn, caused the ethnic divide within the mining community to increase since "old" immigrants were threatened by the increasingly powerful "new" immigrant communities. When the mining companies introduced the one-man drill, which threatened all miners, the WFM briefly bridged the divide between the new and old immigrant communities. The strike caused a divide within the Italian community since some members of the Italian merchant class allied themselves with the companies based on their economic interests while other Italian merchants remained committed to the strike in defense of their "Fratelli" (Brothers). Similarly, the unity between old and new immigrants quickly dissolved as the old immigrants ended their strike efforts and allied themselves with the mining companies while the new immigrants remained committed to the strike.

## **Historiography**

The scholarship on the 1913-14 strike has noted the ethnic divide within the community but has not penetrated the importance of the ethnic divide in the strike. One exception in the scholarship is Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings's *Community in Conflict: A Working-Class History of the 1913-1914 Michigan Copper Strike and the Italian Hall Tragedy*, which seeks to frame the story of the strike within the story of the turbulent Copper Country community. Kaunonen and Goings frame the story by analyzing the development of interethnic labor organization within the community. I analyze the ethnic divide within the context of the Italian community to understand the conditions that caused new immigrant communities to come

together in interethnic labor organizations before the strike. To do so, I track the development of the community in congruence with the development of ethnic strife between old and new immigrants and the resulting interethnic labor organization between new immigrant communities. I begin by telling the story of the first Italian pioneers to arrive in the Copper Country and trace the growing divide between the Italian community and the old immigrant communities until ethnic tensions exploded in the 1913-14 strike.

### **New Immigrants: Italian Pioneers Below and Above Ground**

The first group of Italian immigrants to arrive in the late nineteenth century began a process of chain migration by earning money working underground in the mines and using their new capital to build businesses above ground and subsequently creating an active Italian community that attracted a continuous stream of family and friends from Italy, usually from a particular region. Chain migration defined Italian immigration to the Copper Country much as it defined immigration elsewhere in the United States; Italians immigrated to the Copper Country because they had a family or friend who was already there. Beginning the process of chain migration were pioneers such as Bartholomew “Bat” Quello who first established themselves in the Copper Country before bringing family and friends to join them. According to Peter and Charles Vitton, the sons of an Italian farmer in the Copper Country, “[Quello] was the one that brought most of the Italians from the old country to the Copper country. Some of them worked for him in the woods and some of them worked for him in the mines.”<sup>3</sup> After Quello arrived in the Copper Country, he began by working in the mines in 1859 making him one of the first Italians in the region.<sup>4</sup> After earning a wage underground, Quello became one of the first members of the Italian merchant class by building a teaming and hauling business transporting lumber.<sup>5</sup> Quello came from the region of Piedmont in Italy, so many of the first Italians he brought to the Copper Country were also from Piedmont.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the majority of Italians in the region were from Piedmont.<sup>7</sup>

Merchants such as Quello built the Italian community by bringing Italians to the Copper Country and by establishing businesses to cater to the needs of the new Italians. For example, Italian grocery stores allowed Italians to preserve their culinary traditions while saloons allowed Italians to form social bonds in an unfamiliar place. According to Russell Magnaghi, a historian of Upper Peninsula Italians, Italian grocery stores and bakeries “provided the Italian population

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<sup>3</sup> Oral History Interview of Peter and Charles Vitton Transcript, December 10, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>4</sup> Alvah L. Sawyer, *A History of the Northern Peninsula of Michigan and Its People* (Chicago, Illinois: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), Volume 3, 1288.

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

<sup>6</sup> Oral History Interview of Peter and Charles Vitton Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Russel M. Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives: Michigan's Upper Peninsula Italians* (Marquette, Michigan: Belle Fontaine Press, 1987), 35.

with their traditional foods, such as olive oil, codfish, polenta, and varieties of pasta.”<sup>8</sup> Like the other Italian merchants and pioneers in the region, grocery store owners usually began by working in the mines to earn the capital needed for a grocery store. Cesare Lucchesi, an Italian merchant, worked underground for the Quincy Mining Company and the Baltic Mining Company before opening a grocery store.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Domenico Picchiottino began working underground for the Calumet & Hecla Mining Company in 1886 before opening a saloon in Red Jacket (Calumet).<sup>10</sup> According to a local guide of Italians in the Copper Country from 1910 titled “Pionieri della Colonia” (Pioneers of the Colony), “For the past seven years, [Domenico Picchiottino] has run the well-known Restaurant and saloon, Colombo, located on Sixth Street in Red Jacket, where an ever growing number of compatriots go every day.”<sup>11</sup> The account of Picchittino’s saloon demonstrates the continuous growth of the Italian community and its increasing social activity. According to Magnaghi, “The saloon acted as a social and recreation center for the immigrant men, and Italian saloons were found in most communities.”<sup>12</sup> Grocery stores such as Lucchesi’s and saloons like Picchittino’s provided infrastructure for Italian community building by preserving cultural traditions from Italy and by forming new social bonds in the US, which would prove essential in the face of discriminatory old immigrant groups and company paternalism.

### **“Old” Versus “New” Immigrants: Company Paternalism, Italian Community Building, and Ethnic Strife**

The ethnic divide between the old and new immigrant groups formed when new Italian arrivals to the Copper Country found themselves increasingly excluded from company paternalism and estranged by discrimination from the old immigrant groups, forcing them to build their own communities outside the confines of company property. The Keweenaw Peninsula was a remote and undeveloped region before the mining companies arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. The mining companies had first established a system of paternalism out of the need to create infrastructure for the old immigrants who first worked the mines, but, in turn, paternalism made life and work inseparable in the Keweenaw. Larry Lankton, a historian of the Keweenaw Peninsula, argued, “On a frontier that experienced heavy winters and lacked transportation conveniences, it was essential to locate housing as close to a mine as possible.”<sup>13</sup> As the wives and children of the mine workers began to arrive, the mining companies

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<sup>8</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Dave Halala Oral History Interview of Geno and Fred Lucchesi Transcript, September 13, 1980, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>10</sup> “Pionieri della Colonia,” 1910, MS-708, Box 1, People Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>11</sup> “Pionieri della Colonia,” Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Larry D. Lankton, *Cradle to Grave: Life, Work, and Death at the Lake Superior Copper Mines*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 147.



constructed libraries and schools to accommodate the families. In 1875, the Washington School was constructed by Calumet and Hecla.<sup>14</sup> In 1898, Calumet and Hecla opened the Calumet and Hecla Library holding 6,800 volumes.<sup>15</sup>

There were about 14,000 mine workers in the Keweenaw peninsula by 1913, but there were only about 5,000 company houses between company-owned houses and employee-owned houses built on company property.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the companies determined which workers lived in affordable company houses and which workers had to find their own and more expensive living arrangements. The unskilled Eastern and Southern European immigrants were prevented from living in company houses since the mining companies gave preference to the skilled Anglo-Saxon, German, and American-born workers. In 1905, 181 Austrians worked underground for the Champion Mining Company but none lived in company housing.<sup>17</sup> According to Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings, historians of labor and radicalism, “paternalism rewarded those with roots in Anglo-European Protestant traditions” and “punish[ed] those with ‘foreign’ characteristics and traits.”<sup>18</sup>

By the time the Calumet and Hecla Library was built, it was clear the mining companies also had developed their system of paternalism into a system of social control. According to the 1910 census, copper mine workers in Montana received \$3.87 per shift while Michigan mine workers received \$2.36.<sup>19</sup> The difference in wages between Michigan and Montana is tied to paternalism. Lankton argued, “By the early twentieth century, it cost a mine worker considerably less to occupy a dwelling on the Keweenaw than in Butte, Montana. Local managers figured the difference for comparable dwellings at \$12 per month, or nearly 50 cents per shift worked.”<sup>20</sup> In addition to using paternalism to justify lower wages, mining companies used paternalism to favor some ethnic groups over others.

Excluded from company paternalism, Italians and other Eastern and Southern European immigrants were therefore unconvinced by the mining companies’ justification for paying lower wages. In an Italian-language article published in the WFM’s *Miners’ Bulletin* during the 1913 strike, D. Giannerini wrote, “Brothers learn from the current development in Butte Montana. On October 1, the price of copper will reach 17 dollars, and, consequently, the miners will receive a fine salary of \$4 per day for 8 hours of work.”<sup>21</sup> Italians refused to accept lower wages because they, along with other Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups, were prevented from living in affordable company housing. In addition, as “new” Southern and Eastern European

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<sup>14</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 170.

<sup>15</sup> Lankton, 173.

<sup>16</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 149.

<sup>17</sup> Lankton, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings, *Community in Conflict: A Working-Class History of the 1913-1914 Michigan Copper Strike and the Italian Hall Tragedy* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>19</sup> William B. Gates, *Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars: An Economic History of the Michigan Copper Mining Industry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951), 128.

<sup>20</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 161.

<sup>21</sup> D. Giannerini, September 11, 1913, “Coraggio Fratelli,” *Miners’ Bulletin*, KEWE-00628, Box 185, Folder 005, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Calumet, Michigan.

immigrants were locked out of company houses, they established their own communities where radicalism and organized labor grew.

Since Southern and Eastern European immigrants were mainly prevented from living in company houses, they established their own communities, which in turn broke down the traditional paternal bonds between employers and their employees while facilitating the exchange of increasingly radical ideas. After 1890, production exploded in the copper mines, causing an influx of Southern and Eastern European immigrants who built new immigrant communities. In the Quincy Mining Company mines, production of copper ingot grew from 8 million pounds in 1890 to 14 million in 1900 to 23 million in 1910.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Quincy employed 484, 1,349, and 2,019 workers in 1890, 1900, and 1910 respectively.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, as production increased, so did employment and, consequently, immigration. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “By 1910 immigrants and their children represented 89 percent of the population of Houghton, Keweenaw, and Ontonagon Counties.”<sup>24</sup> The new Eastern and Southern European immigrant workers packed into small boardinghouses with up to twelve people living in each house. According to Peter and Charles Vitton, their father, Battista Vitton, built his farm by supplying the boardinghouses; teams of farm workers would take homemade meat, cheese, and butter from the farm and deliver them to the boardinghouses, which held 8 to 10 boarders.<sup>25</sup> Boarders were essential to the family income. Russel M. Magnaghi explained, “The Upper Peninsula had no factory jobs for the women. Instead [Italian women] augmented the family earnings by taking boarders into their homes.”<sup>26</sup> Boarders were found in all Eastern and Southern European immigrant homes. Packed boardinghouses formed the basis of the new immigrant communities by creating a space where social bonds could be formed and community building could begin.

Eastern and Southern European immigrant communities spilled out of boarding houses into co-ops, mutual benefit societies, and social halls, creating active and developed communities. Among the new Southern and Eastern European immigrant groups, the Finns, Italians, and Croatians were especially active in community building. In 1890, the Tamarack Co-operative opened in Red Jacket selling groceries and other household goods at low prices to compete with local merchants and company stores.<sup>27</sup> Co-ops quickly became fundamental to immigrant community building; Italian immigrants opened the Italian Co-operative Store on July 27, 1912.<sup>28</sup> Finnish immigrants opened three co-ops by 1910 while Croatian immigrants opened one.<sup>29</sup> Co-ops were essential to the autonomy of immigrant communities since their low prices meant local merchants and company stores could not raise prices freely. For example, the Italian

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<sup>22</sup> Larry D. Lankton, *Hollowed Ground: Copper Mining and Community Building on Lake Superior, 1840s-1990s* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 125.

<sup>23</sup> Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 125.

<sup>24</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Oral History Interview of Peter and Charles Vitton Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 177.

<sup>28</sup> MS-708 Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers Box

<sup>29</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 177.

Co-operative Store formed to sell general store items “at the smallest practical rate of cost.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to co-ops, mutual benefit societies also granted autonomy to immigrant communities. Immigrants formed about 50 mutual benefit societies in Houghton County from 1865 to 1910.<sup>31</sup> Italian mutual benefit societies, such as the Italian Mutual Beneficial Society, charged members 50 cents per month in exchange for paying benefits upon accident, sickness, or death.<sup>32</sup> Social halls served as meeting places for mutual benefit societies and served as community centers. The Italian Mutual Beneficial Society constructed the Italian Hall in Calumet in 1908, creating a center for the Italian community since the Italian lodges of Calumet met in the Italian Hall.<sup>33</sup> Co-ops and mutual benefit societies were essential to immigrant community building because they gave immigrants much needed social and economic independence from the mining companies.

Although Italian community building originally began out of necessity since Italians were excluded from company paternalistic benefits, Italian laborers and merchants used community building to resist mining companies and strengthen the position of Italians in the social hierarchy. As the mining industry grew after 1890, new immigrants quickly became aware of the glaring dangers of underground work and their exclusion from paternal benefits; consequently, the mining companies became the clear adversary of new immigrant laborers and resistance to the companies spread in their communities. In 1895, as new immigrant communities were just beginning to form, 30 underground workers died in a fire at the Osceola mine in the most fatal mining accident in the history of the region.<sup>34</sup> On average, 61 men per year died in the mines between 1905 and 1911.<sup>35</sup> After 1900, 80% of the fatalities were foreign-born workers.<sup>36</sup> The continuous deaths of foreign-born workers and tragic accidents, such as the Osceola fire, forced immigrants to become acutely aware of the dangers of underground work while building communities. Eastern and Southern European immigrants were also aware of their place at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the Keweenaw Peninsula. Out of all the Austrians and Italians killed underground only 20% had been promoted to miners.<sup>37</sup> According to Louis Lombardi, the child of an Italian mine worker, Cornish immigrants were made bosses “because they knew mining and they knew how to talk English and all the other foreigners didn’t know how to talk. So they just put them in like slaves, you know, put them to work.”<sup>38</sup> Due to the mining companies’ ethnic discrimination, Italians, Finns, Croatians, and Slovenians occupied the lowest positions of the social hierarchy. The class consciousness of the Italians and other new immigrant groups was solidified by the constant discrimination they faced.

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<sup>30</sup> Articles of Association of the Italian Co-operative Store, 1912, MS-708, Box 1, Unfiled, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>31</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 188.

<sup>32</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Magnaghi, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 183.

<sup>35</sup> Lankton, 182.

<sup>36</sup> Lankton, 112.

<sup>37</sup> Lankton, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Oral History Interview of Louis Lombardi Transcript, December 3, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

## Italians, “New” Immigrant Communities, and Solidarity

Italians faced constant discrimination from old immigrant groups, such as Cornish and Irish immigrants, solidifying Italian class and ethnic consciousness and increasing the ethnic divide within the community. According to William B. Gates, a historian of the Michigan copper industry, the new Eastern and Southern European immigrants faced ethnic discrimination from the old immigrant groups “since the Cornish and Irish workers tended to draw together in the face of new arrivals.”<sup>39</sup> While Cornish and Irish immigrants came together, they sought to divide the new immigrants with their ethnic discrimination. According to Louis Lombardi, the Cornish “wouldn’t put two Italians together. They thought maybe they would do too much talk and no work, so they put a Finnish, an Italian, and an Austrian with somebody else.”<sup>40</sup> Ethnic discrimination against Italians was not limited to the underground mines; ethnic discrimination extended above ground where differences in language and religion fed discrimination against Italians in the communities. Giovanna Cappo discussed, “If [the English] could down an Italian, they wouldn’t stop. That was very prevalent. It was very well known that we were Catholics and Italians, and they were English.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Italians were constantly reminded of their ethnicity by Cornish mining captains who separated workers based on ethnicity and by English community members who discriminated against them due to their religious and cultural differences. As a result, immigrant communities were built with class and ethnic consciousness in mind leading to increased resistance to the mining companies and the old immigrants.

In addition to the glaring dangers of underground work, Eastern and Southern European immigrant community building after 1890 contributed to employee resistance to the mining companies by weakening the paternal bonds between employer and employee. As Eastern and Southern European immigrants were forced to build new communities, they did not view their relationship to the mining companies as benevolent, they viewed it as adversarial. According to Gates, increased immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe “increase[ed] the difficulties of the employer-employee relationship.”<sup>42</sup> Since the companies became the adversaries of the new immigrant laborers, the companies became more suspicious of their employees, and the employer-employee relationship was defined by mistrust on both sides. The new immigrant laborers led brief strikes against the Quincy Mining Company in 1904 and 1905.<sup>43</sup> In response, William R. Todd, President of the Quincy Mining Company, wrote to John L. Harris, General Manger and Superintendent of the Quincy Mine, blaming Italian agitators and advocating for labor spies. Todd wrote, “The Italians seem to be the chief agitators, would think it desirable to

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<sup>39</sup> Gates, *Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Oral History Interview of Louis Lombardi Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, March 16, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>42</sup> Gates, *Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars*, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 89.

let these underground men go fast as their places can be filled with others, better run a little short handed for awhile than keep men who want to make mischief.”<sup>44</sup> Todd reflected the growing distrust of Italian laborers, continuing by advocating for labor spies. Todd proposed, “It may be desirable to find one or more men underground for awhile, who will mix in with the men and who will report those making trouble.”<sup>45</sup> Todd’s advocacy for labor spies represents the complete breakdown of paternal bonds between employer and employee; instead of serving as a benevolent father for the workers, the companies became suspicious and malicious entities attempting to thwart cooperation between workers.

Italian community builders’ class consciousness and resistance to mining companies caused a rise in cooperation and solidarity among Italians in the community, thereby creating the infrastructure for interethnic labor organization. By providing benefits to underground workers who were injured or killed, mutual benefit societies responded to the dangers of underground work. However, mutual benefit societies also advocated for Italians above ground in the communities by fostering solidarity and cooperation among Italians. The Italian Mutual Beneficial Society claimed they associated “together for the purpose of forming a body politic.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, central to the formation of the society was the idea that Italians could improve their lot by coming together in numbers. The same idea fueled the formation of La Federazione Italo-Americana (The Italian American Federation), which was formed in 1909 by Italian community builders who sought to bring all the Italian mutual benefit societies together under one banner.<sup>47</sup> In an Italian-language letter to all the members of Italian mutual benefit societies in the Upper Peninsula, the federation wrote, “United and organized we can form a powerful mass that will demand respect, achieve self-government, and know how to block and prevent any attack.”<sup>48</sup> To celebrate and organize Italians, the federation established an “Italo-American Day” held annually on July 10.<sup>49</sup> Solidarity among Italians was not confined to mutual benefit societies; Columbus Day served as another celebration of Italian culture and heritage. The Italian Hall hosted parades, feasts, and dancing annually on Columbus Day.<sup>50</sup> Through the creation of an Italian community based on solidarity, Italian workers were constantly reminded of their adversarial relationship with the mining companies. Members of mutual benefit societies were required to attend the funerals of deceased members in full uniform.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, through grieving, Italians were constantly reminded of the dangers they faced daily. The Italian solidarity fostered by mutual benefit societies and Italian holidays gave Italian workers autonomy and created a community capable of standing up for itself.

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<sup>44</sup> William R. Todd Letter to John L. Harris, April 7, 1905, MS-708, Box 1, Unfiled, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Meeting Minutes 1909-1915, MS-266, Box 1, Folder 7, Italian American Federation of the Upper Peninsula Records, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 43-44.

