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United States Military Academy
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Alternate Perspectives: the theme for the spring issue of Report asked authors to take a different approach in their research – to explore topics using social, cultural, economic, medical, literary, and even photographic lenses. The editorial staff of Report was thrilled to receive papers from all over the country and the world that shed light on oft ignored perspectives concerning both well-studied historical events and ones that have not been memorialized in the American historical consciousness. We are grateful to everyone who submitted work, and I am thankful to the authors whose work is included, to the editors who spent many hours working with the authors to refine their fascinating papers, and to Major Forney and Captain Ehlers, who spent many hours with me to publish the final journal.

The authors of the first four papers approach the American Civil War and the two World Wars from different social, cultural, and literary perspectives. Justin Liang of the University of Chicago drew upon French diaries and journals to understand how the French people perceived their political involvement under the Vichy Regime in 1940. Jill Bosserman of Purdue applies a similarly critical look to the writings of Ambrose Bierce, connecting the disillusionment in his writing with his experiences during the American Civil War. In an exploration of the “batmen” of World War I – the servant soldiers serving officers during World War I – Blake McGready from SUNY New Palz reveals how the British class structure was reinforced during the First World War. Finally, Zachary Determan examines the motivations of Soviet soldiers fighting in World War II.

The next set of authors add texture and nuance to our understanding of Christianity during certain periods of history, incorporating individual perspectives and popular literature. Francis Ambrogio from the United States Military Academy explores the personal motivations and geostrategic considerations of the key actors in their decision to go on the First Crusade, adding depth to what is normally seen as a simple invasion of the east by the Christian west. The analysis of McGill University’s Sarah Fortin of the different English editions of Bartolomé de Las Casas’ account of Spanish colonialism reveals how English Protestants leveraged this Catholic priest’s call for a more humane approach to colonization to justify anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic policy and sentiment in England. Frustrated with a gap in the historiography of Dorothy Day, Peter Geppert at the University of Wisconsin-Madison explores how Day’s background in socialism was key to her ability to impact the way the Catholic Church considers its obligation to social causes in twentieth century United States.

I have learned a lot and traveled the world through working with these papers for the past four years. It has been rewarding to watch Report grow and to work with the editors. I hope to continue to see a strong mix of civilian schools, international institutions, and service academies contributing to this journal. I would also like to thank the History Department for its continued mentorship of our editorial staff and financial support for our publication, as well as the History Departments of the other colleges and universities who extended our calls-for-papers to their students.

Erin Mauldin
Editor-in-Chief
West Point, NY
The precipitous fall of France to the Wehrmacht and its immediate aftermath in the summer of 1940 is the subject of unending debate. This may seem surprising, since from a military perspective, it appears to have been an open-and-shut case: the Battle of France lasted a mere six weeks and completed a total rout of the French defense. Beginning with the initial offensive on 10 May, the German advance forced the British to evacuate a mere two weeks later at Dunkirk, and soon was forging ahead so quickly that it overtook French troops in their retreat. By mid-June, Paris had fallen, an armistice was signed, and half the country fell under German occupation; in early July, the Third Republic was unceremoniously liquidated, and a new, authoritarian regime under the supervision of the Third Reich was inaugurated in the spa town of Vichy.

Where the Battle of France is most contentious in the historiography and in popular memory alike, then, is the question of civilian response to the military crisis. Indeed, the assessment of French society in the summer of 1940 inevitably casts long shadows on how to judge the entire question of French involvement in the politics of the Vichy state. For those critical months of crisis and catastrophe were the moment when, in the view of many historians, the French suddenly assumed the moral responsibility of acquiescing in a regime that collaborated with Germany in its war effort and took the initiative in deporting its own Jews. They became, in Robert Paxton’s words, “functional collaborators” in a pro-fascist regime, no matter their personal opinions on the politics of Vichy or of the Germans.

Paxton’s polemic was the opening salvo in what is an enduring debate about the relationship of French society to the politics of the Vichy state. In more recent historiography, the debate has distanced itself from
blanket accusations of collaboration by developing in two ways. Some historians continue the attempt to situate the French politically, though with a greater eye for their ambiguities, vacillations, indecision, and divided allegiances. Detailed investigations on public opinion have shown that the French, though rarely “resisters,” had little sympathy for the Vichy government and even less for the German occupiers. On the other hand, some social historians have abandoned the attempt to think of the French politically at all. Instead, they have sought to emphasize the everyday material conditions of the Vichy years, such as the shortages of food and fuel from which most of French society suffered, phenomena like the refugee movement and labor draft that pulled families apart, and other quotidian concerns that most of the French, most of the time, were preoccupied with.

