

# **Ezra's Archives**

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# Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors	7
<b>Beyond the Exhibition:</b> The Taiping Museum and Historical Memory in Modern China <b>Gregory Jany</b>	9
<b>“To Hold the Light Steady”:</b> Foreign Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918–1920 <b>Christopher Morillo</b>	43
<b>American Otherworlds:</b> Myths and Monsters of the Frontier <b>Douglas Palumbo</b>	69
<b>The Roles They Are A-Changing:</b> Women in Jihadi Organizations <b>Nils Peterson</b>	96
<b>Before the Erie:</b> The Dismal Swamp Canal <b>Graham Weinschenk</b>	122

# From the Editors

It is with great pleasure that we present the eleventh edition of *Ezra's Archives*. This journal represents the hard work of a small group of undergraduates dedicated to carrying on the tradition that Maya Koretzky and Andrew White began in Spring 2011 when they sought to provide a space for undergraduates to share exemplary historical research. In their original letter from the editors, published in the very first edition of *Ezra's Archives*, Maya and Andrew asked two simple questions: Why study history? Why write and read history? They rightly observed that the practice of studying history, of putting it into words and sharing it with others, gives us the context necessary to understand our present.

*Ezra's Archives*, however, does not operate in a bubble. The past year has proven especially difficult. We are dealing with the ramifications and fallout of a global pandemic. There is no way to deny that we have been living in a historic moment. For many of us, new circumstances have forced us to evaluate what matters and why we do what we do, including why we study history. History, of course, is not an instruction manual. We cannot look to the past to find neat morals or lessons. Regardless, we believe that looking to the past is one of the ways that we can best understand the present and imagine a new future. In moments like these, the mission of history is particularly important.

This is why the editors of *Ezra's Archives* have always aimed to provide a platform for undergraduate historians working in under-studied areas. Since the first issue, the journal has showcased research on diverse topics, from Christian polemics in Umayyad Spain, the economy of the Viceroyalty of Peru, blood and militarism in colonial Hawai'i, and even German water policy in Quindao from 1898 to 1914.

As in past years, we received a variety of submissions from undergraduates across the country studying at institutions both large and small. This year, we are proud to offer new research on the Taiping Museum, myths and monsters of the frontier, foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War, women in jihadi organizations, and the Dismal Swamp Canal.

Looking forward, we hope to expand the scope of **the journal and the diversity** of our authors. To do so, we plan **to lengthen Ezra's Archives'** submission period and increase the number of schools to which we extend our call for submissions. We appreciate all of the support we have received from the editorial team of *Ezra's Archives*, members of the Cornell Historical Society, and faculty members. Without them, this publication would not be possible. We are pleased to present the eleventh edition of *Ezra's Archives*, and we hope you enjoy.

Sincerely,  
Basia and Julie  
Editors-in-Chief

# Beyond the Exhibition

## The Taiping Museum and Historical Memory in Modern China

Gregory Jany

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *Walking into the exquisite, refined Reverence Garden*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *One returns to the history of yesterday*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *In the exhibition, there lies a microcosm of the  
Taiping*

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *Hiding innumerable tragic stories*

□ □ □ □ □ *And touching poems*

*Shi Shanping, Docent at the Taiping History Museum (1970-1993)*<sup>1</sup>

In the warm spring of 1952, historian Luo Ergang (1901-1997) received a tip that the cobblestone-walled house at No. 74 Tangzi Lane in Nanjing might be the former residence of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's East King.<sup>2</sup> Upon entering the house, Luo found eighteen painted murals, depicting cranes resting under peach trees, mountain scenery, and a full-blown war along the banks of the Yangtze river. It was

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<sup>1</sup> Shi Shanping, □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ [An old docent's recollections], In Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Proceedings, Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chuban she., 488.

<sup>2</sup> Yao Mingfeng □ □ □ , □ □ □ □ □ □ 天国□ □ □ □ □ [Luo Ergang and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum], in *Taiping tianguo bowuguan jianguan sishi zhounian lunwenji* (1996), Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 242.

an opportune discovery—they were long-lost murals from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The Nanjing Municipal Government quickly acquired the house and organized an exhibition.<sup>3</sup> As audiences streamed into Nanjing to see the murals, the head of a scientific and cultural delegation from East Germany commented that, “this is where New China differs from Old China. The People’s Republic protects Taiping relics and educates the people. No wonder there are so many relics here.” Overwhelmed with this positive response, the Nanjing Cultural Relics Preservation Committee and the Nanjing Museum successfully lobbied the Central Ministry of Culture to establish a formal museum. After five years of preparation, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum finally opened to the public on the first of October of 1956, the seventh anniversary of the People’s Republic of China’s establishment.<sup>4</sup>

The date at which the museum opened affirms the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom’s centrality in the Chinese Communist Party’s understanding of its revolutionary history. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was an anti-Manchu rebel state in the Qing Dynasty that lasted from 1850 to 1864 led by the Hakka Hong Xiuquan, who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> The ensuing civil war resulted in up to 90 million deaths—one of the deadliest episodes of conflict in human history. For Mao Zedong, however, the Taiping was an essential precursor to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In his view of Chinese history, Mao recognized the Taiping as a proto-revolutionary movement that preceded the CCP’s rise. In his speech *On New Democracy*, Mao noted that the Taiping was the first of a series of failed revolutions, including the 1911 Revolution and the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>4</sup> “Nanjing chengli taiping tianguo jinianguan” 南京成立太平天国纪念馆 [Nanjing establishes the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Memorial Hall], *Renminribao* 人民日报, October 4, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War*, Knopf, 2012.

May Fourth movement, that culminated only in the success of the 1949 Liberation.<sup>6</sup> The revolutionary history of the Taiping is etched as a relief in the base of the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, and hence etched into the official Chinese understanding of its nation's history.<sup>7</sup> Yet, Mao was not the only one to advance a narrative of the Taiping as a revolutionary movement. Different groups with distinct interests, including Karl Marx who commented on the Taiping from London in 1862, as well as Sun Yat-Sen's Nationalist Party, claimed the Taiping's revolutionary heritage.<sup>8</sup> U.S. historians like Jonathan D. Spence and Phillip A. Kuhn have debated whether the Taiping's primary ideological influence germinated from Christian ideology, forms of Chinese sectarian tradition, anti-Manchu nationalism, or a desire for wide-scale reform. However, most reject that the Taiping was motivated by class-based, Marxist ideologies.

The Taiping History Museum played an important role as an ideological channel through which the Chinese Communist Party monopolized a historical memory of the Heavenly Kingdom. Visitors walked through exhibits listening to docents, emphasizing the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom as “anti-feudal” and “anti-imperial.” The museum displayed cultural relics bearing witness to the history of the Taiping and its revolutionary credentials—its struggle against the feudal Qing government, its redistributive land policies, and its egalitarian cultural programs—claiming that these credentials were inherited by the CCP. Textual displays

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<sup>6</sup> Mao Zedong, "On new democracy." *Selected works of Mao Tse-tung* 2 (1940): 1965-1977.

<sup>7</sup> Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square: a political history of monuments," *Representations* 35 (1991): 84-117.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, "Chinesisches," In *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Werke*, Vol. 15, By Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 514–516, Berlin: Dietz, 1980.

provided this guiding narrative with photographs supplementing the visitor's imagination and making memory of the Taiping real.

While the Taiping History Museum performed a vital role in cementing the Taiping's contemporary reputation as a proto-revolutionary movement, following this narrative alone flattens the museum's complexity both as a site and an institution. As visitors walked through the exhibits, a diversity of stories lent meaning to it. The museum was a living institution, which influenced historical memory through the excavation, collection, and research on the Taiping. It was situated physically and conceptually within the Zhanyuan Garden, evoking admiration for cultural tradition and pleasurable entertainment. The museum was also a base for patriotic education, instilling a revolutionary spirit for students and cadres in Nanjing and the broader Jiangsu province. Sometimes, it transcended space as its collections became part of travelling exhibitions and its relics provided testimony for foreign audiences as varied as Ho Chi Minh, a Japanese student choir, and an Albanian dance troupe.

This paper contributes to recent scholarship that has focused on the heterotopic nature of sites of memory in China and the multiplicity of narratives surrounding those sites. As Denise Ho and Jie Li have shown with their analysis of the revolutionary town of Anren in China in "Landlord Manor to Red Memorabilia: Reincarnations of a Chinese Museum Town" (2016) and Haiyan Lee in her article, "The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan: or, how to enjoy a national wound" (2006) with the ruins of the Qing-dynasty summer palace in Beijing, sites of memory function in manifold roles.<sup>9</sup> Some of these roles are contradictory, but they remain authentic and coexistent. Other scholars like Kirk Denton and Rana Mitter have also tracked the chronological change in museum narratives, demonstrating

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<sup>9</sup> Denise Y. Ho, and Jie Li, "From landlord manor to red memorabilia: Reincarnations of a Chinese museum town," *Modern China* 42, no. 1 (2016): 3-37 and Lee, Haiyan, "The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan: or, how to enjoy a national wound," *Modern China* 35, no. 2 (2009), 155-190.

crucial transitions between Mao and post-socialist, reform era China.<sup>10</sup> This paper attempts to tie the two strands of literature together, illustrating a museum's multidimensionality throughout different historical periods. In addition, this paper also contributes to the scant literature on contemporary public memory of the Taiping in modern China. In this paper, I start with the museum's history in the early Mao era to show how the multiplicity in narrative surrounding the Taiping History Museum has existed since its founding.

The Taiping History Museum is and was a multidimensional site of memory. It commemorated Hong Xiuquan and his followers as revolutionary heroes through its exhibitions and displayed relics. It was also a research institute, a cultural site of imperial beauty, a patriotic education base, and a traveling exhibit all at once. The Taiping History Museum resists our impulse to tell a reductive story, highlighting the multivalent identities a museum can take and the ambiguous roles it performs, both in Mao's China and today.

### **Early years, artistic appreciation, and knowledge production**

This section departs from the discovery of Taiping-era murals in Nanjing, catalyzing the museum's establishment in 1956. The current literature on museums in China, including Rana Mitter's seminal paper in the field of Chinese museum studies, "Behind The Scenes at The Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997" (2000) and Kirk Denton's more recent monograph, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (2014) have tended to focus on the material testimony of museum

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<sup>10</sup> Kirk A Denton, 2014, *Exhibiting the past: historical memory and the politics of museums in postsocialist China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press and Mitter, Rana. "Behind the scenes at the museum: nationalism, history and memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997," *The China Quarterly* 161 (2000): 279-293.

exhibitions in shaping a narrative of Chinese history.<sup>11</sup> However, it is important to recognize that Chinese museums often function not just as exhibitions, but also as research institutes. The Taiping History Museum promoted a revolutionary historiography of the Taiping through its physical exhibits and as an active research center, shaping memory both through material relics and intellectual discourse in the Chinese academy.

Returning to the institutionalization of the museum in 1956 after Luo's discovery of the murals, the sudden drive to create a formalized museum after the mural exhibition's organic success suggests that the impetus for the museum's creation was not solely a revolutionary one. It was also rooted in the fascination for cultural relics and a thirst for historical knowledge. An article in the *People's Daily* from 1961 reported that the Nanjing CCP Municipal Committee established the Museum to "strengthen historical research on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, increase the quality of research, better educate the people, and serve the anti-imperialist, patriotic struggle."<sup>12</sup> The museum's role was not merely to instill patriotism, it was also to produce knowledge and construct history itself. The *People's Daily* article announcing the transformation of the memorial hall into a history museum in 1961 tracked the research accomplishments of the institution, including its acquisition of over 2,000 cultural relics, collection of over 6,000 books, and compilation of "more than 12 million words on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom." The inclusion of these metrics suggests the centrality of research in the Taiping History Museum's identity, and its importance for party officials. In January of 1961, the newly-opened museum hosted a conference for historians of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> 南京建立太平天国历史博物馆 [Nanjing established the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum]. *Renminribao* 人民日报, January 14, 1961.

Heavenly Kingdom from across China, as it started to become a center for researching the Taiping.<sup>13</sup>

With the museum's focus being the production of academic history, the acquisition of cultural relics happening kilometers from Nanjing was as important as the revolutionary education inside the museum's walls. Throughout these early years, staff from the Taiping History Museum travelled to various Chinese cities to recover cultural relics. One group went to Anhui to take photographs of the ruins of a Taiping army camp.<sup>14</sup> Another went to Changsu to recover an iron cannon used by the Taiping against the Qing Dynasty in a war along the Yangtze.<sup>15</sup> The discovery garnered national attention in the *People's Daily*, with the cannon itself becoming the centerpiece of the museum's section on Taiping military history. Some of the museum's cultural workers were lucky and did not have to look far for relics. One preservationist found a Taiping wooden seal in the walls of a kindergarten in Nanjing.<sup>16</sup>

As the collection grew, party officials and commoners recognized the museum as a center for Taiping historical research. In 1958, a Beijing painter donated 11 Yangliuqing New Year woodblock prints from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom to the museum.<sup>17</sup> Soon after, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage shipped nine boxes of archival material

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<sup>13</sup> Yao Mingfeng, "Luoergang yu taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan," 243.

<sup>14</sup> Guo Cun 郭存 . 太平天国北伐、西征历史考察 [Historical investigation of the Northern Expedition and Western Expedition of the Taiping army]. *Renminribao* 人民日报 , December 17, 1965.

<sup>15</sup> Cheng Wanfu 程万福 . 太平天国最早的天京铜炮 [The earliest Taiping Heavenly Kingdom copper cannon]. *Renminribao* 人民日报 , February 17, 1957.

<sup>16</sup> Huang Peixi 黄佩西 . 太平天国今年发现的文物 [Artifacts from the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom discovered this year]. *Renminribao* 人民日报 , October 17, 1957.

<sup>17</sup> Cao Zhijun. "Cong taiping tianguo qiyi bainian jinianbei shuoqi." 362-363.

containing the papers of Wuxu, a Qing dynasty official involved with the military campaign to repress the Taiping, even though the cultural preservation bureau initially acquired it in Zhejiang.<sup>18</sup> As Taiping cultural relics became central to the Taiping History Museum, the museum became the authority over these relics, alongside the material testimony they provided.

The publication of archival materials, historical commentary, and analysis on the Taiping's relics further strengthened the Taiping History Museum's role as knowledge producer. The museum's staff selected and published archival material from the era in a six-volume series, providing a foundational text for the study of Taiping-era history.<sup>19</sup> They published more primary source collections as their archival collections grew.<sup>20</sup> The museum disseminated the cultural repertoire of the era through a book on Taiping ballads, working together with the Shanghai Art and Literature Publishing House.<sup>21</sup> Other books provided illustrated narratives of Taiping history. In total, from 1956 until 1994, the museum published twenty-six volumes of research on Taiping.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, the museum played a foundational role in modern China's understanding of the Heavenly Kingdom itself, influencing networks of intellectuals, academics, and educators who studied these materials and produced historical knowledge for future generations.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Wang Shushen. "Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan shiliao bianji gaikuang." In *Taiping tianguo sishi bowuguan jianguan wushi zhounian lunweni* (1996). Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe.

<sup>20</sup> □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ [Taiping Heavenly Kingdom history museum organizes and edits the historical materials of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom]. *Renminribao* □ □ □ □ , June 22, 1961.

<sup>21</sup> □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ [Record of our museum's publication over forty years]. In *Taiping tianguo sishi bowuguan jianguan sishi zhounian lunwenji* (1996). Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Of course, a revolutionary perspective tinted the Taiping Museum's interpretation, publication, and exhibition of the movement. For example, a booklet from the museum noted that the Taiping represented "the vast working people of China living under the Qing government's reactionary rule," growing in strength due to "intensifying ethnic contradictions and class contradictions."<sup>23</sup> It is hard not to see Luo Ergang's role in the museum's historiography of the Taiping, especially as he presided over the museum's research and excavation work as deputy director. Luo wrote a seminal book about the proto-revolutionary credentials of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in 1937.<sup>24</sup> While academics elsewhere might identify Hong Xiuquan's Christian-influenced beliefs or the importance of European influence on the Taiping, the Taiping Museum elided these potential contradictions. They portrayed the Taiping as a peasant revolt against the feudal class. The following section explores such portrayals in the museum's exhibits and display.

### **Cultural relics, display, and revolutionary narrative**

Besides its influence on academic discourse, the Taiping History Museum also molded the memory of the Taiping through cultural relics exhibited in its halls. In this sense, artifacts became object lessons, making real the designated story through its materiality as objects that existed in the past. Textual descriptions, a booklet to bring home, and the docent's guiding narrative provided contextual detail that filled the empty vessel of the relic, allowing visitors to place the object within the larger exhibitory

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<sup>23</sup> 太平天国纪念馆 [Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Memorial Hall Publishing]. 太平天国历史文物展 [Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Historical Relics Exhibition Display Guide]. Undated. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Luo Ergang 罗尔纲. Taiping tianguo shigang (太平天国史纲). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937.

narrative. Photographs, relics, and even comic illustrations retained their important roles in testifying the revolutionary history of the Taiping.

A visitor walking into the museum in 1959 would first encounter an exhibit about the Jintian Uprising, establishing the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom as an anti-feudal, anti-imperialist movement from the onset. The Jintian Uprising was an armed revolt where Hong Xiuquan mobilized peasants, battled a Qing army, and declared the founding of the Heavenly Kingdom—a critical episode in the class-struggle narrative of the Taiping.<sup>25</sup> Yet, artifacts were absent in this section of the museum.<sup>26</sup> Curators displayed photographs as substitutes, which portrayed the Taiping's supposed enemies or what the Taiping left behind. A picture of British ships represented “foreign capitalism ... that squeezed and crushed the Chinese people.”<sup>27</sup> A photograph of the deed for a female slave represented the feudalism of the Qing.<sup>28</sup> The museum also displayed a picture of a flagpole stele remaining in a Taiping military camp's ruins, supposedly from the Jintian Uprising. It was meant to evoke peasant might.<sup>29</sup> However, the absence of physical, living bodies in the photograph left the size and strength of the movement to the visitor's imagination.

The uncomfortable absence of objects that testified to the uprising can perhaps be attributed to archival constraints, but it ironically evoked the historical controversy surrounding the nature of the Jintian Uprising. Historian Jonathan D. Spence narrated the Jintian episode as a defensive battle, not an uprising, where the Qing army encircled the Taiping base and

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<sup>25</sup> Jian Youwen, 1991, *The Taiping revolutionary movement*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>26</sup> Guo Cunxiao. “Nanjing Taiping Tianguo Jinianguan.” *Wenwu* □ □ (1959). 32.

<sup>27</sup> Taiping Tianguo Jinianguon Bianyin. “Taiping tianguo wenwu shiliao chenglie shuomingshu.” Undated. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

provoked a defensive response.<sup>30</sup> Guo Cunxiao, head of the museum's cultural relics department, wrote that the photograph revealed how the "revolution under Hong Xiuquan's leadership developed quickly, as it started from Jintian ... and began to build the scale of a state."<sup>31</sup> Yet, the picture displayed failed to convey this. In this case, the museum relied on the docent's guidance to fill in the gaps and provide a convincing testimony of the Jintian Uprising's revolutionary character.

In other exhibits, documentary artifacts and excavated relics provided evidence for the Taiping Museum's crafted narrative. As Guo Cunxiao wrote, these artifacts "together with the principles of historical materialism help us analyze the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's revolutionary movement."<sup>32</sup> In a section on land policy, curators displayed land deeds to highlight the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's land redistribution programs. Describing the program as having successfully broken down "the feudal system of private property," the land deeds enhanced the movement's revolutionary credentials.<sup>33</sup> On economic trade and foreign policy, curators chose bronze coins to evoke images of a burgeoning trade, exhibited business licenses, and displayed a graph of the Taiping-British trade balance.<sup>34</sup>

In order to promote an idea of the Heavenly Kingdom as a flourishing economy, curators navigated the tension between the relics' testimony of capitalist policies and the museum's revolutionary narrative. In a version of the museum booklet, curators explained the contradiction as a contingency of the period, a system "adapted to the development of

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<sup>30</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, WW Norton & Company, 1996, 131-133.

<sup>31</sup> Guo Cunxiao, "Nanjing Taiping Tianguo Jinianguan," *Wenwu* □ □ (1959), 32.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Taiping tianguo jinianguan bianyin, "Taiping tianguo wenwushiliao chenglie shuomingshu," Undated, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Taiping tianguo jinianguan bianyin, "Taiping tianguo jinianguan," Undated, 6-7.

social productivity at the time.”<sup>35</sup> The museum also highlighted how the Taiping “organized collective production with high efficiency rates,” which were reminiscent of the people’s communes established in 1958.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, curators justified trade with “Western imperialist oppressors,” because the Heavenly Kingdom had the Chinese people’s best interests in their heart.<sup>37</sup> After all, they had lowered taxes for peasants in their domestic policies. Curators described how the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom pursued “independence, equality, and mutual benefit” in their foreign policy, serving the people’s aspirations in a nod to Mao-era diplomacy.<sup>38</sup>

Another pavilion on culture and education portrayed the Heavenly Kingdom as a site of cultural flourishing, yet it once again elided elements that contradicted the museum’s class-struggle narrative. Curators chose to display Taiping-era literary works, public health notices, and a school calendar among other relics in the exhibit.<sup>39</sup> Respectively, they represented a commitment to vernacular literature instead of classical Chinese, the “progressive” campaign against opium use, and scientific advancements in time-keeping. In particular, the calendar noted how the Taiping expected the children to go to the chapel on Sundays and pray.<sup>40</sup> Yet, curators made no other comment on Taiping’s Christian influences, even when it had formed a foundational basis for Hong Xiuquan’s ideology. Similarly, curators also prominently exhibited marriage licenses to illustrate the Heavenly Kingdom as a feminist state that promoted “equal relations between man and woman” through the abolishment of feudal marriage.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the museum failed to mention the Taiping’s cruel policy of family

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Taiping tianguo jinianguan bianyin, “Taiping tianguo wenwu shiliao chenglie shuomingshu,” Undated. 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Taiping tianguo jinianguan bianyin, “Taiping tianguo jinianguan,” Undated, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Taiping tianguo jinianguan bianyin, “Taiping tianguo jinianguan,” Undated, 6

separation between male and female family members, as well as the hypocrisy of the Taiping leadership's harems.<sup>42</sup>

Sometimes two separate exhibits reflected these underlying narrative tensions, such as the museum's sections on the Taiping military and the Heavenly Kingdom's eventual failure. In the former, curators placed iron and bronze cannons in the center of a hall alongside an assortment of knives, spears, and swords used by the Taiping.<sup>43</sup> These were popular attractions, evoking the strength of the peasant movement and its revolutionary potential.<sup>44</sup> Yet, the latter exhibit suggested that such military strength was insufficient due to its lack of true revolutionary characteristics that the ruling Communist Party possessed. The exhibit ended with a wall of text explaining how the Heavenly Kingdom failed due to "the lack of a new class-based strength and the lack of correct leadership from a progressive political party."<sup>45</sup> Such an ending, of course, evoked the Chinese Communist Party as the true revolutionary movement, which succeeded where the Taiping could not. In this sense, the Taiping History Museum also bolstered the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy as the pinnacle of past revolutions in China.

Finally, visitors ended their tour by viewing a series of graphic illustrations and steles, which transformed the museum into a living storybook. Like the excavated stone steles that showed how Taiping's revolutionary policies left an immortal mark on the People's Republic, the graphic illustrations left a mental imprint for the visitors to remember about the Heavenly Kingdom. These illustrations were 48 comic depictions of scenes in Taiping revolutionary history, taken from a graphic novel

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<sup>42</sup> Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 120-122.