<sup>51</sup> Magnaghi, 65.

Outside organizers took advantage of the communal institutions and the ideas of solidarity spread within the institutions to organize and radicalize increasingly discontented Italian workers. The spread of ideas in the Italian community related to solidarity and resistance to the mining companies caused a rise in radicalism within the community. At Italian Hall, radical and socialist meetings were held by local organizations. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “In March 1906, the Houghton County socialists held a meeting at the hall to pass resolutions protesting the arrests of WFM officials charged with the murder of former Idaho governor Frank Steuenberg.”<sup>52</sup> Newspapers were fundamental to the spread of radicalism in new immigrant communities. Famous labor organizer Teofilo Petriella edited an Italian socialist newspaper called *La Sentinella*.<sup>53</sup> Croatian immigrants formed the *Hrvatski Radnik* as a weekly left-wing newspaper to promote workers’ interests.<sup>54</sup> The Croatian Publishing Company, which published *Hrvatski Radnik*, rented space in the Italian Hall.<sup>55</sup>

Although the Italian Hall was a center of radicalism within the community, it also served conservative community members and organizations. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “Calumet’s Italian Hall *was* an important meeting place for Copper Country radicals as well as their more conservative counterparts.”<sup>56</sup> Although Italian Hall was not a purely radical organization, the Italian Hall provided infrastructure for the spread of radicalism, and the increasing radical activity at the hall marked increasing radicalism within the community.

### **The 1913-14 Strike: Western Federation of Miners, Italian Solidarity, and the “New” and “Old” Immigrants**

The one-man drill introduced by the mining companies provided the necessary spark for social revolt. The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) took advantage by rapidly organizing the Copper Country laborers using the infrastructure created by the class-conscious organizations especially the Italian infrastructure and interethnic organizers. The drill issue briefly united the new and old immigrant groups.

The WFM recognized the potential for Italian workers to be organized alongside the other Eastern and Southern European immigrant groups as a result of the brutal conditions they faced in the mines. In Charles Moyer’s address at the 1910 WFM convention, he listed Michigan with states that had the potential to be organized. Moyer argued, “Then to Michigan, where we find some forty thousand men employed in the production of iron and copper. Of this number but a small per cent are organized and the conditions under which they labor are but little, if any, better than those employed in the southern states.”<sup>57</sup> Although Moyer recognized the Copper Country laborers’ potential to be organized, he also recognized the difficulties of interethnic

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<sup>52</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 52.

<sup>55</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> WFM Convention Proceedings 1910-1911, MS-553, Box 1, Reel 7, Page 28, Western Federation of Miners Collection, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

organization. In the same address, Moyer declared, “It is safe to say that more than one-third of the workers in the mining industry of this country are unable to speak or understand the English language and it is to be regretted that many of our so-called American citizens have yet to realize that these fellow workers are here to stay.”<sup>58</sup> Moyer and the WFM realized the biggest obstacle to organizing Copper Country laborers would be organizing diverse ethnic groups without a common language. Moyer and the WFM were able to overcome the difficulties of interethnic labor organization by capitalizing on the infrastructure provided by local community organizations and foreign-language newspapers and by sending labor organizers who represented the ethnicities of the Copper Country’s new immigrant groups.

Local community organizations and foreign-language newspapers provided the infrastructure for interethnic labor organization. Organizations and newspapers created both physical and ideological infrastructure for interethnic labor organization by providing physical spaces and ideas of solidarity and class consciousness utilized by organizers. Interethnic labor organization developed before the 1913-14 strike. In support of a 1906 miners’ strike in the region, Petriella, editor of the socialist Italian-language *La Sentinella*, organized Italians for an Italian and Finnish socialist meeting and social event.<sup>59</sup> By 1907, Petriella had left the Copper Country to serve as the Italian strike leader for the WFM on Minnesota’s iron range.<sup>60</sup> However, interethnic labor organization continued in the Copper Country. According to Kaunonen and Goings, “A number of Copper Country ethnic groups had, by the early 1910s, begun to unite in class-conscious organizations that bridged ethnic divisions.” Therefore, due to communal organizations and the efforts of interethnic labor organizers, interethnic labor organization and radicalism was on the rise in the Copper Country’s new immigrant communities leading up to 1913.

The conflict over the one-man drill was simple: the companies sought to save labor costs by introducing a drill that only required one man to operate while laborers feared the companies would cut underground jobs in half.<sup>61</sup> In an Italian-language article published in the *Miners’ Bulletin* in September 1913, Ben Goggin, an Italian WFM organizer, expressed the workers’ anger towards the one-man drill. He wrote, “It is a sacred truth that the one-man machine while it exhausts and wears the worker in charge, it damages the working-class that sees many of its members turned out on the street.”<sup>62</sup> The one-man drill issue appealed to the class-consciousness and solidarity of the Italian community since the drill threatened the jobs of all underground Italian workers; consequently, Italians along with all other immigrant groups began to organize in early 1913. According to Lankton, “Early in the spring and summer of 1913, the one-man drill galvanized the men, and membership in the WFM mushroomed from a thousand to about seven thousand.”<sup>63</sup> The one-man drill caused an explosion in labor organization because it united

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<sup>58</sup> WFM Convention Proceedings 1910-1911, Page 27, Western Federation of Miners Collection.

<sup>59</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 61.

<sup>61</sup> Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 192.

<sup>62</sup> Ben Goggin, “LA SACRA VERITA,” September 9, 1913, *Miners’ Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

<sup>63</sup> Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 193.

unskilled and skilled workers and, consequently, new and old immigrant groups. The one-man drill united skilled and unskilled labor because it threatened to cut skilled miners' jobs in half while limiting the chances for unskilled trammers to be promoted into miners' jobs.<sup>64</sup> Uniting skilled and unskilled labor was essential to interethnic labor organization because it bridged the ethnic hierarchy that existed in underground jobs. Kaunonen and Goings argued the one-man drill caused "usually English- or German-speaking skilled workers, to confront capital and join ranks with their fellow workers."<sup>65</sup> The WFM capitalized by sending multiethnic labor organizers to unite workers who had been divided on ethnic lines.<sup>66</sup>

WFM organizers took advantage of the discontent among workers caused by the one-man drill and utilized the infrastructure provided by immigrant communities to organize immigrants for social revolt in the 1913-14 strike. To organize Italians, the WFM sent two major Italian labor organizers to the Copper Country: Ben Goggin and Steve Oberto. Goggin and Oberto captivated Italians with their speeches and articles. According to Giovanna Cappo, "[Oberto] was called 'Red' because of his red hair, and he had these Italians so hypnotized that he was their God. They would have killed for him."<sup>67</sup> Although Cappo had negative memories of Oberto, it is clear his hold on the Italian community was strong and he was successful in his attempts to organize and galvanize the Italian community. Oberto and Goggin used the community infrastructure built by the Italian merchant class to organize Italian workers. An Italian-language advertisement in the October 14, 1913 issue of *Miners' Bulletin* promoted a speech by Oberto at the Torreano Hall in Laurium on October 15.<sup>68</sup> James Torreano was a prominent Italian merchant and active community member.<sup>69</sup> Interethnic organizers such as Oberto and Goggin also took advantage of local newspapers, especially foreign-language newspapers, which published schedules for speakers and parades held at local social halls. According to Kaunonen and Goings, "The publication of speakers' schedules and parades was perhaps one of the newspaper's most important functions. It literally got union folks on the same page regarding collective action among the Copper Country's striking mineworkers."<sup>70</sup> Therefore, interethnic organizers built their organizational efforts using the community infrastructure built by the merchant class. The merchant class, in turn, became integral to organizational efforts leading up to and during the strike.

Using the community infrastructure built by Italian merchants and other ethnic groups, labor organizers had successfully galvanized the Copper Country laborers by July 1913 when the strike was called. As interethnic labor organization reached its peak in early 1913, 98 percent of Copper Country WFM members voted for a potential strike.<sup>71</sup> The strike was begun on July 23,

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<sup>64</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 221.

<sup>65</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 113.

<sup>66</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, 98.

<sup>67</sup> Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>68</sup> *Miners' Bulletin*, October 14, 1913, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

<sup>69</sup> Magnaghi, *Miners, Merchants, and Midwives*, 33.

<sup>70</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 121.

<sup>71</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 222.



1913 after the mining companies refused to meet with WFM representatives.<sup>72</sup> The workers and the WFM demanded the abolition of the one-man drill, higher wages, improved working conditions, and, most importantly, official representation of workers by the WFM.<sup>73</sup> The workers struck against the advice of the WFM, which only had \$23,000 in the bank at the time of the strike.<sup>74</sup> However, the lines had already been drawn and WFM President Charles Moyer led the workers against the mining companies who were led by Calumet and Hecla President and General Manager James MacNaughton.<sup>75</sup> The strike divided the Italian community by dividing the Italian merchant class who served as community leaders. Some merchants allied with the mining companies to defend their economic interests while others remained committed to the miners in defense of ethnic solidarity. The division, in turn, left the community weak and unable to defend itself during the strike.

### **The 1913-14 Strike: Merchants, Miners and Division Among the Italians**

The strike quickly divided the Italian community forcing Italian merchants to make a choice between supporting Italian workers and joining the companies in opposition to the strike. Due to the prominence of Italian merchants in community leadership, they quickly realized they had to choose a side; Italian merchants were forced to choose between supporting their laboring compatriots and supporting the companies, which provided valuable stability and development in the region. On the pro-company side, merchants such as Cesare Lucchesi rallied behind August Marinelli and the pro-company stance promoted in his newspaper *Il Minatore Italiano* (The Italian Miner). On the pro-labor side, merchants such as Antonio Federighi, D. Giannerini, Carlo Macchi, and Paul Tommei rallied behind the organizational efforts of Ben Goggin and Steve Oberto often writing articles and purchasing advertisements in the WFM published *Miners' Bulletin*. Marinelli, due to his position as editor of *Il Minatore Italiano*, quickly became the most infamous pro-company Italian merchant. Goggin, in his Italian-language articles in the *Miners' Bulletin*, relentlessly attacked and insulted Marinelli for his pro-company views. The *Miners' Bulletin* published a series of Italian-language articles titled "SI CERCA" in which they listed and insulted Italian scabs and pro-company merchants often using the series to further insult Marinelli. In a "SI CERCA" article from December 2, 1913, the *Miners' Bulletin* wrote, "If the companies happen to be in debt to him for some item, what system does Mr. Marinelli use to collect checks from them?"<sup>76</sup> The *Miners' Bulletin* contributed to division within the Italian community by polarizing the community through their divisive and insulting articles targeted at pro-company Italian community members. Cesare Lucchesi was another target of the *Miners' Bulletin*. After the strike broke out, Lucchesi supported the companies by working as a deputy

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<sup>72</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 222.

<sup>73</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 225.

<sup>75</sup> Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 106.

<sup>76</sup> "SI CERCA," December 2, 1913, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

for the Copper Range Company.<sup>77</sup> In an Italian-language article published in the *Miners' Bulletin* in March 1914, Lucchesi was attacked and insulted along with other pro-company Italians for their pro-company actions. The newspaper wrote, "Amerigo Santori, Domenico Zana, Cesare Lucchesi, all from south range, are three loyal dogs, or better sycophants, of the companies."<sup>78</sup> Despite the divisiveness and insulting articles published in the *Miners' Bulletin*, many Italian merchants continued to support the paper by purchasing advertisements and writing articles.

Italian merchants who supported the workers did not shy away from the divisiveness of the *Miners' Bulletin*, contributing to the division within the community through their virulent articles in the paper and financial support of the paper. Antonio Federighi was one of the Italian merchants who supported the strike. Federighi was directly involved with the WFM since he issued and signed WFM membership cards, demonstrating the involved role of Italian merchants in organizing labor.<sup>79</sup> Federighi also supported the *Miners' Bulletin* by purchasing advertisements for his grocery store, which he operated out of the Vertin Bros Department Store.<sup>80</sup> Other Italian merchants such as Giannerini, Macchi, and Tommei supported the *Miners' Bulletin* more directly by writing articles in the paper without shying away from the divisiveness of the paper. In an article titled "Corragio Fratelli" (Courage Brothers) from September 11, 1913, Giannerini threatened Italian scabs with ostracization from the community. He wrote, "In conclusion, [a scab] is a danger to the wellbeing of the working-class, and will be chased out from any society and will never find a friend outside of their class in any place."<sup>81</sup> Giannerini was advocating for solidarity in the Italian community, but in doing so, contributed to the division within the community by threatening ostracization for scabs from the mutual benefit societies. However, other Italian merchants who supported the strike, such as Natale Pucci, sought to use the autonomy granted by the mutual benefit societies to foster cooperation within the community. In an announcement in the October 21, 1913 article of *Miners' Bulletin*, Pucci declared the Hancock chapter of La Società Lega Cittadina would support striking members by waiving their monthly dues until the conclusion of the strike.<sup>82</sup> Although Pucci attempted to build cooperation and solidarity within the community, the divisiveness of the strike was too strong and division defined the community.

The division visible within the merchant class came to define the Italian community leading to the defeat of solidarity amongst Italians and, consequently, the weakening of the Italian community. The division within the Italian merchant class was reflected throughout the entire community even dividing close family and friends. According to Giovanna Cappelletti, "The Italians went on strike and they were terrible. Brother didn't speak to brother, and sister didn't

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<sup>77</sup> Gelsomina "Jennie" Lucchesi Family History Notes, KEWE 47408, Box 2, Folder 20, Lucchesi Family Papers, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Calumet, Michigan.

<sup>78</sup> "SCABBIA – SCABBIOSI – SCABBIERIA," March 12, 1914, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

<sup>79</sup> Western Federation of Miners Membership Cards, MS-553, Box 1, Folder 2, Western Federation of Miners Collection, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

<sup>80</sup> *Miners' Bulletin*, October 11, 1913, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

<sup>81</sup> D. Giannerini, September 11, 1913, "Coraggio Fratelli," *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

<sup>82</sup> Natale Pucci, "AVVISO," October 21, 1913, *Miners' Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

speak to sister. If somebody went to work, they were scabs.”<sup>83</sup> The idea of solidarity amongst Italians that had come to define Italian community building was defeated by the divisiveness of the strike since the strike had even defeated solidarity within families. Solidarity was replaced by fear and hate. Louis Lombardi remembered his father, a surface worker at the mines, would bring a revolver to work during the strike. He said, “He never used [the revolver] or got into trouble with it but he was scared.”<sup>84</sup> The fear felt by Lombardi’s father was felt throughout, preventing solidarity and cooperation in the community. Consequently, the Italian community was not able to stand up for itself in the face of pro-company old immigrant communities.

### **The 1913-14 Strike: Division Among “Old” and “New” Immigrants**

Similar to the breakdown in unity of Italians above and below ground, the ethnic divide that had existed in the mining community before the strike quickly rose to the surface when the old immigrant communities abandoned the strike and joined the companies. The brief unity between the old and new immigrants quickly dissolved soon after the strike began. In early October, 98 percent of Cornish employees had returned to work and between 80 and 90 percent of Irish, Scottish, and Scandinavian employees had also returned to work.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, it is clear the old immigrants quickly gave up support of the strike. As a result, the ethnic divisions returned as the old immigrants allied with the companies against the new immigrant groups. While the old immigrants allied with the mining companies, the mining companies formed a pro-company community organization called the Citizens’ Alliance.<sup>86</sup> The Citizens’ Alliance provided the old immigrant communities with an outlet to organize a pro-company resistance to the strike within the communities while the new immigrant communities came together in the face of conflict.

New immigrant communities remained committed to the strike by expressing solidarity across ethnic lines. Two Croatian men, Steve Putrich and Alois Tijan, were killed by company-hired Waddell-Mahon gun thugs at a Croatian boardinghouse on August 14, the same day the Champion mine reopened.<sup>87</sup> The striking Italians felt as if two of their own had been killed. In an Italian-language article in the *Miners’ Bulletin*, Ben Goggin announced the killing of Putrich and Tijan referring to them as “confratelli” (brothers).<sup>88</sup> Shortly after the killings of Putrich and Tijan, the pro-company Citizens’ Alliance was formed with 5,236 members who demanded the expulsion of the WFM from the region.<sup>89</sup>

The Citizens’ Alliance gained support when Cornish residents Arthur and Harry Jane and Thomas Dally were struck and killed by bullets shot into their boardinghouse on December 7.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>84</sup> Oral History Interview of Louis Lombardi Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>85</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 229.

<sup>86</sup> Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 201.

<sup>87</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 228.

<sup>88</sup> Ben Goggin, August 23, 1913, “LE VITTIME,” *Miners’ Bulletin*, Calumet & Hecla Inc Records.

<sup>89</sup> Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 201.

<sup>90</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 235.

The Citizens' Alliance quickly blamed the killings on the WFM and, according to Lankton, "drew strength from strong undercurrents of ethnic discrimination and hatred, which now surfaced."<sup>91</sup> The old immigrant groups united in the Citizens' Alliance while the new immigrants were represented by the WFM and the strike against the mining companies devolved into an ethnic war in the mining community. Since cooperation and solidarity within the Italian community had been defeated, they did not stand a chance against the Citizen's Alliance or the old immigrant groups who supported it.

The interethnic war continued through December. As a Christmas Eve gathering for the strikers and their children at the Italian Hall was ending, a stampede for the door ensued killing 74 attendees of which 60 were children.<sup>92</sup> Of the 74 dead nearly 50 were Finns, 20 were Croatians or Slovenians, and 3 were Italians.<sup>93</sup> The WFM blamed the tragedy on the Citizens' Alliance, claiming a Citizens' Alliance member deliberately yelled "Fire!" to cause a stampede.<sup>94</sup> The truth of the claim remains unknown, but the Italian Hall Tragedy highlights the ethnic division within the community since Eastern and Southern European children died while their families condemned the Citizens' Alliance. By the time the strikers' children were crushed in the hallways of the Italian Hall, the Italian community had already been defeated. In early October, 1913, Calumet & Hecla reported 50% of their Italian workers had returned to work.<sup>95</sup> Between October and the Christmas Eve Italian Hall Tragedy, Italians had slowly returned to work. The divided Italian community had been defeated by the more united Citizens' Alliance. As the tensions of the winter thawed, the WFM knew the strike was over and cut strike benefits, causing the remaining 2,500 strikers to call off the strike on Easter Sunday 1914.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

The Italian community never recovered from the division of the strike. Giovanna Cappo remembered Italians leaving the Copper Country during and after the strike. She said, "There wasn't much they could do, so they left, and that's how the Italians lost out. They left the community."<sup>97</sup> Italian laborers left and headed south for industrial midwestern cities such as Detroit and Kenosha. Cappo claimed Copper Country Italians who left during the strike found employment manufacturing mattresses at the Simmons Factory in Kenosha.<sup>98</sup> Ercole Barsotti remembered Italians leaving to work for Ford in Detroit. He said, "Ford came out with the \$5 per day wage and that's what brought them down there."<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the defeat of the Italian

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<sup>91</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 235.

<sup>92</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 237.

<sup>93</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 237.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 229.

<sup>96</sup> Larry D. Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 205.