What these two dominant approaches to social history have in fact done is to engage in an implicit debate about the relative weight of political perception and everyday experience as determinants of the behavior of French society in the Vichy period. This paper proposes that what may be most important in determining the way civilians react is how they themselves perceive the political content of their everyday experience. Looking closely at the critical months during and immediately after the war in 1940, I suggest that much of French society underwent a process of rapid depoliticization that at least in the inaugural moment of the Vichy regime, when some would argue the French first entered into complicity with the Third Reich, the French themselves thought of their own experiences and actions in largely non-political terms. This depoliticization above all determined the general acquiescence of the French public for most of the remainder of the war.

This paper comprises three parts. In the first, I briefly sketch the broad trends in the historiography on Vichy France until now, paying particular attention to different interpretations of French involvement in the politics of the period, and showing that society’s own perceptions of that relationship have thus far been neglected. In the second part, I draw on a selection of diaries and journals, written by a diverse group of people in the summer of 1940, to demonstrate the process of depoliticization that operated in French society at the time. My survey of contemporary testimonies is by no means exhaustive, nor does it give a complete cross-section of French society. But the evidence suggests something highly significant: in the third part of the paper, I propose that privileging processes of politicization and depoliticization as themselves historically contingent features points to a promising area of research that may help us better understand why people acted the way they did in the summer of 1940—or for that matter, in other periods of armed conflict.
I. Social history in two keys: political perception & everyday life

Postwar French society stayed away from the politics of the Vichy period as much and for as long as possible. After the Liberation of France in 1944, memory of the preceding four years was promptly bundled away. In its place, two competing and equally self-serving impulses took hold: one was to forget the “Dark Years” altogether, treating them as an ellipsis in the historical record. The other was to glorify the period as a heroic chapter in French history, during which “forty million resisters” had struggled valiantly against the German menace, while only a coterie of conniving politicians at Vichy was responsible for plotting the policy of collaboration.\(^1\) In either case, the aim was to generate a *cordon sanitaire* between French society and the French state, so that the ignominy of that regime might never stain the people who suffered its rule.

The layers of silence and mystification that accumulated around the Vichy years have since then progressively fallen away. The beginning of this process was in no small part due to the pioneering work of Robert Paxton, whose 1972 book *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* caused a firestorm of controversy when it appeared in translation in France. Paxton repudiated the widespread idea that if de Gaulle had wielded the sword for France, Pétain had held the shield, protecting France as best he could and giving in to German demands only when he could do no other. Instead, drawing extensively on German archives in default of access to French ones, Paxton argued that not only did Vichy leaders actively seek collaboration with Hitler, they were motivated by a homegrown right-wing, anti-Semitic agenda to initiate their own program of domestic policies, whose ultimate aim was a fundamental reform of society which they called the National Revolution. But while Paxton wrote the first systematic analysis of the nature of the Vichy regime, the nature of French society during that time was left largely unexamined. Limited to political and military archives of the German occupiers, Paxton made the simple assessment that the majority of the French, having created a “broad public climate of acceptance” in the aftermath of the defeat, were without a doubt “‘collaborators’ in a functional sense.”\(^2\)

Subsequent historians, as part of the “social turn” in the mid-80s and 90s, shifted their focus of research away from the Vichy regime to

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those living under it. As a result, fine-grained analyses based on newly-available regional archives in France sought to situate French public opinion more precisely. John Sweets, studying the town of Clermont-Ferrand, and Pierre Laborie, in the southwestern département of the Lot, each concluded that while most people were not resisters, calling them “functional collaborators” would be equally inaccurate. A spate of similar local and regional studies seemed to find “almost universal hostility to the Germans from early on, and a fairly rapid disenchantment with Vichy.”³ But if most of the French were neither collaborators nor resisters, what were they?

These new close-up, local perspectives on French society had the salutary effect of challenging the very usefulness of dichotomies between collaboration and resistance: these categories were too morally and politically charged, and clearly the majority of the French fit into neither typology. Philippe Burrin and others introduced such new concepts such as accommodation, adaptation, and *attentisme*—the wait-and-see attitude.⁴ Pierre Laborie in particular stressed the complexity and confusedness of a society marked by ambivalence. For example, a majority of the French bemoaned the defeat but were in favor of the armistice; they accepted Pétain while rejecting the Vichy state. In fact, many French believed that Pétain, contrary to his own pro-collaboration pronouncements in public, was still playing a “double game,” just as they themselves were often engaging in a daily exercise of double think.⁵ Rather than depict a nation divided between rival factions, Laborie portrayed the French as divided within themselves.