<sup>43</sup> Taiping tianguo jinianguan bianyin, "Taiping tianguo wenwu shiliao chenglie shuomingshu," Undated, 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Guo Cunxiao, "Nanjing Taiping Tianguo Jinianguan," *Wenwu* □ □ (1959), 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

written by Luo Ergang in 1953.<sup>46</sup> One scene depicted Hong Xiuquan with an angry crowd raising a wooden club over a smashed statue of a local deity used “by the landlord class to deceive commoners,” surprisingly reminiscent of photographs of the Cultural Revolution or anti-superstition campaigns throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in China to our eyes today.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the comic illustrations were vivid portrayals that were easily understandable, especially for the illiterate. Guo Cunxiao noted that this exhibit “had large audiences, with farmers, elementary school children, and housewives particularly loving the exhibit.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, like the relics that sparked the visitor’s imagination of the historical past, so did these graphic illustrations visualize the past itself, implanting constructed scenes of Taiping history in the visitor’s mind. No matter their educational background, visitors could bring home a new-found memory of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, narrated through the museum’s revolutionary, class-struggle narrative.

### **Cultural aesthetics and imperial beauty in the Zhanyuan Garden**

Having explored the material power of the relics exhibited within the museum itself, this section examines the Taiping History Museum as a site for cultural authenticity and aesthetic beauty, especially in its new venue at the Zhanyuan Garden. The Zhanyuan is a Ming Dynasty imperial garden that served briefly as the palace of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom’s Eastern King, Yang Xiuqing.<sup>49</sup> In her piece on the Zhanyuan Garden, “*Civil War, Revolutionary Heritage, and the Chinese Garden*,” Tobie Meyer-Fong suggested that the Taiping Museum started to emphasize the garden’s

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<sup>46</sup> Luo Ergang, 1956, *Taiping tianguo shihua*, Nanjing: Jiangsu ren min chu ban she.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Guo Cunxiao, “Nanjing Taiping Tianguo Jinianguan,” *Wenwu* □ □ (1959), 34.

<sup>49</sup> Taiping Tianguo Jinianguan Bianyin, “Taiping tianguo wenwu shiliao chenglie shuomingshu.” Undated, 1.

beauty in the reform era, as curators found the revolutionary narrative increasingly irrelevant. They evoked ideas of “imperial grandeur and cultural authenticity.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, this emphasis on cultural appreciation had in fact been part of the Taiping Museum’s identity since Luo’s discovery of the murals that spurred the museum’s establishment, and especially after the museum’s move to the Zhanyuan in May 1958.

Early on, party officials recognized how the museum’s move to the Zhanyuan carried with it a new cultural valence to the museum’s space. In a visit to the Taiping History Museum in June 1958, the Nanjing’s Municipal Committee Party Secretary, Peng Chong, instructed that “the Zhanyuan should not only be properly protected, it should also be set aside for people to visit and be entertained. It should provide a suitable place to promote China’s traditional culture and arts to international friends and conduct cultural exchanges.”<sup>51</sup> In the same speech, Peng called upon the museum staff to take special care of cultural artworks like calligraphy and paintings housed at the museum. Peng’s emphasis on cultural promotion and entertainment suggests that party officials never intended the museum to merely be a site for anti-imperialist, anti-feudal memory. The Taiping History Museum was also a site to appreciate the Zhanyuan Garden’s aesthetics, invoking ideas of “tradition” and “culture,” linking the museum’s space to a more significant conceptualized idea of a beautiful, ancient China. Later museum officials recognized this speech as integral to the museum’s history and identity. Yao Mingfeng, who directed the museum from 1984 to 1987, opened a memoir he wrote about his time at the museum with Peng Chong’s mandate.<sup>52</sup> The Taiping Museum also included Peng Chong’s

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<sup>50</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, "Civil war, revolutionary heritage, and the Chinese Garden," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 4, no. 1 (2015): 88.

<sup>51</sup> Yao Mingfeng, □ □ □ □ □ [Glancing back at a couple of matters], In Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Proceedings, Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chuban she, 480.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 483.

instructions in the official museum timeline, marking his emphasis on culture as a crucial moment in the museum's history.<sup>53</sup>

Before moving the museum's collections to the Zhanyuan, Nanjing city officials paid special attention to renovating the garden to an idealized aesthetic, suggesting how party officials recognized the garden's cultural value. It was the Taiping History Museum's staff who first proposed a new location at Zhanyuan, after its old one suffered from overcrowding and a lack of relic storage space.<sup>54</sup> Once municipal and provincial-level authorities approved of the plan, they appointed architect Zhang Congyu to design renovations for the garden, alongside an architectural professor at the Nanjing Institute of Technology, Liu Dunkun, who directed the preservation and construction work. Zhang ultimately modeled the renovations after Prince Zhou's Mansion in Suzhou, the former residence of Taiping leader Li Xiucheng. Zhang even employed a construction team from Suzhou to work in Nanjing. Guo Cunxiao reminisced that the renovations were meant to make the space more "magnificent and practical."<sup>55</sup> Zhang's use of the garden in Suzhou as a model to renovate the Zhanyuan suggests an attempt to invoke a specific Taiping-style aesthetic, which draws its significance from its cultural and architectural—not revolutionary—style.

Peng's comment to promote the Zhanyuan as a site "for people to visit and be entertained" can also be understood in the light of Mao's

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<sup>53</sup> Lu Weimin, Fifty-year timeline of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum's establishment, 491 in Yi, Jiasheng and Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum.

2006. *Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan jianguan wushi zhounian lunwenji* □ [Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Proceedings]. Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chuban she.

<sup>54</sup> Guo Cunxiao □ □ □ , □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ [Trivial recollections of building the museum from its establishment until now] in Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Proceedings. Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chuban she. 478.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

exhortation to encourage “culture for the masses” during the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art in 1942. Mao believed literature and art to be inseparable from the “revolutionary machinery,” as it is subordinate to the politics of class struggle.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, Mao outlined that art needed to serve the masses through the physical interaction between cultural workers and the peasantry in rural China. In 1950, the Party built the Workers Cultural Palace in Beijing as a physical manifestation of this principle. The palace was an early Ming dynasty shrine refashioned as a “paradise for the working people in the capital.”<sup>57</sup> As Chang-Tai Hung had argued, the Party desired for the palace to showcase the promise of socialism in providing cultural abundance to the Beijing masses.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the Taiping History Museum was also meant to be a similar recreational site for the working public, both promoting revolutionary narratives on the Taiping and allowing the laboring masses to celebrate the aesthetic beauty of the museum’s gardens.

Regardless, the idea of promoting the Taiping History Museum as a site of cultural tourism remained in the museum staff’s mind, especially when Guo Cunxiao, head of the museum’s relics department, published an article promoting the museum in the travel periodical *Luxingjia* (Traveler) in 1958. While the article emphasized the rich collections of the museum, with its “876 cultural relics and more than 340 pieces on display,” it drew its reader’s attention most closely to the artistic aspects—as opposed to historical, or revolutionary—of the items on display. For example, Guo described in great detail the imposing circular stone gates, the vivid colors of the murals, and the skillful realist composition of a painting of a Taiping

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<sup>56</sup> Timothy Cheek, "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art 1942," In *Mao Zedong and China's Revolutions*, pp. 112-117, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Chang-tai Hung, "A Political Park: The Working People's Cultural Palace in Beijing," *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 3 (2013): 556-77, Accessed January 22, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/23488422](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23488422).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

military fort.<sup>59</sup> Later in the article, Guo referred to the Taiping army's revolutionary characteristics, but emphasized the distinctive character of the artifacts on display. He even narrated an anecdote of two Mexican and Italian painters that looked at the artwork so closely they "sometimes stood up and sometimes crouched to look at the artwork, constantly observing."<sup>60</sup> Guo's article in a travel periodical suggests how museum officials at the time recognized that while the Taiping Museum served to promote a propagandist history of the Heavenly Kingdom, its attraction in drawing audiences lay with the tourism potential of the artifacts themselves.

As a site of cultural exchange, party officials often invited delegations visiting Nanjing to make a stop at the Taiping History Museum. From 1958 onwards, these included representatives of communist parties from eleven Latin American nations, an Albanian folk and dance troupe, the vice chairman of the Albanian Labor party, a Japanese choir on a tour, and even Ho Chi Minh, who left behind his signature as a keepsake for the museum.<sup>61</sup> For the delegates from foreign communist parties, the Taiping History Museum indicated China's long revolutionary history and bolstered the CCP as the rightful bearer of the revolutionary mantle in the People's Republic. The Taiping History Museum itself gained international prominence. Three months before arriving at Nanjing for a celebration of Sino-Japanese youth relations, a group of Japanese students asked to go to the museum, mentioning that "When you go to Nanjing, you must go to

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<sup>59</sup> Guo Cunxiao, "Nanjing Taiping Tianguo Jinianguan," *Lüxingjia* 瞭 行 家 , 26 (1957): 50.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> "A Japanese choir was welcomed in Nanjing and visited Shanghai on the 20<sup>th</sup>." *Renminribao* 人 民 日 报 , August 22, 1961. "Albanian folk song and dance troupe leaves Nanjing to go to Beijing." *Renminribao* 人 民 日 报 , June 11, 1961. "VIPs from all over the world visited China." *Renminribao* 人 民 日 报 , October 11, 1959.

the Taiping History Museum.”<sup>62</sup> Of course, one can attribute this prominence to the cultural aesthetics of the garden, but the students’ comments also reveal how the narrative of the Taiping as revolutionary heroes was now transmitted internationally through the medium of the museum’s exhibition. Indeed, the *People’s Daily* documented how the visiting students read the exhibition texts and took photographs of the relics.<sup>63</sup> Their chaperone, a professor at the University of Tokyo, listened intently and asked questions to the docent. These Japanese students now carry a specific memory of the Heavenly Kingdom as a revolutionary movement.

Through the museum and the Zhanyuan’s coexistence in one area, their narratives became intertwined with the party officials, museum administrators, and tourists that visited the space. A foreign guest remarked that “seeing the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, then glancing at the Zhanyuan’s landscape made [them] intoxicated.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, the Taiping relics’ revolutionary testimony and the cultural, imperial atmosphere of the gardens had become an entangled narrative for any visitor of the Taiping History Museum.

### **After the Cultural Revolution: New historical spaces and patriotic education**

While one could enjoy imperial beauty and revolutionary tradition at the Taiping History Museum until the early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution’s attack on the Four Olds forced the museum to close in 1966. During that period of upheaval, the museum’s staff were sent to the

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<sup>62</sup> Xu Linchang, “A thousands miles of wind, hands clasped together” – Chinese and Japanese youths in the Beijing-Nanjing-Hangzhou friendship festival,” *Renminribao* □ □ □ , September 24, 1984.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Yao Mingfeng, □ □ □ □ □ [Glancing back at a couple matters], 482.

countryside, while its collections were transferred to the Nanjing Museum.<sup>65</sup> Once the museum re-opened in 1974; however, the collection of cultural relics in the museum continued to preserve its memorializing power, again educating the masses about the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom's revolutionary tradition.<sup>66</sup> This section examines two ways in which such education continued, through travelling exhibitions and the museum's designation as a base for patriotic education in the 1990s.

After the Cultural Revolution ended, the Taiping History Museum started curating traveling exhibitions, which extended the museum's spatial reach and allowed a larger populace to interact with the material witness of the relics. Museum staff exhibited their collection at the Taiping History Museum's sister museums across China, including those in other provinces like Zhejiang, Hebei, Jiangxi, and even in the Shizhongshan grottoes in Jiujiang.<sup>67</sup> They held one particularly effective exhibit in the Qing dynasty imperial resort of Chengde. Curators juxtaposed cultural relics from the Taiping, such as land deeds, swords, and photographs, alongside Qing Dynasty luxury items like jade jewelry and a dragon robe.<sup>68</sup> Yao Mingfeng, the museum's director at the time, was particularly impressed by the exhibit's design. He noted that visitors to the exhibit could draw distinctions between "the feudal rule of the Qing's extravagant and rotting lives in Chengde" and the "tragic historical relics of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom."<sup>69</sup> The juxtaposition of the decadent and the desolate is reminiscent of the object lessons imparted in the Rent Collection Courtyard, which instilled righteous outrage in children towards the

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<sup>65</sup> Tan Yu, "Taiping tianguo lishibowuguan wenwu shiliao gongzuo de fazhan miaoshu," In *Taiping tianguo sishi bowuguan jianguan sishi zhounian lunwenji* (1996), Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe. 172.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Yao Mingfeng, □ □ □ □ □ [Glancing back at a couple matters], 482.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

landlord class.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the relics at the Taiping History Museum exhibition in Chengde imparted visitors with an indignant hatred towards the feudal Qing and sympathy for the Heavenly Kingdom's plight.

Much later in 1991, the exhibition even made its way to Beijing, where high-ranked party figures also witnessed the revolutionary narratives of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom outside the museum's physical space. Peng Chong, who in 1961 had become the Vice Chairman and Secretary General of the People's Congress, attended the exhibition.<sup>71</sup> Many other prominent academics, and Gong Yuzhi, head of the central government's Propaganda Department, also took an interest in the relics. These party elites encountered the same narratives that the museum had presented to other audiences of its traveling exhibitions, which included other universities and schools around the museum in Jiangsu.<sup>72</sup>

Besides these traveling exhibitions, the Taiping History Museum's designation as a base for patriotic education was crucial in cementing the museum's educational role. In the throes of the Tiananmen Movement, the CCP's leaders launched a new campaign for patriotic education in 1991, which they carried to full scale in 1994.<sup>73</sup> Having issued the "Outline on Implementing Patriotic Education," the CCP Central Committee required local governments to establish their own bases for patriotic education as part of this government program. The outline stated that this base could be "different sorts of museums, memorial halls, ... protected historic relics, and scenic sites, [which] are important places for patriotic education."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the Taiping History Museum fit these four different descriptors.

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<sup>70</sup> Ho and Li, "From landlord manor to red memorabilia," 11.

<sup>71</sup> Lu Weimin, "Fifty-year timeline of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum's establishment," 486.

<sup>72</sup> Yao Mingfeng, □ □ □ □ □ [Glancing back at a couple matters], 483.

<sup>73</sup> Wang Zheng. "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2008): 783-806. [www.jstor.org/stable/29734264](http://www.jstor.org/stable/29734264), 788.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 794.

Examining potential bases in the area, the Jiangsu Provincial officially designated the Taiping History Museum as a base for patriotic education in July 1994, interestingly just before the Party released the outline to the public.<sup>75</sup>

As this designation went into effect, students and teachers flocked to the Taiping History Museum in increasing numbers. After all, the Outline instructed schools to incorporate visits to these sites in their curriculum. The teachers praised the Taiping History Museum as an excellent “second classroom” to teach patriotism, revolutionary tradition, and historical-materialism.<sup>76</sup> Docents performed significant work in transmitting a narrative of revolutionary history, receiving notable praise from the museum’s visitors. Taiping History Museum docents even led tours outside the museum, extending the space of commemoration of the Heavenly Kingdom outside the physical space of the Zhanyuan.<sup>77</sup> They would take students to former Taiping sites in Nanjing, telling a soaring narrative of the Heavenly Kingdom’s exploits and policies. Students at Nanjing University’s History Department who partook in this new tour commented that, “seeing these sites made us feel as if we were on the ancient battlefield, hearing the stories is better than reading ten-thousand books.”<sup>78</sup> The definition of the Taiping Museum’s living textbook had expanded beyond the materiality of the cultural relics; it now encompassed the physical space of former Taiping structures across Nanjing. Thus, the physical landscape of China had become a museum in its own right.

With the advent of the reform era with China’s opening up in 1978, technological developments allowed the museum’s staff to engage in new ways to promote Taiping history. In 1994, the museum unveiled a large-

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<sup>75</sup> Lu Weimin, “Fifty-year timeline of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum’s establishment,” 489.

<sup>76</sup> Yao Mingfeng, 看看看看 [Glancing back at a couple matters], 482-483.

<sup>77</sup> Shi Shanping, 老教师的回忆 [An old docent’s recollections], 487.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 486.

scale diorama of the Taiping army's battle against Qing forces.<sup>79</sup> One museum official noted the use of “sound, light, and electricity” to simulate the atmosphere of the Taiping’s defense of Nanjing.<sup>80</sup> The graphic illustrations on the walls of the Taiping History Museum in 1951 had taken a new face. Now, the exhibits immersed the audience further in the constructed narrative, as the visitor took on omnipotent, God-like qualities of being able to visualize battles from above. In the library, the museum placed a computer with a 3D animation of the Taiping army’s battle formations, featuring cartoons that young visitors could interact with.<sup>81</sup> The burgeoning number of international, private tourists spurred the Taiping Museum’s launch of English audio guides and the addition of new descriptions in the gardens.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the Taiping History Museum provided patriotic education not just through excavated relics from the 1950s, but also through new technologies of commemoration and memory-making.

### **The Taiping History Museum today: Positioning oneself in a post-Mao world**

Accessing the Taiping History Museum’s website today, one can click on different tabs that allow them access to their preferred mode of engaging with the Taiping History Museum’s space. These tabs include “display and exhibition,” “cultural relics,” “education and research,” and

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<sup>79</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, "Civil war, revolutionary heritage, and the Chinese Garden." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 4, no. 1 (2015): 91.

<sup>80</sup> Dai Lu 戴璐, "The similarities and differences between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum and the service functions of American museums in *Taiping tianguo wushi bowuguan jianguan wushi zhounian lunwenji* (2006), Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 462.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

“the Zhanyuan garden,” suggesting how the museum understood itself as a public space with multiple meanings.<sup>83</sup>

The coexistence of Zhanyuan’s cultural aesthetics and the Taiping History Museum’s revolutionary narratives continues today. In the physical world, docents adjust their tour narratives according to the tour group’s interests.<sup>84</sup> The staff recognizes that some visit the museum because they are interested to learn about the Heavenly Kingdom, while others only seek to enjoy the garden’s scenery.<sup>85</sup> In the virtual world, the website’s background flickers back and forth between the two narratives, a Taiping-era mural and a rendered painting of the Zhanyuan’s red pavilions and gardens.<sup>86</sup> These changes are perhaps a departure from the docent’s fixed narratives in the early Mao era, which solely focused on Taiping revolutionary history, and they mark the increasing orientation of museums and heritage sites towards museums in reform era China. However, they can also be traced to their roots with Peng Chong’s instruction in 1961, calling for the museum’s gardens to “be set aside for people to visit and be entertained.”<sup>87</sup>

In the reform era, the Taiping History Museum continues to perform a crucial function as a maker of memory in the academic world of historians. Starting from 1998, the Taiping History Museum has housed the secretariat of Nanjing University’s Research Institute of Taiping History in

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<sup>83</sup> “[www.tptgmuseum.com/](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/),” *Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan*, 2014,

<sup>84</sup> Dai Lu, The similarities and differences between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum and the service functions of American museums, 463.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> “[www.tptgmuseum.com/](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/),” [Welcome to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum], *Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan*, 2014,

<sup>87</sup> Yao Mingfeng, *Glancing back at a couple matters*, 480.

China.<sup>88</sup> After Luo Ergang’s passing in 1998, the Taiping History Museum hosted a conference commemorating Luo’s hundredth birthday, coinciding with the 150th anniversary of the Jintian uprising. Here, historians in the Taiping Museum have started to engage with previously controversial details, including the movement’s Christian elements.<sup>89</sup> The conference concluded that Christianity was a historically-contingent, useful ideology for the Taiping, but the religion was also a reason for the Taiping’s demise.<sup>90</sup> Today, the museum continues to publish academic articles on its website, which started to deviate from its own revolutionary narrative in the 1950s. For example, a recent author talked at length about Hong Xiuquan’s harem, showing how while women occupied positions at the Heavenly Kingdom’s palace, they mainly performed subordinate roles without any real power.<sup>91</sup> Such a narrative was a departure from the museum’s portrayals of the Heavenly Kingdom in the Mao era that described a society with egalitarian gender relations.

The museum also took on increasingly service-oriented functions that could be understood in both local and global terms. Citing the Charter of the International Museum Association, a museum staff member wrote that the Taiping History Museum has followed the Charter's principle of “providing service to society and societal development,” while also giving

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<sup>88</sup> “太平天国历史研究会” [Introduction to the Research Association of the History of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in China], *太平天国历史研究会* 2014, [www.tptgmuseum.com/zgtshmsc.html](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/zgtshmsc.html).

<sup>89</sup> Zhang Tiebao 张 tiebao , 太平天国历史研究 [A new starting point for the study of the history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], *Renminribao* 人民日报 , July 28, 2001.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> “太平天国早期历史表册研究” [A study of early Taiping History tablets], *太平天国历史研究会* 2014, [www.tptgmuseum.com/studyResult.html](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/studyResult.html).

priority to servicing “socialist culture.”<sup>92</sup> The Taiping History Museum organized a drive to donate stationary, backpacks, and books to an underfunded primary school in Gaochun District.<sup>93</sup> It also promoted cultural education by organizing calligraphy and painting competitions for students in Nanjing and exhibiting student work from local primary and middle schools.<sup>94</sup> The museum’s staff understood these new service roles in relation to the museum’s designation as a base for patriotic education. Announcing a youth Olympics-themed camp for low-income students in the area, the Taiping History Museum commented that “as the first batch of patriotic education bases in the city, the museum is concerned with the healthy growth of young children, supporting summer programs as a method to enrich their summer.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, a new narrative of service and education had become part of the museum’s identity, even in today’s commercial marketplace of the Chinese museum.

Still, the Taiping History Museum is not impervious to the commercialization of museums in the reform era. Visitors can purchase souvenirs as a keepsake of history. But, which historical narrative does the Taiping History Museum sell today? None of the souvenirs sold on the website—the bookmarks, prints, key rings—point to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, except for the museum’s name written on the packaging.<sup>96</sup> Instead, they depict a famous calligraphic work by the Qing dynasty official, Weng Tonghe. Although visitors spend time looking at dioramas of Taiping battles and Taiping military swords in the museum exhibits

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<sup>92</sup> Dai Lu. The similarities and differences. 461.

<sup>93</sup> “□ □ □ □ ” [Academic results]. □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan*, 2014, [www.tptgmuseum.com/studyResult.html](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/studyResult.html).

<sup>94</sup> “□ □ □ □ ” [Educational activities], □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan*, 2014, [www.tptgmuseum.com/educationActivity.html](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/educationActivity.html).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “□ □ □ □ ” [Cultural and creative products], □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ *Taiping tianguo lishi bowuguan*, 2014, [www.tptgmuseum.com/wssc.html](http://www.tptgmuseum.com/wssc.html).



museum also became a site for cultural appreciation. Later, it transformed into a base for patriotic education, a travelling exhibit, a center for service work, and a commercialized tourist destination, as new political and economic currents shifted in the modern history of the People's Republic.

While top-down narratives imposed a revolutionary, Marxist interpretation on the Taiping History Museum's exhibits in Mao's China, officials at the museum knew that it was never just an exhibition hall. The museum's excavation work in Nanjing and Changshu, Peng Chong's instruction for cultural preservation, the cannon and the land deed, the designation for patriotic education, and the 3D battle animation, are all part of the same entangled narratives that imparted real meaning to the museum's space. Museums in the People's Republic of China remain robust repositories of historical memory. But, as the past itself frays into heterogeneous strands of memory, so does the museum possess multiple tangled identities at once.

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# **“To Hold the Light Steady”**

## **Foreign Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920**

**Christopher Morillo**

Despite a century characterized by global conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, the U.S. has militarily occupied Russian soil on just one occasion.<sup>98</sup> In the summer of 1918, during the Russian Civil War, American troops landed in Archangel and Vladivostok alongside other Allied forces. This paper traces the origins of these interventions in Russia to their wartime justifications, before suggesting that ideological considerations—specifically an American commitment against Bolshevism—were just as compelling in the decision to intervene. After exploring the operations of Allied involvement, I report the legacy of the interventions with a particular emphasis on Soviet politics in subsequent decades. The interventions were indeed limited in commitment and in casualties; as a result, they are often lost to the footnotes of history. Nevertheless, if a line can be drawn from these interventions to crucial developments in the growth and nature of the Soviet state, further attention is warranted.