<sup>97</sup> Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>98</sup> Oral History Interview of Giovanna Cappo Transcript, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers.

<sup>99</sup> Oral History Interview of Ercole Barsotti Transcript, October 22, 1982, MS-708, Box 1, Russel Magnaghi Interview Transcripts Folder, Italians in the Copper Country Research Papers, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

community in the 1913-14 strike marked the defeat of a vibrant, booming, and cohesive Italian community in the Copper Country. Although victorious in the strike, the mining companies never fully recovered from the strike and crashed after World War I. Without the mining companies, the Italian community in turn had no chance of returning to the vibrancy and cooperation that had defined it before the strike. The old immigrant groups did not fare any better since the mining companies “effectively halved their force of miners.”<sup>100</sup> The mining companies’ crash after World War I prevented the old immigrant communities from ever regaining the standing they held before the strike.

The ethnic divide, which had been developing since new immigrant groups began to arrive in large numbers around 1890, reached a violent climax in the strike of 1913. Discriminatory company paternalism and ethnic discrimination from the old immigrant groups caused the ethnic divide between the new and old immigrant groups. The one-man drill initially united old and new immigrant groups because it targeted skilled and unskilled labor equally. However, once the strike began, the cooperation between the new and old immigrant groups quickly dissolved, causing the new and old immigrant groups to become rivals once again. The old immigrant groups united in the Citizens’ Alliance while the new immigrants were represented by the WFM. Therefore, the strike became an ethnic battle rather than a struggle for purely economic gains. The new immigrant groups could not compete with the old immigrant groups since the new immigrant communities were marred by division, which was especially visible within the Italian community. The new immigrant groups were defeated, leaving their communities divided and destroyed. The Italian community was no exception since it never recovered from the strike. Italian merchants and laborers alike were both left without the vibrant and powerful community they had before the strike.

Despite the turbulence and emotion that defined Italian community, its story reached an anticlimactic conclusion; the laborers who constituted the largest group of Italian community members realized their opportunities in the Copper Country were behind them after the strike. The community had failed to commit to its defining value: unity. Instead, it was clear individual community members had their own personal interests and would abandon unity when conflict arose. Consequently, the Italian community, which had been building strength and autonomy since the first Italian pioneers settled in the Copper Country, was left divided and weak during the strike. Italian workers were unable to defend themselves against the old immigrant groups and mining companies that had discriminated against them for so long. The Italians were defeated in the strike, so their workers left, forced to start over in some other industrial center.

I now return to the question I posed in the introduction: what role did the Italian community play in organizing labor for the 1913-14 Copper Country Strike? The Italian community facilitated the organization of labor by creating the infrastructure utilized by the WFM to organize Italians alongside the other new immigrant groups. Once the strike began and the new and old immigrants divided once again, the Italian community and the other new immigrant communities became the centers of labor organization and the struggle against the

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<sup>100</sup> Lankton, *Cradle to Grave*, 241.

mining companies. The Italian community was involved in a process of give and take between itself and the old immigrant communities. The Italian community first developed in response to exclusion from company paternalism and ethnic discrimination from the old immigrant communities. The power Italians gained from their community threatened old immigrant groups and the mining companies causing the ethnic divide to grow and the traditional employer-employee paternal bonds to dissolve. Consequently, Italians used the social, ideological, and physical infrastructure of the Italian community to resist the mining companies and old immigrant groups. As Italian resistance grew, the WFM sent interethnic labor organizers to unite the new immigrant groups, including the Italians, and to use their combined resistance to confront the mining companies and old immigrant communities in the 1913-14 strike. However, the Italian merchants who built the community were divided by the strike and consequently that lack of unity caused the community to collapse while confronting the mining companies. Equally importantly, the unity of the “old” and “new” immigrant groups broke down and killings inflamed the situation causing the new and old immigrant groups to become rivals once again. Brief unity dissolved into animosity, both between “new” and “old” immigrant groups and among the Italians above and below the ground.

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**“They are not of our race”:  
Northern Republican Senators, Anti-Cuban Prejudices, and the  
American Opposition to Cuban Acquisition in 1859**

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On October 15, 1854, American statesmen James Buchanan, J.Y. Mason, and Pierre Soulé convened in Ostend, Belgium to discuss the American acquisition of Cuba. The conference resulted in a document known as the Ostend Manifesto, which the *New York Herald* leaked to the American public the following year. Among its most controversial statements, the manifesto asserted that “[if] Cuba, in the possession of Spain, seriously endanger[s] [...] the existence of our cherished Union [...] we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain.” The manifesto encountered backlash from multiple sectors. Opposers worried about the high price of the acquisition and the toll it would have on relations with Spain. The matter resurfaced in 1859, when President Buchanan presented Senate Bill 497 to Congress, asking for a sum of \$30’000’000 to acquire Cuba from Spain. As demonstrated by the heated debates among U.S. Senators, the bill raised divisions regarding the American economy, the relations between the U.S. and European powers, and the expansion of slavery into foreign territories. In an attempt to interpret opposition to the annexation of Cuba in the 1850s, Indiana Senator Albert J. Beveridge argued that the proposition heightened tensions<sup>1</sup> among slaveholding and non-slaveholding states in the Union and that for these reasons opposers saw it as “impracticable.”<sup>2</sup> However, a closer examination of the Senate speeches regarding the 1859 bill reveals that the reasons behind the opposition went beyond the institution of slavery. Northern Republican Senators in 1859 also opposed the annexation of Cuba because they deemed the island’s population to be incompatible with the Union due to their cultural, religious, and racial difference. The opposers of the bill

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<sup>1</sup> This argument rests on the idea that, if added to the Union, Cuba would be a slaveholding state. Many senators for Southern states pointed at the potential acquisition of Canada as a non-slave state as the event that would restore the balance (Basil Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba: 1848-1855* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 57).

<sup>2</sup> Albert J. Beveridge, “Cuba and Congress,” *The North American Review* 172, no. 533 (1901), 538.



argued that Cuba's largely Spanish, Catholic, multi-racial population was unable to uphold American standards of self-government.

Existing analyses of the American acquisition of Cuba scarcely mention this prejudiced view of the Cuban people. Rather, historians such as Rauch and Ferrer ascribe opposition to the domestic tensions around slavery. The argument of anti-Cuban prejudice illuminates Northern Republican views on the exclusivity of American institutions. For Northern Republicans, the incorporation of new territories rested on the possibility of "Americanization." Cuba's Catholic, Spanish, and multiracial characteristics made it incompatible with the idea of America. Often, Northern Republican senators were more adamant in their prejudiced views than in their opposition to the expansion of slavery in Cuba. This argument illuminates how anti-slavery Northerners were also motivated by the preservation of the American ideal, in addition to the elimination of slavery. Their anti-slavery views often extended only as far as the white, protestant, American man could reach.

### **Antecedents and Literature Review**

U.S. policymakers had long pondered the acquisition of Cuba for economic, geopolitical, and ideological reasons. Cuba's place as one of the largest slaveholding societies in the world made its markets extremely desirable, especially the sugar market. Its placement on the Gulf of Mexico and next to the mouth of the Mississippi River made it key for commercial and trade strategies with the Caribbean. After the acquisition of Florida in 1819, many U.S. statesmen viewed Cuba as the next logical step, being under a hundred miles away. Many wondered about the possibility of a European power with a strong navy eventually acquiring Cuba, such as France or England. This shift in the control of Cuba would place a significant threat to U.S. sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere. Additionally, in a paternalistic impulse that survived until the Spanish-American War (1898), U.S. statesmen hoped to liberate Cuba from the allegedly tyrannical power of Spain, whose prowess was in a state of decline by the loss of its colonies.

Therefore, when American senators encountered the question of Cuban acquisition in 1859, they were aware that it was nothing new. Like Louisiana Democratic Senator John Slidell stated in his report of the Bill 497, "the ultimate acquisition of Cuba has long been regarded as the fixed policy of the United States [...] The only difference of opinion is as to the time, mode, and conditions of obtaining it."<sup>3</sup> In his book *American Interest in Cuba 1848-1855*, Rauch analyzes the multiple Early American statesmen that at some point showed interest in the acquisition of Cuba. Men such as Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams considered Cuba a crucial commercial and strategic addition to the Union. In a letter to James Monroe in 1823, Thomas Jefferson stated, "I have ever looked upon Cuba as the most interesting addition which

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<sup>3</sup> John Slidell, "Making Appropriations to Facilitate the Acquisition of the Island of Cuba," (Washington, DC: 1859), 9.

could ever be made to our system of states.”<sup>4</sup> Jefferson and Adams considered it an American duty to free the Cuban people of the ostensibly tyrannical Spanish government. According to Adams, the geographic placement of Cuba would provide the United States with full commercial access to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River, as well as the network of the West Indies.<sup>5</sup> Yet another major motivation in the acquisition of Cuba, later cited in the Ostend Manifesto, is its provision of security to the American states from potential slave revolutions which could pour into the newly acquired, neighboring territories of Louisiana and New Mexico.<sup>6</sup>

For decades after, U.S. administrations engaged in unsuccessful negotiations with Spanish powers for the acquisition of Cuba. During the administrations of Van Buren, Taylor, and Fillmore, these negotiations took a more relaxed stance. These presidents were content with the government of Spain over Cuba as long as it prevented other European powers such as Britain and France from controlling the territory.<sup>7</sup> Ada Ferrer identifies the Pierce administration as a point of the reignition of American interest in Cuba. In his inaugural speech in 1853, Franklin Pierce declared that “[his] Administration will not be controlled by any timid forebodings of evil from expansion [...] our attitude as a nation and our position on the globe render the acquisition of certain possessions [...] eminently important for our protection.”<sup>8</sup> This anti-abolitionist, expansionist administration was further foreshadowed by Vice President William Rufus King’s recitation of the oath of office from an American-owned sugar plantation in Cuba, where he sought relief from tuberculosis.<sup>9</sup> The next year, in 1854, soon-to-be president James Buchanan signed the Ostend Manifesto in Belgium. The Ostend Manifesto signified a shift from negotiation to forceful “wresting” in American policy regarding the acquisition of Cuba. The writers of the Manifesto made it clear that they were willing to go to great lengths in order to count Cuba among the U.S.’s possessions.

## **The Ostend Manifesto**

The Ostend Manifesto represented the compilation of all considerations in favor of the acquisition of Cuba in one document. It emerged after a meeting among James Buchanan, John Mason, and Pierre Soulé, American ambassadors to England, France, and Spain respectively, met in Ostend, Belgium in October 1854 to discuss the acquisition of Cuba. The meeting emerged under the instruction of secretary of state William Marcy, in the face of Southern pressure to add more slave states to the country. Once the document was leaked, as far as we know, by the New York Herald and through Pierre Soulé’s indiscreetness, it encountered backlash from domestic and foreign sectors of opinion. Domestically, members of the Republican party feared that the pro-slavery democrats held too much power in the Union’s

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<sup>4</sup> Slidell, “Making Appropriations to Facilitate the Acquisition of the Island of Cuba,” 2.

<sup>5</sup> Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba: 1848-1855*, 23-24.

<sup>6</sup> Slidell, “Making Appropriations to Facilitate the Acquisition of the Island of Cuba,” 4.

<sup>7</sup> James R. Doolittle, “The Acquisition of Cuba—Colonization of Central America” (1859), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Cuba: an American History*, (New York: Scribner, 2021), 107.

<sup>9</sup> Ferrer, *Cuba: an American History*, 111.

decisions. Abroad, the manifesto's suggestion that the United States could take Cuba by force aroused suspicion of the U.S.' expansionist efforts.



Figure 1. The Ostend Doctrine. Lithograph. From Library of Congress.

The above lithograph, created by Nathaniel Currier, exemplifies the backlash against the Ostend Manifesto. It shows James Buchanan, surrounded by a group of men attempting to take his hat, coat, watch, and money. In their requests, the men use quotes from the Ostend Manifesto. This lithograph brings into question the validity of the Manifesto's claims on Cuba, including the "danger" of the situation, and the U.S.' entitlement to "wrest [Cuba]" Additionally, it exemplifies concerns regarding the corruptibility of the Democratic doctrine present in the Manifesto, if put into practice. These concerns of corruption carried on to the debates of Senate Bill 497, and according to historians, signified a motivating factor for the Civil War.

The actual text of the Ostend Manifesto is careful to not explicitly mention the addition of Cuba as a slaveholding state. Instead, it provides extensive attention to other factors in favor of the acquisition, such as the geographical proximity of the island. The document places significant emphasis on the security that the island will provide to the Union. It states that is numerous streams of commerce would be dangerous to U.S. security in foreign hands. Additionally, it presents the idea that Cuba's "system of immigration and labor" threatens an insurrection that could hurt U.S. interests. This idea certainly stems from the fear of recent slave insurrections in the Caribbean, such as those of Haiti and Jamaica, and their potential influence on U.S. shores. The authors state that, unless annexed to the Union, Cuba will become

“Africanized” and become “a second St. Domingo.” Such a possibility is reason enough for the United States to be justified in “wresting” Cuba from Spain, by means of war.

The only mention of slavery present in the document complicates historians’ common view of Cuba as a potential slaveholding state. The authors state that “as long as [Spanish rule] shall endure, humanity may in vain demand the suppression of the African slave trade in the island.” They characterize the Spanish rulers on the island as “needy” and “avaricious” for the immense profit that slavery produces for the island. Therefore, under Spanish rule, the slave trade would never cease to be in Cuba. This statement implies that were Cuba to be annexed to the United States, the goal would be to eventually suppress the African slave trade. Evidently, this sentence aims to please anti-slavery sectors of opinion in the U.S. This is undoubtedly a stealthy way of addressing the slavery question in the document. However, as discussed in the 1859 debates, this prospect does not necessarily signify that Democrat annexationists aimed to abolish the slave trade in Cuba. Instead, they hoped to supplant enslaved Africans with American Southerners as a source for human labor. The plausibility of this suggestion was a subject of heated discussion during the 1859 Congress.

### **Senate Bill 497**

When James Buchanan presented a bill to the Senate in 1859 asking for a sum of 30’000’00 in order to “facilitate” the acquisition of Cuba, the senators engaged in a heated debate. This debate was in constant conversation with the desires of Early American statesmen, as well as the authors of the Ostend Manifesto. However, the involvement of a large sum of money that would necessitate significant federal funds heightened the tensions between the Senators. The speeches are filled with personal attacks, accusations of corruption, and the discrediting of public officials (including President Buchanan). The debates took place between January and February of 1859 and involved a number of Northern Republican and Southern Democrat Senators. Although their arguments varied, generally, the Northern Republican Senators opposed the acquisition, while the Southern Democrats supported it. Louisiana Democrat Senator John Slidell, who succeeded Pierre Soulé in said office, wrote a report to accompany Bill 497. The report outlined the arguments supporting the acquisition of Cuba and includes counterarguments to some of the common claims of the opposition.

Slidell argues that were the U.S. not to acquire Cuba, the two possible alternatives would include the possession of Cuba by some other European power, such as Britain or France, or the independence of the island. Slidell states the former alternative would endanger American security and sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere, while the latter would result in a “Black Republic” similar to Haiti in its lack of prosperity.<sup>10</sup> The Louisiana senator also addresses a variety of the counterarguments presented at the debate, such as the possibility of offending Spain through the suggestion to sell Cuba. This consideration hearkens back to the Ostend Manifesto, which also argues against the idea that Spain will feel offended at the offer to

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<sup>10</sup> Slidell, “Making Appropriations to Facilitate the Acquisition of the Island of Cuba,” 10.

purchase. Slidell states that due to the U.S.' willingness to pay a large sum of money for the island, Spain should present no objections. Furthermore, Slidell also argues against the idea that the population of Cuba is unfit for the Union. Slidell states, "the white creole is as free from all taint of African blood as the descendant of the Goth from the plains of Castile."<sup>11</sup> This statement immediately caught my attention. Why did a pro-slavery Southern statesman feel the need to argue for Cuban whiteness in these debates on annexation? Was the existence of a predominantly white population a precondition for the annexation of territory to the United States? Which sectors of opinion was Slidell trying to appeal to in this statement? These are the questions that motivated this paper.

In order to answer these questions, this analysis looked at a number of speeches by Northern Republican Senators delivered at the 1859 debates on Bill 497. These include Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, James Dixon of Connecticut, James Rood Doolittle of Wisconsin, and Jacob Collamer of Vermont. All of these senators opposed the acquisition of Cuba. Likewise, every single one of these senators claimed to hold anti-slavery views, and eventually supported the Lincoln administration during the Civil War. For contrast, this essay also looked at the speeches of a few Southern Democrats, including John Slidell of Louisiana, Tristen W. Polk of Missouri, and Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana. The rhetoric of these debates allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural, religious, and racial considerations that went into the acquisition of Cuba. The Northern Republican Senator's speeches provide insight into the specific prejudices that convinced them Cubans were incapable of self-government, and thus incompatible with the Union. This analysis puts the Senator's anti-slavery views in question. Did their convictions come from a place of humanity and respect of other races, or rather social convenience?

This argument is also in conversation with Michel Gobat's *Empire by Invitation* by suggesting that contradictory dynamics were at play in American Northerners' interest in Cuba and Nicaragua in the 1850s. Gobat's book focuses on William Walker's filibuster expedition to Nicaragua in the 1850s. Gobat views Walker's filibuster regime in Nicaragua, composed largely of American Northerners, not as an effort to extend slavery Southward but as an attempt to spread American democratic ideals in Central America. Therefore, Walker's expansionist ambitions served the larger Manifest Destiny project of the mid-19th century. This essay finds different dynamics at play in the Northern opinion of Cuban acquisition. Are Northern statesmen similarly interested in expanding Democratic ideals into Cuba? The sources suggest quite the opposite—Northern statesmen dismissed Cuba as unfit for the proliferation of American democratic ideals. This disparity in the Northern perspective of Nicaragua and Cuba in the 1850s can perhaps be attributed to the perceived willingness of Nicaraguan people to accept Walker's regime. By contrast, Northern Republicans in 1859 considered that Cubans would be reluctant to assimilate to American institutions.

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<sup>11</sup> Slidell, "Making Appropriations to Facilitate the Acquisition of the Island of Cuba," 13.

## Discussion: The Debates

In February of 1859, a number of American Senators engaged in a heated debate regarding an island off the coast of Florida. In front of them stood a request from Democrat President James Buchanan asking for \$30'000'000 to “facilitate” the acquisition of Cuba. Many interpreted this wording as a potential bribe of the Spanish crown. Ever since the divulgence of the Ostend Manifesto, and the diplomatic backlash that it produced, the Cuban question had been relatively silent. Yet these representatives faced the question of whether they should grant the President access to this large sum of money. Louisiana Democratic Senator John Slidell introduced the bill with strong argumentation in favor of the acquisition. His report, printed on January 24, 1859, includes an in-depth financial analysis of the profits of Cuba’s sugar industry. Slidell played an important role in the declaration of the Mexican-American War in 1846. He was elected to Senate in 1853, where he advocated against the Missouri Compromise and for the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In 1859, he was one of seven members of the Committee of Foreign Relations, along with Polk and Crittenden, also present at the Bill 497 debate. Later in life, he allied with the pro-slavery, secessionist “Fire-Eaters” and became a pro-Confederacy diplomat in France.