While the social historians working on public opinion were still trying to locate French society politically, others were moving beyond politics altogether. If the former operated at the level of the imaginary, the latter turned to look at French society in its basic materiality. These historians contended that for most people, the daily rhythms of private life were far more significant than the political sphere. Sweets suggested that the one word to which the war years in Clermont-Ferrand could be reduced is “shortage,”⁶ while Richard Vinen found other themes that recur in contemporary documents: refugees, deportations, food supplies, and provi-

sioning thereof, which often involved the vagaries of the black market.\textsuperscript{7} Some historians have expressed discomfort with giving too much attention to such mundane concerns, even if these were what were on most people’s minds; historians saw the focus on social and material history as downplaying the political choices people made, and even seemed sometimes like an apologia for their moral failure to act responsibly. But these reasonable concerns beg the question: what, indeed, \textit{was} the political content of everyday life in Vichy France?

At one extreme, anyone who stayed in France after the invasion and armistice could be considered politically implicated. Such was Paxton’s description of all French as “functional collaborators,” even if they did nothing. But even inaction can have many meanings: as John Sweets provocatively suggested, if a bystander who deliberately did nothing while seeing a Jew being arrested by the police was a functional collaborator, was a bystander who did nothing while watching someone stuff anti-Vichy tracts into letterboxes therefore a functional resister? Sweets also highlights that the Vichy regime premised itself on a fundamental reform of French society.\textsuperscript{8} If the social body resisted reform, was that resistance? By intruding on and attempting to regulate various aspects of private life, the Vichy regime increased the total surface of possible opposition. Even a once private activity, like listening to the BBC, could be seen as having been politicized by the regime’s attempt to prohibit it.

All this goes to show that quibbling over where to draw the line between political and non-political may inevitably be somewhat of a semantic exercise. On the other hand, what might be more useful is to examine where people themselves drew that line—their perceptions of how political their actions were—for these perceptions were what influenced how people ultimately behaved. The way you chose to answer a local gendarme’s seemingly innocuous question—“have you seen Pierre X this week?”—hinged on whether you saw any political stakes involved, and then on whether one considered yourself at that moment to be a political actor. Similarly, how you interacted with German soldiers depended on whether you saw them primarily as the German enemy or as homesick young men who happened to be German. These perceptions of where the boundary of politics lay should not be seen as stable or unambiguous, but

\textsuperscript{7} Richard Vinen, \textit{The Unfree French} (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 5.
\textsuperscript{8} Sweets, \textit{Choices}, 169.
they were nonetheless critical in determining how the French interacted with the occupying forces and with the Vichy state.

II. Contemporary attitudes in diaries and journals: everyday life beyond politics

The fall of France in the summer of 1940 created a climate of indescribable confusion in which events moved with astonishing rapidity. The swiftness of the rout put six million people on the road as refugees, and pushed many more into close contact with the invading German army. The sudden fall of a seemingly stable state, the equally sudden invasion by another one, and the unexpected appearance of a third—all in the span of six weeks—fundamentally destabilized settled relationships between state and society. The summer of 1940, then, was the moment that the French had to abandon their roles as citizens of the Third Republic and begin formulating initial terms of engagement with both the Vichy regime and the German occupiers. This is a process best captured by the diaries and journals that the French kept at the time. These documents demonstrate how rarely people saw their own actions and experiences in political terms. In fact, what people overwhelmingly wrote and thought about at this time suggests a more generalized process of depoliticization that occurred in much of French society during and in the immediate aftermath of the German invasion. This did not mean that people did not have political opinions, but these were perceived as quite distinct from their everyday lives. Neither did it mean that people were not conscious of the need to make difficult choices in their approach to the Vichy state and to the German occupiers, but these were made largely on the basis of personal non-political criteria.

Accordingly, the French were depoliticized at precisely the moment that earlier historians have seen them as entering political and ideological complicity. Some scholars have actually viewed the summer of 1940 as the moment of strongest public support for Pétain and his policies: in Philippe Burrin’s words, “the career of what was soon to be known as the Vichy government began at its peak.” But any attempt to accurately situate the French politically in this period is open to question. In fact, Richard Vinen argued that “many recall the few weeks or months after the German entry into France as a period that was somehow separate from the rest of their lives.” Simone de Beauvoir, for example, talked about the period as a “no man’s land” in time, as political passions and national concerns were put on hold while individuals learned to deal with the new situ-

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ations that invasion and defeat posed. Many diaries’ authors hoped fervently for an armistice—but no one thought of it as the basis for national regeneration and a new political order, only as a way to end the fighting, stem the refugee crisis, or reunite torn families. And almost immediately, they were forced to adjust to food shortages, civil restrictions, and the presence of German garrisons in the occupied territories. Depending on specific circumstances that varied considerably, the diaries show people perceiving their lives as removed from the political sphere in different ways and for a range of reasons.