### **Intervention in the Context of World War One**

The United States entered the First World War in April 1917. The American public was broadly supportive of intervention as necessary for future peace—“the war to end all wars.” Meanwhile, the same conflict grew increasingly unpopular in Russia. At the outbreak, Tsar Nicholas II

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<sup>98</sup> Rhodes, “The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel, 1918-1919” (1986), 387.

had hoped that war would both unify and distract the agitated public, but his hopes never manifested, given the reality of modern war. Besides killing millions, the war devastated the Russian economy by exacerbating inflation and food shortages. Discontent about the human and economic costs of the war effort forced the abdication of Nicholas II in March, 1917 and continued to hamper the domestic popularity of the successor Russian Provisional Government. Still, the Provisional Government resolved to continue the fight against Germany, an unpopular decision that opened up the path to power for the Bolsheviks. In the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks successfully overthrew the Provisional Government, promising the beleaguered Russian people an immediate end to the war.

Upon their ascension, the Bolsheviks declared a ceasefire with the Central Powers, causing the Allies to fear a stronger and more capable Germany along the Western Front.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, on March 21, 1918, just a week after signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which formalized Russia's exit from World War One, the Germans began a massive military offense westward.<sup>100</sup> Desperate to keep the German forces divided between two fronts, the Allies believed a military occupation in Russia could create a "nucleus of Allied force" around which Russians might rally and eventually reinstate the Eastern Front.<sup>101</sup> Optimistically, one British Captain hoped that "an Allied force... would at least assure Russia's millions that the Bolshevik peace was not final and that there was still hope."<sup>102</sup>

The U.S. Department of State outlined their reasons for joining the proposed Allied intervention in an aide-mémoire issued July 17, 1918.<sup>103</sup> In the document, the most prominent justification for intervention was in the

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<sup>99</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002), 58-60.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>101</sup> Proctor, "Japanese Intervention and Seizure of Archangel" (1918), Image 63 .

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., Image 77.

<sup>103</sup> Trickey, "The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War" (2019).

name of the war effort. It stated simply, “The whole heart of the people of the United States is in the winning of this war.”<sup>104</sup> Beyond reinstating the Eastern Front, the aide-mémoire wrote of the necessity of curbing German access to vital resources and military stores throughout Russia. 648,000 tons of military stores containing valuable equipment and supplies remained in Siberia.<sup>105</sup> On the other side of the country in and around Archangel, North Russia, 162,495 tons of military stores sat unprotected.<sup>106</sup> Fearing seizure by the Germans, Bolsheviks, or German-aligned Russians, the British War Cabinet proposed armed occupation as “extremely necessary to prevent the railing away of the stores and to give the Allies another foothold in Russia.”<sup>107</sup> In addition to the unprotected military stores, Allies feared the Germans would gain access to an abundance of Russian land and natural resources that might assist them defensively and ruin the efficacy of the Allied blockade.<sup>108</sup> Writing to Wilson’s Secretary of State Robert Lansing, one officer warned, “Germany hopes to control and utilize Russian resources and, if possible, Russian man-power against the Western Allies in the war.”<sup>109</sup> In particular, the Allies feared Germany’s ability to establish submarine bases across Russian ports as well as the organizing of former German and Austrian POWs within Russia.<sup>110</sup> Lansing reported the phenomenon to Wilson in March, 1918, writing that “the military prisoners in Siberia are being organized under German officers... we will have a new situation in Siberia which may cause a

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<sup>104</sup> Department of State, “Aide-Mémoire” (1918), Document 345.

<sup>105</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002), 104.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>107</sup> Wemyss, “The situation at Archangel: Admiralty memorandum for the War Cabinet” (1918), Image 36

<sup>108</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union* (1933), 25.

<sup>109</sup> Robins, “Lt. Col Raymond Robins to the Secretary of State” (1918), Document 201.

<sup>110</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union*, 104-106.

revision of our policy.”<sup>111</sup> As suggested by Lansing, Wilson’s opinion on intervention would change amidst these considerable fears.

Perhaps the most publicly offered justification for the intervention was the intended evacuation of the Czech Legion—the approximately 50,000-strong Czechoslovak volunteer corps of the Russian army turned *cause célèbre* by their determination to rejoin the fight and liberate their homeland.<sup>112</sup> Referring to the Legion, Secretary Lansing wrote, “These troops are most loyal to our cause and have been most unjustly treated by the various Soviets ought we not to consider whether something cannot be done to support them?”<sup>113</sup> Wilson agreed, and the published aide-mémoire emphasized that the Czechoslovaks deserved to be evacuated by the Allies and brought to Vladivostok to assist on the Western Front.<sup>114</sup> Because of their military fitness and opposition to the Central Powers, the Czech Legion was considered “a potential asset to the Entente in Russia.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Anti-Bolshevism and the Ideological Roots of Intervention**

In virtually all published explanations of the intervention, Wilson stressed that there was to be no interference in Russia’s internal affairs. The President prioritized the war effort as the sole cause of the intervention. There was no reference to Russia’s political system or internal conflict. At the very least, such a dichotomy obscured the fact that anti-Bolshevism was a significant component in the Allied conception of aiding the war effort.

The grandest Allied plan for reopening the Eastern Front was the ascension of an anti-Bolshevik government committed to mobilizing

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<sup>111</sup> Lansing, “The Secretary of State to President Wilson” (1918), Document 189.

<sup>112</sup> Borch, “Bolsheviks, Polar Bears, and Military Law” (1998), 184.

<sup>113</sup> Lansing, “The Secretary of State to President Wilson”, Document 199.

<sup>114</sup> Department of State, “Aide-Mémoire” (1918), Document 345.

<sup>115</sup> British War Office, General Staff, “Memorandum on the benefits of Russian intervention” (1918), Image 11.

troops, the revocation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the re-release of the “Russian Steamroller” on the teetering Germans.<sup>116</sup> Even months before the formal intervention, the U.S. and other Allies assisted anti-Bolshevik, or White, forces throughout Russia. As early as December, 1917, Secretary Lansing secured financial support to aid the British and French plan to establish an anti-Bolshevik government in southern Russia.<sup>117</sup> Regarding Siberia, President Wilson asked the Secretary to “follow very attentively what Semenov [a Russian Cossack leader] is accomplishing and whether there is any legitimate way in which we can assist.”<sup>118</sup> These plans predated the intervention but confirmed the intention of the Allies. With the formal occupation of North Russia and Siberia, the Allies believed they could more effectively prop up anti-Bolshevik warlords and provisional governments and thus renew the Eastern Front, most notably with the government of Admiral Alexander Kolchak.<sup>119</sup> Leon Trotsky summarized how the anti-Bolshevik perspective of the Allies permeated their conception of the war effort: “They want to involve Russia in the war, to create a new Eastern Front. The Soviet Power does not want this. Hence the idea of overthrowing Soviet Power.”<sup>120</sup> In addition, a strong suspicion among the allies of the Bolsheviks as “cunning false German paid” agents aided this perspective.<sup>121</sup>

The Allies also expressed a commitment against Bolshevism beyond the Bolsheviks’ relation or suspected relation to the war. Given that Allied occupation persisted long after the armistice in November, 1918, and even

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<sup>116</sup> Francis, “The Ambassador in Russia (Francis) to the Secretary of State” (1918), Document 625.

<sup>117</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations*, 80-86.

<sup>118</sup> Wilson, “President Wilson to the Secretary of State” (1918), Document 194.

<sup>119</sup> Trickey, “The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War.”

<sup>120</sup> Trotsky, “The Landing at Murmansk” (1918).

<sup>121</sup> Proctor, “Japanese Intervention and Seizure of Archangel” (1918), Image 63.

past the Treaty of Versailles the following year, a commitment to the war effort is not on its own a satisfying justification for the interventions. Instead, it seems the Allies possessed an independent commitment to overturning the Bolshevik regime, desiring instead a government that would be willing to pay back foreign debts and, more broadly, that would be willing to participate in the capitalist world order.

Financial incentives against the Bolsheviks and their policies certainly informed this commitment; Wilson had already used this justification in other foreign interventions. In 1915, President Wilson began an occupation of Haiti in order to protect American financial interests, and he looked ready to replicate the process in Russia. In January of 1918, the Bolsheviks issued a decree annulling their obligation to all foreign debts accumulated by Imperial Russia and the Provisional Government, including the 450 million dollars of credit supplied by the United States since the outbreak of war.<sup>122</sup> <sup>123</sup> Further, the Bolsheviks nationalized industry across Russia and confiscated vast amounts of private property, especially at the expense of foreign citizens and firms. Americans, for instance, filed about 400 million dollars' worth of claims related to property lost after the Russian Revolution.<sup>124</sup> In response, the Allies fruitlessly demanded that the Bolsheviks recognize Imperial Russia's debts and restore private property. Incensed at the Bolsheviks' refusal, the Allies turned to the White forces in the ongoing civil war who publicly committed to acknowledging foreign debts.<sup>125</sup>

However, financial interests were only part of a broader commitment to overturning the Bolshevik regime on an ideological basis. The Allies also feared Bolshevik sympathy and class conflict at home. In 1918, Lenin published his "Letter to American Workers," an attempt to incite general

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<sup>122</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union* (1933), 93.

<sup>123</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War*, 42.

<sup>124</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union* (1933), 103.

<sup>125</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union* (1933), 93-98.

strikes and class violence in the United States.<sup>126</sup> President Wilson would later warn, “There are apostles of Lenin in our own midst... apostles of the night, of chaos, of disorder.”<sup>127</sup> The Allies considered the Bolsheviks a threat to their governments and to capitalist development. Accordingly, the intervention was a defense of their broader economic and political ideology. Secretary Lansing would describe the Bolsheviks to Wilson as “a direct threat to the existing social order in all countries,” and it is difficult to believe that such a threat was not part of his decision to intervene.<sup>128</sup>

Historians fiercely debate Wilson’s role in the interventions.<sup>129</sup> That the President, amidst a campaign in favor of peace and self-determination, would agree to intervene in a country facing civil war is especially puzzling. To an extent, the immense influence of other actors in the decision to intervene resolves the apparent contradiction. From November of 1917 to the summer of 1918, Wilson remained opposed to intervention in Russia while the governments of Britain and France exerted increasing pressure through diplomatic channels and the Supreme War Council in hopes of ensuring an American commitment to the interventions.<sup>130</sup> Further, Wilson faced pressure from his own administration, including his Secretary of State, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, and the Ambassador of the former Provisional Government.<sup>131</sup> Lansing in particular was influential in convincing the President to intervene and prevent any attempts at negotiation between the Bolsheviks and U.S.<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile, Wilson was

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<sup>126</sup> Sibley, *Loans and Legitimacy* (1996), 20.

<sup>127</sup> Wilson, “Address at Auditorium, Billings, Mont.” (1919), 133.

<sup>128</sup> Lansing, “The Secretary of State to President Wilson” (1918), Document 178.

<sup>129</sup> Trani, “Woodrow Wilson and the Decision to Intervene in Russia: A Reconsideration” (1976), 440-5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>131</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002), 90-100.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

preoccupied with his strategy on the Western Front, so it is possible he simply caved to the immense pressure from the Allies and his staff.

However, Wilson also seems to have persuaded himself that there existed no contradiction between the interventions and his principles of self-determination. Crucially, Wilson questioned the democratic legitimacy of the Bolshevik regime. Secretary Lansing made an effort to portray this to the President, arguing in January of 1918, “by what authority the Bolsheviks assume the right to speak for the Russian people... They seized the Government at Petrograd by force.”<sup>133</sup> It seems that Wilson agreed with this portrayal. Speaking to the American public in Des Moines, he referred to the Bolsheviks as “a little group of men just as selfish, as ruthless, just as pitiless, as the agents of the Czar himself who assumed control and exercised their power by terror and not by right.”<sup>134</sup> Stressing that the Bolsheviks were merely temporary, false, and brutal representatives of Russia, Wilson conceived of intervention as legitimate and even in assistance of Russian self-determination.<sup>135</sup> British General Frederick Poole, who commanded the North Russian intervention, would later frame this explicitly as an ideological duty to the Russian people. “To hold the light steady until they find themselves,” Poole wrote to Secretary Lansing, “that is now the task of nations which like ourselves are so fortunate as to have acquired capacity for peaceful orderly adjustment of their political institution to progress of age.”<sup>136</sup>

Finally, in placing limitations on the range and size of the intervention, Wilson believed he could avoid any serious violation of the autonomy of the Russian people. Going “no further than these modest and experimental plans” around a few Russian ports as presented in the aide-

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<sup>133</sup> Lansing, “The Secretary of State to President Wilson” (1918), Document 178.

<sup>134</sup> Wilson, “Address at Des Moines, Iowa” (1919), 60.

<sup>135</sup> Department of State, “Aide-Mémoire” (1918), Document 345.

<sup>136</sup> Poole, “The Chargé in Russia (Poole) to the Secretary of State” (1918), Document 689.

mémoire, Wilson hoped the intervention would not be a “method of making use of Russia” but “a method of serving her.”<sup>137</sup> However, most of Wilson’s intended limitations—even if made in earnest—would not be respected. By the end of 1918, American troops had decisively involved themselves in the internal affairs of Russia, including direct combat with Trotsky’s Red Army.<sup>138</sup>

### **I. Polar Bears and Siberian Rail Guards: The Beginnings and Operations of the Interventions**

In July of 1918, after months of refusal, Wilson agreed to send troops to North Russia. They would arrive in Archangel over the remainder of the summer. A total of about 4,500 troops constituted the American Expeditionary Force North Russia or, as they preferred, the Polar Bear Expedition.<sup>139</sup> Most of the men were members of “Detroit’s Own” 339th Infantry Regiment, as it was suspected they might be familiar with the Arctic climate.<sup>140</sup> Despite Wilson’s public intentions, including that his troops remain at the ports and avoid direct interference in the civil war, the Polar Bears were under the command of British General Poole. Poole, who had occupied Murmansk north of Archangel since May, considered the defeat of the Red Army a central component of the intervention, as did many other British leaders. Besides ignoring Wilson’s orders, the British severely underestimated the capabilities of the Bolsheviks.<sup>141</sup> Captain Alex Proctor reported to Britain’s War Cabinet that the “Bolshevik Red Guards

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<sup>137</sup> Department of State, “Aide-Mémoire” (1918), Document 345.

<sup>138</sup> Trickey, “The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War” (2019).

<sup>139</sup> Rhodes, “The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel, 1918-1919” (1986), 371.

<sup>140</sup> Trickey, “The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War” (2019).

<sup>141</sup> Rhodes, “The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel, 1918-1919” (1986), 368-375.

or so-called ‘troops’ are cowardly beyond belief and utterly incapable of offering any resistance to disciplined troops.”<sup>142</sup> Acting on this expectation, by the fall of 1918, Poole had brought the Allied forces deep into Russia and toward Petrograd, 400 miles from where they had landed.<sup>143</sup> He also aided the Whites in establishing the Supreme Administration of the Northern Region, an anti-Bolshevik provisional government under Nicolai Chaikovski.<sup>144</sup>

To an extent, the intervention in Siberia was more consistent with Wilson’s stated limitations. Under the command of American General William S. Graves, the 10,000 American soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force Siberia landed in Vladivostok in September, 1918.<sup>145</sup> Instead of engaging in direct combat with the Red Army, around half of the troops were to remain in Vladivostok while the other half assumed control of significant parts of the Trans-Siberian Railway.<sup>146</sup> In doing so, they were to evacuate the Czech Legion, who had controlled the railways since June, assist them to Vladivostok, and eventually relocate them to the Western Front. However, by the time American troops landed in Siberia, the war was coming to a close in Europe and there was thus less of an incentive to quickly evacuate the Czechoslovakians. As a result, the intervention in Siberia shifted to maintaining and defending the railways with the help of the Czechoslovaks rather than aiding in their evacuation.<sup>147</sup> Trotsky would write, “the Trans-Siberian Railway has ceased to be Siberian, it has become foreign.”<sup>148</sup> At least in regard to the Czech Legion, the Allied

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<sup>142</sup> Proctor, “Japanese Intervention and Seizure of Archangel” (1918), Image 62.

<sup>143</sup> Borch, “Bolsheviks, Polar Bears, and Military Law” (1998), 184.

<sup>144</sup> Rhodes, “The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel,” 368-373.

<sup>145</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002), 177.

<sup>146</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union*, 121-22.

<sup>147</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002), 178.

<sup>148</sup> Trotsky, “Behind the Smokescreen” (1919).

intervention in Siberia seems to have strayed from Wilson's expressed limitations.

One reason for the Siberian intervention's continuation was the roughly 72,000 Japanese troops who entered Siberia via Vladivostok.<sup>149</sup> The removal of other Allied forces threatened to open the path to Japanese domination of the region. In a letter to the U.S. Ambassador in Japan in December 1918, Acting Secretary of State Polk warned that "exclusive military control is being taken advantage of to enable Japanese merchants and Japanese capital to be established to the exclusion of other foreign merchants and capital."<sup>150</sup> The Allies believed their presence in the region was necessary to balance the military and economic presence of Japan.

Additionally, control of the railways became a crucial component of the Allied interventions in its own right, especially when viewed in conjunction with the aid and supplies dispersed around Russia and to the Whites. As early as December 1917, Britain and France had aided anti-Bolshevik warlords in Southern Russia with financial assistance from the United States.<sup>151</sup> By the end of 1918, the Allies rallied around Admiral Alexander Kolchak, who declared the Provisional All-Russian Government centered in Siberia. Promising to recognize foreign debts and establish democracy, Kolchak secured machine guns, ammunition, airplanes, and tanks from the U.S. and the other Allies.<sup>152</sup> The U.S. provided this aid in secret, using the Russian Embassy as a channel rather than Congress, and maintained that the intervention was unrelated to Kolchak.<sup>153</sup> However, the Allied "neutral" control of the Trans-Siberian Railway was clearly to

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<sup>149</sup> Trickey, "The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War" (2019).

<sup>150</sup> Polk, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Japan (Morris)" (1918), Document 562.

<sup>151</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002), 80-86.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>153</sup> Les Lecture 2/25/2020.

Kolchak's benefit. The Railway would allow Kolchak's army to unite with White forces and resources across Russia.<sup>154</sup> With a blockade against the Bolsheviks and simultaneous control of the trains, the Allies hoped to starve the Reds of the aid and resources that might otherwise assist them against Kolchak. For the next year, the Allies maintained faith that Kolchak would soon occupy Moscow, though he never came close.<sup>155</sup>

## II. The Red Tide Turns

Throughout the remainder of 1918, the Allies engaged in frequent combat with Red Army forces. As winter approached and the weather worsened, the Allied position grew weaker because the Bolsheviks not only outnumbered the Allies but also were more adept at fighting in Arctic conditions and terrain.<sup>156</sup> In January of 1919, the Bolsheviks successfully prevented the linkage of the Whites in the East to the anti-Bolsheviks in the North. Moreover, they launched offensives on these fronts, forcing the Allies and Whites to retreat.<sup>157</sup> Even beyond the successes of the Red Army, the conditions in Russia worsened for the Allies.

During the winter, Admiral Kolchak declared a dictatorship and overthrew the Provisional All-Russian Government. For Kolchak, the rest of 1919 would be characterized by military failures and a loss of public support amongst even those opposed to the Bolsheviks.<sup>158</sup> During the summer, General Graves visited the Admiral in Omsk to find his government entirely lacking in the support of the civilian population as well

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<sup>154</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War*, 178-180.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>156</sup> Rhodes, "The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel," 373.

<sup>157</sup> Trickey, "The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War" (2019).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

as any semblance of professionalism or democracy.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, there were reports of mass murders and rapes undertaken by Kolchak's army and other White warlords.<sup>160</sup> The Czech Legion and Allied soldiers found it increasingly difficult to associate with Kolchak as well as other anti-Bolshevik warlords and their soldiers. As 1919 came to a close, Secretary Lansing was defeated, reporting, "the Kolchak Government has utterly collapsed; the armies of the Bolsheviki have advanced into Eastern Siberia... the people seem to prefer them to the officers of the Kolchak regime."<sup>161</sup>

Beyond the effect of Kolchak's coup, the Allied forces were demoralized and tired as the war ended in the rest of Europe. In a telegram dated November 1918, General Poole expressed his fear that the "signing of the armistice has created some uncertainty among American and French troops... The reasons heretofore assigned for their presence in North Russia no longer seem valid to them."<sup>162</sup> The Czechs in particular were unwilling to continue fighting on the other side of the world from their newly-liberated homeland. Additionally, the Bolsheviks tried to exploit the low morale, creating propaganda that targeted Allied soldiers. Trotsky admitted to "supplying information about the events in Austria-Hungary, about Bohemia having gained independence... [so that] every Czechoslovak understands and knows."<sup>163</sup> Further, Trotsky often published statements directed specifically to the foreign troops, writing in April, "Your situation is becoming more and more difficult. The British and American presses speak openly about the hopeless situation that the Archangel expedition is in... Your governments have thrown you into the

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<sup>159</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War*, 179.

<sup>160</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union*, 123-24.

<sup>161</sup> Lansing, "The Secretary of State to President Wilson" (1919), Document 222.

<sup>162</sup> Poole, "The Chargé in Russia (Poole) to the Secretary of State" (1918), Document 682.

<sup>163</sup> Trotsky, "The Military Situation" (1918).

cold North and then halted in a state of indecision.”<sup>164</sup> Amidst demoralization from multiple fronts, discipline collapsed, and there were even reports of mutiny among Allied forces. An entire regiment of conscripted Russian soldiers refused to leave their barracks. At the request of the Allies, the ringleaders of the mutiny were executed.<sup>165</sup> Still, the event devastated American morale as it signaled the resignation of those who were meant, according to President Wilson, to bear the brunt of combat. On March 30, 1919, the men of “Detroit’s Own” 339th U.S. Infantry refused to proceed to the front. Though they eventually yielded, this would be a deciding episode encouraging U.S. withdrawal.<sup>166</sup>

In light of the reported conditions and mutinies of the soldiers, public support for the interventions disappeared. Congressional leaders demanded a justification for the continued American presence in Russia, but Wilson consistently avoided the topic. In a particularly critical speech on the Senate floor, Senator Hiram Johnson demanded, “What is the policy of our Nation toward Russia? I do not know our policy, and I know no other man who knows our policy. I do know we are killing Russians, and they, when they can, are killing ours.”<sup>167</sup> Later, a Senate resolution against the intervention failed by just one vote, but the condemnation of the media and general public continued to intensify.<sup>168</sup>

Given military failure, fervent criticism, and his own initial judgment, Wilson announced in the spring of 1919 that he intended to have the American troops out of North Russia by June.<sup>169</sup> The U.S. ordered the withdrawal of troops in Siberia in December of that year, with troops

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<sup>164</sup> Trotsky, “To the Foreign Soldiers in North Russia” (1919).

<sup>165</sup> Poole, “The Chargé in Russia...”, Document 693.

<sup>166</sup> Rhodes, “The Anglo-American Intervention at Archangel,” 385.

<sup>167</sup> Johnson, “Affairs in Russia” (1918), 345.

<sup>168</sup> Trickey, “The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War” (2019).

<sup>169</sup> Bok, *The United States and The Soviet Union* (1933), 120.

exiting via Vladivostok throughout the following spring.<sup>170</sup> Britain maintained forces for months after the American withdrawal, but by February of 1920, the Red Army had won decisive control of the vast majority of Russia. The interventions had failed to overthrow the Bolshevik government, but they contributed to a longer and more brutal Russian Civil War, one that resulted in the deaths of millions of Russian civilians.<sup>171</sup>

Some historians consider these events part of “the first cold war.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed, the ideological divide often associated with the Cold War also characterized American-Soviet relations during and immediately following the interventions. In 1920, Wilson’s new Secretary of State, Bainbridge Colby, outlined the U.S. position on Russia in a famous memorandum: “In the view of this Government, there cannot be any common ground upon which it can stand with a Power whose conceptions of international relations are so entirely alien to its own, so utterly repugnant to its moral sense.”<sup>173</sup> The context of the interventions helps make sense of Colby’s position, setting the stage for the next thirteen years, in which the U.S. refused to recognize the Soviet Union, placed a ban on Soviet gold, and allowed firms to trade with the Bolsheviks only at their own risk.<sup>174</sup>

### **I. The Legacy of Foreign Intervention in Bolshevik Policy and Decision-Making**

For the Bolsheviks, the most immediate effect of the interventions was a total repudiation of trust in the United States and the West. After first learning of Allied forces landing in North Russia, Trotsky declared,

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>171</sup> Trickey, “The Forgotten Story of the American Troops Who Got Caught Up in the Russian Civil War” (2019).