One of the first responses to Slidell’s report was that of Wisconsin Republican Senator James Rood Doolittle, delivered on February 11. Originally, Doolittle belonged to the anti-slavery Barnburner section of the Democratic Party, and in 1857 switched over to the Republican Party. In spite of his anti-slavery views, Doolittle was a staunch opposer of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment during the Reconstruction era. At the 1859 debates, although he opposed Cuban acquisition, his stance was rather moderate, much like the rest of his political endeavors. Doolittle agreed with Slidell that Cuban acquisition was the eventual destiny of the Union. However, he believed that then was not the right time for the acquisition to happen. His oppositions were rather logistical: he wanted Spain to voluntarily renounce Cuba, and he wanted a majority of the white male population of Cuba to vote in favor of the transfer. Pushing back against the Ostend Manifesto, Doolittle stated, “unless Spain offers to sell Cuba, we should not take it by force.”<sup>12</sup>

Doolittle’s speech took a turn when he revealed that he hoped to acquire not only Cuba but also parts of Central and South America, in order to provide for the emigration of all people of color in the Union. This prospect of emigration seems to be one of his key convictions, considering that he delivered an entire speech to Congress on April 11, 1862, advocating for “homesteads for black men in the tropics—white immigration to and black emigration from the United States.” In 1859, he proposed the eventual “colonization of Central America” through acquisition or negotiation with the “tropical states” Doolittle considered slavery to be a declining institution and wondered what white American statesmen would “do with” all the people of color in the Union once there was no more use for them.<sup>13</sup> This statesman holds an interesting definition of abolition as the gradual dissolution of slavery into the regions of Mexico and

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<sup>12</sup> Doolittle, “The Acquisition of Cuba—Colonization of Central America,” 4.

<sup>13</sup> Doolittle, “The Acquisition of Cuba—Colonization of Central America,” 5.

Central and South America.<sup>14</sup> Doolittle's arguments suggest that he did not oppose the institution of slavery itself, but rather its proximity to the predominantly white states of the Union. As long as slavery was outside of his view, Doolittle was satisfied. His arguments also point at the assumption that there was a fundamental separation between the Union as it stood and the areas of Central and South America. Even if included in the Union, Doolittle would never regard Cuba as an equal to the other American states, but rather as a dumping ground for the evils of slavery.

Although Doolittle's views were not popular among the debaters—his name was seldom brought except in the spirit of ridicule—, his opinions were symptomatic of a larger issue in American opinion of Cuba. For these senators, regardless of their party or geographical affiliation, the value of Cuba was inherently tied to the institution of slavery. This is why not even anti-slavery Senators considered abolition in Cuba a plausible prospect.<sup>15</sup> If slavery were to cease to exist on the island, it would descend into the state of Haiti or Jamaica. This condemnation was not only due to the dependence of the island's economy on slavery-related commodities but also on the inability of the population for self-government. Therefore, it was an underlying assumption that, were the U.S. to acquire Cuba, it would also acquire the 400'000 enslaved people who worked on the island.<sup>16</sup> Southern Democrat Senator Judah P. Benjamin was one of the strongest proponents of the decay of Cuba upon the abolition of slavery. He stated in his speech, "the population, wealth, and the prosperity of Cuba, are dependent solely on a system of compulsory labor, without which she must inevitably relapse into the condition of Hayti."<sup>17</sup> Benjamin utilized this fear of "Africanization," which he predicted would happen were Cuba to remain in Spanish hands, as an argument in favor of the acquisition.

The point where Republican and Democrat senators diverge is on the capacity of Cuba to practice self-government in equality to the existing states. In his speech, also delivered on February 11<sup>th</sup>, Benjamin proposed that the U.S. acquisition of Cuba would signify an "admission to self-government."<sup>18</sup> He opposed this mode of government to the subjugation and imposition of the Spanish. He stated that "she [Cuba] shall unite with us freely, an equal associate of the free States."<sup>19</sup> Quite explicitly in his speech, Benjamin stated that Cuba was capable of practicing two key American values: freedom and equality. After February 11, the increase in assertions of Cuban incompatibility with American institutions signals a retaliation against Benjamin's suggestions. Consequent Northern Republican speakers Chandler, Collamer, and Dixon found Benjamin's granting of self-government to Cubans a scandalous proposition.

Next in the line of the debate was Republican Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, who delivered an anti-acquisition speech on February 17, 1859. Zachariah T. Chandler, first a member of the Whig Party, then one of the founders of the Republican party in 1854 was a

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<sup>14</sup> Doolittle, "The Acquisition of Cuba—Colonization of Central America," 7.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Collamer, "Speech of Hon. Jacob Collamer, of Vermont, on the Acquisition of Cuba," (Washington, DC, 1859), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Collamer, "Speech of Hon. Jacob Collamer, of Vermont, on the Acquisition of Cuba," 7.

<sup>17</sup> James Benjamin, "Speech of Hon. J.P. Benjamin, of La: On the Acquisition of Cuba," (Washington, DC, 1859), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, "Speech of Hon. J.P. Benjamin, of La: On the Acquisition of Cuba," 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

strong anti-slavery activist and, during the Civil War, an advocate for the incorporation of African Americans into the Union army. Chandler identified with the Radical Republicans, who opposed the Fugitive Slave Act and supported the abolition of slavery. However, Chandler's views seem much less radical upon the examination of his speech. In his speech, Chandler first argued against the acquisition of Cuba for economic reasons. He pointed at the bankruptcy of the American treasury, and the possibility of President Buchanan utilizing the requested funds for the restoration of the deteriorated Democratic Party.<sup>20</sup> For Chandler, Buchanan's request of such a large sum of money to the American Congress was a sign of corruption.

Later in his speech, Chandler went on a tirade against the idea that Cuba merited joining the Union, which was most likely addressing Benjamin's claims. By referencing his recent trips to the island, Chandler established that the Cuban population and environment were not fit for their incorporation into the United States. Of white Cubans, he wrote, "they are an ignorant, vicious, priest-ridden set."<sup>21</sup> Chandler said that Cubans were enamored with Catholicism and that there was no "such thing as a love of liberty here."<sup>22</sup> Additionally, he stated that Cuba was an improper place for Northern men to emigrate to, given the number of tropical diseases and animals that would assail them at all times.<sup>23</sup> In line with the association of Cuba's value to slavery, Chandler seemed uninterested in promoting the abolition of slavery in Cuba. His chief concern was the unfitness of the white population, which due to its religious and cultural differences from white Americans, would be unable to practice liberty and self-government, which he considered key American values. Chandler does not deny that Cuban creoles were white but instead argued that they carried a corrupted kind of whiteness, one associated with criminality and bondage. Chandler's condemnation of the Catholic and Spanish influence on the Cuban population seems to be in line with the heightened anti-Catholic and nativist ideologies in the 1850s, as evidenced by Know-Nothingism.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Chandler's argumentation came with an idealization of the West as a territory more fitting for expansion than Cuba. He stated that, even though Cuban land is considered fertile for its facility with tropical commodities such as sugar, "it is in no way comparable to the prairies and bottom-lands of the Great West."<sup>25</sup> While Chandler saw the population of Cuba as an obstacle to expansion, he considered the Western territories to be largely unpeopled. Addressing Senator Benjamin, Chandler said, "You have hundreds of acres of land to which you can extinguish the Indian title for a song and obtain better lands and create better states than you will ever make out of Cuba."<sup>26</sup> Not only is this a direct dismissal of Indian sovereignty, but it also illustrates that in order for a territory to be fit for the Union, American

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<sup>20</sup> This suggestion here hearkens back to the debates surrounding the Ostend Manifesto, which denounced the possible corruption of pro-slavery Democrat officials.

<sup>21</sup> Zachariah Chandler, "Acquisition of Cuba," (Washington, DC, 1859), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Chandler, "Acquisition of Cuba," 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860; a Study of the Origins of American Nativism*, (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

<sup>25</sup> Chandler, "Acquisition of Cuba," 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



whiteness must be able to predominate. Chandler regarded the West as “unpeopled,” therefore the obstacles that the Cuban population signified for American institutions were not present.

Perhaps one of the most elaborate opposition speeches was that of Vermont Republican Senator Jacob Collamer on February 21<sup>st</sup>, where he built on Chandler’s views. His speech was very much aware of the antecedents in Cuban acquisition, even going as far as calling the debate a “second edition of the Ostend Conference.”<sup>27</sup> Collamer argued that Slidell’s report and the Ostend Manifesto share a key commonality: the belief that it is the destiny of the Union to expand. By contrast, he believed that the Union has already expanded enough, considering its recent acquisitions of Florida and Texas. Therefore, the acquisition of Cuba would be unnecessary for the Union. He states, “we could shovel up the whole of [Cuba] into ships and dump it off into the Atlantic Ocean [...] The idea that the possession of Cuba is necessary [...] is an actual figment of the imagination.”<sup>28</sup> Collamer’s assertions built on Chandler’s idea that Cuba is of very little value for the United States without the institution of slavery. He called the prospect of abolishing the slave trade in Cuba a “delusion.”<sup>29</sup>

Similar to his fellow so-called anti-slavery senators, Collamer seemed unexcited about the prospect of abolishing the slave trade in Cuba. In fact, Collamer’s views on slavery appear very moderate in his words, “my opinion is that any people who desire to have slaves and will pay enough for them can have them in any country.”<sup>30</sup> This view seems rather inconsistent for an anti-slavery senator who later provided legal aid to Abraham Lincoln in the Emancipation Proclamation<sup>31</sup>. However, if we consider the postulate that Collamer held different standards on anti-slavery for territories inside and outside the Union, his views suddenly seem perfectly consistent. Collamer’s advocacy for anti-slavery extended only as far as the American white man’s reach.

Collamer is by far the most vocal senator about the racial tensions that the acquisition of Cuba aroused. In response to the possibility of ending the African slave trade in Cuba and, instead, supplying the island with enslaved workers from the American South, Collamer stated that Southern slaveholders would be unwilling. He said that Southern slaveholders would be fearful of “the border slave states being shaved off into what they call, if you please, abolition.”<sup>32</sup> Collamer’s way of bringing the word “abolition” into the conversation suggests that there is great tension around it. When questioned by Slidell on his opinions on Southerners, Collamer stated that he doesn’t wish to have any written record of him supporting the slave trade.<sup>33</sup> His response signals a greater preoccupation with his public image rather than his ideological convictions.

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<sup>27</sup> Collamer, “Speech of Hon. Jacob Collamer, of Vermont, on the Acquisition of Cuba,” 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> The correspondence between Collamer and Lincoln is evidenced by a small letter where Lincoln asks Collamer to meet him at Church. Collamer, a prominent lawyer, most likely provided legal aid to Lincoln on the public’s response to the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln, Abraham. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Volume 6.*, 2001. <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/lincoln6>.

<sup>32</sup> Collamer, “Speech of Hon. Jacob Collamer, of Vermont, on the Acquisition of Cuba,” 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 12.

Additionally, Collamer goes as far as to assert that Southern secessionists may have been wanting to incorporate Cuba in order to have access to the mouth of the Mississippi River after their separation from the Union.<sup>34</sup> His arguments evidence that Collamer was aware of the stark factional divide between pro-slavery and anti-slavery Senators on the topic of acquisition. Therefore, we can also understand his anti-slavery views as a factional commitment, rather than an ideological proposition. In other words, anti-slavery was a part of Collamer's discourse against the Southern Senators and the looming threat of secession.

In his speech, Collamer builds on the incompatibility of the Cuban population with American institutions due to its cultural habits and Catholicism. Collamer refers to the Union as a "family," its members able to harmoniously coexist with others.<sup>35</sup> Because Cuba was so densely populated, it would be hard to Americanize it. Territories such as Florida, by contrast, had a "scattered" Spanish population, which made it easy to assimilate.<sup>36</sup> In reference to Cubans, Collamer questioned, "Are they a people adapted to our institutions? Are they a people who, if they understood those institutions, would desire them?" Reminiscent of Chandler's speech, Collamer stated that the half a million Spanish creoles on the island were "entirely unintelligent" and unacquainted with the English language.<sup>37</sup> He emphasized freedom of religion as a crucial value of the Union and considered that the intrusion of the Catholic Church on Cuban affairs would be detrimental to potential Protestant settlers.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, Collamer rejected the Cuban people on racial grounds, which he established by comparison to Mexico. Previously, in the House of Representatives, Collamer had opposed Texan annexation and the Mexican-American War (1848). In the speech, he referred to the failed attempts to annex Mexico as a slaveholding state. He referred to Mexicans as a people of "mixed race and blood" who have so far erased the line between Black and White as to be incapable of self-government.<sup>39</sup> In this context, Collamer frames "self-government" as the ability to sustain the institution of slavery, predicated upon racial discrimination. By comparing Mexico's racial composition to Cuba, Collamer asserts that Cuba's population too would be incapable of sustaining a self-governing body, being used to Spanish governance. Additionally, Collamer generalizes the people of the tropics as "idle" due to the large availability of fruit in their surroundings.<sup>40</sup> Because the racial difference was not as marked in Mexico and Cuba as it was in the United States, Collamer thought they would be incapable of sustaining themselves as a slaveholding state. And as established before, Cuba held no value without the institution of slavery. Therefore, Cuba would be of no benefit to the Union.

Lastly, on February 25<sup>th</sup> of 1859, Connecticut Republican Senator James Dixon culminated anti-Cuban discourse by asserting that their white population belonged to a different

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<sup>34</sup> Collamer, "Speech of Hon. Jacob Collamer, of Vermont, on the Acquisition of Cuba," 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

race altogether. James Dixon, like his peers, was an anti-slavery senator. However, he was also an Episcopalian and sympathized with anti-Catholic sentiments. In his speech, Dixon discussed,

“are [Cubans] fit to come into our government as equals? (...) All Southern senators claim that the Black portion of that population are unfit for self-government (...) How is it with the whites? They are not of our race. They are of a race that has never yet succeeded in self-government.”<sup>41</sup>

His definition of “race” in this passage combined the considerations of other senators. What constitutes the “difference” of white Cubans is their affiliations to Catholicism, their history of Spanish governance, and their cultural and environmental upbringing.

In “othering” white Cubans, Dixon also marked a difference between American institutions and Cuban institutions. He compared Cuba to a number of other American territories and argued that territories such as Massachusetts and Connecticut had been practicing self-government long before the Revolution. He engaged in a sort of “the chicken or the egg” discourse by wondering whether the institutions make the people, or the people make the institutions. He concluded that the American longstanding tradition of self-governance, even under British rule, was what created the institutions of liberty and equality. Therefore, these institutions could not apply to those who have not practiced self-governance before (i.e., Cuba). With regards to the newly acquired territories of Louisiana and Florida, Dixon stated that they were largely unpeopled and that their Spaniard populations did not get seats in the Senate.<sup>42</sup> These considerations drove Dixon to deem the Cuban population incapable of practicing American institutions.

Although this study is not an exhaustive analysis of all the anti-acquisition speeches delivered in the Senate between January and February of 1859, the speeches of Doolittle, Chandler, Collamer, and Dixon, provide powerful insight into the Northern Republican view of Cuba’s population. Although Senators such as Chandler and Dixon mentioned the environmental factors of the island and their supposed inhospitality to American settlers, their concerns largely centered on the island’s population and their inability to assimilate into the Union. All the Senators arrived at the conclusion that Cubans are incompatible with American institutions. Although sometimes defined as equality, liberty, or self-government, the apparent ambiguity of these “institutions” is perhaps a tool to obscure the prejudiced views of these Senators. Their prejudice stems from multiple grounds, including the anti-Catholic sentiments that were common among Protestant Americans at the time, the characterization of the Spanish population as lazy or uninterested in liberty, and the lack of a white population by Northern standards. These factors compounded in a near racialization of not only the Black population in Cuba but also the white population, by the assertion of their difference from American whiteness. This idea reinforced

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<sup>41</sup> James Dixon, “Speech of Hon. James Dixon, of Connecticut, on the Thirty Million Bill, for the Acquisition of Cuba,” (Washington, DC, 1859), 24.

<sup>42</sup> Dixon, “Speech of Hon. James Dixon, of Connecticut, on the Thirty Million Bill, for the Acquisition of Cuba,” 24.

the exclusivity of American institutions and values, which was a common discourse among Nativist sectors of opinion.

Going back to the conversation with Gobat's argument, this analysis provides insight into the comparison between Cuba and Nicaragua. Since Northern American statesmen saw in the Walker regime a solid opportunity to promulgate American democratic ideals to Nicaragua, they were more willing to support his expedition. In Cuba, by contrast, Northerners had little proof of the population's willingness to cooperate with the Union. Therefore, they held little interest in spreading American institutions into Cuba.

This analysis also ultimately showed how Northern Republican senators considered anti-slavery itself to be an exclusively white, Protestant, American value. The Senators suggest that the only territories that have value without slavery are those that are dominated by a white and Protestant American population. Therefore, they are quick to betray their anti-slavery views when considering the American annexation of Cuba. For these senators, the need to preserve American exclusive values was more important than the elimination of slavery. A variety of questions remain from this study, including the role of the antebellum tensions in these debates, and how the Cuban question ultimately motivated the Civil War.

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# COBOL Cripples the Mind!

## Academia and the Alienation of Data Processing

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In early April 2020, deluged with over 200,000 unemployment insurance claims, the state of New Jersey’s application website crashed. New Jersey was not alone. With thousands freshly laid-off in the midst of a global pandemic, states like Colorado and Rhode Island also reported large-scale system failures. The culprit, according to New Jersey governor Phil Murphy, was the sixty-year-old programming language COBOL. “Literally, we have systems that are 40 years-plus old, and there’ll be lots of post-mortems,” he said. “And one of them on our list will be how did we get here where we literally needed COBOL programmers?”<sup>1</sup> News coverage of the crash was also unsympathetic to COBOL, variously describing it as ‘old’, ‘outdated’, and ‘dead.’

But COBOL is anything but a dead language. Designed to be a portable, readable, and standardized business-purpose language, COBOL took the business world by storm when it was first released in 1960. By 1970, it was the most widely used programming language in the world.<sup>2</sup> Much of today’s critical business infrastructure is still COBOL-based—95% of all ATM transactions use COBOL, and 500 million mobile phone users are connected by it every day.<sup>3</sup> COBOL systems have proven to be resilient, efficient, and reliable. In the case of New Jersey, as it turns out, COBOL wasn’t to blame at all. The failure was in the Java-based frontend, meaning that claimants were hitting a wall before their application ever touched a COBOL system.

The continued reliance on COBOL is reason enough for its study as a technological artifact. But as the language itself nears the (human) retirement age, a close examination of its origins and reception provide a glimpse into a different era of computing. As Michael Mahoney puts it in his classic essay *What Makes the History of Software Hard and Why It Matters*<sup>4</sup>, “the history of software is the history of how various communities of practitioners have put their portion of the world into the computer.” Replace ‘software’ with ‘programming languages’ and

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<sup>1</sup> As *Unemployment Claims Spike New Jersey Seeks COBOL Coders*, NJ Gov.