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For the French lying in the invading army’s path, it was the prevention of death and devastation, above and beyond any political concerns, that underpinned the widespread desire for a ceasefire. As the German army advanced through northern France with apparent invincibility, many municipal and provincial authorities rushed to declare their cities and towns open ahead of the troops’ arrival, so as to spare them destruction. But in Nantes, an article in the local newspaper incorrectly declaring that the city was no longer open and that it would be defended until the very end set off mass panic and confusion. Edmond Duméril, a high school teacher better informed than his fellow citizens, found himself reassuring an anxious crowd that no fighting would be done. Someone Duméril considered a “zealot” did accuse him of defeatism—but he was the rare exception. Most people wished to avoid the last-ditch, desperate resistance that they considered likely to result in meaningless ruin.

Local officials’ declarations of open towns were sometimes contradicted by the French army’s rearguard actions, such as the detonation of bridges, which drew widespread condemnation because it raised the possibility of German reprisals. Berthe Auroy, passing through the town of Moulins in central France, recorded its inhabitants’ reaction to a detonation on the river Allier: “‘Why,’ asked the [townspeople], ‘did our troops blow up the bridge? Badly given instructions? Or had a countermand not arrived in time?’” Auroy reported that both the prefect and the mayor had tried parleying with the German commander and “implored him to spare the town.”

Back in Nantes, Duméril also reported rumors that the French

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army was considering blowing up bridges on the Loire; but this, Duméril thought, was “to what end? One must wish that the armistice conditions be accepted soon so as to avoid more destruction.”¹²

Of course, the desire for an armistice hardly stemmed from sympathy with Germany, or from any investment in the vague promise of national revival. In fact, when Pétain first announced on the radio the government’s request for an armistice, Bobkowski, then still in Montluçon in central France, noticed the somber mood that fell over the town. “We saw a crowd in front of a bistro from which escaped the sound of a radio. The Marseillaise. We approached. The women were in tears and the men had a gloomy air.” He reported feeling “the desire to cry.” But the next moment he added, “we snapped out of it.” Contained here is a key idea: that the national tragedy of defeat and armistice was hard to take, but life went on; as refugees, Bobkowski noted that “we pulled ourselves together. We had to think about what we were going to do.”¹³ In a way, all across the country people were “snapping out of it:” they were relegating political passions to a space separate from the daily decisions they faced.

Many of those whom Bobkowski observed lamenting the defeat but welcoming the armistice were refugees like him: they may have bemoaned the subjugation of France, but they rejoiced at their own liberation from weeks of senseless wandering. The exodus numbered up to six million people, a staggering one-sixth of the entire country.¹⁴ In Nantes, Duméril watched as an unending stream of “panic-stricken automobiles, covered with mattresses and parcels continued to tumble night and day down the road from Rennes.”¹⁵ Given such a context, Berthe Auroy did not even think to mention the armistice in her diary, or perhaps did not hear of it until later. After all, she was spending days on end riding a se-

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¹³ Ibid., 25. “On a aperçu un attroupement devant un bistrot d’où s’échappait le son d’une radio. La Marseillaise. On s’est approchés. Les femmes étaient en larmes et les hommes avaient l’air sombre... J’avais envie de pleurer... Nous nous sommes secoués. Il fallait songer à ce que nous allions faire.”


series of overcrowded trains that carried her in a haphazard, crisscrossing itinerary to more than a dozen different places across northern and central France. The suspension of all regular rail services led Auroy and Bobkowski onto trains that stopped in unfamiliar towns and ejected its passengers, who were forced to find shelter as they waited for the next, equally unpredictable train. Bobkowski was fortunate enough to soon escape the chaos and the crowds by getting his hands on a bicycle, but such independence was rare. More often, the problems of travel in the summer of 1940 led people to situations in which they had to engage with German or local officials. On 30 June, Auroy, laden with heavy packages, tried to traverse a dangerous gorge across which the bridge had been destroyed: “but then a German who was there had a chivalrous gesture. He took the packages and brought them up on the other side.” 16 The Germans may have sought to politicize such relationships with propaganda posters proclaiming “National Socialist protection to the French refugees!” which Auroy noticed outside a lycée. 17 But in Auroy’s own mind, it was an older form of chivalrous interaction that took precedence in her mind over the political nature of the relationship.

This is not to deny that some pressure to see the world of 1940 through the prism of politics existed. Myths like that of a “fifth column” of Germans infiltrating the country ahead of the troops were widespread; but these were liable to disappear when held against the light of local interactions. 18 Auroy, for instance, came upon a German-speaking family and immediately suspected them of being fifth columnists, especially since a German soldier was exchanging chocolate and cigarettes with them. But while the mother and father could not speak French, “the little girl started relating in good French that... they had the bad luck, while crossing Paris, of losing in the crowd... the eldest child, a girl of 19, who knows not a word of French and had no money on her.” Auroy noted that now “I felt sorry for them, and God knows when they will be able to go find their

16 Auroy, Jours de guerre, 77. “Un Allemand qui se trouvait là a un geste chevaleresque... a pris les paquets et les a remontés de l’autre côté.”
17 Auroy, Jours de guerre, 77. “Protection National-Socialiste aux Réfugiés français!”
child!” Here as elsewhere, Auroy’s personal experiences were defying simple political expectations.