<sup>172</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S. Soviet Relations* (2002).

<sup>173</sup> Colby, “Episode 1.”

<sup>174</sup> Davis and Trani, *The First Cold War*, 175-180.

“We cannot regard interference from the Allied imperialists in any other light than as a hostile attempt on the freedom and independence of Soviet Russia.”<sup>175</sup> From their perspective, the Allied intervention was the quintessential counterrevolutionary threat predicted in communist writings that suggested foreign countries were driven by capital to destroy any semblance of socialism. During the civil war, Bolshevik propaganda made use of this threat to justify their ideology as well as the wartime sacrifices they demanded of the Russian people. Entrenched in the Soviet psyche, the interventions would continue to be cited as justifications for the increasingly authoritarian measures that would characterize the next decades of Bolshevik rule, including Stalinism.

First, the interventions contributed to the militarization of the Bolshevik state, including the growing size and power of the Red Army. In the resolution in which the Bolsheviks established their Red Army, they referred specifically to the Allied threat, stating, “The Soviet Republic needs a strong revolutionary army, capable of... giving a rebuff to the onslaught of the imperialist predators.”<sup>176</sup> The army, as suggested, was to be especially powerful and disciplined in order to defeat the foreign invasion. Accordingly, the Bolsheviks referred to the Allied intervention as justification for militarized policies, including mandatory conscription, an “iron revolutionary discipline,” and the establishment of “Soviet organs of local military administration.”<sup>177</sup> In 1918, for instance, the Bolsheviks called for mandatory conscription with the specific warrant: “to repulse counter-revolution, both domestic and external.”<sup>178</sup>

Such militarization reached its apogee in later regimes. Even as late as 1941, Stalin explicitly invoked the “foreign military interventions” of the

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<sup>175</sup> Trotsky, “Toward Intervention” (1918).

<sup>176</sup> Fifth Congress of Soviets, “Resolution on the Report on Creating the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army” (1918).

<sup>177</sup> Trotsky, “Soviet Resolution on Military Matters” (1918).

<sup>178</sup> All-Russia Central Executive Committee, “Reinstitution of the Draft” (1918).

civil war in an order calling for the expansion of the military and state machine.<sup>179</sup> Later in his life, Leon Trotsky—who commanded the Red Army from 1918 to 1925—would trace the developments of the Red Army during the civil war to its eventual status as one of the most influential elements of the Party and as an effective tool of social control, even outside of wartime. After the civil war concluded, Trotsky argued that the Red Army began to militarize all components of Soviet bureaucracy and wrote that “in the local Soviets, in economy, in education,” Red Army commanders “persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war.”<sup>180</sup> As the military arm of the Party brought the entire bureaucratic system under its oversight, “the masses” possessed less of an ability to participate in the leadership of their country. For Trotsky, this was the crucial point at which the revolution was “betrayed.” Indeed, in 1936, the new Soviet Constitution would use the notion of “capitalist encirclement” to justify the presence and growing size of the state and its army, decidedly abandoning the ideological commitment to a stateless society.<sup>181</sup>

Second, beyond militarized power, the Bolsheviks instituted authoritarian policies with the justification that such policies were necessary to cope with the conditions of the civil war and especially with foreign intervention. Trotsky issued a warning in July of 1918, stating, “Anyone who sells himself to the foreign imperialists in order to take parts in revolts or in the occupation of Russian territory will be punished by death.” The Bolsheviks quickly began to associate internal dissent with the intervening foreign governments and utilized such an association to justify increased restrictions and repression. In the fall of 1918, the Bolsheviks formally accused competing parties, both the Left and Right Socialist

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<sup>179</sup> Supreme Soviet USSR, “Political Administration of the Red Army” (1941).

<sup>180</sup> Trotsky, “The Revolution Betrayed” (1937).

<sup>181</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (2017), 156.

Revolutionaries, of conspiring with the imperialists.<sup>182</sup> Trotsky specifically referred to Admiral Kolchak and his foreign support to discredit the Socialist Revolutionaries, who had supported Kolchak, and to gain support for limitations on the freedoms of speech and press, including the creation of the Cheka (the Bolshevik secret police) and its early “Red Terror.”<sup>183</sup> On September 4, 1918, the Bolsheviks ordered the mass arrests and murder of thousands of political enemies, foreshadowing the Great Purge that would occur twenty years later.<sup>184</sup>

The tools of repression established during this period—as well as the justifications for such repression—persisted for decades. The Cheka, established during the civil war, was the direct predecessor of the infamous NKVD and eventually the KGB.<sup>185</sup> So too continued the association of foreign actors with internal dissent. In his famous article, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” George Kennan would summarize this phenomenon: “all internal opposition forces... have consistently been portrayed as the agents of foreign forces of reaction antagonistic to Soviet Power.”<sup>186</sup> Indeed, in 1924, Stalin defended his “organs of suppression,” including the secret police, on the grounds that they were a necessary response to “capitalistic encirclement.”<sup>187</sup> The latter phrase referred to more than particular Allied interventions; instead, it recognized the broader fact that the Soviets were virtually alone and encircled in a capitalist world. The interventions of the civil war seemingly provided proof of such an existential threat. Throughout his infamous purges the following decade, Stalin regularly invoked the threat of Allied intervention, specifically foreign invasion and elements of foreign intelligence, to justify mass arrests and executions.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Trotsky, “The Military Situation” (1918).

<sup>183</sup> Trotsky, “Freedom of the Press” (1922).

<sup>184</sup> “Order for Intensified Red Terror” (1918).

<sup>185</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (2017), 166.

<sup>186</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (1947).

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (2017), 166.

The legacy of the interventions thus lingered in the Soviet psyche through two key beliefs. First, the threat of invasion and encirclement contributed to a pervasive belief in the necessity of wartime measures and personal sacrifice, including the curtailing of civil liberties and living standards for the greater good. “With the concentrated fury of world imperialism, which has turned its Anglo-French and Japano-American face toward us,” Trotsky stated in 1918, “we are obliged to transform the soviet Republic into one single armed camp, and all our resources, all our forces, everything the country possesses, and the personal possessions of each individual citizen and citizeness must be devoted to the defense of the Soviet Republic.”<sup>189</sup> Secondly, the Allied interventions strengthened the notion that the world was divided into inherent enemies and inherent friends. To the Bolsheviks, the interventions signaled the inherently antagonistic nature of the West as well as their ubiquity as a counterrevolutionary threat. Emboldened by propaganda, both of these beliefs were instrumental in designing and popularizing Soviet policy for the next decades, including Stalin’s purges and Five-Year Plans, both of which called for massive personal sacrifice in the name of the growth and defense of the state.<sup>190</sup>

## **I. Conclusion**

Wilson and other Allied leaders characterized these interventions as in the best interests of Russian self-determination—as General Poole would say, there was a duty “to hold the light steady” for the Russian people, assisting them in establishing an ideologically legitimate and democratic government.<sup>191</sup> However, there are reasons to doubt the

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<sup>189</sup> Trotsky, “Before the Capture of Kazan” (1918).

<sup>190</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (2017), 131-136.

<sup>191</sup> Poole, “The Chargé in Russia (Poole) to the Secretary of State” (1918), Document 689.

earnestness of this intention in light of the operations of the interventions, including the funding and military aid supplied to anti-Bolshevik warlords. Regardless of intention, the interventions did not facilitate democracy and the liberation of the Russian people. Fraught international relations at the hands of a global capitalist regime, including military occupation, assisted in provoking decades of authoritarianism in the Soviet Union. The interventions remained embedded in the Soviet psyche as the quintessential manifestation of “capitalist encirclement,” thus contributing to the asserted necessity of various repressive and militarized state policies.

That elements of Stalinism might be traced to the foreign interventions in the Russian Civil War is a weighty historiographical argument with significant implications. In American discourse, it is often asserted that authoritarianism is the inherent telos of any socialist ideology, with Stalin and the leaders and former leaders of other socialist states as convenient examples of this phenomenon. This paper disputes such an inherent correlation between socialism and authoritarianism, shedding light on how specific historical events affected the development of the Soviet state, including military interventions from the United States. These interventions, too often forgotten, remind us that the conditions in these regimes are rarely inherent and that responsibility for them is multifaceted.

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# American Otherworlds

## Myths and Monsters of the Frontier

**Douglas Palumbo**

As the Latin words “Terra Incognita” came to define the American continent, America’s frontier remains intrinsically tied to ancient notions of the exotic that emerge dynamically from the fringes of known society. Depending on where these imaginary frontiers were placed, either resting alongside an unexplored American West or projected onto celestial bodies and subterranean worlds, they inadvertently alluded to and directly evoked the realms of the Roman Pliny’s Cynocephaly and the Phoenician Hanno’s Troglodytes.<sup>192</sup> In its colonial era, America was the “other-world”; it was a Terranova created by European intellectuals, such as Hernandez, Columbus, and Oviedo, drawn from a collective cultural tradition of defining monstrous borders in order to directly compare themselves to scholars of the ancient past. As the United States grew to nationhood, America sought out an array of fabricated “New Worlds” intrinsically tied to scientific and religious nationalism, subsequently preserving this Western tradition of defining civilized society against alien soil. With the closing of America’s real Western frontier—a physical symbol of America’s exotic border—nostalgia for this explorative past would reconstruct these fantasylands into distinctly American myths of the paranormal. These frontiers, with monstrous peoples, unprecedented resources, and fantastical descriptions, were as adaptive to the prospects of American popular consciousness as they were necessarily sensational, defined by America’s scientific, literary, and political communities for the same reason ancient

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<sup>192</sup> Pliny The Elder, “Cynocephali,” Translated by Project Gutenberg, (Accessed October 26, 2020).

societies conceived them: to separate the known from the unknown and the nation from the wild.

### **I. Frontier Dialogues: A Historiography on American Mythmaking and Folklore**

Despite the many nuanced histories that explore America's unique relationship with the ancient past and dissect the nature of the United States' mythmaking, this paper explores the consistent historical dialogue between how Americans defined themselves against and associated with ancient frontiers and offers an extra layer of depth in understanding the formation of unique American national and folk identities. As such, this paper stands on a solid foundation of scholarship, from Kurt Andersen's *Fantasyland* (2017), which grounded this work in an analysis of America mythmaking particularly useful in categorizing the fiction of the American Wild West, to Scott Poole's *Monsters in America* (2018), which added political, scientific, and racial context to the development of the American paranormal in late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>193,194</sup> Articles such as Broedel's and Byer's "Monsters and Borders in the Early Imagination" (2018), provided a critical basis in understanding the evolution of the American colonial mindset from an Early Modern European identity linked to medieval, biblical, and classical thought. These provided an effective foundation for J.L. Hilton's "Lucian and the Great Moon Hoax of 1835" (2012), which explored its titular event of fabricated extraterrestrial worlds and the literary circuit of the early nineteenth century in relation to ancient

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<sup>193</sup> Kurt Andersen, *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: a 500-Year History*, (London: Ebury Press, an imprint of Ebury Publishing., 2017).

<sup>194</sup> W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018).

dialogues.<sup>195,196</sup> As each of these histories captured a different moment of American reckoning with a fictional borderland, I supplemented these works with a variety of primary accounts such as the oral traditions of eighteenth century loggers and voyagers (1720-1860), Adam Seaborn's *Symzonia* (1820), various publications of *The New York Sun* (1835), William T. Cox's *Fearsome Creatures of The Lumberwoods* (1910), Charles Fort's *Lo!* (1931), and Fredrick Jackson Turner's *Frontier Thesis* (1893), which demonstrated a non-singular exploration of speculative frontiers. Investigations into such spaces reveal contradictory evocations of antiquity and the monstrous suggesting that American boundaries were dynamically defined.

## II. The "Brave New World:" Early Modern Perceptions of Monstrous America

The discovery of the Americas by the Europeans in 1492 coincided with a realignment of intellectual discourse surrounding classical texts. This ultimately precipitated a colonial mindset that viewed the New World as a successor to ancient frontiers, thereby associating colonial intellectuals with ancient intellectuals. As historian Peter Dear wrote in his work, *Revolutionizing the Sciences*, eight years after the discovery of the Americas, "Europeans were looking outwards on a world that no longer corresponded to the classical geography found in much-reprinted standard ancient text."<sup>197</sup> In examining how Early Modern explorers both defined the nations, flora, and fauna of the New World through the context of ancient ideas on exploration and perceived America as a frontier beyond ancient knowledge, one may directly trace discussions of the American

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<sup>195</sup> J. Byars, (Ed.) H. and Broedel, (Ed.), *Monsters and Borders in the Early Modern Imagination*, (New York: Routledge: 2018).

<sup>196</sup> J.I. Hilton, "Lucian And The Great Moon Hoax Of 1835," *Akroterion* 50 (2012).

<sup>197</sup> Peter Dear, *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge in Transition, 1500-1700*, (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), 8.

continents to dialogues of the monstrous. Recontextualizing the discovery of the New World within these dialogues reveals how European colonialization was tied to a popular demand, based in early scientific sensationalism that rested on echoing the ancient past and unearthing the exotic.

With the crossing of the Torrid Zone by Columbus and his contemporaries and the discovery of new continents, stars, and peoples, the Europeans were forced to reckon with the fact that ancient wisdom could not be universally applied to their growing world. As such, America presented itself as a literal alien realm. If Pliny's and Aelian's frontier was set amidst snake-worshipping cults, dog-headed cannibals, and one-legged dwarves, what monstrosities could have existed in the new frontiers outside of their perceptions?<sup>198</sup> Such thoughts presented Terranova as a unique opportunity to surpass ancient wisdom and apply classical tradition to novel surroundings. In the emerging American colonies, this ideology is perhaps no more evident than in the publications of the Spanish naturalist Doctor Francisco Hernandez de Toledo. A court physician of King Phillip II, Hernandez was sent to the New World to record the biology and uses of over 3,000 species of flora and fauna in Spain's unexplored continental frontier. It was no coincidence that Hernandez was chosen for this task after his rise in academic prominence due to his integral translation of thirty-six volumes of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.<sup>199</sup> Yet Hernandez did not intend to replicate the works of the ancient, but rather, to surpass it. As the doctor studied in the Americas, his botanical compendiums were written in both Latin, the tongue of the old world, and Nahuatl, the language of the indigenous communities of the New World who worked with him.

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<sup>198</sup> Kim Zarins, "Medieval MONSTERS," *Calliope* 18, no. 3 (November 2007).

<sup>199</sup> Simon Varey, ed. "The Instructions of Philip II to Dr. Francisco Hernandez," *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr Francisco Hernández*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

These texts described the agricultural promise of tomatoes, the richness of cocoa, the restorative properties of tobacco for the lungs, and the ability of chili peppers to cure poor eyesight with the same earnestness. Although Hernandez's work was in part scientific, based off of the oral knowledge and traditions of Central America's indigenous inhabitants, it was also sensational, as the scientist could only continue his research with funding from the Spanish King, who would, only invest in a New World exotic enough to hold his attention. As Hernandez's contemporaries hailed him as the "New Pliny," the Americas were categorized as part of a fantastic and wild unknown – one that eluded ancient knowledge with boundless potential for the unexplained, collapsing the boundary between the mundane and the impossible.<sup>200</sup>

Ancient voices not only labeled the New World under the guise of novelty, but also under monstrosity as well, as Early Modern science sought to alienate the people of the Americas from those of Europe. In his work "New World, New Stars," historian Jorge Esguerra focused on how the explorer Fendandez Oviedo evoked Hippocratic-Galenic physiology to denounce the people of the New World as "shy and cowards." He cited the Early Modern medicinal beliefs in astrological influence on humors to suggest that men born under the constellation of the Southern Cross "were condemned to toil and suffer."<sup>201</sup> As Oviedo's ideas were carried back to Spain in his book *La Natural Hystoria de las Indias*, the explorer spoke to an audience of Spanish elite, who were fearful of financing a separatist venture more powerful than their motherland.<sup>202</sup> As such, his work served to both reaffirm ideas surrounding European superiority and justify a destined immorality for what would become the encomienda system of the New

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<sup>200</sup> Varey, "Dr. Francisco Hernandez," 1.

<sup>201</sup> Jorge Cañizares Esguerra, "New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 33-68.

<sup>202</sup> Esguerra, "New World, New Stars," 46.

World by reinforcing an innate monstrosity to “Terra Incognita.”

Historian Elena Daniele traced how similar sentiments existed throughout the contradictory letters of Christopher Columbus, who wrote both that he had “so far found no human freaks” and extensively described America’s “Cannibals, Amazons,... and hairless men and an abundance of gold.”<sup>203</sup> Indeed, it is revealing that Columbus’s descriptions of the inhabitants of Matinino parallel ancient accounts of Amazonian women down to the records of bow and arrow weaponry and a rejection of the “feminine arts.”<sup>204</sup> While Daniele speculated whether such descriptions were added by Columbus as he embellished his travels or precipitated from rumors and editorialization, it is unmistakable that ancient ideas regarding outside worlds were evoked to separate Europeans from the foreign. The ideologies that permeated both Columbus’s and Oviedo’s writings culminated in the Valladolid Debates, where Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda evoked biblical scripture, Aristotelian moral philosophy, and the works of Pliny and Plato to justify whether the Amerindian inhabitants of the New World were rational beings capable of civilization or beasts whose dispositions had been predicted by alien stars.<sup>205</sup> All of these sources centered on the rationality, or monstrosity, of the people of the Americas, but even so, each argument was rooted in a subtext that “monstrous” bodies were formed under alien environments—contextualizing colonial America within the backdrop of an environmental “other.”

Depictions of a literally monstrous America were most visible in the emerging Spanish and Portuguese Empires, as they were the main European actors in the North American Atlantic sphere. These earlier

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<sup>203</sup> Elena Daniele, “Columbus's Monsters: Monsters and Borders in the Early Modern Imagination,” (Taylor & Francis Group: June 14, 2018), 117.

<sup>204</sup> Christopher Columbus, *The Journal*. Edited by Paolo Emilio Taviani and Consuelo Varela. Nuova Raccolta Colombiana. Vol. 1–1. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1992.

<sup>205</sup> Esguerra, “New World, New Stars,” 49.

Iberian ideologies on the monstrous inspired England to place ancient otherworlds within its colonial frontier. As William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* met broad success on the English stage, it is notable that the bard set his castaway comedy on an island in the Atlantic, where the magus Prospero commanded unnegotiable spirits of nature and monstrous half-men by contemplating ancient texts.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, Shakespeare scholar Robert E. Fleesser traced the etymology of Caliban to the word "Caribs," one of the cannibal tribes Columbus recorded in his letters back to Spain.<sup>207</sup> As such, the ideas Columbus and his contemporaries shared regarding the New World diffused beyond their Iberian empires and directly influenced later English popular culture.

During the eighteenth century, these ideologies surrounding monstrous Euro-American frontiers were highlighted in the oral traditions of French-Canadian voyagers, whose European folk beliefs synergized with Native Algonquin legends to create an obscure but evocative mythology of wild-men, cannibals, and "windigos." As Carolyn Podruchny wrote in her article "Werewolves and Windigos," "stories about cannibal monsters provided an intriguing point of cultural conjunction between French-Canadians and Algonquian speakers."<sup>208</sup> Podruchny referred to the scholar Frank Lestringant, who traced these syncretic myths "from Pliny and Solinus to St Augustine and thence into Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*... with the Blemmyes, [and] the Panoti,... Artabites, the Satyres..., the legendarily long-lived Macrobes and the Pygmies."<sup>209</sup> In this way, indigenous mythologies and folklore interacted with European monsters of antiquity and, in some instances of Algonquian or Metis communities,

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<sup>206</sup> Charles Frey, "The Tempest and the New World," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, (Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>207</sup> Robert F. Fleissner (2013), Caliban's Name and the "Brave New World," *Journal of Onomastics* 295-298.

<sup>208</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, "Werewolves and Windigos: Narratives of Cannibal Monsters in French-Canadian Voyageur Oral Tradition." *Ethnohistory* 51, no. 4 (2004): 677-700.

<sup>209</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, "Werewolves and Windigos," 680.

defined this otherworld as beyond their familiar tribal lands. At the same time, from a European perspective, these interactions reinforced the conception of a 'foreign' New World that held not only revised versions of ancient beasts but also entirely novel monstrous races unique to American thought. This syncretic mythology was formed in a broth of Early Modern notions of American otherworlds, and, like their more educated contemporaries, the frontiersmen of the New World placed the demons of the ancient past in the fringes of America.

### **I.Nation and the Monster-Lands: Defining American Identity in The Nineteenth Century**

Even as a syncretic folklore tied to ancient monstrosity emerged along the American frontier, singular Anglo-American myths that paralleled the independence and rise of the United States challenged perceptions of America as an otherworld, instead mapping out stranger, fictitious worlds that the new nation sought to explore. As Benjamin Rush wrote, "We shall never equal the sublime and original authors of antiquity until we cease to study them," one may see how early Americans maintained the necessity of "surpassing" ancient wisdom.<sup>210</sup> This perception was now held by the inhabitants of the former Terranova, and while many Americans still treated the frontier as a wild otherworld, those who characterized America as a normalized western society were forced to look for their own "New Worlds" in the Americas, as the Europeans and ancients did before them. Ironically, these notions developed during the same periods that other Western powers defined "exotic worlds" within tangible places such as Africa and the Middle East through colonial

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<sup>210</sup> Benjamin Rush, "Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical by Benjamin Rush, M.D. and Professor of the Institutes of Medicine and Clinical Practice in the University of Pennsylvania," August 24, 1791, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N25938.0001.001/1:5.3?rgn=div2%3Bview>.

exploitation and travel literature. Yet, even as American exoticism paralleled the motives of its European counterparts, the lands they distinguished themselves from were twice as sensational, as America would need to overcome its own legacy as a monstrous frontier.

In 1818, during the presidency of James Monroe, former U.S. cavalry captain John Cleves Symmes, Jr. published an article entitled “Circular Number 1” along with a certificate validating the prospective explorer’s sanity: “I declare the earth is hollow and habitable within; containing a number of solid concentrick spheres, one within the other, . . . and am ready to explore the hollow, if the world will support and aid me in the undertaking.”<sup>211</sup> While Symmes was unable to convince Congress for financial backing, he was able to draw the interest of then-Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, who personally funded the expedition. Though Adams was ridiculed for his personal interest in and support for such an ambitious venture, his notions of discovery rested alongside an American precedent. Before Adams, Thomas Jefferson sought “to procure one or more entire skeletons of the Mammoth, so called, and of such other unknown animals as either have been, or *hereafter may be discovered* in America.”<sup>212</sup> Jefferson’s ambition to discover new and extinct species within the New World was as tied to perceptions of America as an unknown frontier realm as it was a means to protect American pride from popular European ideas on American biological inferiority.

These ideas were best portrayed by the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, whose scientific thought was built on Oviedo’s Early Modern classifications of the Americas as a regressive continent, as he wrote that animals such as the “dogs of the New World were ‘absolutely

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<sup>211</sup> Michelle Kathryn Yost, “American Hollow Earth Narratives from the 1820s to 1920,” 2014.

<sup>212</sup> “Isolated Molars of Mastodon,” Monticello, (1807), Retrieved October 26, 2020, from <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/isolated-molars-mastodon>.

dumb,' 'perfectly mute,' and in cold regions 'they have decreased in size.... Thus, they have degenerated.'"<sup>213</sup> Jefferson's interest in mastodons and fictional border realms, reached beyond early paleontology and into a nationalistic natural history that defined America as a realm ripe for discovery and Americans as those destined to explore it. In Adam's personal diaries, the president wrote of his desire for Americans to be the first to reach the North Pole, and Symmes's own writings immediately tied national pride to his expedition, implying that the nation must once again break the frontier of a New World.<sup>214</sup> The crux of these arguments for American civility rested in denouncing old notions of environmental monstrosity, yet the methods early Americans used to defend their sophistication rested in defining themselves against a further monstrous land precipitating into sensationalism and fantasy.