<sup>2</sup> Hicks, *Built to Last*.

<sup>3</sup> *Academia Needs More Support to Tackle the IT Skills Gap*, Microfocus.

<sup>4</sup> Mahoney, 1.

this logic holds—programming languages define a set of instructions for the machine, invariably representing the priorities (‘worlds’) of those who design and implement them. A history of COBOL, by this token, is not just a list of its technical hits and misses. It is a history of the business community of the 50s and 60s that created it, the defense industry that supported it, and the programmers that received and used it.

To study an artifact, however, is not just to study its well-wishers. Any history of COBOL is incomplete without its long list of detractors and discontents. Governor Phil Murphy was not the first to criticize (or in his case, scapegoat) COBOL. Many programmers, academics, and ‘hackers’ expressed their dissatisfaction with COBOL over the years, and for different reasons. Consider this acerbic entry for COBOL in the *New Hacker’s Dictionary* (1996):

“COBOL /koh'bol/ n. [COMmon Business-Oriented Language] (Synonymous with evil.) A weak, verbose, and flabby language used by card wallopers to do boring mindless things on dinosaur mainframes. Hackers believe that all COBOL programmers are suits or code grinders, and no self-respecting hacker will ever admit to having learned the language. Its very name is seldom uttered without ritual expressions of disgust or horror.”<sup>5</sup>

Criticisms of COBOL, as the example above shows, highlight the different value systems held by different ‘communities of practitioners.’ Here, COBOL is positioned as the antithesis of ‘hacker’ culture, revealing something about the hacker community through this negation. The community I am interested in, however, is not hackers, but academia. As I will argue, the academic reception of COBOL was largely negative, and remains a blind spot in its historiography. This critical reception, I propose, can be read as a familiar battle over technological and aesthetic *standards*, now waged by academia and ‘business’ in the nascent field of data-processing. This ‘battle’ itself was a product of and highlights the changing nature of the defense-academy-business connection in the computing world of the 1950s and 60s.

### **COBOL is Born: Portable, Readable, Controllable**

In June 1978, the first ACM SIGPLAN History of Programming Languages (HoPL) conference was held in Los Angeles. The conference featured presentations on about a dozen languages, each of which was later published as a peer-reviewed paper in the *SIGPLAN Notices*. One of the languages presented at HoPL 1 was the now-teenaged COBOL, already the most widely used programming language in the world. Jean Sammet—widely regarded as the ‘mother’ of COBOL for her leading role in its development—delivered her presentation<sup>6</sup> to a room full of computing pioneers, in a rare history straight from the proverbial horse’s mouth. In painstaking detail, Sammet described meetings, funding sources, committee structures and motivations. Her account of COBOL is the primary source for the brief history I describe below.

COBOL’s story began with Mary Hawes, a programmer at the Burroughs Corporation. In early 1959, Hawes had requested a “formal meeting involving both users and manufacturers . . .

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<sup>5</sup> ES Raymond, 104.

<sup>6</sup> In Wexelblat, the COBOL Paper is 199 onwards



to develop the specifications for a common business language.”<sup>7</sup> Hawes got her wish. In April 1959, a small group including Sammet and Grace Hopper met at the University of Pennsylvania’s Computing Center to flesh out the objectives for a first formal meeting. Through Charles Phillips, they decided to ask the Department of Defense to sponsor this effort. The DoD responded enthusiastically, immediately convening a meeting at the Pentagon for May 1959. Phillips summarized the DoD reaction as follows:

“The Department of Defense was pleased to undertake this project; in fact, we were embarrassed that the idea for such a common language had not had its origin by that time in Defense since we would benefit so greatly from the success of such a project.”<sup>8</sup>

About forty people attended the Pentagon meeting. Among them were 15 representatives from manufacturers such as Honeywell, GE and IBM; representatives from government; users and consultants; and one sole representative affiliated with a university. This was Saul Goren, of the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> He attended only one of the two conference days and had little to do with COBOL’s development afterwards. From the very start, COBOL’s development and design was completely detached from academia, in a physical as well as an intellectual sense.

There were two key outcomes of the Pentagon meeting. The first was the agreement that a common programming language *should* be created, with some of its core features decided upon. After much debate over two days, these rudimentary features were laid out: it should employ “maximum use of simple English language,”<sup>10</sup> and it should be “easier to use, even if somewhat less powerful.” There was also a recognition of “need to broaden the base of those who can state problems to computers.”<sup>11</sup> At the heart of COBOL’s conception, then, was a certain democratizing impulse. This was reflected in COBOL’s English-looking design, meant to make code easier to read and write. Consider the following example that Mar Hicks cites<sup>12</sup>, of a line of code that computes a social-security payment rounded to the penny. In FORTRAN, this would look something like: `TOTAL = REAL(NINT(EARN * TAX * 100.0))/100.0` while the corresponding COBOL code would read: `MULTIPLY EARNINGS BY TAXRATE GIVING SOCIAL-SECUR ROUNDED`. Thus a key feature of COBOL was to be its readability, a decision taken at its very first formal meeting.

Readability, but for whom? In a paper published in the IEEE’s *Annals*, Ben Allen views COBOL as a socially constructed piece of technology, arguing that “its English-like appearance was a rhetorical move designed to make the concept of code more legible to non-programming communities.”<sup>13</sup> Within industry (the intended audience of COBOL), Allen argues, some parties stood to benefit from COBOL more than others. Programmers already understood the code that was being written within large businesses, but there was an important group to whom code was a

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<sup>7</sup> Wexelblat, 200.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, 1959b, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Wexelblat, 240.

<sup>10</sup> Wexelblat, 201.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Hicks, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, 17.

total black box: managers, who hitherto did not have the technical capabilities to understand the programming process. With the promise of English-looking code, management could dream of understanding and therefore controlling programmers, making them particularly invested in COBOL's creation. These social factors, Allen argues, enabled COBOL's success, shaping it into the verbose, English-looking language it would become. Allen's argument is debatable, but highlights an important qualification that needs to be remembered while discussing COBOL's ostensibly democratizing impulse. COBOL was meant to be readable, yes, but that also made it and the programming process more controllable by management.

Another key feature—and COBOL's *raison d'être*—was its *portability*. This was so obvious to the attendees at the Pentagon meeting that it went virtually undebated. After all, portability was what had driven Mary Hawes to kickstart this entire process. At the time, major computer manufacturers from IBM to Remington-RAND were racing to develop proprietary languages for their machines, which would run poorly (or not at all) on a competitor's hardware. In December of 1960, that changed forever. Sammet and team ran “essentially the same COBOL program”<sup>14</sup> on both RCA and Remington-RAND Univac computers. It worked like a charm. In Sammet's own words, “the significance of this lay in the demonstration that compatibility could really be achieved.” COBOL was not only readable but was also portable—an immense technological achievement that would shape industry for years.



Fig. 1: COBOL headstone

Rome was not built in a day, and neither was COBOL. With the key features of readability and portability laid out, the second key outcome of the Pentagon meeting was the creation of a plan of action. The urgency of the situation was recognized—with proprietary languages quickly being developed across the board, the COBOL task force was divided into two parts. The first was the Short-Range Committee, whose mission was to create an interim, stop-gap language to nip proprietary language development in the bud. This was to be done by combining features of Grace Hopper's FLOW-MATIC, the Air Force's AIMACO and IBM's COMTRAN, three languages that loosely resembled the COBOL bill. The Short-Range Committee moved quickly, and by December of 1959 the fundamental concepts, structure and

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<sup>14</sup> Wexelblat, 216.

layout of COBOL had been established. By the end of 1960, COBOL 60 was produced and released. Even at this very early stage, COBOL had its skeptics and doubters. As a practical joke, committee member Howard Bromberg even had a COBOL tombstone made<sup>15</sup> for his teammates (see above). But COBOL was anything but dead on arrival. The readable, portable, and potentially controllable language would go on to become the most popular programming language in the world.

It is important to note that despite the HoPL conference's stated aim of considering the "technical factors which influenced the development of certain selected programming languages,"<sup>16</sup> the histories written there were anything but purely technical. As Sammet's account and the analyses of Hicks and Allen demonstrate, the creation of a programming language is not done in a social vacuum. COBOL's creation was a socially constructed process—if anything, it was more shaped by the whims of Honeywell's managerial elite<sup>17</sup> than by notions of technical efficiency. To paraphrase Michael Mahoney (who himself may have been quoting Fred Brooks), the history of COBOL is "only accidentally about computers."<sup>18</sup> In the following sections I will discuss the nature of the academy-business-defense connection and the academic reaction to COBOL, but this brief history of COBOL's creation should serve to highlight its social construction and uniqueness at the time as a readable, portable, business-oriented language.

## **Communities of Computing in a Changing World**

To understand the relationship between academia and COBOL, it is necessary to set the stage by briefly describing the historically unique nature of the academy-defense-business connection in the computing world. As I will argue, the end of the Second World War was the beginning of a divergence in priorities of academia and business, with the latter shifting its focus towards data-processing tasks for clients in industry.

While the academy and defense parts of the triangle are fairly self-explanatory, it is worth defining who and what falls under the umbrella term 'business' that I will continue to use. By 'business' I refer to early commercial machine manufacturers such as IBM, Honeywell, Burroughs and Remington-Rand that themselves have rich histories predating the computer. IBM serves as an illustrative example. Founded in 1896 under the name Tabulating Machine Company, IBM and many of its peers had been involved in data-processing long before the twentieth century enabled electronic, computerized data processing.<sup>19</sup> IBM in particular was founded by Herman Hollerith, the patent holder of punched cards. His firm grew rapidly during the interwar years—as the need for data processing rose sharply, sales of machines like tabulators and sorters which could effectively summarize punched-card information grew in

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<sup>15</sup> COBOL Tombstone, *Computer History Museum*.

<sup>16</sup> Wexelblat, xvii.

<sup>17</sup> Wexelblat, 215.

<sup>18</sup> Mahoney, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Cortada, *Information Technology as Business History*, 48.

military and commercial use. By 1922, IBM's revenues totaled \$10.7 million, up from just \$4.2 million in 1914. As James Cortada—lifelong employee and historian of IBM—notes, “IBM typifies the pattern of behavior within the equipment industry during this era.”<sup>20</sup> Although IBM monopolized the punched-card industry, other firms were carving out similar niches for themselves. Burroughs made headway in typewriters, while NCR built cash registers, for example. The mainframe-builders of the fifties and sixties did not come up overnight—this ‘business’ community had historical ties to electronics and data-processing.

But it was the Second World War that really built the business-academy connection. During wartime, electronics and office-equipment manufacturers turned their attention to war-related projects. IBM, for example, turned to weapons manufacturing, while other ‘businesses’ helped develop radar and other sophisticated electronics.<sup>21</sup> Since much of military research was done on university campuses, the connections between defense, business and academy began to grow. The development of the ENIAC in 1943 is representative of this trend—designed to calculate artillery firing tables by the Army, it was formally dedicated at the University of Pennsylvania and took input from IBM card readers.<sup>22</sup> This three-way confluence is somewhat unique in technological history, and itself is a reflection of the military-centric development of modern computing.

By the end of the war in the 50s and 60s, the demand for this new digital computing was ever-growing, and now had a new source: commercial customers. While railroads, insurance companies and the likes had always demanded data-processing services, newer services like airline companies opened avenues for ‘businesses.’ Some statistics encapsulate this meteoric growth: while the data-processing industry was worth less than \$1 billion in the mid-50s, it stood at over \$40 billion by the end of the 1970s.<sup>23</sup> The shift was not just a question of scale, however. The *function* of computers was also changing, from scientific uses to more classical accounting, payroll and inventory tasks. This itself was a reflection of broader commercial interest in these machines growing rapidly in the tumultuous 1950s. In 1953, some historians argue, all computer development activity was for the government.<sup>24</sup> By the end of the fifties this statement was patently false, with COBOL itself being a perfect counterexample.

Thus the Second World War pushed defense, academia and ‘business’ into close quarters, as they collaborated on military problems and hardware development. The end of the war, however, coincided with a boom in commercial demand for data-processing which increasingly became the priority of ‘businesses’ such as IBM. COBOL was born against this backdrop of steady divergence between academy and business—while the former remained occupied by scientific and theoretical problems, the latter was turning (or returning) to data-processing problems, now in a digital world.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Cortada, *Information Technology as Business History*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> *ENIAC at Penn Engineering*, Penn Engineering.

<sup>23</sup> Cortada, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 53.

## Academics Against COBOL: A Battle Over Standards

“The use of COBOL cripples the mind; its teaching should, therefore, be regarded as a criminal offence,” wrote Turing Award winner Edsger Dijkstra in 1975.<sup>25</sup> In a memo entitled *How Do We Tell Truths that Might Hurt?*, Dijkstra railed against the popular programming languages of the day—even FORTRAN (“the infantile disorder”) was not spared from criticism. But Dijkstra was not the only computer scientist averse to COBOL. The phenomenon was so widespread that in 1984, the September issue of *Computerworld* magazine published an article entitled *An interview: COBOL defender* with Donald Nelson, a long-time programmer. COBOL defenders were novelty, to hear Nelson tell it. “Lots and lots of computer science graduates are being churned out every day, and nearly every one of those graduates has had ‘hate COBOL’ drilled in to him,” Nelson said.<sup>26</sup> In this section I will attempt to understand what seems to be a widespread aversion to COBOL in academia. As I will argue, much of this stemmed from a view of data-processing as ‘simple’ and inelegant, as opposed to more ‘complex’ and theoretically grounded computer science. This has its roots in the academia-business drift described in the section above, and can be read as a battle over technological *standards*.

The first (and only) author to systematically study this reaction was Ben Shneiderman, himself a distinguished computer scientist. In a 1985 paper entitled *The Relationship Between COBOL and Computer Science*, he attempted to offer “historical, technical and social/psychological perspectives on the fragile relationship between COBOL and computer science.”<sup>27</sup> He opens the paper provocatively: “for a computer scientist to write sympathetically about COBOL is an act bordering on heresy,” he says. The development of COBOL, Shneiderman argues, was intellectually separate from academia. No academics worked on the design team, there were no citations of academic work (a proxy for flow of ideas), and COBOL did not use the Backus-Naur form as a metasyntax. Besides these historical factors, Shneiderman also stresses social ones. “The rejection of COBOL,” he says, “is a product of their (computer scientists’) desire to avoid the business data processing domain.”<sup>28</sup> This may explain why several programming language textbooks like MacLennan’s 1983 bestseller<sup>29</sup> do not so much as mention COBOL. In his interviews, Shneiderman found a degree of snobbishness among the academic community, with some deriding the “trade school nature” of COBOL while others remarked that they were “hostile to teaching what is used commercially.”<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that COBOL was not without its legitimate technical criticisms. As Allen notes, COBOL’s verbosity and attempt to mimic English made writing and debugging

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<sup>25</sup> Dijkstra, *How do we tell truths that might hurt?*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Computerworld*, ID/29.

<sup>27</sup> Shneiderman, *The Relationship Between COBOL and Computer Science*, 348.

<sup>28</sup> Shneiderman, 350.

<sup>29</sup> MacLennan, xi.

<sup>30</sup> Shneiderman, 351.

code difficult.<sup>31</sup> COBOL statements ended with a period, which was easy to misplace when writing nested IF statements. The attempt at imitating English was also over-the-top at times—COBOL reserved a large number of meaningless ‘noise words’ like “ARE”, “WHEN” and “AT”, which were discarded prior to compilation and could not be used as variable names. A serious defect of COBOL was its inability to define functions with local variables; the original COBOL 60 only allowed for global variables. This made generic subroutines like summing the elements of an array difficult to write.<sup>32</sup>

The presence of these legitimate criticisms are what make the continued focus on the ‘simple’, data-processing nature of COBOL all the more surprising. Consider Terence Pratt’s textbook *Programming Languages: Design and Implementation* from 1984, which dismisses COBOL’s “orientation towards business data processing” and its algorithms as “relatively simple.”<sup>33</sup> At the HoPL I conference, Jean Sammet herself pushed back against this notion. “I’m sure this will step on a great many toes,” she said in the question-answer session, “[but] I think simply the data-processing activity is much harder . . . it’s always been a very great source of sadness to me that so many people who clearly have the intellectual capability to deal with these kinds of problems on an abstract basis, have not chosen to do so.” Data-processing, to Sammet, “has a significant intellectual component” which went unrecognized as a consequence of academia’s “snob reaction” to it.<sup>34</sup> In particular, she cited problems of machine independence and file organization as truly challenging. There was also a more normative reason for academic criticism, she said. “COBOL was not considered very elegant . . . it was just useful. And usefulness and elegance are not necessarily the same thing.”

To understand this academic reaction, I propose we treat COBOL as a technological *standard*. In an obvious sense, this was the intent behind COBOL’s development—when the DoD said they would not purchase any machines not running COBOL, a *de facto* standard had been laid down for manufacturers to adhere to. But standards are also power, in two ways. As sociologists Timmermans and Epstein note, “standardization is a powerful, sometimes subtle, and sometimes not-so-subtle means of organizing modern life.”<sup>35</sup> Firstly, then, standardization is powerful because it organizes life—it provides a definition of how things *should* be. Secondly, the ability to set a standard is itself a manifestation of power, since standards usually come ‘from above’. Reading COBOL as a *standard*—an attempt to reify an ideal of what a programming language *should* be—allows us to analyze its creation and reception through a new lens of power and control.

What are the results of such an approach? Seen this way, the academic hostility to COBOL is more than just a symptom of the broader business-academy drift. It is also a reflection of power—the power to determine aesthetic and functional ideals in programming languages—shifting away from the incumbent that was academia. COBOL, unlike ALGOL and LISP, was

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<sup>31</sup> Allen, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Shneiderman, 350.

<sup>33</sup> Pratt, 405.

<sup>34</sup> All quotes here are from Sammet in conversation with Marcotty. For a full transcript, see Wexelblat, 266.

<sup>35</sup> Timmermans and Epstein, 70.

unique in its distinctly un-academic creation. Its verbosity and English-looking design were intentional choices by the Short-Range Committee that came under heavy attack from academics, one of whom sneered at “the folly of an English-looking language.”<sup>36</sup> This is a normative critique, not a technical one. As seen above, COBOL’s domain of data processing was also a focal point of criticism—to some academics, this was not what programming languages were *meant* to do. If COBOL was an attempt at standard-setting by ‘business’, the academic hostility to COBOL is better understood as an attempt to wrest back control of what programming languages *should* be in a changing world.

The academic hostility to COBOL can thus be understood as stemming from two key sources. First, there was a general disdain among academics towards the plebeian, ‘simple’ data-processing domain of COBOL. Secondly, the academic reaction itself can be read as a battle being waged over *standards* of what a programming language should be, aesthetically and functionally. The academic reaction was not in a vacuum: it was shaped by the diverging nature of the academy-business connection after the Second World War.