In fact, political categories themselves were often fluid or almost completely flattened by the material concerns that everyone both those who fled and those who stayed put, seemed to share. The shortage of not only food, but daily necessities and domestic articles, was exacerbated by the looting that almost all sides were seen to have perpetrated. Now back in northern France, Auroy took down what she heard again and again from people: “Certainly, the Germans had emptied out the groceries, the cellars, the shops of all kinds. But the French soldiers, and especially, especially the refugees themselves had plundered without scruple.” Auroy saw this as evidence that “war unleashes the basest of instincts” in everyone, without regard to political allegiance.

Not quite seeing the Germans as Germans, or political adversaries, was a prevailing perspective reflected in the diaries under discussion. As the Wehrmacht streamed into Nantes and inundated the town, Edmond Duméry remarked that “civilians surrounded the soldiers and tried to interview them, without showing any animosity, while the Germans took pictures of them.” Some of the “onlookers,” he noted half-sardonically, “can even go tomorrow and watch the changing of the guard, with music!”

Liliane Schroeder, a twenty-year old Parisian who sought sanctuary with her mother in the southwestern town of Marennes, recorded how “bizarre” she found the reaction of the population: “much more of curiosity than of repulsion.” A surprising proportion of the townspeople made their way to the fairground in front of the gendarmerie to get a glimpse of the Germans and their parked armored cars. “Not to forget that evidently we are in a small town, population 3,000... distractions are rare... and the Germans are

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19 Auroy, *Jours de guerre*, 81. “Et puis la fillette se met à raconter en bon français... Ils ont eu le malheur, en traversant Paris, de perdre dans la foule d’une gare l’aînée de leurs enfants, une jeune fille de 19 ans, qui ne sait pas un mot de français et qui n’avait sur elle aucun argent. Maintenant, ils me font pitié, et Dieu sait quand ils pourront partir et rechercher leur enfant !”

20 Ibid., 93. “Certainement, les Boches ont vidé les épiceries, les caves, les boutiques de toutes sortes. Mais les soldats français et surtout, surtout les réfugiés ont pillé sans scruple... tant il est vrai que la guerre déchaîne les instincts les plus bas.”

21 Duméry, *Journal d’un honnête homme*, 28. “Des civils entourent les soldats et essaient de les interviewer, sans montrer aucune animosité, pendant que les Allemands les photographient... Certains d’entre ces deniers sont capables d’aller demain assister à la relève de la garde en musique !”
serving as a circus or some other phenomena.”22 Somehow this scene seemed separate from the distressing news that had “gone on and on” the night before on the radio, and which gave her the feeling “in my breast of real physical grief”—a grief that the sight of real Germans somehow did not elicit.23

Schroeder soon came into even closer contact with the garrisoned invaders. On 2 July, she and her mother came home to eight German soldiers who had been billeted to a room in their home, and were already performing their ablutions in the courtyard. This she found to be “all comedy.” Late that night, when they found the Germans drunk and rambunctious, her mother communicated in pidgin French and simple gesticulations her disapproval of their behavior, after which the Germans sobered up and “acted very wisely, to not make noise and to go to bed before eleven o’clock.” Schroeder found them “touching,” “very proper,” and “full of good will.”24 Though it was at first in bad taste to interact with them any more than was needed, she and her mother gradually developed “almost friendly” relations with them. Such relations seemed to depend on their perception of these eight young men as individuals, rather than members of a political category. While remarking wryly that “they have only one flaw—they’re not French or English!” Schroeder also asked: but “how can we be cold and disagreeable to them thus taken individually (ainsi séparément)?” At times, she did question her easygoing attitude to this unusual and politically compromising situation. But “where did this attitude come from?” She concluded that “it’s not cohabitation with miserable soldiers that troubles me when there are so many more important things

22 Liliane Schroeder, Journal d’Occupation, Paris 1940-1944 (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 2000), 19. “La réaction de la population a été bizarre : beaucoup plus de curiosité que de répulsion. Il ne faut pas oublier évidemment que nous sommes dans une petite ville qui compte en général 3 000 âmes... Les distractions sont rares... et les Allemands ont fait office de cirque et de phénomènes.”

23 Ibid., 19. “Ces discours dont on nous a rebattu les oreilles depuis hier. Lorsque, pour la première fois, il en a été question à la T.S.F., j’ai ressenti dans ma poitrine une véritable douleur physique...”