Symmes's nationalistic, pseudo-scientific, and religious rhetoric, existed as a continuity of American thought. As the historian Conway Zirkle points out in his article, "The Theory of Concentric Spheres," Symmes's exploration strongly reflected the early American Puritan Cotton Mather's ideas on concentric worlds in the *Of Magnetism* chapter of Mather's 1721 work *The Christian Philosopher*.<sup>215</sup> Zirkle stresses this point to comment that ideas of concentric divine geometries emerge from the knowledge of a globe-Earth and the internalization of a physical underworld. In this way, while Hollow Earth reflected American desires to seek new frontiers, it was also deeply rooted in American biblical sentiments and interpretation. As his work *Wonders of the Invisible World* implies, subterranean lands were only one of Mather's many monstrous realms. He contrasted these worlds to Puritan New England, as "The New-

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<sup>213</sup> Lee Alan Dugatkin, "Buffon, Jefferson and the Theory of New World Degeneracy," *Evolution: Education and Outreach* 12, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12052-019-0107-0>.

<sup>214</sup> Yost, "American Hollow Earth Narratives."

<sup>215</sup> Conway Zirkle, "The Theory of Concentric Spheres: Edmund Halley, Cotton Mather, & John Cleves Symmes," *Isis* 37, no. 3/4 (1947): 155-59.

Englanders are a People of God settled in those, which were once the Devil's Territories... made unto our Blessed Jesus.”<sup>216</sup> Symmes’s nationalistic confidence in America evolves out of Mather’s pride in Puritan New England and in both of these scenarios, monstrous worlds are created from a desire to prove one’s homeland against the unknown. Yet, even as America was the first to send an expedition to Hollow Earth, theories of concentric worlds had emerged centuries before Symmes, or even Mather, in Early Modern Europe and the classical Mediterranean.

Inspired by the physics surrounding lunar density in Sir Isaac Newton’s *Principia* and his inexplicable observations of aurora borealis as he mapped the northmost celestial stars, Sir Edmund Halley first proposed a Hollow Earth in 1692. In his proposal, he claimed a subterranean world was responsible for the Earth’s strange lack of calculated mass and leaked colored natural gas that became the northern lights.<sup>217</sup> While his research was contentious amongst his contemporaries, Cotton Mather directly quoted Halley alongside biblical scripture and Virgil and Claudian’s Elysian Fields.<sup>218</sup> Indeed, while Hollow Worlds do not have a central role in ancient philosophy, the ideas of subterranean underworlds filled with peril were integral in the narratives of Greco-Roman chthonic religions from legends as popular as *The Tragedy of Orpheus* to cults surrounding the worship of Hermes, the Erinyes, and Kore.<sup>219</sup> As he compared ancient writings to contemporary thought, Mather evoked a strange world separate from the American frontier whose “Amissum ne crede Diem,” or *whose lost sons do not believe in day*, finishing his chapter with the warning “but it’s time to stop, we have gone beyond *Human Penetration*, we have dug as far as ‘tis fit any

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<sup>216</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, (Boston: 1985, 1693), Printed by Benj. Harris for Sam. Phillips, 1.

<sup>217</sup> N. Kollerstrom, “The Hollow World of Edmond Halley,” *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 23, no. 3 (August 1992): 185–192.

<sup>218</sup> Zirkle, "The Theory of Concentric Spheres," 156.

<sup>219</sup> Arthur Fairbank, *Chthonic deities*, (1900), Retrieved October 27, 2020, from <https://www.greek-gods.org/greek-deities/chthonic-deities.php>.

*Conjecture* should carry us!”<sup>220</sup> Historian Michelle Katherine Yost wrote in her dissertation, “with the disappearance of ‘Terra Incognita’ from nineteenth century maps, new lands of imagination emerged in literature, supplanting the blank spaces on the globe with blank spaces inside the globe, the terra cava.”<sup>221</sup> Interpreting this through the writings of Symmes and Mather, one may see that the identity of “Terra Incognita” had not necessarily disappeared by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but nevertheless, “terra cava” was evoked from the past in order to normalize the “New World” against it.

Seventeen years after Symmes’s publication, a new monstrous frontier was discovered, located not within a subterranean earth, but in an extraterrestrial realm. In August 1835, *The New York Sun* published an article crediting the astronomer Sir John Herschel with the discovery of entire ecosystems on the Moon.<sup>222</sup> Among its lunar vegetation were exotic animals such as “the horned bear, and the biped beaver,” along with monstrous people with leathery bat wings, known as “Vespertillo-Homo.”<sup>223</sup> For weeks, *The Sun’s* publications were among the most well-read of its kind. The contemporary author Edgar Allan Poe even remarked that the story was “the greatest hit... ever made by any fiction in either America or Europe.”<sup>224</sup> In fact, numerous facets of the *The Sun’s* account seemed to be directly stolen from Edgar Allan Poe’s own work, “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal,” published in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, and soon the “Herschels account” was revealed as a hoax, commonly attributed to the journalist Richard Adam Locke.<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, the success that followed

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<sup>220</sup> Zirkle, "The Theory of Concentric Spheres," 156.

<sup>221</sup> Yost, "American Hollow Earth Narratives," 1.

<sup>222</sup> David A Copeland, "A Series of Fortunate Events," *Journalism History* 33, no. 3 (2007): 140.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

the Moon Hoax revealed a long-seated attraction between the United States and fabricated border realms, presented through the lens of pseudo-scientific discovery and deep religious inspiration.

America was far from the first Western society to rally nationalism from the discovery of an alien realm, yet the extent to which fantasy, faith, and scientific speculation embed themselves within this discovery is a distinctly American achievement. In the article, “A Series of Fortunate Events,” historian David Copeland argues, “It was not the ‘scientific garb’ of the [Moon Hoax but...] instead, the clever use by Locke of the conventional wisdom of humans and the desire to know the characteristics of God's creatures in the heavens that made the Moon Hoax a welcome revelation.”<sup>226</sup> To Copeland, the appearance of winged men in the hoax evoked old ideas of Christian monstrosity, while their largely human forms identified their possession of rational souls. Copeland refers to a passage written in Plato's *Timaeus*, where the ancient scholar describes how “the creator sowed some of them [people] in the Earth, and some in the Moon, and some in the other instruments of time,” to highlight how the base ideas of the hoax reflect pangenetic ancient writings.<sup>227</sup> In his article, “Lucian And The Great Moon Hoax Of 1835,” J.L. Hilton expands on Copeland's premise, stating that the speculative fiction directly evokes the tradition of Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and *True Histories* and Plutarch's *On the Face of the Moon*, which mythologize sensationalized forms of extraterrestrial life.<sup>228</sup> Hilton expertly cites the classical training of Poe, Locke, and the contemporary authors they were in communication with, creating a strong argument for direct inspiration from these texts. As such, the Moon Hoax directly built on a narrative of alien frontiers by drawing from discussions of antiquity, yet these allusions were made to fabricate a new frontier that Americans may define themselves against.

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>228</sup> J.L. Hilton, “Lucian And The Great Moon Hoax Of 1835.” *Akroterion* 50 (2012).

As Symmes's "Hollow Earth" expedition constructed an exotic land centered around pseudo-scientific and religiously-inspired truths, *The New York Sun* drew from established Early Modern and ancient ideas to distinguish America from a fictional frontier. In his work "Lunar Fancies and Earthly Truths," the historian Mario Castagnaro argues that the content of the Moon Hoax was "compelling and interesting reading, but there was little to differentiate the story from what one might find in the travelogues that had been popular since the seventeenth century."<sup>229</sup> Accounts of a lunar frontier that mirrored Early Modern, Medieval, and Classical presentations of monstrous borderlands, allowed Locke to garner the support of an American audience that desired their own Terranova to explore. Indeed, in reading how Locke framed his portrayal of the "Vespertilio-Homo" as rational beings able to construct golden-roofed temples and fluently speak in a yet untranslated language, the core provocation of the news series surrounded the question of whether foreign habits and unfamiliar biology can separate mankind from an outlandish other.

One may trace these questions back to the writings of the Early Modern Valladolid debate, as Casa and Sepulveda strained to label Amerindians as either human beings or a monstrous race, or even to St. Augustine's accounts of the Cynocephali as a race of dog-headed cannibal men, which the ancient naturalist directly used to question if bestial men could be held to the same moral measures of people.<sup>230</sup> Truthfully, such debates on rational souls based themselves in a long tradition of segregating the civilized sphere from the monstrous on society's fringes. Ironically, the Moon Hoax's composition displays that these sentiments of sensationalizing the exotic persisted beyond American perceptions. The real John Herschel was conducting astronomical research in South Africa at

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<sup>229</sup> Mario Castagnaro, "Lunar Fancies and Earthly Truths: The Moon Hoax of 1835 and the Penny Press," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 34, no. 3 (2012): 253.

<sup>230</sup> Byars, and Broedel, *Monsters and Borders*, 6.

the time of *The Sun*'s publications, and Locke exploited this vacancy to impersonate him for the satirical articles. In the meantime, the real Herschel wrote about how his voyages to the edge of the British Empire allowed him to observe “the most astonishing phenomena.” Although Herschel’s passage only referred to purely astronomical oddities of the British frontier, his accounts back to England purposefully captured the excitement surrounding similar frontier expeditions by British explorers forging the new fields of Anthropology and Egyptology. In the same decade that the Moon Hoax was written, George Hoskins published his *Travels in Ethiopia* and *Visit to the Great Oasis of the Libyan Desert*, which opened the region’s past to an English-speaking audience.<sup>231</sup> A decade after Symmes’s proposal to seek Hollow Earth, René Caillié became the first European to return from the legendary city of Timbuktu after the poet Alfred Tennyson glorified it as the “Divinest Atalantis” and “Imperial Eldorado roof’d with gold.”<sup>232,233</sup> Within this context, the “Vespertilio-Homo’s” gold-roofed pyramids echoed the exotic literature of Europe. In the years preceding and following each of these events, European colonialism spread beyond the Americas into Africa and the Middle East, bringing with it new regions tied to exotic perceptions. In following the exotic fervor of its time, America sought out new and strange corners of the globe. Guided by nationalistic, scientific, and spiritualistic optimism, the formative United States of America found these new corners not on the surface of a familiar earth but within and beyond it.

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<sup>231</sup> Robert G Morkot, “George Hoskins, *Travels in Ethiopia and the History of Meroe*,” *Souvenirs and New Ideas*, 2013, 98–118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh1dkd5.12>.

<sup>232</sup> Tijana Radeska, “René Caillié: the First European Explorer Who Returned Alive from the Town of Timbuktu,” *The Vintage News*, (May 8, 2017.), <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/05/08/rene-caillie-the-first-european-explorer-who-returned-alive-from-the-town-of-timbuktu/>.

<sup>233</sup> Alfred Tennyson, and Aidan Day Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: Selected Poems*. (London, England: Penguin Books, 1991), 20.

## **I.A Border Within: Monstrous Death and Rebirth in the Twentieth Century**

As America's own western frontier closed at the end of the nineteenth century, the nationalistic sentiments of Symmes and Locke were reflected inwards in the United States as a nostalgia for the unexplored west drove a second mythization of a "Terra Incognita." This mythology, however, was distinct from Columbus and Oviedo's *New World*, as Symmes and Locke sought to familiarize the exotic with the American. Instead of defining American nationalism against a frontier land, the popular consciousness of the twentieth century held America as the land of frontiers—a last bastion of discovery. While this identity was no more fabricated than any previous American fantasy, it was an identity that nevertheless evolved from and celebrated the sensationalism of America's cultural consciousness.

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner revolutionized the relationship America had with its frontier in his titular *Frontier Thesis*, where he argued that the American West served as an epicenter of America's social, economic, and political unrest.<sup>234</sup> But more than just a historical essay, the *Frontier Thesis* was a social document that refocused an American popular consciousness on the impending closure of West and centralized fear around the loss of American identity that came with it. This sentiment is, perhaps, best conveyed in the sculptor James Earl Fraser's "End of the Trail" from 1913, which depicted an indigenous American dejected and riding horseback, presumably mourning an untarnished American West.<sup>235</sup> The indigenous subject Fraser represented in his art was immediately indicative of the myth of the "vanishing Indian," and common

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<sup>234</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, 1861-1932. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1894.

<sup>235</sup> James Earl Fraser, *The End of the Trail* [Sculpture]. *Arts of the Americas*, (The Art Institute of Chicago: Chicago, 1893).

assumptions of the loss of a “historic” race of people to make way for a modern one. In this case, even as it was more a symbol of a white American anxiety surrounding the frontier than it was of indigenous sentiments, Fraser’s sculpture depicted how American frontier mythology was tied to fictional imagery of a real boundary that was now closed. In discussing how indigenous American stereotypes rose simultaneously with the advent of silent film, historian John A. Price noted that “the western became a milieu of fictional history with symbols for such frontier concepts as freedom, pragmatism, equality, agrarianism, and brutalization.” Though it is perhaps uninspired to say that the Wild West was born from the broth of nostalgia that surrounded frontier culture, an exploration of American perceptions of the West would be incomplete without addressing the essential role this nostalgia played in the development of one of America’s most recognizable spheres of popular culture.<sup>236</sup> In this case, the Wild West may not have been specifically monstrous, but it was both fantastical and exotic, mythologies of gun shows, saloons, and cattle drives serving as a new bizarre spectacle. As the American consciousness gravitated towards this fictional frontier based off of a closed—but real—space, it is possible to understand the American West as an Otherworld tied to a distinctly American fantasy.

In his 1910 work *Fearsome Creatures of the Lumberwoods: With A Few Desert And Mountainous Beasts*, forester and conservationist William T. Cox compiled a small repository of folklore from the lives lumberjack and trappers living beyond America’s western boundary.<sup>237</sup> Among others, his writing depicted the Billdad of Northern Maine, a creature with poisonous flesh able to bound one hundred and twenty feet into the air from a single jump; the Hugag of the American-Canadian border, a long-lipped, knee-

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<sup>236</sup> John A. Price, “The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures,” *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 2 (1973): 153, <https://doi.org/10.2307/481668>.

<sup>237</sup> William T. Cox, *Fearsome Creatures of the Lumberwoods: With a Few Desert and Mountain Beasts*. (Sacramento, CA: Bishop Pub. Co., 1984).

less, deer that continuously walked, awake and asleep, as it lifted its legs at ninety degree angles; the Gumbaroo of California, a tireless, hairless, bear-like creature with a hide that “burn[ed] like celluloid”; and the Slide-Rock Bolter of Colorado, an enormous clawed fish that propelled itself down mountains to eat whatever dwelled in the valleys below.<sup>238</sup> Cox’s stories paralleled the same travel fiction that inspired Locke and precipitated itself into Columbus’s writings. However, rather than centralizing itself around an unfamiliar realm, Cox spoke of a familiar and vanishing West. To prelude his work, Cox provided a brief excerpt of his thoughts on American modernity: “The lumber regions are contracting. Stretches of forest that once seemed boundless are all but gone, and many a stream is quiet that once... echoed the song of the river driver... It is my purpose in this little book to preserve at least a description and sketch of some of the interesting animals which he has originated.”<sup>239</sup> Cox’s work was a direct acknowledgement of the cultural significance of America’s frontier, yet, rather than presenting the West as an alien otherworld as others had, his work strove to familiarize the continent’s “other” in American history, encouraging an appreciation for and preservation of the “Terra Incognita” before it was gone.

Almost a decade after Cox, a familiarization of America’s monstrous frontier reemerged in the prolific writings of Charles Fort, whose work served as a microcosm for America’s own reinterpretation of the exotic. In *The Morning of The Magicians*, Louis Pauwels, Jacques Bergier, and Rollo Meyers describe Fort as an artistic and literary pioneer “before the first manifestations of Dadaism and Surrealism.” Fort’s contemporary Benjamin De Casserias described the author as “a man done with the clumsy

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 43, 9, 11, 21.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 1.

apparatus of thought.”<sup>240,241</sup> During his literary career from 1919 to 1932, as a creative exercise, Fort attempted to deconstruct contemporaneous scientific assumptions and build his own models of reality from an array of collected historical anecdotes. His conclusions were often mind-bending and fantastical: from speculations on a storm cloud-like “teleported force” to descriptions of a Super-Sargasso Sea, where all forgotten objects eventually drifted to, to some of the first theories on psychokinetics.<sup>242</sup> Fort’s writings can be traced to the rise of science fiction in America, but they remain grounded in historical American folk beliefs and evocations of an ancient past. In his book *Lo!*, an attempt to remap the universe’s cosmology, Fort evoked the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and Zeno alongside Jewish and Christian mysticism.<sup>243</sup> He wrote, “According to Zeno’s paradoxes, nothing can be carried over intervening space and added to something else” in order to speculate on the possibility of teleported motion while introducing unexplainable accounts of disappearances and apparitions within American popular culture.<sup>244</sup> In this way, these uniquely American evocations were placed within a hidden realm, whose speculative existence was reinforced by a revisionist ideas surrounding the ancient past. As such, Fort’s analysis of ancient writings was shallow at best, as each excerpt served his overall goal of redefining the normal and the conceived as bizarre suggesting a true monstrosity to the familiar.

If Charles Fort was alone in his interpretation of this realm, these ideas would have died with him, yet his publications encouraged the formation of Fortean-specific reading circles and inspired societies

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<sup>240</sup> Louis Pauwels, Jacques Bergier, & Rollo Myers, (2007). *The Morning of the Magicians*. London: Souvenir, 95.

<sup>241</sup> Jim Steinmeyer, *Charles Fort: The Man Who Invented the Supernatural*, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

<sup>242</sup> Steinmeyer, *Charles Fort*.

<sup>243</sup> Charles Fort, & Tiffany Thayer, *The Books of Charles Fort, With an Introduction*. (New York: Pub. for the Fortean Society by H. Holt and Company, 1941).

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

dedicated to collecting more unexplained events that fit within the author's anthology. Though the author acknowledged his writings were speculative fantasy, the Fortean Society, founded in 1931 by Tiffany Thayer and his literary contemporaries, outgrew its skeptical foundations and instead devoted itself to establishing a semi-consolidated mythology of paranormal events and conspiratorial phenomena within mid-twentieth century America.<sup>245</sup> Just as the Symmes's Hole Expedition and Moon Hoax attempted to redefine the normal against a speculative other, the works of Charles Fort successfully defined a monstrous frontier hiding within modernity.

Moreover, Forteanism referenced these events in tandem with ancient works, establishing a concrete identity of a fantastical America. In the 1950s and 60s, the Fortean Society reinvented itself as the International Fortean Organization (INFO) and within its ranks emerged the pseudo-scientific minds of Vincent Gaddis, the man who coined the phrase "Bermuda Triangle," as well as Bernard Heuvelmans and Ivan T. Sanderson, the fathers of modern cryptozoology.<sup>246</sup> In his history, *Cryptozoology and the Medieval and Modern World*, which explored the rise of the paranormal within modern history by dissecting its relationship to the ancient past, Peter Dendle writes that "Cryptozoology books and organizations frequently point out that the North American landscape is not so charted as people may think. This recalibration of the known and the unknown helped recapture the frontier so sanctified in American mythic consciousness."<sup>247</sup> Accordingly, Fort's writings gained attention as

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<sup>245</sup> *The Fortean Fallacy*. Retrieved October 26, 2020, from

<https://web2.ph.utexas.edu/~coker2/index.files/fortean.shtml>.

<sup>246</sup> Darren Naish, *A Review of Neanderthal: The Strange Saga of the Minnesota Iceman, Part 1*, (2017, April 23), Retrieved October 26, 2020, from <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/tetrapod-zoology/a-review-of-neanderthal-the-strange-saga-of-the-minnesota-iceman-part-1/>.

<sup>247</sup> Peter Dendle, "Cryptozoology in the Medieval and Modern Worlds," *Folklore* 117, no. 2 (2006): 190-206.

the author presented a solution to America's closed frontier: to fabricate yet more monstrous realms.

Even so, these otherworlds were not new to American consciousness and, as such, evoked an American mythos that arose from ancient beliefs. Bigfoot drew from trapper syncretic mythology between the First Nations' accounts of Sasq'et and the Wildmen, Woodwoose, and the Green Man of Europe. America would revisit its Moon Hoax through the alleged extraterrestrial encounters of the 1960s and 70s, but even Locke's account was influenced by the writings of Lucian and Plutarch.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, modern perceptions of paranormal American phenomena remained rooted in Fortean otherworlds tied to the closing of the West-bound frontier and ancient ideas on monstrosity.

### **I. The Eternal Frontier: Concluding Thoughts**

As Anglo-America developed from a New World on the border of an unexplored frontier to a novel nation in the market of exploring fictitious frontier territories and finally to a country reckoning with the closing of its own frontier, its relationship to how monstrous otherworlds were depicted within popular consciousness changed. These depictions always suited the prospects of their time while fundamentally maintaining sensationalist tones that separated "civilization" from the "other." In colonial America, monstrous frontiers were used to compare European intellectuals to the ancients and expand on a collective cultural myth of monstrous borders. In the early United States, borderlands were deeply tied to the scientific and religious zeal of the new nation and offered a means of providing America with a fictitious "New World" of its own to explore. In the later nineteenth century, this frontier, familiarized as a real western border, closed and was in turn redefined in American consciousness under the mask of the unseen

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 199.

and paranormal. This hidden frontier never really vanished from the American perception, as public thought continues to transfix itself on conspiratorial realities and unexplainable ideas. Yet a close examination of how Americans, Europeans, and the ancients have always perceived wild realms speaks to a need to define the known world against the exotic. This exotic element is appealing and repulsive, a place both inviting Symmes' exploration and staying beyond Mather's "Human Penetration," as temporal as Cox's woodlands and as eternal as Pliny's monsters, lurking on the edge of the societies that perceived them. While the frontiers of America were subject to physical and social change, studying conceptions of fictionalized boundaries and their placement within ancient text reveals that monstrosity is an element of civilization inescapable of context and will endure, not only as long as there are regions left unexplored, but so long as mankind chooses to be defined by what it is not.

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# The Roles They Are A-Changing

## Women in Jihadi Organizations

Nils Peterson

### I. Introduction

In late 1979, Soviet tanks rolled into Afghanistan and helped spark the creation of modern jihadi groups as a reaction to Soviet power. Since then, jihadi groups have relied on men to perform the majority of their fighting. Men also lead all the major jihadi groups in existence today. Thus, the vast majority of literature regarding jihadi groups centers on men. The lack of focus on women's roles in these groups prevents a complete understanding of how jihadi organizations operate. In more recent years, women have come to play a more prominent role in several jihadi groups such as ISIS. This under-researched phenomenon will be the focus of this paper and will provide a window into understanding the gender dynamics within jihadi groups, as well as complement existing scholarship focused on the power wielded by male jihadi leaders.

I will analyze jihadi groups' views on women since 1979 and how these influenced women's participation in jihad. Specifically, how technological developments allowed women to take part in jihad as terrorists,<sup>249</sup> recruiters, and enforcers while simultaneously occupying the

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<sup>249</sup> Defining these women, or anyone, as terrorists implies that their use of violence was not legitimate. In the current era, the power to determine what constitutes a legitimate use of violence lies with nations and their governments. The state, and by definition its government, holds a monopoly on the use of violence. Therefore, any government may theoretically declare violence used against it to be unlawful and the perpetrators terrorists. In this paper, the term terrorist refers to sub state actors who

traditionalist female gender role of mother. Female terrorism, accomplished mainly via suicide bombing, has become more common since 1979, due in part to technological development. I will also address why female jihadi terrorism emerged and argue that the practical usefulness of female suicide bombers, in addition to the media's reactions to them, drove this trend. As technological progress allowed for increased female participation in terrorism, jihadi groups molded these new female roles to address jihadi organizations' traditionalist conception of motherhood, often with ideological tension and hypocrisy.