## Conclusion

I began this paper by outlining COBOL’s behind-the-scenes existence in the world of today, but many of the issues that swirled around it are still front and center. The gap between data-processing and academia is still relevant—although most universities now offer database modelling and information management courses, much of data-processing development still comes from outside the academy. In attempting to draw lessons from the COBOL experience, however, it is important to note that today’s computing landscape is radically different from that of the 60s and 70s. The rise of the Internet, PCs, the software industry and artificial intelligence have all been paradigm-shifting events that leave the COBOL heyday nearly unrecognizable, and leave the traditional academy-business-defense connections in need of reevaluation.

But that is not to say that nothing can be learnt from understanding COBOL’s reception. Computing history may not repeat, but it certainly rhymes.<sup>37</sup> JavaScript, by some accounts, is the most popular programming language in the world today. Much like COBOL, it has borne its fair share of criticism, and from influential figures: internet pioneer Robert Cailliau once referred to JavaScript as the “most horrible kluge in the history of computing.”<sup>38</sup> Famously replete with technical problems<sup>39</sup>, JavaScript gives the programmer (and the academic) much to grumble about. But a great deal of the criticism JavaScript receives is along more aesthetic, philosophical and functional lines—concerns about what a web-scripting language *should* be. In writing the history of, and shaping JavaScript—as HoPL IV, scheduled for 2021, attempts to do—there is a lot to be learned from COBOL. Zooming out a little, there is also much to be gained from the programming-language-as-a-standard historiographical approach. Arguably every programming

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<sup>36</sup> Shneiderman, 351.

<sup>37</sup> Paraphrased from Levitsky and Ziblatt’s *How Democracies Die* (2018).

<sup>38</sup> Wirfs-Brock, Allen, and Brendan Eich, 77:30.

<sup>39</sup> See [wtfjs.com](http://wtfjs.com) for a non-exhaustive list of JavaScript inconsistencies.

language is an ostensible standard, and many contemporary ones would benefit from close social histories that treat them as such.

None of these contemporary parallels, however, should take away from the lively, ongoing, and unique history of COBOL itself. Designed as a readable, stop-gap language to be eventually discarded, COBOL exceeded all possible expectations, becoming the first language to achieve true portability across business machines. Its development and the world it was born into was indelibly shaped by the post-war dynamics of its various communities of computing—in historicizing COBOL, we also better understand Burroughs, American Airlines, and the Department of Defense. In contrast to the enormity of its relevance, the histories written on COBOL (and programming languages in general) are few and far between. Dijkstra may not have seen anything worth learning in COBOL, but its unique history and rich legacy beg to differ.



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**Radio and Rebellion:**  
**An Investigation of Radio and Its Use by Czechoslovakian Youth**  
**During the 1968 August Invasion**

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From the rise of numerous protest movements around the globe to the assassinations of political officials and the self-immolation of activists, day-to-day happenings around the world in the year 1968 continually shocked those who lived through the turmoil. Further contributing to the explosive nature of 1968, the advent of new forms of media allowed people around the world to learn of critical historical moments substantially faster than past generations. Along with the rise of satellite television and the rapid transmission of battlefield or protest footage to television screens around the world, radio broadcasting continued to advance technologically and served as a critical medium for communication and relaying breaking information both nationally and internationally. Given this function, radio played a key role in many protest movements and caused those attempting to crush resistance and protest efforts to classify radio as a highly influential tool of resistance, similar to the way in which they classified press publications and leaflets. This paper explores the ways in which radio impacted the actions of youth movements and encouraged cross-generational resistance among the Czech population during the invasion and subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union between August 21, 1968 and August 27, 1968. Specifically, this paper focuses on the way that the Czechoslovakian youth reacted to radio broadcasts immediately preceding and during the Soviet invasion and how they used radio as a tool to advance their beliefs and vision for the future of Czechoslovakia. During the invasion of Czechoslovakia, established and clandestine radio networks capitalized on shifting political attitudes towards communism among the nation's growing youth movement and guided the response of Czech youth by directing them to engage in acts of passive resistance and providing them with a medium through which they could express their sentiments. Furthermore, the availability of radio networks as a channel of information and a tool of

resistance empowered Czech youth and granted them the ability to work in tandem with older generations of Czech citizens, a cross-generational allyship not frequently seen in 1968, and directly engage in a variety of activities meant to combat the Soviet invasion.

Radio, both as a communication and broadcast medium and as a tool of resistance, was not a new concept in 1968. While its invention occurred in the late nineteenth century, the radio became a household feature beginning in the 1920s when it emerged as a tool of commercial broadcasting.<sup>1</sup> The development of the smaller and more portable transistor radio in 1947 contributed to increased ownership of radios throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup> By the 1950s, most nations had a national broadcasting network through which they disseminated state-sponsored, and in some countries, commercial programming alongside national broadcasts. As radio gained steadily in popularity, politicians and governments shifted their strategies to incorporate this new medium. As early as the late-1930s and early to mid-1940s, political figures like Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler utilized radio broadcasts to speak to a broader audience and advance their respective political agendas, with Churchill using his rhetorical talent to engage listeners and Hitler using radio as a means to create a “heroic” and “mystical” version of himself through his speeches.<sup>3</sup> In addition to politicians utilizing radio, the medium became increasingly available to the general population throughout the 1930s and 1940s. During World War II, underground resistance movements across Europe operating with the purpose of subverting Nazi power utilized radio in order to coordinate resistance efforts and generate solidarity throughout the occupied territories in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The use of radio by the general population to construct a widespread and effective resistance movement during the 1940s signaled a new era of radio in which the medium was not only accessible to the common man, but also one in which radio could be used to advance political and social change.

The use of radio as a political tool became increasingly more common in the wake of World War II and with the onset of the Cold War. In the context of the Cold War, a large body of pre-existing scholarly literature suggests that radio played an important role in the tenuous relationship between the East and West. As author René Wolf declared, radio broadcasts, “with [their] personal intimacy, [were] thought to exert an immensely persuasive... influence on a polarized world.”<sup>5</sup> The rise of shortwave transmitters, which allowed radio broadcasts to reach remote audiences via an unlimited number of receivers, gave nations the ability to spread their

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<sup>1</sup>“A Science Odyssey: People and Discoveries: KDKA Begins to Broadcast,” PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed November 12, 2021, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dt20ra.html>.

<sup>2</sup>“The Rise of Top 40 Radio,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed November 12, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/radio/The-rise-of-Top-40-radio#ref1124110>.

<sup>3</sup> Huub Wijfjes, “Spellbinding and Crooning: Sound Amplification, Radio, and Political Rhetoric in International Comparative Perspective, 1900–1945,” *Technology and Culture* 55, no. 1 (April 2014): pp. 148-185, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2014.0013>.

<sup>4</sup> Bob Moore and Bob Moore, “Comparing Resistance and Resistance Movements,” in *Resistance in Western Europe*, 1st ed. (London, United Kin: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2000), 256

<sup>5</sup> René Wolf, “‘Mass Deception without Deceivers’? the Holocaust on East and West German Radio in the 1960s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (October 2006): pp. 741-755, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009406067755>.

political and societal commentary to nations previously deemed inaccessible.<sup>6</sup> In the climate of the Cold War, where the conflict between communism and Western capitalism pervaded all aspects of society, states looked unfavorably upon potentially manipulative or antagonistic radio broadcasting. As the twentieth century progressed, both national leaders and the general population realized that radio, with its wide geographic reach and broad audience, was a tool for political activism and a crucial communication medium for social movements.<sup>7</sup> In some instances, the Soviet Union severely limited the use of radio broadcasting for non-state sanctioned purposes and deliberately disrupted non-state broadcasts within its borders and in Eastern bloc nations by employing a technique known as “jamming.” These reactions towards radio underscored the perceived importance of such communication mediums.

A considerable body of scholarly works also tout radio as a key tool in the resistance efforts mounted by Eastern European nations throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and in the eventual liberation of a number of these nations from the sphere of Soviet influence. As Linda Risso asserted in her article “Radio Wars: Broadcasting in the Cold War”:

Radio played an important role in the ideological confrontation between East and West as well as within each bloc... it was among the most pressing concerns of contemporary information agencies.<sup>8</sup>

Risso’s comment demonstrates the importance of radio in the larger ideological battle of the Cold War, as well as in inter-bloc conflicts. In terms of available broadcast mediums, radio was the most accessible for the average person in Eastern Europe. Despite the popularization of television in western nations like the United States in the 1960s, household television sets did not become commonplace in Eastern Europe until the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>9</sup> The most well-known radio organizations from the Cold War era included the Western-sponsored networks of Radio Free Europe (RFE), Radio Liberty (RL), and Voice of America (VOA), as well as nation-specific networks such as Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor, a station that operated in the American sector of Berlin. These broadcast networks utilized short and medium wave transmitters in order to reach and engage Eastern bloc listeners while also working to counter Soviet propaganda.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that these radio stations were bastions of free press in many Eastern bloc nations, as domestic radio stations had little to no latitude in relation to what they broadcast and could not promote the same non-censored materials as RFE and RL, as they were state-controlled entities that answered to the leadership in Moscow. As a result, organizations like

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<sup>6</sup> “Shortwave Transmitters,” Ampegon (Ampegon, October 30, 2020), <https://ampegon.com/shortwave-transmitters/>.

<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Bedford, “The Power of Radio’: Radio and Social Change,” *Making Waves Behind Bars*, 2018, pp. 19-38, <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781529203363.003.0002>.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Risso, “Radio Wars: Broadcasting in the Cold War,” *Cold War History* 13, no. 2 (2013): pp. 145-152, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.757134>, 145.

<sup>9</sup> “Screening Socialism,” Loughborough University Research (Loughborough University), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/subjects/communication-media/research/research-projects/screening-socialism/television-histories/tvinromania/>.

<sup>10</sup> “History of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty,” RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), accessed December 14, 2021, <https://pressroom.rferl.org/history>.

RFE and RL became known as, in the words of French historian Jacques Sémelin, “substitute radios.”<sup>11</sup> These substitute radios served as a ‘free’ alternative the Soviet-controlled domestic media outlets.

Realizing their role as a substitute to heavily censored national media, international broadcasts crafted their broadcasting style accordingly. The self-described goal of RFE, agreed upon by historians like A. Ross Johnson, was to provide an “unbiased, professional substitute for the free media that countries behind the Iron Curtain lacked,” specifically focusing on local news often omitted from censored national media in order to preserve independent thinking.<sup>12</sup> This broadcast prerogative allowed RFE, as well as RL and VOA, to supply Eastern bloc countries with a steady flow of non-censored information throughout the tumultuous decades of the mid to late twentieth century. Domestic stations held similar goals. As historian Nicholas J. Schlosser asserted in his book, *Cold War on the Airwaves : The Radio Propaganda War Against East Germany*, Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor wanted to maintain a “‘strategy of truth’ that aimed to counteract Communist propaganda by presenting factual reporting.”<sup>13</sup> Through this method, both international and domestic ‘free radio’ networks, referring to those networks not subject to government censorship, provided a valuable weapon during the Cold War. Author and historian Michael Nelson likened radio to a form of weaponry in his book, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*. He claimed that radio was “mightier than the sword” and that a lack of this Western broadcasting would have lengthened the lifespan of the Soviet Union and its influence over Eastern European nations.<sup>14</sup> This comparison demonstrates how powerful radio broadcasting was in the context of the Cold War, an era in which the dissemination of information and propaganda played a central role in political conflicts and rebellions.

While much of the pre-existing scholarly material on mainstream radio networks centers on the impacts of the Western and Western-sponsored media that permeated the Soviet sphere of influence, there also exists a body of scholarship on the role and rise of clandestine radio during the Cold War and its use by different groups of revolutionaries. A collection of scholars, including telecommunications author Donald Brown, historian Julian Hale, and broadcasting pioneer Sig Mickelson, assert that clandestine radios, first utilized in the 1930s, played an integral role in the Cold War by providing a medium through which rebels and resistance movements, which often included galvanized youth, could communicate and organize. Coincidentally, one of the first uses of clandestine networks occurred in Czechoslovakia in

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Sémelin, “Communication and Resistance. the Instrumental Role of Western Radio Stations in Opening up Eastern Europe,” *Réseaux. The French Journal of Communication* 2, no. 1 (1994): pp. 55-69, <https://doi.org/10.3406/reso.1994.3260>, 57-8.

<sup>12</sup> “History of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty,” RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), accessed December 14, 2021, <https://pressroom.rferl.org/history>.; Matthew R. Crooker and Jonathan Reed Winkler, “Cool Notes in an Invisible War: The Use of Radio and Music in the Cold War from 1953 to 1968” (dissertation, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas J. Schlosser, *Cold War on the Airwaves the Radio Propaganda War against East Germany* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1997).

1931.<sup>15</sup> Due to their secret and unrestricted nature, underground radio networks became a key tool for rebels operating in the nations encompassed in the Soviet sphere of influence. Authors of *Clandestine Radio Broadcasting: A Study of Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Electronic Communication*, Lawrence C. Soley and John S. Nichols, also assert that the distinction between the broadcasts of ‘free’ radios like RFE and RL and clandestine radios, like those operating in Czechoslovakia during the August invasion, is not always as clear cut as it may seem.<sup>16</sup> While not imbued with the same core goals, both clandestine and ‘free’ public radio sought to support the exchange of information and to provide truthful accounts about the situation in Eastern bloc nations, oftentimes leading to wide-ranging impacts. The blurring that Soley and Nicholas refer to strengthens the study of the impacts of public and clandestine radio and reinforces the interplay between the two forms of broadcast. Additionally, it permits the inclusion of source material beyond the limited body of works that discuss the far-reaching impacts of clandestine radio.

To further understand the manner in which both ‘free’ public and clandestine networks interacted with events during the Cold War, one can examine specific occurrences from the time period and the radio’s role in how they transpired. Before the tumultuous events of the Prague Spring and the 1968 August Invasion in Czechoslovakia, radio played a central role in the unrest in two Eastern bloc nations: Poland and Hungary. Radio Free Europe, alongside the Free Europe Committee (FEC), an organization established with the intent of helping eastern European populations retain sovereignty in the face of Soviet communism in the aftermath of World War II, played a critical role in the protests that arose in these nations in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> By the late 1950s and early 1960s, many European nations had a broadcasting branch of RFE, and Poland and Hungary were no exception. In 1956, the Polish RFE station broadcast throughout the Polish October, a moment of political change in Poland that many thought would lead to reform and some degree of liberalization of Polish socialism.<sup>18</sup> The RFE, which supported the reformist protesters, broadcast to “provide the Polish population... with as much relevant information as possible” while not exacerbating the situation.<sup>19</sup> This demonstrates radio’s use as a tool of resistance, as it provided protesters and their supporters with a steady flow of information that aided their protest efforts. A similar sequence of events also occurred in Hungary in 1956 when Hungarians gathered to protest the nation’s Stalinist government.<sup>20</sup> However, Hungary’s protests quickly descended into a full-fledged revolution. The Hungarian branch of the RFE approached their broadcasts with a similar mission to that of their Polish counterparts throughout the

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence C. Soley and John Nichols, *Clandestine Radio Broadcasting: A Study of Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Electronic Communication* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1987).

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

<sup>17</sup> R. Eugene Parta, A. Ross Johnson, and Paul B Henze, “RFE’s Early Years: Evolution of Broadcast Policy and Evidence of Broadcast Impact,” in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Bromke, “Background of the Polish October Revolution,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 3, no. 1 (1958): pp. 43-58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.1958.11417837>.

<sup>19</sup> R. Eugene Parta, A. Ross Johnson, and Paul B Henze, “RFE’s Early Years,” 15.

<sup>20</sup> “Hungary, 1956,” U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed November 18, 2021, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/107186.htm>.

Hungarian Revolution. While neither nation emerged from its scuffle with the Soviet Union unscathed, in both instances, radio distinguished itself as an important tool for protesters and RFE advanced the idea of increased national autonomy for Eastern bloc nations.

Despite nearly twelve years passing in the wake of the political unrest in Poland and Hungary, the political situation in Czechoslovakia began showing signs of shifting in a similar manner in the mid to late-1960s. By January 1968, the government replaced the standing First Secretary, Antonin Novotny, with Alexander Dubček, a longtime government figure who previously served under Novotny.<sup>21</sup> This change in leadership came after Novotny lost much of his support throughout 1967 and the public began to show signs of unrest. In his new position, Dubček called for the redevelopment of Czech socialism into “socialism with a human face.”<sup>22</sup> This rethinking of socialism in Czechoslovakia meant the incorporation of many liberalizing policies typically disallowed in the Eastern bloc. In an early resolution passed by Dubček and the central committee, he called for a “far greater encouragement of an open exchange of views.”<sup>23</sup> Other reforms included greater press freedoms, increased access to Western media, and the lessening of travel restrictions of Czech citizens.<sup>24</sup> These freedoms were largely unheard of in the Eastern bloc, as most nations under the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence operated under strict directive from the Soviets concerning the materials provided to public and travel allowances. Given the Cold War conflict between the Soviets and the West, the Soviets did not permit the consumption of Western media and severely limited travel to the West. This period of change, which much of the public supported and enjoyed, became known as the Prague Spring. The reforms initiated by Dubček during the Prague Spring grew more progressive over time, pleasing many within the country but also resulting in negative pressure from Soviet leaders to reverse the new policies.

At the time the reforms of the Prague Spring began to spread throughout Czechoslovakia, radio was an established broadcasting medium across the country. As noted by Olesya Tkacheva et al., ascertaining a comprehensive statistic of Czech listenership was not an easy task, as it was difficult, and oftentimes impossible, to implement routine survey mechanisms used to measure such statistics.<sup>25</sup> One recent metric found that over fifty percent of Eastern Europeans routinely listened to Western broadcasts.<sup>26</sup> From this statistic it is reasonable to infer that radio was commonplace in Czech homes in 1968. Furthermore, the invention of transistor radios in 1954 transformed radios from immovable pieces of furniture to handheld devices able to be

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<sup>21</sup> Jaromír Navrátil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2006), liv, 20.

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

<sup>23</sup> Navrátil, *The Prague Spring 1968*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York, NY: Random House Paperbacks, 2005), 36-37.

<sup>25</sup> Olesya Tkacheva et al., “Information Freedom During the Cold War: The Impact of Western Radio Broadcasts,” in *Internet Freedom and Political Space* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2013), pp. 149-184, 157-8.

<sup>26</sup> Risso, “Radio Wars: Broadcasting in the Cold War,” 145.



transported with ease.<sup>27</sup> Original radios and transistor radios appealed to adults and youth alike, with both groups owning radios during this period. The one limitation on portable radio ownership, however, was the price, which averaged around 400 USD in the 1960s.<sup>28</sup> This price likely precluded lower-income Czechs from owning a portable radio in 1968. Still a considerable portion of the Czech population accessed radio broadcasts, both domestic and international, either through their own radio or via a radio of a friend or relative.