24 Ibid., 24–25. “Tout est comédie... ils se sont engagés à être très sages, à ne pas faire de bruit et à aller se coucher avant 11 heures... Les locataires sont touchants, propres, et pleins de bonne volonté. Comment pourrait-on être froid et désagréable avec eux ainsi séparément ? ... Ils n’ont qu’un défaut, c’est de ne pas être français ou anglais !”
that are happening, will happen.” 25 In comparison to the national drama of defeat, armistice, and political turmoil, her friendly encounters with eight soldiers seemed to belong to a world apart.

Needless to say, relations with the Germans were not always entirely innocent or purely amicable. The country house in Chartres to which Berthe Auroy had finally succeeded in arriving was approached by a German officer in search of a parking space. Over the course of her conversation with him, Auroy was friendly but not very truthful. She lied and said she was married, claimed her husband was an officer in the army now taken prisoner, and presented herself as a university professor. As she imagined, such a self-portrait served to ingratiate herself with the German officer and made her a “person of distinction” in his eyes. When she “dared” to recommend he be cautious around her bed of roses in the garden, she noticed he “does make a few precautions,” but she still could not keep out a “bunch of grunts” who later “invaded the garden.” Auroy was not lacking in political consciousness; in fact, she relished making a not-so-subtle jab at the German by telling him that “they were not going to have the English as they had the French,” and they would have a “properly difficult task” ahead of them. 26 But it is telling that she considered her own interaction with him to be removed from that political sphere.

Perhaps the most complex relationship between the diarists and the Germans was that of the German speaker Edmond Duméril in Nantes, who shortly after the invasion offered his linguistic services to the prefect of the Loire-Inférieur and served as a key intermediary between the département and the occupying forces. Given his profile and his responsibilities, Duméril appeared as the classic collaborator. But in fact he refused to join the collaboration movement, citing the “absolute neutrality” that he saw his role as requiring. 27 Duméril’s diary entries in the summer of 1940 demonstrate the largely non-political perspective he held on his own conduct. Even if his political opinions were staunchly anti-German—

25 Ibid., 28–29. “Presque amicales... D’où me vient cet état d’esprit ? Ce n’est pas la cohabitation avec de misérables soldats qui me troublera quand il y a tant de choses tellement plus importantes qui se produisent, et se produiront.”

26 Auroy, Jours de guerre, 102–103. “Je tremble pour notre beau rosier et ose lui recommander de faire attention. Et je dois dire qu’il prend quelques précautions... J’ai l’aplomb de lui dire qu’ils ont là une tâche bien difficile et qu’ils n’auront pas les Anglais comme ils ont eu les Français... Je suis un personnage de marque... Une bande fantassins a envahi le jardin.”

27 Duméril, Journal d’un honnête homme, 129. “Neutralité absolue de ma part”.

upon first seeing Wehrmacht troops in his beloved city, he saw them as the “first visions, how painful, of war and defeat!”—he ultimately gave greater weight to his responsibility towards the local community. Moreover, as Schroeder observed, it was hard to sustain a grudge against all Germans, especially once relations became personal and no longer political. Meeting the German commander for the first time, Duméril expected, based on his own political preconceptions, someone “big, brutal, and haughty,” and was “surprised” when he found instead “an aged man, almost elderly, lean and short... who rushed to meet us with a kindness, I would even say a cordiality, that did not seem feigned.” He was particularly struck by the commander’s parting words: “‘we both find ourselves,’ he said with tears in his eyes, ‘in a situation we did not wish for.’” Ultimately, Duméril hoped this “conversation will be useful to all my fellow citizens by permitting me to intervene tirelessly in their favor.”

In subsequent meetings with the Germans, Duméril lobbied hard for the return of prisoners-of-war and negotiated over the status of “refugees, ration cards, petrol.”

One reason Duméril and others may have focused on personal or local concerns was because their own nation seemed far away and increasingly elusive. Radio and print media—the usual means by which French people participated in the national political sphere—soon became unreliable, and for a time fell silent altogether. On 24 June, Duméril complained that “we are without news regarding the rest of France.” One month later, on 23 July, Schroeder remarked, “no newspapers, no radio,” while even in the free zone, Jean Guéhenno noted “such silence. No more newspapers. All the stations for French radio have stopped. We enter into servitude.

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28 Duméril, *Journal d’un honnête homme*, 27. “Premières visions, combien douloureuses, de la guerre et de la défaite!”

29 Ibid., 30–31. “Un grand reître brutal et rogue. Quelle surprise ! C’est un homme âgé, presque un vieillard, sec et de petite taille... qui se précipite vivement à notre rencontre avec une amabilité, je dirais même une cordialité, qui ne paraît pas feinte... ‘Nous nous trouvons tous les deux, dit-il les larmes aux yeux, dans une situation que nous n’avons pas voulue...’ J’espère que cette conversation sera utile à tous mes concitoyens en me permettant d’intervenir sans répit en leur faveur.”