Several primary source magazines published by jihadi groups shed light on how jihadi groups view women and their role in the organizations. *Mujabideen Monthly*, *Al-Somood*, and *Inspire* trace various jihadi groups' views on women over time. While other media, such as propaganda films or a capella jihadi anthems, may provide deeper insight into these groups' values writ large, jihadi magazines repeatedly address the role of women. The magazines continue to revisit the topic, while other forms of media do so haphazardly. This makes jihadi magazines a promising medium for analyzing jihadi groups' views on women. The magazine *Mujabideen Monthly*, published by the anti-Soviet jihadi group Hizb-i Islami during the 1980s and 1990s, serves as a base from which to compare the changing roles of women in jihad through the 2010s. The Taliban's *Al-Somood* and al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine cover the mid-2000s and early 2010s, while ISIS's *Dabiq* magazine covers the mid-2010s. All

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commit acts with the goal or as part of a strategy to instill terror in a segment of a population. However, state entities may also commit acts of terror and become terrorist regimes themselves. Most importantly, by using the term terrorist, this paper does not address whether the acts of such groups are considered justified. Lastly, this paper avoids using the term terrorist as a stand-in for declaring that Group X is bad. Moral questions regarding the actions of a specific group are beyond the purview of this paper.

the magazines were originally published in English except for *Al-Somood*,<sup>250</sup> which the Taliban published in Arabic.<sup>251</sup>

It is imperative to start with a comparison between the historical and contemporary role of women in jihad. First, I examine the domestic roles of women in jihad and some notable exceptions. Next, I address continuity and change within these domestic roles. This understanding of the past paves the way for analyzing technology's impact on the roles of women in jihad over time.<sup>252</sup> A brief history of suicide bombing and the usage of female jihadi participants provides context for the ways in which technology changed women's relationship with jihad. The phenomenon of using women as active and passive recruiters also becomes apparent in relation to technology. Finally, I examine the recent rise of women occupying law enforcement roles in ISIS. A discussion of why female jihadi terrorism emerged is interwoven throughout these arguments.

## **II. Historical and Contemporary Roles of Women in Jihad**

While men have participated in battlefield combat throughout Islamic history, women have primarily occupied the role of mother.<sup>253</sup> In

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<sup>250</sup> All translations of *Al-Somood* were accessed via the online Taliban Sources Repository at the University of Oslo.

<sup>251</sup> While the other groups mentioned are clearly jihadi groups, my decision to include the Taliban in this category deserves an explanation. Their close association with al-Qaeda and shared belief towards the strict interpretation of Sharia gives the group a strong jihadist bent. Primarily for this reason I include the Taliban as a jihadi group, even though they do not fit the traditional mold because they ruled a state, Afghanistan, and were recognized as legitimate by certain Middle East governments.

<sup>252</sup> Jihad may be categorized into a greater and lesser variety. The former connotes self-betterment for the sake of living according to God's will, while the latter involves fighting in war in the name of Islam. Throughout this paper, jihad will refer to the lesser variety unless otherwise noted.

<sup>253</sup> John L. Esposito, ed., *The Islamic World: Past and Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/print/opr/t243/e370](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/print/opr/t243/e370).

some cases, women contributed to religiously framed fighting by taking on supporting roles, such as a nurse. The Prophet Muhammad did not forbid women from fighting in wars. Despite this, women in the Muslim world were not usually permitted to engage in battlefield fighting.

Religious justifications also contributed to women's exclusion from the battlefield. For a male fighter, "the women of paradise were a major attractant," and "earthly women represented a tie that bound them to this world, whereas the whole focus of the fighter was supposed to be on the next."<sup>254</sup> Ninth century jurist Ibn Abi al-'Asim supported this view when he declared that the Prophet Muhammed said, "No man who has built a house and has not dwelt in it, or who has married a woman and not entered into her should accompany me [Prophet Muhammed], nor any man who has any need to return."<sup>255</sup> The message to the fighter was that he should not be distracted by such things as a house or an Earthly sexual temptation. Thus, women on Earth were viewed as a distraction to the male fighters and were not welcome in early jihad.

Yet there are always exceptions; while extremely rare, women did occasionally fight. For example, Nusayba bint Ka'b, an early female convert to Islam and companion of the Prophet, fought in the Battle of Uhud (625 CE) and "suffered eleven wounds, and lost one arm." The Prophet's wife Ayesha and granddaughter Zaynab bint Ali also took part in battlefield combat at later points.<sup>256</sup> At the time, these battles were not viewed as jihad, but rather as raids (*ghazawat*). While not all religiously legitimized fighting was interpreted to be jihad, the Quran set the precedent for female participation in armed conflicts.

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<sup>254</sup> David Cook, "Women Fighting In Jihad?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (February 2005): pp. 375-384, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500180212>, 377.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 377-378.

<sup>256</sup> Farhana Ali, "Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the World: The Role of Muslim Female Fighters," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8, no. 1 (November 2006): pp. 21-35, 25.

Not all women felt content with being relegated to a non-participatory role in jihad. Those women eager to participate “were told that their jihad was a righteous pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). It is not surprising that what was in classical times...a very dangerous trip to the holy city would constitute the equivalent to fighting.”<sup>257</sup> In this way, her actions contributed to both greater and lesser jihad and therefore constituted a separate but spiritually equal action to that of the male jihadi fighter.<sup>258</sup>

This historical precedent of women contributing to jihad served as the basis for contemporary jihadi groups to remold the “proper” role for women. Contemporary groups kept a woman’s primary role as a mother and housewife. Undoubtedly, a woman being at home and raising a family in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century differed greatly from the seventh century. As will be discussed further on, technology expanded the roles a contemporary woman could take on while staying at home. Yet in both periods, raising children constituted women’s primary duty. In light of this view, it makes sense that in 1986, Hizb-i Islami reported that a “woman whose four year old daughter was killed by the Russians a few days before... had a heart attack because she was so overjoyed to see the [Russian] base blazing and exploding.”<sup>259</sup> The accuracy of this report remains dubious; furthermore, the mother’s public reaction did not necessarily depict her actual feelings. However, it did demonstrate that male jihadis viewed women primarily in relation to their children.

Through her role as a mother, a woman demonstrated loyalty to jihad. In 2007, a Taliban writer echoed this value judgment when he wrote that a:

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<sup>257</sup> Cook, “Women Fighting In Jihad?,” 376. Going on hajj was also a path to God’s will and the greater jihad.

<sup>258</sup> This is not to suggest that men did not go on hajj; they most certainly did.

<sup>259</sup> *The Mujahideen Monthly*, January 1986, 31.

report drawn up by the humanitarian coordinator of the international organization in Iraq pointed to the increasing number of widows supporting their families, knowing that the Ministry of Social Affairs could not tally up the full number that has so far reached 565,000 women. In the meantime, 400 children are being orphaned every day in Baghdad alone as a result of the violence, while the divorce rates increased by 22% from 2003 to 2006 and the marriage rates dropped by 50% during that same period, as per the statistics of the Iraqi Justice Ministry.<sup>260</sup>

Focusing on widows supporting their families implied that these women were mothers, because the children would normally be the only remaining members of the family a woman would have had to support. It would have been a stretch for a woman to be expected to be the breadwinner for any of her non-children relatives, considering the Taliban's negative view on women working outside the home. The marriage and divorce trends horrified the Taliban because an unmarried woman, in their view, could not produce a legitimate child. Since widows could not produce more legitimate children, the Taliban saw them as not fulfilling their role as mothers. Therefore, a woman's role as mother remained in the spotlight.

Although the role of women within jihadi organizations changed with technological developments, the main focus remained on a woman's domestic role as a mother. The modern view of a domesticated woman, popular among jihadi groups, did not arise in a vacuum, nor did it represent a direct continuity with the past. One of the key developers of the conservative Islamist view on women in the 20th century was Zaynab al-Ghazali. She declared that "women's liberation [w]as a deeply misguided failure" that did not recognize that since "all rights derive from Islam, there is no 'woman question' distinct from the emancipation of humanity, which is possible only through the restoration of Islamic law as

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<sup>260</sup> *Al-Somood*, April 2007, 26-27.

sole sovereign.”<sup>261</sup> Ghazali also founded the Jama’at al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat (the Muslim Women’s Association), whose “emphasis on education and charity ... [portrayed] such work as an extension of women’s primary duties as wives, mothers, and ‘builders of men.’”<sup>262</sup> The Muslim Women’s Association would eventually become the female branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Ghazali’s own words, that meant that she, in conjunction with the Brothers, strove for “the return of the Islamic state, which rules by the Qur’an and sunna.”<sup>263</sup> Islamist groups usually espoused these goals, but contemporary jihadi groups take more extreme action than she ever explicitly endorsed. These jihadi groups also share Ghazali’s view that women should serve as “builders of men” via motherhood. They would also strike a similar tone as Ghazali did when she argued “for women’s education in Islam, participation in jihad, and engagement in da’wa<sup>264</sup> as a necessary expression of, rather than threat to, Muslim tradition.”<sup>265</sup>

The most important role a woman performed, in the eyes of jihadi groups, was that of a nurturing mother who properly educated her children in the eyes of jihadi groups. Umm Yahya, the widow of former al-Qaeda second in command Abu Yahya, actively endorsed such a view when she wrote:

O mother of the upcoming generation, it is your obligation and responsibility to teach and enlighten your children. They are precious gems in your life. They are your *amanah* [trust] and responsibility. You should teach them about Islam and give them its history so that they can learn to love their *deen* [religion] and get

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<sup>261</sup> Roxanne Leslie Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 276.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>264</sup> Da’wa in this sense may be roughly understood as missionary work.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

ready to fight for the sake of it.... On top of it all, you should put sense into the minds of your family and the community at whole.<sup>266</sup>

For Yahya, a women's role is to educate her children and protect her "precious gems" from being led astray from Islam.

Not all women in jihadi groups voluntarily bear children, nor are they all Muslim. This dynamic is seen prominently in ISIS. The group still views non-Muslim women as useful because they can produce offspring who may be groomed for their future life as an ISIS member. In this way, ISIS weaponizes the womb and views it as a factory for producing the next generation of homegrown ISIS members. The temporary marriages and repeated rapes of captured women, like the Yazidis, demonstrate that ISIS carries out womb weaponization. While ensuring high morale among the male jihadists plays a part in this forced remarriage, the production of children from these temporary marriages also serves as a tool to breed the next generation of ISIS.<sup>267</sup> The process reinforces the traditionalist female gender role of mother that jihadi groups expect women to perform.

Jihadi groups reflect the historical trend of portraying a woman's prime duty as a mother. However, what it means to be a mother has changed substantially over time. During the colonial period in Egypt, Britain established girls' schools

"whose curricula centered largely on *tadbir al-manzil* (household management); the training and certification of nurse-midwives; and the proliferation of pedagogical articles in a burgeoning women's press, discussing how to maintain the requisite standards of hygiene to ensure a happy home and a healthy family, [which] were all measures aimed at 'remaking women' as a means of modernizing Egyptian society."<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> *Inspire* 10, 2013. 33.

<sup>267</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 55.

<sup>268</sup> Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 27.

British colonial officials, as a means to achieve their “civilizing” colonial mission, strove to produce a “properly” educated woman to serve in the role of mother. The role of mother changed over time, especially during the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser. This even included views on female participation in the workforce.<sup>269</sup> This brief overview of the changing role of motherhood in Egypt demonstrated that the role of mother is not a historically continuous one. Jihadi groups molded the role of mother to fit their needs, as had previous ruling parties in the Middle East.

When analyzing women in jihadi groups, the issue of women’s agency rears its head. Specifically, there is a question of whether women are viewed as manipulated individuals tricked into membership or whether they willingly join these jihadi groups. Undoubtedly, women fall into both categories. Additionally, some women, like the Yazidis, are forced into jihadi groups without any say in the matter. However, as a broad generalization, women in the aforementioned roles should be viewed as having self-agency and not as manipulated victims. It is not uncommon for

“many women who have been forced into joining [a jihadi group to] remain with their husbands after the conflict is over. In most studies of terrorist women, women are considered victims or are not agents of their destiny. This is not true in jihadist terrorist organizations; for the most part, women decide to join and remain in these jihadist terrorist organizations.”<sup>270</sup>

Although propaganda most likely played a role in convincing these women to join, it does not preclude agency. In regard to ISIS, “a history of past discrimination has been found to be an especially important factor in the decisions of some women to join, as Muslim women may be more openly discriminated against [in their home country] due to wearing the

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 65-73.

<sup>270</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 101.

hijab, niqab or abaya.”<sup>271</sup> While discrimination conceivably made a potential female ISIS recruit more amenable to the group’s message, she still must have made a conscious effort to join the organization. Other individuals’ prejudiced behavior does not strip these women of their personal agency. By and large, women who voluntarily joined jihadi groups, whether or not they experienced past discrimination, should be viewed as individuals using their self-agency.<sup>272</sup>

The other roles women occupy in jihadi groups, besides that of a mother, are that of a terrorist (accomplished mainly via suicide bombing), recruiter, and enforcer. As terrorists, women strike at civilian and military targets. As recruiters, women performed central roles in their specific jihadi organization. For analytical purposes, the recruiter role may be broken down into two subcategories: active and passive. Active recruiters take intentional action, often via the Internet or the indoctrination of their own children, in order to recruit members for their jihadi group. Passive recruiters are women who are used as symbols in a female grievance narrative, such as foreigners allegedly preying on Muslim women, to draw others to join jihadi movements. Lastly, women can act as enforcers of the rules for other women in their jihadi group. However, this last phenomenon has so far only been observed in ISIS, demonstrated prominently in the Al-Khansaa Brigade.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Ester E.J. Strømme, “Jihadi Brides or Female Foreign Fighters? Women in Da’Esh – from Recruitment to Sentencing,” *Jihadi Brides or Female Foreign Fighters? Women in Da’esh – from Recruitment to Sentencing* (Oslo: PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security, 2017), 2.

<sup>272</sup> Women who are forced into jihadi groups are not the focus of this paper because they are largely relegated to the role of domestic servant or sex slave. They do not perform the other roles, mentioned in the introduction, of female terrorist, recruiter, or enforcer. The question of how much self-agency women forced into jihadi groups are able to exercise while in captivity remains a topic for further research and is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>273</sup> In theory, other jihadi groups like the Taliban could benefit from female enforcers similar to the Al-Khansaa Brigade. Without access to various internal jihadi

## II. Technology's Impact on Women's Roles in Jihad

Since a woman's role as a terrorist mainly involves suicide bombings, it is necessary to first understand the evolution of suicide bombers. Dalal al-Maghribi, a Palestinian woman, became the inaugural suicide bomber by throwing grenades into an Israeli bus on March 11, 1978, in what became known as the Coastal Road Massacre.<sup>274</sup> This event was a watershed moment for future jihadi groups, even though al-Maghribi belonged to the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), because it marked the beginning of a tactic they would come to regularly employ. However, throwing grenades into a bus is very different from entering a crowded public space and blowing oneself up. While the two actions have the same aim—striking terror into the hearts of a civilian population and killing as many people as possible—the latter involves substantially different technology.

Before describing the development of the suicide belt, the question of why certain devout Muslims would choose to blow themselves up needs to be examined. In the case of Dalal al-Maghribi, the motivation appeared to be a secular nationalistic fervor and deeply held belief in the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for a nation state independent from Israel. However, many jihadi groups rooted their justification not in nationalism, but in Islam. Still, others like Hamas mixed nationalism and Islam to justify their actions. Jihadi groups that solely used Islam to justify suicide bombings placed the highest value on achieving eternal life in paradise. In turn, Muslim women in jihadi groups also began to place a high value on martyrdom via suicide bombing. Their gender allowed them

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organizations' documents and conversations, it is not possible to definitely state why women do not serve as enforcers in groups other than ISIS.

<sup>274</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 62.

to pass through security checkpoints with greater ease than their male counterparts and achieve their martyrdom goal more easily.<sup>275</sup> The technological development of the suicide belt provided a way for women to participate in jihadi warfare and break with the historical restrictions of a woman's role in jihad.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, also known as the Tamil Tigers, invented the suicide belt during the 1990s.<sup>276</sup> By and large, jihadi groups did not adopt this method right away. The early 1990s constituted a transitional and organization-building period for jihadi groups that had just expelled the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989. They were also young; al-Qaeda was only two years old by 1990. These terrorist groups used the early 1990s to hash out their ideological grounds and to mobilize for a new jihadi movement focused on opposition to Euro-American military and cultural influence in the Middle East. During this period, Hamas was a pioneer for the use of the suicide belt among jihadi groups. Hamas popularized the suicide belt with their first attack in Israel, on April 6, 1994, followed by another one week later.<sup>277</sup> Thus, Hamas provided a precedent for the tactic to be widely adopted among future jihadi groups. Hamas also had to address the problematic issue that Islam forbids suicide. They maneuvered around the issue by declaring suicide bombing an operation that would achieve martyrdom, since martyrs in Islam go directly to Paradise. Martyrs did not commit suicide; they were simply transferred from their life on Earth to live in Paradise.<sup>278</sup>

Despite the practical usefulness female terrorists offered to jihadi groups, the use of women as suicide bombers was not adopted

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>277</sup> Tareq Baconi, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 29-30.

<sup>278</sup> The Sunni jurist Yusuf al-Qaradawi provides a justification of this practice. See Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 276-281.

immediately. In 2004, during the Second Intifada (2000-2005), Hamas used its first female suicide bomber in part because of “growing Israeli security ‘obstacles’ facing its male bombers.”<sup>279</sup> The year prior, the al-Qaeda member

Umm Osama stated, “The idea of women Kamikazes came from the success of martyr operations carried out by young Palestinian women in the occupied territories. Our organization will be open to all women wanting to serve the (Islamic) nation, particularly in this very critical phase.”<sup>280</sup>

Umm Osama based his justification for women serving as suicide bombers on their efficacy in Palestine. Considering al-Qaeda’s strict interpretation of Islamic law concerning the intermixing of non-related men and women, the organization would not voluntarily allow women onto the battlefield unless the practical benefits outweighed the organizational taboos. Even in jihadi groups, ideological purity had its limits.

The Roshonara Chaudhry case presented a notable example of the gap between jihadi groups’ obsession with martyrdom and the actual reasons motivating female suicide bombers. Chaudhry stabbed British Member of Parliament (MP) Stephen Timms in 2010 because he voted for British involvement in the Iraq War. While she was not martyred, Choudhry carried out an attack where an armed response by British authorities could have achieved that result. Her stated rationale for stabbing MP Timms rooted itself in the secular world, namely the British decision to invade Iraq.<sup>281</sup> Thus, not all female jihadi terrorists viewed

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<sup>279</sup> “ Hamas Woman Bomber Kills Israelis,” BBC News (BBC, January 14, 2004), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3395973.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3395973.stm). While men carried out suicide bombings on behalf of Hamas starting in 1994, this was the first time a woman performed the role of suicide bomber.

<sup>280</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 32.

<sup>281</sup> “Woman Jailed for Life for Attack on MP Stephen Timms,” BBC News (BBC, November 3, 2010), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-11682732>.

martyrdom as their end goal, even if jihadi groups like al-Qaeda wished to portray it as such. Successful martyrs regardless of gender went directly to Paradise, though men theoretically received seventy-two virgins, called the *houris*, who provided sexual gratification. The reward for female martyrs in Paradise remains unclear.<sup>282</sup> Unlike men, women who died in martyrdom operations could not continue their valued role as nurturing mothers.

Women who did participate in martyrdom operations remained under the control of men. The Dubrovka Theater hostage crisis in Moscow in 2002, when roughly forty Muslim Chechen men and women took hostages inside the theater, highlighted this. The men in the group “did not appear to be wearing suicide belts, yet they had control of the women’s suicide belts.”<sup>283</sup> The men controlled the women’s lives and could end their lives whenever the men deemed acceptable. The technological development of the suicide belt allowed women to participate in attacks such as that one, but they also served to reinforce male authority in jihadi groups.

Women did not always commit suicide bombings alone, but were sometimes joined by their children. Mother-child suicide bombings both defied and supported a woman’s role as a mother. The obvious conflict from an organization’s perspective was that the pair’s death made them no longer of use to the jihadi group, except for propaganda purposes. A woman dying also meant that she would no longer produce children who could grow up to become soldiers for the jihadi group. While this conflict remained front and center, the mother-child suicide bombing also fulfilled a mother’s child-rearing duty. In the eyes of jihadi groups, women raised children because they constituted a potential future soldier or wife.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 73.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>284</sup> See al-Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine article attributed to Umm Yahya on page 8 of this paper for an example of this viewpoint. She explicitly tells the women to preprepare children “to get [them] ready to fight for the sake” of their religion, assumingly via al-Qaeda.

Therefore, using the child as a suicide bomb realized the child's soldierly potential and completed the mother's duty.

Even with a reinforced power structure, the usefulness of female suicide bombers and their media coverage drove jihadi groups to continue to use women in martyrdom operations. Male suicide bombing has been a well-known phenomenon, especially in the West, since the all-male suicide bombing plane hijackings of September 11, 2001. Women, on the other hand, still occupy a nebulous role in Western perceptions. Women are less suspected of being suicide bombers, so they garner "much more media publicity [after a terrorist attack] than male ones, which brings significant benefits to the jihadist cause without compromising their conservative credentials."<sup>285</sup> Considering the development of a trend for "mothers [to] take [their own] children to die with them in suicide bombings," increased news coverage for women does not come as a surprise.<sup>286</sup> The stereotypical role of a woman as mother and nurturer still permeates Western culture, and the intentional suicide of a mother and her child via suicide bombing is anathema to that image.

Women who participated in suicide bombing also defied conservative Middle Eastern Muslim societal norms. In Salafi groups, a highly conservative strand of Islam, women primarily occupied domestic roles.<sup>287</sup> However, recent years have seen the rise of female Salafi

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<sup>285</sup> J. Leman and Pektaş Şerafettin, eds., *Militant Jihadism: Today and Tomorrow* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 107.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>287</sup> This is not to suggest that these roles are traditional in the sense that they represent continuity with the past. What currently constitutes a domestic role has changed since the time of the Prophet. For example, the relegation of women into domestic roles as well as the "greater interest [by Salafi groups] in the public position of women as it related to modesty and interaction with men" emerged in the 1950s and 60s. For an in-depth analysis of gender regulation in Egypt, and source of the aforementioned quote, see Aaron Rock-Singer, "The Salafi Mystique: The Rise of Gender Segregation in 1970s Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society* 23 (2016): pp. 279-305, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-00233p03>, 287.

preachers, especially via the Internet. These women broke with their male counterparts by not citing Quran or Hadith reports, sayings or actions of the Prophet Muhammed, as frequently.<sup>288</sup> Instead, their identity, especially that of mother, plays a central role in their sermons. Therefore, suicide bombers and the accompanying destruction of a mother flies in the face of certain conservative segments of Middle Eastern Muslim society, in addition to the West. Hence, the public, across vastly differing socio-cultural beliefs, has found the phenomenon of female suicide bombing interesting and increased media coverage around such events.

Above all, a woman's role as terrorist must negotiate with the role of mother. Upon a woman's death, she may no longer bear children, future soldiers, for the jihadi group, which is her central duty in their eyes. But by practicing terrorism, she also fulfills her duties by becoming a martyr. The tension, in the eyes of jihadi groups, between a woman achieving martyrdom via suicide bombing and her role as a mother must be continually negotiated.

## **I. Women as Recruiters and Enforcers**

Beyond working as suicide bombers and terrorists, women also act as recruiters for jihadi groups. For analytical purposes, I divide women in the recruiting role into two categories: active and passive recruiters.<sup>289</sup> The distinction between the two remains malleable and women can switch

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<sup>288</sup> Richard A. Nielsen, "Women's Authority in Patriarchal Social Movements: The Case of Female Salafi Preachers," *American Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 1 (September 2019): pp. 52-66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12459>, 61-62. This trend applies to Salafi groups writ large and not specifically to jihadi groups who claim to be Salafi. Nielsen's article did not explicitly address suicide bombers in relation to female Salafi preachers. However, considering the recruiter role that women in jihadi groups perform, which will be discussed later in this paper, it is likely that the aforementioned trend applies to jihadi groups, many of whom claim to be Salafi, as well.