One popular frequency belonged to Radio Prague, one of Czechoslovakia's main broadcast networks. While Soviet influence resulted in the censorship of media in the country for much of the 1950s and 1960s, the reforms of the Prague Spring allowed networks like Radio Prague some latitude in what they broadcast. By the latter half of March 1968, Dubček allowed for the complete abolishment of censorship in relation to the media.<sup>29</sup> Going forward, the Czech media retained the ability to publish and broadcast freely, inciting anger on the part of Soviet leadership in Moscow. These freedoms allowed for a widespread and open discussion of Czech politics, leading to criticisms being levied by the Czech public and media alike about the previous repression as well as the traumas the nation experienced under Stalin prior to 1953.<sup>30</sup> As spring faded into summer the content of the media, including radio, shifted towards the promotion of free speech and the ability for Czechoslovakia to proceed with the development of Czech socialism.<sup>31</sup> The content of these messages demonstrates that radio networks, along with other broadcast mediums, utilized their new freedoms, in part, to question the political state of the nation and support Dubček's reforms despite increasingly negative Soviet responses. The fact that a large portion of the Czech population engaged with these broadcasts and participated in ongoing political conversations alludes to the shifting political sentiments of a portion of the Czech population as the Prague Spring continued.

Despite the tenuous situation between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union throughout the Prague Spring, the Czech youth supported Dubček's changes and the overall turn towards the liberalization of Czechoslovakian socialism. However, even before Dubček's attempts to recreate Czechoslovakian politics to encompass "socialism with a human face," the youth questioned the nation's political system. As Dr. Galia Golan described in her report on youth in Czechoslovakia, "Czechoslovak youth in the early 1960s was a disillusioned and generally speaking apathetic group... repelled by the regimentation, authoritarianism, and deceptions of the communist regime."<sup>32</sup> Even half a decade before the reforms of the Prague Spring, young people were unhappy with the political situation under which they lived. However, the group remained

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Stromberg, "The Transistor Radio Launches the Portable Electronic Age," Smithsonian.com (Smithsonian Institution, October 18, 2011), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/the-transistor-radio-launches-the-portable-electronic-age-110761753/>.

<sup>28</sup> Rose Heichelbech, "The Ridiculously High Cost of Electronics Back in the Day," Dusty Old Thing, March 4, 2021, <https://dustyoldthing.com/electronics-prices-change/>.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Culik, "The Prague Spring: Dubček, the Media, and Mass Demoralisation," Wilson Center, August 23, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-prague-spring-dubcek-the-media-and-mass-demoralisation>.

<sup>30</sup> Kurlansky, 1968: *The Year That Rocked the World*, 240-243.

<sup>31</sup> Culik, "The Prague Spring: Dubček, the Media, and Mass Demoralisation,"

<sup>32</sup> Galia Golan, "Youth and Politics in Czechoslovakia," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 1 (1970): pp. 3-22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947000500101>, 4.

relatively politically inactive during the early 1960s, with only 11.4% of Czech youth considering themselves politically active.<sup>33</sup> This stemmed, in part, from the fact that the government controlled the Czechoslovakian Youth Movement (CSM) for much of the decade and actively stifled calls for liberalization. By 1967, Czech youth began organizing separately from the CSM. Disgruntled by increasingly repressive measures introduced by Novotny, the CSM's failure to consider any liberalizing policies, and other material concerns, youth engaged in protests and marches and regularly encountered police violence.<sup>34</sup> These protests, along with a comprehensive list of demands authored by the fledgling youth movement, solidified the crucial break with the state-influenced CSM. Conservative members of the Czechoslovakian government responded to these protests negatively and cited the content of Radio Free Europe broadcasts as a catalyst for the youth's political discontent. Despite the rejection of student demands by the Novotny government, Dubček acknowledged what he called the "special position" held by youth and asserted that providing conditions under which youth could express themselves might prove a more productive remedy to the protest problem.<sup>35</sup> When Dubček came to power, his turn towards political liberalization appealed to many students, as it finally seemed as if the government chose to listen to their demands. This feeling of representation and inclusion helps to explain why Czech youth defended Dubček and his government, even as tensions rose between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

By late summer in 1968, tensions between the Soviet Union and the allied Warsaw Pact countries and Czechoslovakia were at an all-time high. A letter from the Warsaw Pact in July noting their "firm resistance to anti-communist forces and... the preservation of the socialist system in Czechoslovakia" and a phone call between Dubček and Soviet leader Leonoid Brezhnev in which Brezhnev accused Dubček of "outright deceit" and sabotage in relation to his handling of domestic affairs in Czechoslovakia indicated that a breaking point was near.<sup>36</sup> On August 18th, officials within the Kremlin authorized the invasion of Czechoslovakia and in the following days, the Soviets quietly placed their forces at the Czech border. Three days later, on August 21st, hundreds of thousands of Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops rolled into Czechoslovakia, marking the end of the Prague Spring and the beginning of a week-long resistance effort by the Czech people, namely the youth.

Part of the resistance efforts undertaken by the Czechoslovakian youth, with the help of other Czech protesters, included the protection of their radio broadcasting networks. Fearing Soviet intervention and in an attempt to combat heavy censorship, select Czech citizens started moving radio operations underground in order to maintain lines of communication.<sup>37</sup> When the Soviets invaded in August, these fears were realized. Soviets labeled radio and television

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<sup>33</sup> Golan, "Youth and Politics in Czechoslovakia," 4.

<sup>34</sup> Navrátil, *The Prague Spring* 1968, 23.; Galia Golan, "Youth and Politics in Czechoslovakia," 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> Golan, "Youth and Politics in Czechoslovakia," 11.

<sup>36</sup> Navrátil, *The Prague Spring* 1968, 231, 340.

<sup>37</sup> Tad Szulc and Clyde H Farnsworth, "Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1968, 117 edition, pp. 1-6.

broadcasting stations as primary objectives of the first stage of the invasion.<sup>38</sup> The Soviets considered these mediums to be of strategic importance and wanted to eliminate all sources of free Czech media in order to snuff out dissidence and utilize the broadcasting equipment to spread pro-Soviet propaganda. As Soviet troops crossed the border, Czech radio stations engaged in the first of many critical revolutionary acts at around 1:00 AM when they announced the invasion and warned civilians to not mount a resistance against the advancing Soviet troops.<sup>39</sup> This first announcement was formative, as it directed students towards the use of passive resistance methods rather than outright violence.



*Image 1: Czech youth watch as an invading tank approaches the Radio Prague building.*

After this announcement, civilians and radio stations awaited the arrival of the tanks and troops. At the Radio Prague broadcasting station in the city, Czech youth poured into the streets in order to mount a defense against the Soviet invaders and protect the radio transmitters housed in the station. The young people of Czechoslovakia felt that “so long as the radio continued broadcasting... the world would know what was happening.”<sup>40</sup> While the radio advised passive resistance so as to not provoke a Soviet massacre, the defense of the Radio Prague building marked one of the rare instances in which Czech youth utilized active and violent resistance techniques. The young Czechs threw Molotov cocktails, barricaded the surrounding streets with cars, and used their bodies to block and disable tank crews.<sup>41</sup> The three images on the following page depict the approach of the tanks and two styles of confrontation utilized by Czech students.<sup>42</sup> Image Two shows a young man using a passive resistance technique in the initial

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<sup>38</sup> Pavel Žáček, “The KGB and the Czechoslovak State Security Apparatus in August 1968,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 29, no. 4 (October 14, 2016): pp. 626-657, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2016.1232561>, 636.

<sup>39</sup> “Czech Republic: A Chronology of Events Leading to the 1968 Invasion,” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty (Czech Republic: A Chronology Of Events Leading To The 1968 Invasion, April 9, 2008), <https://www.rferl.org/a/1089303.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Szulc and Farnsworth, “Invasion of Czechoslovakia.”

<sup>41</sup> Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*, 292-293.

<sup>42</sup> Josef Koudelka, *Warsaw Pact Troops Approaching the Radio Headquarters.*, photograph, *Magnum Photo* (New York, New York: Magnum Photo), Magnum Photo, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/josef-koudelka-invasion-prague-68/>; Josef Koudelka, *Invasion by Warsaw Pact Troops in Front of the Radio Headquarters*, photograph, *Magnum Photo* (New York, New York: Magnum Photo), Magnum Photo, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/josef->

stages of the street battle for Radio Prague in which youth attempted to reason with Soviet troops and demand they leave the station and the country. Image Three depicts a later stage of the fight, in which students like the three young men shown in the photo turned to more violent methods, such as disabling tanks with Molotov cocktails and flaming mattresses in attempts to prevent the fall of Radio Prague. The dedication and bravery displayed by the Czech youth during the battle for Radio Prague demonstrated their understanding that radio in Czechoslovakia was a critical tool of resistance against the Soviets. Even when Soviet gunfire pierced the crowds, Czech youth remained committed, with a fifteen-year-old Czech reporting that “despite scores of people lying dead in the streets, [there was] a giddy black humor was in the air.”<sup>43</sup> While incredibly morbid, this atmosphere fostered continued unity between youth resisters in the face of violence.



**Image 2 (left):** A young Czech man stops a tank and speaks to the Soviet invaders.



**Image 3 (right):** Young Czech protesters throw stones at a disabled Soviet tank.

This instance of violence by youth in defense of Radio Prague stands out as an anomaly amongst the use of passive resistance techniques that defined the August Invasion. As asserted, while radio broadcasts advocated for the use of passive techniques, sporadic episodes of violence still occurred. However, the Czechoslovakian response to the invasion remained predominantly nonviolent. Examining the August Invasion in conjunction with the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, another instance of Soviet aggression towards a dissident country within its sphere of influence, illustrates the differences between a resistance effort guided by violence and one defined by passive resistance and the significance of tending towards nonviolence. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1956, a student protest in Hungary quickly transformed into a spontaneous and violent revolution. The fighting raged between the Soviets and the Hungarian revolutionaries between October 24<sup>th</sup>, when the first wave of Soviet forces marched on Budapest, and November 4<sup>th</sup>, when the Soviet Union deployed another wave of troops and successfully suppressed the revolution.<sup>44</sup> By November 10<sup>th</sup>, estimates indicated that around 2,500 Hungarians died during the ten-day

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[koudelka-invasion-prague-68/](#); Libor Hajsky, *Czech Youth Throwing Things at a Tank*, photograph, *The Atlantic* (The Atlantic, August 20, 2018), Reuters, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/08/photos-50-years-since-a-soviet-invasion-ended-the-prague-spring/567916/#img01>.

<sup>43</sup> David Welna, “Prague 1968: Reforming a Soviet Communist Regime,” NPR (NPR, October 18, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/18/658570673/prague-1968-reforming-a-soviet-communist-regime>.

<sup>44</sup> John Furlow et al., “Revolution and Refugees: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956,” ed. Eva Molnar, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1996): pp. 101-117, 102.

uprising.<sup>45</sup> In comparison, a comprehensive investigation conducted by two Czech historians, Prokop Tomek and Ivo Pejčoch, showed that 138 Czechoslovakians perished during the seven-day August Invasion, with 50 of these deaths occurring on the first day when Warsaw Pact Troops shot indiscriminately.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Tomek and Pejčoch's investigation failed to yield a single case in which a Czechoslovakian killed a member of the Soviet invasion force.<sup>47</sup> These statistics highlight the overall non-violent nature of the Czechoslovakian resistance efforts in 1968, despite the early occurrence of violence on the streets in front of Radio Prague, when placed in contrast with a comparable event often described by historians as violent. It also speaks to the success of Czechoslovakia's clandestine radio networks in their promotion of passive resistance during the August Invasion.

Despite the considerable efforts of youth and other Czech citizens, Radio Prague fell to the Soviets on the morning of August 21st. Before going silent, a female announcer told the nation that "[the Soviets] are going to silence our voices, but they cannot silence our hearts" in an attempt to provide hope to the youth protesting in the streets.<sup>48</sup> However, the silence alluded to by the announcer did not last long, as clandestine radio networks soon appeared and provided a communication network for the youth sect of the resistance movement.

Less than twelve hours after the fall of Radio Prague, clandestine radio networks appeared and alerted Czech youth and the broader Czech resistance effort of their existence. To denote their separation from the now Soviet-controlled networks, the underground radio broadcasters continually announced that they were "the free, legal Czechoslovak radio" or "the legitimate voice of occupied Czechoslovakia."<sup>49</sup> These radio broadcasts were so influential that in the coming week, radio became "the main means through which a politically mature and effective resistance was shaped."<sup>50</sup> While the radio broadcasters who were working to provide radio coverage via medium and short-wave transmitters were not Czech youth, the rise of these clandestine radio networks was crucial to the continuation of youth resistance efforts. The continuous broadcasts provided much-needed information about troop movements and directed youth on how best to engage with and hinder Soviet troops.<sup>51</sup> The radio broadcasts also served as a critical line of communication for youth activists attempting to contact one another to discuss their movements, as well as those seeking to coordinate youth efforts with those of the broader

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<sup>45</sup> "Hungarian Revolution of 1956," Communications Unlimited, October 24, 2017, <https://www.communications-unlimited.nl/hungarian-revolution-of-1956-4/>.

<sup>46</sup> Prokop Tomek and Ivo Pejčoch, *Černá kniha Sovětské Okupace: Sovětská Armáda V Československu a JEJÍ OBĚTI: 1968-1991* (Cheb, Czech Republic: Svět křidel, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Prokop Tomek and Ivo Pejčoch, *Černá kniha Sovětské Okupace: Sovětská Armáda V Československu a JEJÍ OBĚTI: 1968-1991*; Ruth Frankova, "Historians Pin down Number of 1968 Invasion Victims," Radio Prague International (Radio Prague International, April 8, 2021), <https://english.radio.cz/historians-pin-down-number-1968-invasion-victims-8184417>.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Wechsberg, *The Voices* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 19.

<sup>49</sup> Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 29.; "Radio Prague Broadcast from August 25th, 1968," August 1968 - Audio Archive - Radio Prague International (Radio Prague International), accessed November 16, 2021, <https://archiv.radio.cz/en/static/august-1968/audio>.

<sup>50</sup> Gerry Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, 1973), 100.

<sup>51</sup> "Radio Prague Broadcast from August 25th, 1968," August 1968 - Audio Archive - Radio Prague International (Radio Prague International), accessed November 16, 2021, <https://archiv.radio.cz/en/static/august-1968/audio>.



Czechoslovakian resistance movement.<sup>52</sup> These systems developed tremendously quickly in the evening hours of August 21st, enabling Czech youth to re-engage with Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops in full force the next morning, with some coteries of youth even returning to the streets that evening.

The continuous directive from all of the free and legitimate clandestine stations advised Czech youth to proceed cautiously when demonstrating and restrict their protest efforts to acts of passive resistance. The broadcasters at these stations realized that direct, violent confrontation risked allowing the nation's youth to walk directly into a Soviet trap, resulting in the murder of innocent civilians under the guise that their actions equated to a provocation of Soviet troops. Aware of this, radio stations provided careful updates and directives as to how and when to stage demonstrations, as well as suggesting tactics to fuel ongoing passive resistance. On the evening of August 21st, the radio warned youth to limit their demonstrations, citing the death of numerous civilians that occurred earlier that day.<sup>53</sup> By August 22nd, the clandestine networks routinely reported the license plate numbers of the Soviet vehicles conducting arrests.<sup>54</sup> These cyclical announcements helped civilians avoid those cars and provided Czechs attempting to seize the cars with the necessary knowledge.

After the first day of the invasion, the underground radio stations took an increasingly hardline stance against mass demonstrations and violent conflict with the invading troops. Throughout the invasion, Wenceslas Square, located in the city of Prague, and Freedom Square, located in Brno, served as central locations for protest and became symbols of resistance in Czechoslovakia.<sup>55</sup> These places served as gathering points for young people. Many youths met and gave speeches denouncing the invasion and praising Dubček and even more came to listen to their comrades. On August 21st, protesters in and around Freedom Square grew increasingly restless and concerns arose about the potential for street violence and arrests. A free radio station in Brno acknowledged the situation and urged students to “go home, please,” declaring that the absence of unrest in the square might encourage Soviet tanks to leave the center of the city. Another reporter also appealed to the youth by ordering them to back away from burning tanks, crying, “Get away from [the] burning tanks, people, don't stand around! [The Soviets] may shoot!”<sup>56</sup> Despite the impassioned nature of the youth protesters, many heeded the warnings shared by the radio stations and coordinated their time in the streets based on the information provided via broadcasters. Just a day later, on August 23rd, the underground radio stations in Prague broadcast similar messages to those protesting in and around Wenceslas Square. Announcers spoke directly to the youth, saying, “Young people, get off the streets, the situation is serious” and warning that a demonstration scheduled for 5:00 PM that evening in Wenceslas

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<sup>52</sup> Zein Nakhoda, “Czechoslovak Resistance to Soviet Occupation, 1968,” Global Nonviolent Action Database, May 14, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/czechoslovak-resistance-soviet-occupation-1968>.

<sup>53</sup> Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 100.; Joseph Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Constantine Christo Menges, “Prague Resistance, 1968: The Ingenuity of Conviction.” Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1968. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P3930.html>, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Szulc and Farnsworth, “Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week.”

<sup>56</sup> Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 49-50.

Square would be considered a provocation by the Soviets.<sup>57</sup> Less than an hour later, the nearly 50,000 young people that occupied the square at the time of the radio broadcast were gone.<sup>58</sup> This scenario demonstrates the Czech youth's mindfulness of radio directives and their willingness to cease their protest efforts when such radio directives indicated that their actions risked causing more harm than good to the overall resistance effort.

Covert radio stations also continually advocated for the use of passive resistance methods by Czech youth. The radio argued that violence was futile, and non-violence provided a method of defense that did not supply the Soviets with evidence to rationalize their invasion of an autonomous nation.<sup>59</sup> To emphasize the importance of passive resistance, Vaclav Havel, a highly respected Czech writer who later became the president of Czechoslovakia, broadcast the following message on free airwaves on August 22<sup>nd</sup>. He spoke passionately but calmly to the Czech population and conveyed the following message: "We urge you: don't engage in open conflict with the occupiers! We have a different weapon: loyalty to our native land. Be loyal and don't betray it! Expose the traitors! Prevent them from doing their work! Fight against them. Success in this fight will mean the aggression will fail."<sup>60</sup> Havel's words not only urged youth to refrain from violent confrontation for safety reasons, but also demonstrated the impactful and effective nature of national loyalty and passive resistance in the hands of the Czech people.

One of the most common forms of passive resistance encouraged by clandestine radios during the first days of the invasion involved directly engaging Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops in conversation. The conversations were simple. As instructed by the radio, Czech youth asked the invaders simple questions like "Why have you come here?" and told them that Czechoslovakia did not need their assistance.<sup>61</sup> Jiri Pehe, a Czechoslovakian who was just 13 years old in August 1968, engaged in conversations with the Soviets and remembered "people going to the tanks and going to the soldiers, and talking to the soldiers who did not even know where they were, they were saying: 'This is a terrible mistake. What are you doing here? Why did you come?'"<sup>62</sup> In response to the bombardment of questioning, many Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops did not know how to respond other than to say that their orders demanded they partake in an intervention in Czechoslovakia. Images Four and Five depict the exchanges between invading forces and young Czechs described by Pehe.<sup>63</sup> In Image Four, the facial expression on the young Czech girl's face

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<sup>57</sup> Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 100

<sup>60</sup> "Vaclav Havel's Radio Appeals from August 1968," VHLF, August 21, 2015, <https://www.vhlf.org/news/vaclav-havels-radio-appeals-from-august-1968/>.