30 Ibid., 43. “Les mêmes questions reviennent sur le tapis : réfugiés, cartes de ravitaillement, essence...”
without knowing precisely what it will be.” Henri Drouot in Dijon similarly noted that in relation to the nation’s affairs, “the French people... informed about nothing, cannot know, nor approve, nor reprove.” But Schroeder also observed that “this is just as well, since everything we can learn from all this [newspapers, radio] must be greeted with skepticism.” The quality of the wartime press was widely recognized as questionable, so much so that Andrzej Bobkowski recorded having “to read between the lines” with newspapers to even find out that the Germans had reached Paris. Near the end of June, Auroy was at first delighted with the reappearance of the local newspaper, but upon reading discovered only barely disguised pro-German propaganda. She wryly imagined herself reading it for lack of any other news source: “there will perhaps be sensational news... a rail service message, a postal announcement... Deception! Deception!” Reluctantly, she could still see herself reading the news for personal pleasure or community announcements. But when sources of reliable information on the real fate of the rest of the country ceased to exist, for Auroy as for many others, their horizons were momentarily shrunk to a world of private concerns and local matters where Germans were no longer just Germans and national politics receded into the far distance.

Conclusion

By examining diary entries written in the summer of 1940, penned at various locations in the country and within a diverse set of circumstances, the outlines emerge of what might be a wider process of depoliticization occurring in French society at the time. These diary entries are particularly useful in demonstrating the interweaving of action and

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33 Schroeder, *Journal d’Occupation*, 34. “Ni journaux, ni T.S.F.... C’est d’ailleurs tout aussi bien car tout ce que cela pourrait nous apprendre devrait être accepté avec réserve et scepticisme.”


35 Auroy, *Jours de guerre*, 76~77. “Il y aura peut-être des nouvelles sensationnelles... l’annonce d’un train, d’un courrier... Déception ! Déception !
perception, reality and interpretation: they exemplify the way people reflected on their own behavior based on how they perceived its political content. Contemporary testimonies propose a view of history that considers processes of politicization or depoliticization as themselves historically contingent facts. Such facts merit their own research, and that is the direction in which this paper hopes to point. But the historical contingency of those facts may constitute an equally important area of study. The question that needs to be asked more often is: why do processes of politicization or depoliticization occur? Philippe Burrin has recently proposed breaking out of the limitations of national frameworks and making comparative studies of military occupations. On the other hand, Peter Fritzsche, in the historiography of Nazi Germany, has convincingly suggested looking to political culture to determine whether, and to what extent, people interpret their personal lives through the prism of politics. His astute use of diaries and correspondence written by Germans at the time of the Nazi rise to power uncovers an astounding degree of politicization in society. He shows, first, how political language had seeped into everyday discourse. In addition, he suggests how such normally private activities as vacationing became politicized through mass movements like the Kraft durch Freude program: when Germans travelled on holiday, they were “consuming images of the nation”; when they enjoyed a rise in real incomes, they experienced their own prosperity through the prism of national regeneration.

Although a handful of scholars have studied the evolution of political culture in the Third Republic, much more remains for historians to uncover. Likewise, the study of Vichy political culture in the current historiography remains subject to a narrow focus on the right-wing fringe, and as such tends to extrapolate from aspects of the Vichy regime’s conservative politics to French society as a whole. This paper suggests of course exactly why the precise role of politics in society can never be presumed. The role of political culture in predicting the processes of politicization or depoliticization—processes so important to deciding how society

behaves over the course of military conflicts—is a question to which we have only begun to formulate an answer.
Truth in Fiction: Disillusionment of Civil War Soldiers in the Stories of Ambrose Bierce

By Jill Bosserman

Jill Bosserman is a sophomore majoring in History and English Literature at Purdue University. While taking a course on the Civil War and Reconstruction with Professor Robert May in the fall of 2013, Jill found herself intrigued by the short stories of Ambrose Bierce, a soldier in the Union Army who later became a journalist and writer. Combining her passion for history with her enthusiasm for literature, Jill examines in this paper what Bierce’s stories reveal about the attitudes of soldiers and civilians in the Civil War.