<sup>289</sup> See page 8 for the definition of these two categories.

between them. For example, a woman could actively recruit individuals and then commit a suicide bombing herself, only to be used by the jihadi group as a symbol to shame men into greater participation in jihad. An example of an active recruiter came from an article in al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine. The article was claimed to be written by Umm Yahya, the widow of former al-Qaeda second in command Abu Yahya, who was killed in a drone strike in 2012 by the United States.<sup>290</sup> She wrote, "my sister, don't just attend a lecture, be the speaker. Don't wait for the author to write, be the author. Don't just be a part of the *ummah*, help improve it."<sup>291</sup> In this column, Umm Yahya actively encouraged women to support al-Qaeda via their writings and speeches. She wanted them to improve the global Muslim community, the *ummah*, and the best way to do so, in her view, was to join al-Qaeda.

Umm Yahya's article should not be taken as an indication of a widespread public female-led discourse about women in jihadi organizations. There is no doubt that she was able to publish her writings in the premier al-Qaeda publication primarily due to her late husband's status in the organization. Throughout *Inspire*, there are very few articles by women, and this trend holds true for the other jihadi publications I analyzed for this paper.

Since jihadi groups often confine women "to their homes, the Internet is the major way for women to socialize and, inevitably, get other women to join them."<sup>292</sup> The Internet also allows men to recruit women as well because there is no need for forbidden gender mixing online. In a study of Salafi female preachers, those Twitter accounts that "only retweeted writing[s] of female preachers ... [were] 58% female." This

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<sup>290</sup> Jenan Moussa and Harald Doornbos, "The Ghost of Abu Yahya," *Foreign Policy* (FP Group, July 23, 2012), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/07/23/the-ghost-of-abu-yahya/>.

<sup>291</sup> *Inspire* 10, 2013, 32.

<sup>292</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 96.

suggested that Salafi women who used the Internet to further their radicalization efforts aimed at other women.<sup>293</sup> While not all jihadi groups are Salafi and vice versa, several, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, subscribe to its theological and legal approach. It is plausible that women who belonged to these groups proselytized Salafism to other women online and functioned as key recruiters for their jihadi group. Before the Internet made it possible for women to be active recruiters, women more commonly occupied the passive recruiter role. In *Al-Somood*, the Taliban wrote that they were “trying to warn the Afghans against the Christianisation [sic] missions operating under the name of humanitarian associations and offering medical services to women and children with one hand and the bible with the other to convert them to Christianity.”<sup>294</sup> The Taliban viewed women as a vulnerable part of the population susceptible to conversion. They framed the conversion of women and children as a dirty trick and figurative low blow to the *ummah*.

However, this narrative tool of using women’s perceived vulnerability to conversion to incentivize men to join jihadi groups was not unique to the Taliban, as the Muslim Brotherhood,<sup>295</sup> an Islamist organization founded in 1928 by an Egyptian schoolteacher named Hasan al-Banna, led counter evangelization efforts against Christian missionaries in Egypt starting in the 1930s. They did this by opening schools, originally just for boys, that preached Islam instead of Christianity. In 1933 a local Christian school attempted to convert a young girl named Wafiqa. This struck the Brothers as a particularly egregious offense because it targeted a female child, a segment of the population they perceived to be susceptible to conversion. The Brothers then decided to open schools for girls, though they only taught skills necessary for being a housewife and a pious

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<sup>293</sup> Nielsen, “Women’s Authority,” 63.

<sup>294</sup> *Al-Somood*, March 2007, 14-15.

<sup>295</sup> I do not consider the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

Muslim.<sup>296</sup> The Taliban's portrayal of women as vulnerable to conversion away from Islam continued a historical trend seen in previous groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. Foreign targeting of women for conversion fit into jihadi groups' overarching female grievance narrative that the organizations used to shame potential recruits into joining.

The Taliban were not the only jihadi group to use women as symbols to incentivize others to fight in jihad. ISIS also engaged in this practice, as seen by a declaration in their magazine entitled *Dabiq*. In one issue, ISIS declared, "We will conquer your Rome [the United States], break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted."<sup>297</sup> Considering the repeated rape of Yazidi women captured by ISIS, the prospect, however far-fetched, of Western sex slaves certainly enticed ISIS's male fighters to join in the hopes of receiving sex slaves of their own.

Female terrorists, especially suicide bombers, also served as a shaming device for men who did not fully participate in jihad. Al-Qaeda stated this belief when it mentioned that Roshonara Choudhry, who stabbed British Member of Parliament (MP) Stephen Timms, "has shown to the ummah's [the global Muslim community] men the path of jihad! A woman my brothers! Shame on all the men for sitting on their hands while one of our women has taken up the individual jihad!"<sup>298</sup> Al-Qaeda did not praise Choudhry for her actions, but instead used them to shame men into participating in jihad. Even though Choudhry used her self-agency to attack MP Timms, al-Qaeda's focus on how men should respond to her act demonstrated that the organization still viewed men as the prime movers in the warfare aspect of jihad. Again, in reference to Roshonoara Choudhry, al-Qaeda continued this message by declaring "to

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<sup>296</sup> Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), Chapter 5.

<sup>297</sup> *Dabiq* 4, October 2014, 5.

<sup>298</sup> *Inspire* 4, 2010, 24.

the men of the ummah: Take the example of this woman [Choudhry] and you will ‘find success in the afterlife.’”<sup>299</sup> What al-Qaeda failed to emphasize was that Choudhry did not “find success in the afterlife” via martyrdom; instead, she is currently serving a life sentence in prison for her actions.<sup>300</sup>

ISIS did not always objectify women in order to use them as passive recruiters. For example, in a later issue of *Dabiq*, ISIS stated that women should:

Follow the example of Maryam [Moses’ sister] ... in her chastity, modesty, obedience of Allah, and truthfulness, which was one of her greatest traits, and so Allah chose her and raised her above many women. And all praise is due to Allah, the Majestic. There were many righteous women in history, so follow their example. Be patient. Patience is a great virtue.<sup>301</sup>

The passage showed that ISIS sometimes appealed to women’s piety in order to recruit them, one of the few times in which ISIS treated women as agents capable of making their own decisions. The group used Maryam as a passive recruiter by emphasizing her as a righteous woman capable of patience and virtue. ISIS implied that it was possible to live such a life as part of their organization. They used Maryam as a figure to inspire women to lead what was, in their view, a righteous, patient life as part of ISIS and to reject the liberation movement espoused by Western feminists.

Within the passive recruiter role, women might have also been treated as victims and used to spur the *ummah* to take part in jihad, as seen earlier by al-Qaeda via the Choudhry attack on MP Timms and by the Taliban in response to Christian proselytization efforts. In the 1980s, Hizb-i Islami engaged in the same female victimization tactic. They stated

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., Emphasis removed.

<sup>300</sup> “Woman Jailed for Life for Attack on MP Stephen Timms,” BBC News (BBC, November 3, 2010), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-11682732>.

<sup>301</sup> *Dabiq* 7, February 2015, 51.

in their magazine *Mujahideen Monthly* that “our women and aged are being gunned down for the participation of their sons in [the] resistance”<sup>302</sup> against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Notably, Hizb-i Islami quoted the United Nations Rights Commission as a source that legitimized their position. Hizb-i Islami stated that “the United Nations Rights Commission has strongly condemned the Afghanistan government [imposed by the Soviet Union] for violating human rights and said that among other things it is guilty of the indiscriminate mass killing of civilians, particularly women and children.”<sup>303</sup>

Western military intervention in the Middle East provided jihadi groups further opportunities for passive recruitment. Once the jihadi movement definitively turned against geopolitical projects led by Western countries during the 1990s—specifically United States-led military interventions in the Middle East—al-Qaeda utilized the same female victimization narrative as Hizb-i Islami had when it wrote in *Inspire* that “American cruise missiles and cluster bombs...killed women and children in Yemen.”<sup>304</sup> Al-Qaeda restated its position when Adam Gadahn, a senior American al-Qaeda member killed in 2015, wrote that “it was confirmed to me that oppression and the intentional killing of innocent women and children is a deliberate American policy.”<sup>305</sup>

Women could also act as rule enforcers when not performing the role of suicide bomber or recruiter. This nascent phenomenon is so far limited to ISIS and is demonstrated most prominently in the Al-Khansaa Brigade.<sup>306</sup> The Brigade is made up of female police officers who enforce regulations like dress codes that pertain to women in ISIS-held territory. Brigade members also allegedly act as ISIS’s eyes and ears, akin to a secret

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<sup>302</sup> *The Mujahideen Monthly*, January 1986, 10.

<sup>303</sup> *The Mujahideen Monthly*, February 1986, 16.

<sup>304</sup> *Inspire* 1, 2010. 57.

<sup>305</sup> *Inspire* 4, 2010. 18.

<sup>306</sup> See footnote 25 for why this phenomenon is so far limited to ISIS.

police force, among the populace who live in the group's territories. It was also reported that these women served as guards at detention camps for captured Yazadis.<sup>307</sup> The namesake of the Brigade is Al-Khansaa, a female poet who lived in the early seventh century and wrote poems extolling the qualities of her brothers who died in battle.<sup>308</sup> This role for women makes sense because "men are not allowed to speak to or look at other women, unless they are a close family relative."<sup>309</sup> The Brigade itself owes its existence in part due to technological developments. Contemporary technology, like cars and cell phones, allows for greater communication and faster travel, which in turn permit greater enforcement of regulations than in previous eras. The power of the women of the Al-Khansaa Brigade remains under the control of their higher-ranking male superiors because "the women cannot challenge any policies or practices of ISIS. They are merely enforcers."<sup>310</sup> It is fitting, from ISIS's perspective, that the Al-Khansaa Brigade remains under the control of men because this arrangement allows for women to serve in a backup role to the male jihadi fighters on the front lines.

Despite the various roles that women performed in jihadi organizations, they always negotiated with a woman's primary duty as a mother. The tension produced between a mother dying via suicide bomb and her responsibilities to her child has never been resolved. The limitations on the formal enforcer role of ISIS's Al-Khansaa Brigade indicates the hesitancy jihadi groups have to grant women roles outside of

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<sup>307</sup> Amanda Spencer, "The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State," *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no. 3 (2016): pp. 74-98, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.3.1549>, 83-84. Exact details concerning the day-to-day operations of the Brigade remain unavailable due to the nature of the group and ISIS's subsequent territorial decline.

<sup>308</sup> David Wasserstein, *Black Banners of ISIS: The Roots of the New Caliphate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 134.

<sup>309</sup> Rinehart, *Sexual Jihad*, 92.

<sup>310</sup> Spencer, "The Hidden Face of Terrorism," 83-84.

the home which do not ultimately result in their martyrdom. Furthermore, women in the Al-Khansaa Brigade spent less time raising children, a central tenet of their role as mothers. Women's roles in jihadi organizations developed as practicality dictated, but always centered around and negotiated with a woman's primary duty as a mother.

## **II. Conclusion**

Women expanded beyond their role as mothers in jihadi groups to take on positions as enforcers, recruiters, and even became terrorists themselves. Jihadi groups turned to female suicide bombers because of their usefulness and out of a desire for increased news coverage. In their role as both active and passive recruiters, women contributed to keeping various jihadi groups' available pool of soldiers as high as possible. Women did large amounts of recruiting via the Internet, an indispensable technological development that changed the role a woman could play in jihad. As members of ISIS, some women served as enforcers of rules that pertained solely to their sex via the Al-Khansaa Brigade, yet always remained subordinate to their higher-ranked male superiors, a trend indicative of jihadi groups. Finally, women performed their traditionalist role as mothers and nurturers of their offspring.

Ultimately, technological developments affected the roles women performed in jihad, most notably via their job as recruiters and as suicide bombers. The technological development of the suicide belt by the Tamil Tigers proved crucial in opening the door for women to participate in martyrdom operations. Without the technological innovation of the Internet or social media, women in jihadi organizations could never have spread their call to physically distant individuals, persuaded them to join a jihadi group, and still maintained their roles as mothers and housewives.

Despite these technological developments and the changing roles of women in jihad, jihadi groups remained consistent in their view of

women. They believed that a woman's primary place was in the home and the other aforementioned activities could only take place if they did not conflict with her role as a mother. This belief produced tension, most visibly in the case of suicide bombers, regarding what role a woman should fulfill in a jihadi group. These debates were not held by the women themselves, but instead by their male leaders. In this regard, jihadi groups' approach to gender roles did not change as technology developed.

Technology transformed jihad, along with the rest of the world, in the period between 1979-2020. Women's roles in jihad adapted to changing times, even if the jihadi groups' views on women stayed relatively stagnant. As times and technology continue to change, so will a woman's role in jihad. If using women in a new role promises a high potential for success, even if it contradicts a jihadi group's beliefs, then women will be employed to achieve that end.

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# Before the Erie

## The Dismal Swamp Canal

Graham Weinschenk

“The conveniences [of a canal in the Great Dismal Swamp] to the Citizens individually, and the sources of wealth to the Country generally, which will be opened thereby will be found to exceed the most sanguine imagination – The Mind can scarcely take in at one view all the benefits which will result therefrom.”

– *George Washington to James Madison, Nov. 30, 1785*<sup>311</sup>

Flanked on either side by suburban houses, highways, and farms, a straight line of water—unused except by occasional recreational boaters—cuts its way through The Great Dismal Swamp. Today’s Dismal Swamp Canal would be unthinkable to the leaders who advocated for and oversaw its completion over 200 years ago. With its inaugural transit in 1814, the Dismal Swamp Canal was one of the earliest examples of transportation innovation. It undoubtedly served as an important model of future internal improvements, such as the Erie Canal. Discussion of the conditions of the Great Dismal Swamp emerged in the mid-1700s. American founding fathers such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Patrick Henry questioned the economic value of the vast, harsh environment that earned its name as a “dismal” place. Connecting international ports in Norfolk, Virginia, with the farms and small towns that dotted the banks of the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina, building the Dismal Swamp Canal would prove to be an

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<sup>311</sup> George Washington, “The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition: To James Madison,” November 30, 1785, University of Virginia Press, Rotunda.

audacious undertaking with an enormous economic payoff. However, there was almost constant opposition to the canal's construction, opening, and operation due to perceived—and eventually realized—uneven economic development between North Carolina and Virginia. Despite substantial opposition, the Dismal Swamp Canal ushered in a period of profound economic and population growth in both states and proved the growth of commerce that accompanied internal improvements.

## The Beginnings of the Canal

The Dismal Swamp Canal was one of the earliest adventures into the realm of internal improvements. Thomas Jefferson favored using federal money to construct roads and canals, arguing that a national scheme of canals and roads would improve commerce and maintain liberty by allowing for the inexpensive and efficient transportation of goods throughout the coastal and interior United States.<sup>312</sup> The creation of the Dismal Swamp Canal began in the early 1700s when George Washington, along with Patrick Henry and other men of landed gentry, formed the Dismal Swamp Company to drain the Great Dismal Swamp and sell the land for farming.<sup>313</sup> While the company never managed to drain the swamp, due to their ineptitude and mismanagement, they continued to sell land and market the high agricultural quality of its soil. As more prospectors purchased land, the idea of a canal running through

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<sup>312</sup> Sheriff, *The Artificial River*; Skeen, "Internal Improvements," 97–98; Shaw, "Pioneer Canals and Republican Improvements," 23.

<sup>313</sup> Charles Royster, *The Fabulous History of the Dismal Swamp Company: A Story of George Washington's Times*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 293; "The Great Dismal," *The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository (1790-1797)* (New York: American Periodicals Series I, April 1791), 88868452, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online; Clifford Reginald Hinshaw, "North Carolina Canals Before 1860," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 25, no. 1 (1948): 17–18; Mathew Carey, *The American Museum, or, Universal Magazine*, vol. 11 (Philadelphia: Printed by Mathew Carey [etc.], 1787), 459.

the Great Dismal Swamp from North Carolina to Virginia gained popularity, both as a means of transporting lumber and wooden shingles, and of shipping agricultural and manufactured goods.<sup>314</sup>

In correspondence with George Washington in 1786, Thomas Jefferson shared his excitement that a canal would be built through the swamp. Washington saw the canal as a scheme that would enrich all who owned land along its course.<sup>315</sup> In 1785, Virginia auctioned off land in the Great Dismal Swamp, advertising that the proposed canal “will greatly enhance the value of” the lands.<sup>316</sup> Patrick Henry, then governor of Virginia, eagerly supported the canal and was one of many prospectors who acquired huge tracts of land.<sup>317</sup> Henry’s political detractors were quick to criticize this purchase as a self-serving abuse of power, akin to land-mongering.<sup>318</sup>

In 1772, the Virginia General Assembly approved a team of surveyors to travel into the Great Dismal Swamp to survey the land and propose a course. However, few men were willing to travel into such an abysmal place, and they conducted surveys hastily and carelessly.<sup>319</sup> The original route of the canal failed to run through the land owned by Washington’s Dismal Swamp Company, but the course was later changed due to Washington’s expressed opposition and the need to avoid the shallow inlet at North Carolina’s Currituck Sound (located at the original route’s exit) that was impassable by large ships. In 1783, the Virginia General Assembly approved the course of the Dismal Swamp Canal to

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<sup>314</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 292–93.

<sup>315</sup> Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Jefferson Randolph, *Memoirs, Correspondence, and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Late President of the United States*, vol. 1 (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1829), 249.

<sup>316</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 300.

<sup>317</sup> Jackson T. Main, “The One Hundred,” 376–77.

<sup>318</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 292.

<sup>319</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 299–301; Carey, *The American Museum, or, Universal Magazine*, 11:459.

run much closer to Washington's land, but not through the property.<sup>320</sup> The Virginia and North Carolina General Assemblies created the Dismal Swamp Canal Company by 1790 and charged it with raising funds, constructing, and managing the Dismal Swamp Canal. The Canal Company's charter set shares at \$250, and the company would charge tolls on the goods that flowed through the canal. Prospective investors and land-mongers clearly saw the potential for such a canal: the company sold 252 shares in the first nine months of trading, with Washington's Dismal Swamp Company as the largest shareholder.<sup>321</sup>

Despite its popularity, there was also opposition to the canal. Some North Carolinians decried the effort, arguing that the canal would harm North Carolina's trade by making Norfolk, Virginia the epicenter of commerce. Other opponents in Virginia and in North Carolina believed the canal would only benefit the land-mongering politicians who owned land near the canal. In a letter to the North Carolina House of Commons, Edward Jones wrote that the "granting [of] perpetuities to a particular set of men, and empowering them...to wrest the property of their fellow citizen from him without his consent...is a flagrant violation of the constitution by which the people of North Carolina have consented to be governed."<sup>322</sup> In 1786, the North Carolina House of Commons voted 56-30 to postpone its consideration of financial support for the canal in order to allow for more input from citizens. The North Carolina General Assembly finally passed a bill approving the canal and providing financial

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<sup>320</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 299–300; Tanner, *Memoir on the Recent Surveys*, 459; "Advertisement," *New-York Daily Gazette*, 1792; Hinshaw, "North Carolina Canals Before 1860," 15; "No. II. Part 1: Report of the Secretary of the Treasury" *The Historical Register of the United States (1812-1814)* (Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, 1814), 10, 90566640, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online.

<sup>321</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 340–42; "[Dismal Swamp Canal; North Carolina; Halifax; Directors; Robert Andrews; Esquire; Williamsburg]," *The Freeman's Journal; or, The North-American Intelligencer*, 1791; Hinshaw, "North Carolina Canals Before 1860," 19.

<sup>322</sup> Jones, "Protest."

support in 1790 after delegates who opposed the canal in 1786 established a quid pro quo for funding of their own projects.<sup>323</sup>

The digging of the canal began in 1792, with one end beginning in North Carolina and the other in Virginia. The canal was designed to accommodate vessels with a 15-foot beam and 3-foot draft, necessitating at least eight feet in depth. With \$100,000 in capital raised from the sale of stock, the two ends were to meet in the middle, and the canal was to be operational by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1800.<sup>324</sup> During construction, the canal was little more than a muddy ditch with horrific working conditions. Slaves hired out by their owners from nearby plantations primarily built the canal because contemporaries viewed the labor as too dangerous and horrendous for white workers.<sup>325</sup> In a hot and humid climate, slaves felled trees, cleared underbrush, and dug through ten feet of morass, peat, roots, and sand with axes and saws. After digging three feet below the surface, muddy water flowed down the sides of the ditch, leaving the slaves to work in ankle-deep (and sometimes neck-deep) mud. A day's work on the canal meant moving less than ten yards.<sup>326</sup> As construction slowed to a crawl, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company ran out of funds. In addition to the poor conditions of the swamp, many of the financial difficulties were due to the company's disregard for proper surveying. The Canal Company failed to calculate both the number of locks needed and the elevation change of the canal. By 1796, there were still 11 miles between the two ends of the canal and the company routinely ran out of capital every few weeks, requiring work to stop. Two years later, shares of the company had

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<sup>323</sup> Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 246–47.

<sup>324</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 342; “State of the Dismal Swamp Canal,” *State Gazette of North-Carolina*, 1796.

<sup>325</sup> Cecelski, “A March Down into the Water,” 103–21.

<sup>326</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 242–43; Hinshaw, “North Carolina Canals Before 1860,” 21; “[President; Directors; Dismal Swamp; Canal; Company; Norfolk; April; Resolved],” *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*, 1792; Sawyer, “Antebellum Golden Age,” 104; Cecelski, “A March Down into the Water,” 110.

decreased in value from \$250 to a mere \$100. Construction would resume as funds came in, then stop again as the money was exhausted.<sup>327</sup>

By 1804, the North Carolina and Virginia ends of the canal were still more than a mile apart. The two ends of the canal finally met in 1805, but the canal was not wide enough for boat traffic larger than wooden flats.<sup>328</sup> An enormous fire in 1806 further slowed construction, possibly caused by the company's rushed efforts to clear land for the canal. Six months after the fire, a series of blizzards blanketed the swamp with snow.<sup>329</sup> Work resumed in the spring and the canal finally reached an appropriate width of 20 feet in 1809, although it was much narrower than the intended width of 32 feet.<sup>330</sup> As the War of 1812 began, the Virginia General Assembly decided to increase appropriations for internal improvements in Virginia's defense through strengthened commerce.<sup>331</sup> However, the newly appropriated monies were not enough, and the company's coffers quickly ran dry. The canal's lack of locks and the Dismal Swamp Canal Company's lack of funds to build them out of stone prevented the transit of ships and goods. As a temporary substitute, the company borrowed money and built locks out of juniper logs.<sup>332</sup> June of 1814 finally saw the first wind-powered vessel pass through the canal. Carrying twenty tons of bacon and brandy, the vessel traveled from Scotland Neck, North

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<sup>327</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 343, 419; Hinshaw, "North Carolina Canals Before 1860," 22.

<sup>328</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 414; Hinshaw, "North Carolina Canals Before 1860," 22; Sawyer, "Antebellum Golden Age," 104; "By the Mails. Norfolk, June 4," *Newburyport Herald*, 1805.

<sup>329</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 414–15.

<sup>330</sup> Royster, 422; Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics, 1781-1800*, 247.

<sup>331</sup> "The Publick Ledger: Virginia Legislature," *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger*, January 4, 1813.

<sup>332</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 422; "No. II. Part 1: Report of the Secretary of the Treasury," 10.

Carolina to Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>333</sup> This transit initiated a drastic rise in regional commerce and prosperity that would last for nearly a half-century.

### **Economic Growth, Population Growth, and A Successful Canal**

The growth of commerce and population in the region—particularly in northeastern North Carolina—was sizable once the canal was navigable by ships that could carry produce and goods in larger quantities, thus allowing for more trade. Prior to the opening of the Dismal Swamp Canal, efficient long-distance shipping in North Carolina was limited to the southern part of the state. Ships sailing from northeastern parts of the state needed to be small enough to pass through shallow inlets along the coast, inhibiting their ability to carry large cargoes. With the opening of the canal, larger vessels such as schooners could safely and quickly transit to Norfolk and out to sea through the Chesapeake Bay.<sup>334</sup> The ease of transporting goods that came with the canal strongly benefited the economy of North Carolina.