<sup>61</sup> Szulc and Farnsworth, "Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week."

<sup>62</sup> Marc Santora, "50 Years after Prague Spring, Lessons on Freedom (and a Broken Spirit)," *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, August 21, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/world/europe/prague-spring-communism.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Josef Koudelka, Czech Girl Yelling at Warsaw Pact Soldier on Tank, photograph, *Magnum Photo* (New York, New York: Magnum Photo), Magnum Photo, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/josef-koudelka-invasion-prague-68/>; Bettmann, *A Confrontation Between A Soldier and a Czech Girl*, photograph, *The Atlantic* (*The Atlantic*, August 20, 2018), Getty, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/08/photos-50-years-since-a-soviet-invasion-ended-the-prague-spring/567916/#img01>.

indicates her anger towards the occupying troops and her discomfort at being mere inches away from her occupiers. This speaks volumes to the will of the Czech youth. Similar to Image Four, numerous young people swallowed their fears surrounding their invaders in order to confront them as directed by the radio stations helping to lead the resistance efforts. Image Five not only depicts the bravery of a young Czech girl standing inches away from a Soviet tank and interrogating the tank crew, but also the throngs of youth protesters around her. This photograph demonstrates the dedication of the young girl pictured as well as the willingness of thousands of Czechoslovakian youth to place themselves at the forefront of resistance efforts under the direction of clandestine radio networks.



**Image 4 (left):** A young Czech girl speaks with one of the invading soldiers in a crowded street in Prague.

**Image 5 (right):** A young Czech girl yells at soldiers sitting on top of a tank surrounded by other youth protesters.

Another act of radio-sanctioned passive resistance committed by Czech youth involved basic deception tactics meant to confuse Soviet and Warsaw pact troops as they tried to traverse the country. Knowing that the invading troops had little knowledge about the geography and roadways in Czechoslovakia, the youth heeded the radio's suggestion and switched out or removed street signs and highway markers and covered house numbers.<sup>64</sup> Pavel Machala, who was 21 at the time of the invasion, recalled how "so many street signs, road signs, disappeared" and remembered seeing a sign for Prague pointing in the opposite direction.<sup>65</sup> By altering or destroying potential reference points, the youth sought to slow down the advancement of the soldiers and tank crews. Image Six depicts the damage done to signs by Czech youth in order to render them useless.<sup>66</sup> Some resistance groups went as far as creating false detours on key roads to divert and delay tank reinforcements sent from Poland.<sup>67</sup> Given the soldiers' reliance on geographic landmarks and their inability to discern false traffic diversions, the youth succeeded in temporarily decommissioning numerous sections of the invasion force during the occupation.

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<sup>64</sup> Szulc and Farnsworth, "Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week."

<sup>65</sup> Katherine Whittemore, "Reality Czech," Amherst College (Amherst College, August 17, 2018), [https://www.amherst.edu/news/news\\_releases/2018/8-18/reality-czech](https://www.amherst.edu/news/news_releases/2018/8-18/reality-czech).

<sup>66</sup> Katherine Whittemore, "Reality Czech," Amherst College (Amherst College, August 17, 2018), [https://www.amherst.edu/news/news\\_releases/2018/8-18/reality-czech](https://www.amherst.edu/news/news_releases/2018/8-18/reality-czech).

<sup>67</sup> Szulc and Farnsworth, "Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week."



This success demonstrates the way radio helped to direct Czech youth and their resistance efforts in a manner that allowed them to have an actual negative impact on the invaders they targeted.



*Image 6: Street signs defaced during the August Invasion.*

The radio stations also helped to coordinate specific protest efforts and disseminated this information to their young listeners. On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Fourteenth Party Congress, which formed during the invasion and convened earlier that day, called for a one-hour general strike the next day.<sup>68</sup> Clandestine radios immediately broadcast this information to their audiences. Encompassed within the directive to strike was a request to cease communication with Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops. While the result was not immediate, by the afternoon of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, many of the most populated protest locations were empty.<sup>69</sup> This again demonstrates how youth protesters who pledged themselves to resisting the Soviets heeded the instructions given via radio broadcasts. Additionally, the invaders, bewildered by the sudden absence of the youth that previously harassed them about their presence, did not know how to handle the situation and some reports indicated that the soldiers fired their rifles indiscriminately into the air.<sup>70</sup> The discomfort and confusion that resulted from this strike and the impacts of youth action described above demonstrated the efficacy of resistance efforts. As Vaclav Havel stated in a radio broadcast on August 23<sup>rd</sup>:

We must continue doing what we have done so far: strike, demonstrate, write resolutions and declarations, put up signs in public places, welcome the occupiers with our fists, wear

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<sup>68</sup> “The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia : August 1968,” The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Invasion and Resistance (University of Michigan), accessed November 16, 2021, [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/117511/Invasion\\_and\\_Resistance.html](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/117511/Invasion_and_Resistance.html).; Constantine Christo Menges, “Prague Resistance, 1968,” 10.

<sup>69</sup> Menges, “Prague Resistance, 1968,” 10.; Szulc and Farnsworth, “Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week.”

<sup>70</sup> Szulc and Farnsworth, “Invasion of Czechoslovakia: The First Week.”

the Czechoslovak tricolor, hang out Czechoslovak flags, refuse to deal with collaborators, support only legal bodies and their rules.<sup>71</sup>

Havel's comments during the broadcast not only advocated for methods of passive resistance, such as the general strike, but also reiterated the importance of the multiple methods of protest the youth engaged in while proudly resisting Soviet efforts to diminish Czechoslovakian autonomy. Images Seven and Eight depict youth engagement in the forms of protests mentioned by Havel.<sup>72</sup> The banner carried by the students in Image Seven reads "Never Again with the Soviet Union," a political message that they hoped to convey while participating in a nonviolent march through the streets of Karlovy Vary.<sup>73</sup> A closer look at the picture also reveals that the students wore the Czech tricolor pinned to their chests to display their patriotism as they marched. Image Eight depicts another display of Czech patriotism by youth protesters, with many of the young people on the army truck waving Czech flags as they sang national songs and chanted pro-Czech slogans. Havel's decision to broadcast this information via the clandestine Czech radio networks and the fact that the youth engaged in these suggested forms of protest illustrate how central radio was in relation to the youth resistance movement and the activities in which they chose to participate.



*Image 7: A large group of young Czechs march through the street carrying an anti-Soviet banner.*

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<sup>71</sup> "Vaclav Havel's Radio Appeals from August 1968," VHLF, August 21, 2015, <https://www.vhlf.org/news/vaclav-havels-radio-appeals-from-august-1968/>.

<sup>72</sup> Bettmann, *Karlovy Vary*, photograph, *The Atlantic* (The Atlantic, August 20, 2018), Getty, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/08/photos-50-years-since-a-soviet-invasion-ended-the-prague-spring/567916/#img01>.; Bettmann, *Czech Youth on a Soviet Military Vehicle*, photograph, *The Atlantic* (The Atlantic, August 20, 2018), Getty, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/08/photos-50-years-since-a-soviet-invasion-ended-the-prague-spring/567916/#img01>.

<sup>73</sup> Bettmann, *Karlovy Vary*, photograph, *The Atlantic* (The Atlantic, August 20, 2018), Getty, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/08/photos-50-years-since-a-soviet-invasion-ended-the-prague-spring/567916/#img01>.



*Image 8: A caravan of Czech youth sitting atop a commandeered military vehicle.*

In addition to directing youth action and serving as an uncensored line of communication, the clandestine radio networks established during the invasion also helped to amplify youth voices. The Czech youth recorded messages relevant to the invasion and their resistance efforts and aired them on the radio networks operating within Czechoslovakia. They also relied on underground networks within the country to smuggle such messages out and pass them to broadcasting stations with a broader audience, such as Radio Free Europe (RFE) and the British Broadcasting Company (BBC). One of the earliest youth broadcasts came soon after many of the clandestine networks began broadcasting on the evening of August 21st around 7:50 PM. In the message, select Czech youth made an appeal to fellow young people across the country to denounce the Soviet Invasion and to engage, if possible, in the fast-forming resistance movement.<sup>74</sup> In the wake of this message, the utilization of the radio by youth became increasingly frequent. At some point during the first few days of the invasion, the underground radio network smuggled a pre-recorded interview with young Czech protesters out of the country and passed it along to the BBC who aired it on August 24<sup>th</sup>. During this broadcast, one Czech student told the world that “young people were very happy... in the six [eight] months between January and August” before the invasion and that the people of Czechoslovakia would “no longer believe that we [the Czech people] are your [the Soviet’s] brothers.”<sup>75</sup> This message helped to show the world that the Czech people did not condone the presence of Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia, a message that ran contrary to the narrative the Soviet Union attempted to advance.

On the same day, members of the reformed Czech Youth Organization broadcast a message on multiple radio networks that called upon young people both nationally and internationally to break ties with the Warsaw Pact countries for their support of the Soviet Invasion.<sup>76</sup> In this instance, radio provided Czech youth with the opportunity to call upon young

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<sup>74</sup> Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> “BBC Broadcast August 24, 1968: Czech Students Explaining How They Had Argued with Russian Soldiers in the Streets of Prague in an Attempt to Get Them to Return Home,” August 1968 - Audio Archive - Radio Prague International (Radio Prague International), accessed November 18, 2021, <https://archiv.radio.cz/en/static/august-1968/audio>.

<sup>76</sup> Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 63.

people both in their own country and abroad to act in the face of Soviet aggression. On August 26<sup>th</sup>, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of Czechoslovakia broadcast a dramatic one-and-a-half-minute message hoping to reach audiences both within and outside Czechoslovakia. The female scout spoke to the world, relaying the following message: “In solidarity... with all young people who love freedom, we beg you to actuate through your organizations upon your government to protest against the violent occupation of Czechoslovakia.”<sup>77</sup> Again, the utilization of radio by the young people involved with the Scout programs demonstrates not only the hands-on nature of youth protest during the invasion, but also how students recognized radio to be a medium through which they could encourage resistance and make pleas for international solidarity and aid.

The clandestine radio networks within the country also helped to foster a cross-generational resistance effort during the August Invasion. In addition to the widespread youth protest efforts, adult citizens also demonstrated against the Soviet Invasion and engaged in many of the same passive resistance techniques. While a good percentage of youth supported the liberalization of Czechoslovakian socialism and Dubček’s reforms, ample evidence exists that “many of those who pushed hardest for change were among the oldest members of the [Czechoslovakia Communist] party.”<sup>78</sup> This reality confirms that both youth and adults often shared similar positive opinions on Dubček and his reforms. When Soviets crossed the Czech border, anger and concern erupted amongst youth and elders alike. Given the somber reality of the invasion, the people of Czechoslovakia knew that “their strength derive[d] from their unity.”<sup>79</sup> The youth and adult populations immediately understood that their disdain for the Soviet and Warsaw Pact soldiers was a commonality shared by much of the Czech population, ranging from teenagers all the way to the nation’s oldest citizens.



*Image 9: A sit-in strike in Wenceslas Square in Prague during the August Invasion*

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<sup>77</sup> “Radio Prague Appeals to Scouts,” Digital Collections Home – Digital Collections, August 26, 1968, <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/45287/radio-prague-appeals-to-scouts?ctx=68b2ec7612d7e65711ceadf19581e06d4c01c4ad&idx=3>.

<sup>78</sup> Golan, “Youth and Politics in Czechoslovakia,” 3.

<sup>79</sup> Menges, “Prague Resistance, 1968 : The Ingenuity of Conviction,” 15.

One clear instance of cross-generational resistance efforts came during the general strikes that took place during the week of the invasion. Based on details provided via the underground radio networks, youth and adults alike marched into the streets or concealed themselves in their homes in coordination with the radio directive. Image Nine shows a strike that resembled a sit-in that occurred in Wenceslas Square during the invasion.<sup>80</sup> Closer examination of the faces of the crowd shows the varying ages of those occupying the square. Amongst the young protesters concentrated in the center and right side of the photograph, groups of adult Czechs can be seen sitting in the square. For example, in the bottom left corner of the image, a group of older Czech men sit beside smiling young boys. A similar situation arose in the hours before the protest scheduled in Wenceslas Square on August 22<sup>nd</sup> was called off, fearing violence. Before the calls to return home, thousands of Czech citizens of all ages flooded into the square, coalescing into one large protest movement. Image Ten shows a section of the crowd.<sup>81</sup> In the foreground of the photo, two older men and two older women are visible. One of the men is angled towards the soldiers, suggesting that he is speaking to one of them. Standing behind the adults is a group of young men attempting to talk to the soldiers posted on the edges of the square. The mingling of these groups, especially when engaging in passive resistance efforts, demonstrates the emergence of cross-generational collaboration fostered by radio broadcasts in the early days of the movement. Later in the afternoon when underground radio networks began broadcasting the directive to clear the square to avoid a potential massacre, young people and adults cleared the square together, leaving it nearly deserted by 5:00 PM.<sup>82</sup> Based on this, it is clear that both youth and their elders listened to the clandestine radio networks and paid attention to the directives that were broadcast.



**Image 10 (left):** Crowds protesting the Soviet-led invasion in Wenceslas Square on August 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Image 11 (right):** Young Czechs standing around a portable radio listening to a broadcast.

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<sup>80</sup> Josef Koudelka, *A Protest in Wenceslas Square*, photograph, *The New York Times* (New York, New York: The New York Times, August 20, 2018), Magnum Photo, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/world/europe/prague-spring-communism.html>.

<sup>81</sup> *Prague Spring - Suppression Demonstrations and Protests against the Invasion of Czechoslovakia by Troops of the Warsaw Pact Countries*, photograph, Getty Images (Getty Images), Getty Images, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://www.gettyimages.com/search/2/image?phrase=protests+in+Wenceslas+square+august+1968>.

<sup>82</sup> Wechsberg, *The Voices*, 55.



The use of radios in the streets and in safehouses to receive information provides further evidence as to how radio fostered connections between youth protesters and their elders. Young people carried portable radios as they walked throughout Czechoslovakian cities and often congregated around radios to receive updates on the location of the Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces and communications from other cities and protests. Image Eleven shows the way young people crowded around personal radios to listen to the information provided by the clandestine networks.<sup>83</sup> The expression on the face of the young man in the middle of the photograph is particularly impactful. The furrow of his brow, his somber expression, and the way his hand rests on his chin suggest that he, like the others around him, is intently listening to the radio broadcast and contemplating the next course of action for himself and the band of young people surrounding him. Interest in the clandestine radio broadcasts was not limited to the youth of Czechoslovakia. Just as adults and young people banded together when approaching Soviet soldiers, defending the Radio Prague building, and participating in the general strikes held throughout the invasion, members of every generation huddled around small radios in order to gain information. Image Twelve supports this assertion, as it shows an older woman holding a small radio while surrounded by four men ranging in age from a young boy on the left and to an older gentleman on the far right.<sup>84</sup> Armed with the new information they received from radio announcements, protesters of all ages, like the ones shown in Image Twelve, modified and continued their interconnected resistance efforts.



*Image 12: Czech citizens of all ages gather around a small portable radio held by an older woman while listening to the broadcast.*

The formation of a successful cross-generational resistance movement was somewhat of an anomaly in 1968, as many nations suffered from a widening gap in mentality between the youth and their parents and grandparents. The societal differences between the pre-World War II years and the ever-changing 1960s fueled this gap in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, as young

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<sup>83</sup> Czech Youth Listening to a Radio Broadcast, photograph, *Digital Journal* (Digital Journal , February 27, 2017), AFP, <https://www.digitaljournal.com/world/us-challenges-kremlin-with-new-russian-tv-channel/article/486792>.

<sup>84</sup> Corbis, *Czech Civilians Listening to a Portable Radio*, photograph, *The New York Times* (The New York Times, August 20, 2018), Getty, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/world/europe/prague-spring-communism.html>.

people around the world born in the 1950s and 1960s grew up in a time of peace as opposed to their parents, who endured the atrocities of World War II, and their grandparents who lived through years of bloody attrition and food shortages during the Great War.<sup>85</sup> The safe atmosphere that enveloped members of the baby boomer generation around the world fostered discontentment among the youth. Young people saw the aspirations of their parents' and grandparents' generations as "prosaic," and felt that, in the words of an angry seventeen-year-old German boy, the "disgusting economic miracle" that followed World War II gave rise to "an older generation unable to recognize its superficiality."<sup>86</sup> Unlike their elders, the youth of the 1950s and 1960s questioned the systems they lived under and concerned themselves with both domestic and international events and their consequences. Youth became increasingly involved in politics, taking stances that often opposed their parents on heavy issues such as the war in Vietnam, as well as on unique domestic issues. As Tom Hayden, a well-known American youth activist, stated, "My father's generation believed... that they had defended democracy against foreign despotism. We believed that we were defending democracy from its enemies at home."<sup>87</sup> While some of the factors contributing to the divide between youth and adults in 1968 varied from nation to nation, Hayden's quote accurately illustrates the difference between the mentality of young people and that of older generations around the world in the 1960s. The widening of this divide made the rapid formation of a cross-generational resistance movement in Czechoslovakia even more shocking. The bridging of the generational divide via shared protest methods and collaborative resistance also speaks to the tremendous power of the clandestine radio networks. Radio played a central role in the emergence of the functioning cross-generational resistance movement during the August Invasion. Without the protected clandestine networks, Soviet censorship would have limited communication between youth activists and adult-led resistance efforts, making coordination between the groups more difficult, and the communication of passive resistance directives and warnings impossible.

The creation of a cross-generational resistance movement, the coordination of widespread protest efforts by young people, and the efficacy of passive resistance techniques implemented by Czech youth all demonstrate the far-reaching impact and influence of the clandestine radio networks on youth activism. As demonstrated by the timeline of youth activism throughout the invasion, the announcements and speeches aired by underground radio networks directly influenced youth protest methods by directing young people toward passive resistance methods and notifying them of safety risks and planned strikes. The existence of free radio networks also advanced youth activism during the invasion by granting them access to a medium that amplified their defiant voices in Czechoslovakia and abroad. While the historians often consider the invasion as a military success for the Soviet Union, the existence of free radio and the perseverance of the cross-generational resistance movement that radio helped to produce ensured that the invasion was a clear political defeat for the Soviets. The successful week-long resistance

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<sup>85</sup> Gerard J. De Groot, *The Sixties Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>86</sup> De Groot, *The Sixties Unplugged*, 15.

<sup>87</sup> De Groot, *The Sixties Unplugged*, 16-17.

effort mounted by Czechoslovakian youth and their elders via radio networks not only demonstrated the strength of the Czech people and their opposition to their Soviet oppressors, but also provided a foundation for Czech political resistance that the Velvet Revolution would build upon two decades later. Together, this information emphasizes radio's role in creating and coordinating the youth protest movements during the invasion and radio's long-term impact on Czechoslovakian resistance and politics. Given this incredible significance, those considering the events of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia must not discount the crucial role of clandestine radio in relation to Czech youth activism, and instead must view the existence of underground radio networks as a central component in the history of the August Invasion.



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