While the War of 1812 damaged the economy of most towns in North Carolina, it benefited those near the canal. An account from a slave traveling with his former master revealed the effects of the war. Goods bypassed the British blockade of the Chesapeake Bay by going down the mostly finished Dismal Swamp Canal on flats before transferring to larger vessels and heading south out to sea. A newspaper article from the time discussed how Elizabeth City and Beaufort—the towns closest to the North Carolina entrance of the canal—had “four times the shipping in

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<sup>333</sup> Royster, *Fabulous History*, 422; Sawyer, “Antebellum Golden Age,” 104; Hinshaw, “North Carolina Canals Before 1860,” 23.

<sup>334</sup> Sawyer, “Antebellum Golden Age,” 104.

their harbours” than they had prior to the war.<sup>335</sup> After the war, these North Carolinian towns quickly developed into busy commercial centers.

Agricultural products came into towns like Elizabeth City to be shipped to Norfolk. Those in the surrounding areas, identified in a *Norfolk Herald* article as M. Cooke and Miles King, recognized that “no profitable trade” with Norfolk “could be carried on without the aid of canals” and that trade through the Dismal Swamp Canal had the ability to improve the exports of North Carolina’s Albemarle Sound.<sup>336</sup> Lemuel Sawyer, a former member of Congress from North Carolina, opened a successful store along the Dismal Swamp Canal. Sawyer wrote that he “kept the boats steadily employed in bringing through the Canal, the grain, lumber,” and manufactured goods that were needed.<sup>337</sup> Population growth and increased commerce worked in tandem; such a steady stream of goods indicated not only the demand for imports from Norfolk, but also the population growth in northeastern North Carolina that drove Sawyer’s success. Land near the canal in North Carolina was highly valued as a result. The *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger* advertised a tract of land as having “great advantages over any other lands' ' in the area due to its proximity to the canal.<sup>338</sup> In 1800, Pasquotank County, North Carolina, which included Elizabeth City and the southern end of the canal, had a population of 5,037. By 1820, the population of Pasquotank County had soared to over 8,000.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Grandy and Thompson, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 9; “Raleigh, N. C. Nov. 5,” *New York Herald*, 1813.

<sup>336</sup> Cooke, King, and Lewis, “Navigation of Roanoke.” *Niles’ Weekly Register (1814-1837)* (Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, July 13, 1816), 136764870, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online.

<sup>337</sup> Sawyer, *Autobiography of Lemuel Sawyer*, 12.

<sup>338</sup> Harvey, “Valuable Lands for Sale.”

<sup>339</sup> Manson et al., *1810 and 1820 Census Data*, version 15.0 [dataset], IPUMS, IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System (Minneapolis, MN, 2020); “Census Data, 1790-1850” (United States Census Bureau, 1790-1850).

On the Virginia side of the canal, the effects were commensurate. Goods flowed to ports in Norfolk and to towns along the Elizabeth River and Hampton Roads.<sup>340</sup> In the Virginia House of Delegates, the Committee of Roads and Internal Navigation issued a report that declared the Dismal Swamp Canal to be the most important public work in Virginia. The report noted the fact that raw materials and agricultural goods produced in Virginia's interior often "enrich[ed] the coffers of her neighbours" by flowing into other states. While the canal did not reach Virginia's interior, it contributed to reversing this trend by enabling Norfolk's merchants to acquire North Carolina's produce.<sup>341</sup> The magnitude of goods coming from North Carolina resulted in a significant growth of Norfolk's commerce, evidenced by the population increases that occurred in the areas surrounding the Dismal Swamp Canal. By 1820, the population of the cities and counties that would have been affected by the canal's trade had grown from 26,984 in 1790 to 34,050.<sup>342</sup>

The newspapers illustrated the canal's initial success throughout the region, which reported records of tolls on the goods that passed through the canal. A *Norfolk Gazette* article in 1815 reported that one North Carolinian alone sent 1,200 tons of staves, corn, and bacon—valued at \$32,000 (over half-a-million dollars in today's currency)—to Norfolk in a seven-month period, taking up about four entire ships on his own. The newspaper predicted that the total goods that flowed through the Dismal Swamp Canal to Norfolk from December 1815 through June 1816, "would be sufficient to load three hundred vessels, of three hundred tons

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<sup>340</sup> "Other 28 -- No Title," *Niles' Weekly Register (1814-1837)*

(Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, August 28, 1817), 136761003, American Periodicals.

<sup>341</sup> "Legislature of Virginia, House of Delegates.," *Niles' Weekly Register (1814-1837)*

(Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, February 24, 1816), 136306736, American Periodicals.

<sup>342</sup> Manson et al., *1810 and 1820 Census Data*; "Census Data, 1790-1850."

each.”<sup>343</sup> In 1822, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company collected \$4,364.94 in tolls. By 1824, that number had grown to \$7,716.97.<sup>344</sup> Although the canal was not large enough to allow for sea-going vessels, it achieved steady growth.

Despite the canal’s relative early success, it found opposition in North Carolina. While those in Virginia were satisfied with the canal’s strengthening of the state’s shipping commerce, North Carolinians aired grievances.<sup>345</sup> Some in North Carolina viewed the canal as a scheme to divert their commerce to Virginia.<sup>346</sup> Archibald D. Murphey, the chairman of North Carolina’s Board of Internal Improvements, shared this view. Murphey began to oppose the Dismal Swamp Canal shortly after its opening due to its redirection of North Carolinian goods to Virginia. He wrote in 1819 that “we have shipped from our own Ports not more than one-third of our Agricultural products; and even a considerable portion of our Staves, Lumber and Naval Stores, have been sent to other ports by the Dismal Swamp Canal [...]” Murphey expressed concern that North Carolina would become less economically viable as a result of this exodus of goods. He expressed this in his papers, writing that the “unfortunate division of our trade produces many bad effects. It makes us appear a poor state in the union. It leaves us without markets at home: and thus we lose the profits upon our Commerce.”<sup>347</sup> Murphey and other North Carolinians who opposed the Dismal Swamp Canal were not simply opposed to commercial development, but rather the canal’s effects of diverting commercial products away from the state. However, the immediate economic benefits of the canal to North Carolinian farmers,

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<sup>343</sup> “The Publick Ledger: Dismal Swamp Canal,” *Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger*, June 1, 1816.

<sup>344</sup> “The D.S. Canal Bill,” *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, March 19, 1832.

<sup>345</sup> “Legislature of Virginia, House of Delegates.”

<sup>346</sup> “From the Lynchburg Press. Navigation of Roanoke, And C,” *American Beacon*, 1816.

<sup>347</sup> Murphey, “The Papers of Archibald DeBow Murphey,” 5–6.

Virginian merchants, and the revenues collected from tolls for both states rendered opposing arguments mute.

### **Success, and the Argument for Enlargement**

Arguments in favor of enlarging the canal began to surface soon after the opening of the Dismal Swamp Canal in 1814. As the fruitfulness of the canal became clear, those invested in its success sought to widen and deepen the channel to allow for the passage of larger, sea-going ships carrying more goods. One observer commented that such an expansion would “render it a highway of invaluable importance” and “invite an extensive commerce.”<sup>348</sup> With its enlargement, the canal would be a much more efficient option for merchants because sea-going vessels could travel through the canal without transferring goods to smaller vessels.<sup>349</sup> In pursuit of this efficiency, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company sought to accommodate larger ships through expansion, lowering the number of locks, and improving the navigability of the rivers at the openings to the canal.<sup>350</sup>

In order to acquire the necessary capital to enlarge the canal, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company launched a variety of efforts. In addition to advertising lotteries in area newspapers, the company sought the assistance of the Virginia legislature in 1819.<sup>351</sup> A report issued by the Virginia Board of Public Works recommended—and the legislature agreed to—the buying of more stock and the issuing of three loans totaling \$137,000. To justify this recommendation, the Board of Public Works described the canal’s “just expectations of full success” of the expansion based on the speculation that “the trade of the Roanoke and

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<sup>348</sup> “From the Lynchburg Press. Navigation of Roanoke, And C.”

<sup>349</sup> Hinshaw, “North Carolina Canals Before 1860,” 23–24.

<sup>350</sup> Niles, *The Weekly Register*, vol. 55.

<sup>351</sup> “Dismal Swamp Canal Lottery,” *Norfolk Herald*, February 1, 1828.

Albemarle sound will pass through this channel.” The economic benefits of the expansion were expected not just for Norfolk’s ports directly, but also for lower Virginia and northeastern North Carolina through “a great and growing market for all their commodities.”<sup>352</sup> The ability of commercial merchants to access more goods and for farmers to gain access to new markets was central to arguments for expansion. The canal also won financial support from the federal government. The United States Congress, convinced by the Department of War of its defensive value as an escape route from Norfolk in the case of future blockades, purchased 800 shares in the Dismal Swamp Canal Company between 1826 and 1829.<sup>353</sup> This investment would fuel a national debate within the next five years regarding the constitutionality of the monetary roles and responsibilities of the federal government in internal improvements.

Construction began on the enlargement in 1824, and the expanded canal opened in December 1828. The reopening of the canal was heralded as an event of great importance and noteworthiness. *Niles’ Weekly Register* listed the canal’s reopening as the first item in its weekly chronicle section, underlining how the enlargement was “so important to an internal trade and to Norfolk.”<sup>354</sup> The canal further proved its worth after 1828, leading to the continued growth of commerce in the region.

## **Increased Commerce and Debates of Constitutionality**

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<sup>352</sup> Hinshaw, “North Carolina Canals Before 1860,” 24; “Education & Internal Improvement: IMPORTANT REPORTS TO THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF VIRGINIA,” *Niles’ Weekly Register (1814-1837)* (Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, February 20, 1819), 3, 136763345, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online.

<sup>353</sup> Hinshaw, “North Carolina Canals Before 1860,” 24.

<sup>354</sup> “Chronicle,” *Niles’ Weekly Register (1814-1837)* (Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, December 4, 1819), 136305333, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online; Hinshaw, “North Carolina Canals Before 1860,” 24.

By the 1830s, the Dismal Swamp Canal had, as one newspaper opinion writer put it, “knocked all speculation in the head,” proving “that Virginia is now sensible of her own important facilities, and alive to all her own natural advantages.”<sup>355</sup> While Virginia gained substantial quantities of commerce from the newly enlarged canal, North Carolina also reaped profits from their more efficient access to markets. In 1830, a hogshead of tobacco sold for \$3 in Norfolk. After traveling 460 miles from a farm on the Roanoke River in North Carolina through the Dismal Swamp Canal to Norfolk, tobacco farmers earned twice what they spent cultivating their crop.<sup>356</sup> In addition to the most common destination of Norfolk, many ships departed North Carolina and sailed to Alexandria, Virginia, and Baltimore, Maryland by way of the Dismal Swamp Canal.<sup>357</sup> With the ability to move more goods through the canal, North Carolinian farmers were able to sell produce more quickly, more safely, with higher profits, and in more ports than with the formerly used sea route.

The enlargement of the canal caused a dramatic increase in trade, and the collection of tolls improved the Dismal Swamp Canal Company’s financial standing. To further increase the canal’s trade and the flow of goods from North Carolina to Norfolk, citizens in Virginia incorporated a shipping enterprise called the Virginia and North Carolina Transportation Company in 1828. Recognizing the desire of North Carolinians located further in the interior to ship goods and produce to ports in Norfolk, those behind the transportation company sought to provide a dedicated line of shipping routes from the distant upper parts of the Roanoke River

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<sup>355</sup> “To the Editor Of the Enquirer. the Trade of Virginia and Commercial Importance of the James,” *Enquirer*, 1830.

<sup>356</sup> “The Herald: The Markets,” *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, February 1, 1828.

<sup>357</sup> “The Dismal Swamp Canal: From the Norfolk Herald,” *Niles’ Weekly Register (1814-1837)* (Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, December 12, 1829), 136301762, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online.

to Norfolk.<sup>358</sup> In October of 1829, a petition was presented to the legislature of Virginia for an act to incorporate the company.<sup>359</sup> By July of 1830, eight shipping vessels and several steam-powered tow boats were built.<sup>360</sup>

In 1827, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company collected \$7,635 in tolls, a figure slightly lower than that of 1824 due to the progressing renovation. In 1831, three years after the canal reopened, the company collected \$27,030 in tolls. The number of foreign vessels entering the canal nearly doubled between 1829 and 1831.<sup>361</sup> From 1830 to 1831, 50,508 tons of goods were transported through the canal, with 45,953 tons going to market in Norfolk and 4,555 tons of merchandise heading back to North Carolina. Nearly 20 percent of those tons traveled to or from the Roanoke River.<sup>362</sup> By 1833, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company collected \$34,059.89 in tolls, an increase of over \$7,000 in two years.<sup>363</sup> Over a two-week period in June 1829, 15 schooners, seven sloops, 12 rafts, and 18 lighters traversed the canal. Four years later, most of the ships journeying through the canal were large shipping vessels. In April 1833, 272 schooners and sloops, 29 lighters, and 15 rafts passed through the canal, most heading to Virginia.<sup>364</sup> The Dismal Swamp Canal's growth, illustrated in Table 1, shows the increase of common articles of produce passing through the canal in 1829, 1831, and 1833 to Norfolk, with goods

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<sup>358</sup> "Our Only Hope," *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, June 13, 1828; "From the Lynchburg Press. Navigation of Roanoke, And C."

<sup>359</sup> "Notice," *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, November 11, 1829.

<sup>360</sup> "The Herald: Virginia and North Carolina Transportation Company," *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, July 16, 1830.

<sup>361</sup> "The D.S. Canal Bill."

<sup>362</sup> "Dismal Swamp Canal Toll Office, December 10th, 1831," *Enquirer*, 1831.

<sup>363</sup> "The D.S. Canal Bill"; "The Herald: The Dismal Swamp Canal," *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, May 22, 1833.

<sup>364</sup> "Canal Commerce," *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, July 16, 1830; "The Herald: The Dismal Swamp Canal."

originating from the Roanoke River, eastern North Carolina, and the surrounding areas.<sup>365</sup>

Table 1: Common Articles Passing Through the Dismal Swamp Canal, 1829, 1831, and 1833<sup>366</sup>

<b>Pr o- du ct</b>	<b>U ni t*</b>	<b>182 9</b>	<b>183 1</b>	<b>Chan ge 182 9- 183 1</b>	<b>183 3</b>	<b>Chan ge 183 1- 183 3</b>	<b>Chan ge 1829 - 1833</b>
Tobacco	Hhds	770	3,237	+ 2,467	5,733**	+2,496	+4,963
Cotton	Bales	1,964	10,232	+8,268	11,401	+1,169	+9,437
Corn	Bush	30,000	164,668	+134,668	217,634	+52,966	+187,634
Shingles	Indiv	14,296,000	26,018,582	+11,722,582	48,250,563†	+22,231,981	+33,954,563
Flour	Bbls	2,957	13,342	+10,385	11,008	-2,334	+8,051
Fish	Bbls	2,507	10,770	+8,263	13,688	+2,918	+11,181
Staves	Indiv	1,170,000	3,271,752	+2,101,752	8,076,861‡	+4,805,109	+6,906,861

\* “Hhds” = hogsheads; “Bush” = bushels; “Indiv” = individuals “Bbls” = barrels

\*\* 2,044 hogsheads and 3,689 boxes and kegs

† 5,921,211 large (3ft); 2,514,179 2ft; 39,815,173 small

‡ 1,616,174 pipe staves; 6,304,936 hoghead staves; 102,627 barrel staves; 53,124 cooper’s staves

<sup>365</sup> “The D.S. Canal Bill.”

<sup>366</sup> “The D.S. Canal Bill”; “The Herald: The Dismal Swamp Canal.”

After more than \$800,000 had been spent on the canal's construction and improvements, the company reported receiving \$19,455.93 in profit for the year of November 1834 through November 1835.<sup>367</sup> In 1841, the value of tolls collected by the Dismal Swamp Canal Company was 40 percent higher than the average of the past five years, with 94 percent of the tolled goods originating in North Carolina and six percent originating in Virginia.<sup>368</sup> This imbalance in trade fueled continued opposition to the canal in North Carolina.

The improved canal's effects on commerce in Norfolk and agricultural profits in North Carolina also resulted in population growth. The population in the areas of Virginia near the canal had grown from 34,050 in 1820 to 40,050 in 1830 and to 49,905 in 1850. The population of the canal areas in North Carolina grew from just over 8,000 in 1820 to 8,641 in 1830 and rose to just under 15,000 in 1850.<sup>369</sup> While much of this population growth was due to the improved opportunities for commerce that stemmed from the Dismal Swamp Canal, not all of the effects were positive. In August of 1830, the *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald* reported that the prosperous opportunities generated by the Dismal Swamp Canal increased demand for housing and landlords aimed to raise rents. It was the position of the *Herald* that, although business had improved with the canal's reopening, the conditions did not warrant rent increases.<sup>370</sup>

Although the prosperity generated by the canal was large and widespread, opposition in North Carolina continued to arise in response to the imbalance of trade and the perceived unconstitutionality of federal funding for the canal. In 1828, Joseph Caldwell, the first president of the

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<sup>367</sup> Sparks et al., *The American Almanac*, 239.

<sup>368</sup> "States of the Union: Virginia: Dismal Swamp Canal," *Niles' Weekly Register (1841-1842)*, November 27, 1841, 61–62 edition, 203; "Chronicle: Dismal Swamp Canal," *Niles' Weekly Register (1841-1842)*, January 1, 1842, 61–62 edition, 288.

<sup>369</sup> "Census Data, 1790-1850."

<sup>370</sup> "The Herald: A Note or Two to Landlords," *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, August 18, 1830.

University of North Carolina, criticized North Carolina's failure to build canals and improve the state's unnavigable rivers. Reiterating Murphey's argument in opposition to the canal, Caldwell claimed that North Carolina's support for the Dismal Swamp Canal created a situation in which Virginia had "almost completed [...] the appropriation of our goods." He continued to denounce "the destitution of [commerce]" in North Carolina. Caldwell not only wanted North Carolina to build its own canals, but also to end its support of the Dismal Swamp Canal due to its motive to "lead off the whole trade of the Roanoke, and of the Albemarle and Pamlico waters to Norfolk."<sup>371</sup> Although Caldwell was accurate in his assertion that the canal resulted in goods and produce leaving the state, this opposing argument would not be sufficient enough to lead to the canal's closure nor the withdrawal of North Carolina's financial support, as Murphey had advocated. Additionally, due to North Carolina's lack of quality ports and harbors, it is likely that the economic development of the state would have been further harmed were the canal not in existence.

Other arguments in opposition came from Congress. Although Congress did not explicitly oppose the Dismal Swamp Canal, the Senate's disagreement on the federal government's constitutional authority to fund internal improvements inhibited the canal's ability to receive additional federal funding. Despite this dispute, Senator James Noble of Indiana favored the construction of canals as a way of increasing commerce. During debate in 1830, Senator Noble invoked Congress' previous backing of the Dismal Swamp Canal to support the need for funding of canals in the west.<sup>372</sup> Regardless, many opposed the funding of any projects that would benefit only one state or region.<sup>373</sup> Newspapers such as *Niles' Weekly Register* argued in favor of internal improvements, writing that it should be preferable to enjoy "a *positive good*" instead of "the

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<sup>371</sup> Caldwell, *The Numbers of Carlton*, 145, 146, 160.

<sup>372</sup> Niles, *The Weekly Register*, vol. 39.

<sup>373</sup> Larson, *Internal Improvement*, 167.

establishment of an abstract *question of right*.”<sup>374</sup> Proponents of funding for internal improvements such as canals didn’t believe that the constitution prevented—or should have prevented—commercial development that would benefit the citizenry.

In the years to come, the Dismal Swamp Canal Company would continue to build on its success by making improvements to the canal. The Canal Company frequently dredged sand bars that formed at the mouths of the canal to ensure travel without obstruction.<sup>375</sup> In the 1860s, a guidebook for immigrants to North Carolina indicated that produce found profitable markets in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Norfolk through the Dismal Swamp Canal.<sup>376</sup> At the time of the Civil War, the canal was commandeered by the United States Government, which failed to maintain it throughout the conflict. Once the war passed, the canal was returned to the Dismal Swamp Canal Company in a dilapidated state.<sup>377</sup> By the late 1860s, tolls collected by the Dismal Swamp Canal Company had declined from over \$34,000 in 1833 to just under \$14,000 in 1869 due to competition with railroads and the diminished capacity of the canal that resulted from its neglect during the Civil War.<sup>378</sup> The recently opened Norfolk and Southern Railroad had eclipsed the canal and reduced its traffic of goods.<sup>379</sup> In 1880, the Dismal Swamp

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<sup>374</sup> “Interesting Items.,” *Niles’ Weekly Register (1814-1837)*

(Baltimore; Washington; Baltimore; Philadelphia: American Periodicals Series II, November 21, 1829), 136301486, American Periodicals; Periodicals Index Online.

<sup>375</sup> “Impediments to the Navigation of the Dismal Swamp Canal,” *Norfolk & Portsmouth Herald*, April 5, 1830.

<sup>376</sup> *A Guide to Capitalists and Emigrants*, 15.

<sup>377</sup> “To Buy Dismal Swamp Canal,” *New York Tribune*, November 16, 1899, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>378</sup> Corprew and Dismal Swamp Canal Company, *Annual Report of the President for the Fiscal Year Ending Sept. 30th, 1869*, 8; “The Herald: Virginia and North Carolina Transportation Company.”

<sup>379</sup> North Carolina Board of Agriculture, *North Carolina and Its Resources* (M.I. & J.C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1896).

Canal Company was forced to sell its canal at auction to the Lake Drummond Canal and Water Company for the measly sum of \$275,000.<sup>380</sup> Between 1880 and 1899, the canal was sold at least three more times to merchants in Baltimore and New York City, once for just \$10,000.<sup>381</sup> After its sales, numerous attempts were made to widen and enlarge the canal but these rescue efforts proved to be futile.<sup>382</sup>

Despite severe mismanagement at the beginning of its construction and constant opposition throughout its operation, many contemporaries believed that the canal surpassed expectations.<sup>383</sup> Although it sits unused by shipping vessels today, the canal was critical to the growth of the region's commerce. The ability of North Carolina's goods to find markets in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New York City would have been impossible were it not for the Dismal Swamp Canal. Without its presence, North Carolina's northeastern population—and quite possibly Norfolk's as well—would not have grown so dramatically. The flow of goods, showcased through first-hand accounts and toll books, indicate that the canal was often alive with shipping vessels until it faced competition from railroads. As one of the earliest man-made commercial waterways in the United States, the Dismal Swamp Canal left a legacy of success for other internal improvements to come, particularly the Erie Canal. Although eventually eclipsed by the Erie, it is impossible to ignore the contribution

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<sup>380</sup> “[Recollections; Dred; Dismal Swamp; Lake Drummond],” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 12, 1877, America's Historical Newspapers; “Sale of a Canal,” *New York Herald*, January 16, 1880, 16 edition, America's Historical Newspapers; “To Buy Dismal Swamp Canal.”

<sup>381</sup> “Talk of the Day,” *The Boston Daily Journal*, September 1, 1892, LIX edition, America's Historical Newspapers; “Dismal Swamp Canal to Be Rebuilt,” *Springfield Daily Republican*, April 29, 1896, America's Historical Newspapers; “To Buy Dismal Swamp Canal.”

<sup>382</sup> North Carolina Board of Agriculture, *North Carolina and Its Resources*, 130, 133, 184–85, 380.

<sup>383</sup> “The Herald: The Dismal Swamp Canal”; “To the Editor of the Enquirer. the Trade of Virginia and Commercial Importance of the James.”

of the Dismal Swamp Canal's success to later efforts that advocated for a broad program of internal improvements. Had the canal failed, it would have served as the prime example against continued internal improvements in the South. Despite funding crises, land-mongering, and opposition, the Dismal Swamp Canal showcased exactly what the founding fathers envisioned for the nation: the growth of commerce and wealth among citizens resulting from internal improvements, creating a powerful example for improvements to come.

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