A small child laughs delightedly at the bloodied faces of wounded soldiers, unable to comprehend the horror of the battlefield before him. Next, dark water swirls ominously below a man who is about to be hanged for his foolishly impulsive attempt to burn a Union bridge. Finally, a Union soldier pulls the trigger of his rifle after internal moral deliberation, sending his Confederate father to the grave. These three scenes are drawn from the short stories of Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, a writer and former Union soldier whose works look beyond romanticized notions of the Civil War to reveal the horrors of the battlefield. Although Bierce has been obscured by literary giants of the period, such as Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, the significance of his writing should not be overlooked. As Bierce’s short stories reveal the atrocities of the war, they also explore how Civil War soldiers’ romanticized notions of war transformed into disillusionment. In his stories, Bierce’s soldiers attempt to reconcile their disappointed expectations with reality, a common struggle for returning soldiers. In particular, Bierce’s stories explore these soldiers’ discovery that the romantic mythos of war with which they had been indoctrinated had no basis in reality. Written from his own experiences as a soldier in the Civil War, Ambrose Bierce’s short stories suggest that Bierce believed the horrors of the war were masked by the romantic idealism and patriotism of his fellow soldiers.

Understanding Bierce’s literary works requires some knowledge of his background. In 1862, Ambrose Bierce enlisted as a private in the Ninth Indiana Regiment, which joined General William Nelson’s Fourth
Corps of the Army of the Ohio, commanded by General Don Carlos Buell. One of Bierce’s first experiences as soldier was fighting at Shiloh, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. In fact, Bierce’s regiment suffered the most casualties of all Union regiments on the second day of fighting. In his essay “What I Saw of Shiloh,” one of several autobiographical pieces in the first part of his Collected Works, Bierce describes his experiences at that battle. He begins the narrative by recalling the almost mystical quality of the call to assemble before the battle: “[T]his call….goes to the heart as wine and stirs the blood like the kisses of a beautiful woman. Who that has heard it calling to him above the grumble of great guns can forget the wild intoxication of its music?”

The assembly call invokes sensations of patriotism and duty, ideals that can lead men to commit otherwise unthinkable acts. Yet this eagerness to fight, invoked by the call to assemble, fades into gloom in the aftermath of the battle. After the fighting, Bierce comes upon a group of tents full of dead and wounded soldiers:

> The kind of comfort they supplied was indicated by pairs of men entering and reappearing, bearing litters; by low moans from within and by long rows of dead with covered faces outside….It was as if the helpless had been carried in and murdered, that they might not hamper those whose business it was to fall to-morrow.

Lastly, as Bierce passes Shiloh Chapel, he finds it ironic that a Christian church has given name to the battle, which he refers to as a “wholesale cutting of Christian throats by Christian hands.” It is clear the battle of Shiloh gave Bierce a powerful early impression of war. Shiloh taught Bierce to wonder at the mystic power of the call to fight, but it also taught him to marvel at the atrocities and paradoxes of war.

After Shiloh, Bierce fought in the battle of Chickamauga, which took place September 19-20, 1863. This time, Bierce served as an acting topographical officer under Colonel William Babcock Hazen, a post he held from 1863-1864. In “A Little of Chickamauga,” Bierce hides none

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4 Bierce, Collected Works, Volume I, 247.
5 Ibid., 251.
of the horrors of the battle from his readers. He notes that after the cannons fired on the enemy, the fallen Confederates were so thickly covered with dust that “they looked as if they had been reclothed in yellow.” Bierce then conjectures that after these men were buried, they were dug up again, as some were likely still “partly alive.” Bierce’s reference of the soldiers’ yellow color echoes his use of color in “Chickamauga,” one of his most celebrated short stories. In the story, a deaf-mute child stumbles upon the bloody aftermath of Chickamauga while pretending to be a soldier. The child mistakes the blood-stained soldiers he sees for painted clowns: “Something in this—something too, perhaps, in their grotesque attitudes and movements—reminded him of the painted clown whom he had seen last summer in the circus, and he laughed as he watched them.” The boy thinks the men crawling on their hands and knees are simply playing a game, until he gets a clear look at a man with a missing jaw. Frightened, the child runs home, only to find his house in flames and his mother dead. In writing “Chickamauga,” Bierce drew upon his own experiences at that particular battle. In the conclusion of his essay “A Little of Chickamauga,” Bierce alludes to how deeply the battle affected him: “To those of us who….keep in memory the dear dead comrades whom we left upon that fateful field, the place means much.”

Bierce’s memoir and his short story reveal how deeply Chickamauga affected him. In particular, the short story “Chickamauga” provides one of the best examples of Bierce’s use of macabre images to convey a profound sense of despair in response to the devastating consequences of the war.

Chickamauga, like Shiloh, proved a highly significant event in Bierce’s experience of the Civil War; yet Bierce considered another minor battle, known as the Battle of Pickett’s Mill, important enough to include in his Collected Works, alongside his reflections on Shiloh and Chickamauga. Fought on May 27, 1864, in Paulding County, Georgia, Pickett’s Mill marked an attempt by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman to attack the right flank of the army of Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston. As an officer, Bierce was privy to exchanges between upper level officers, and was appalled when he heard Sherman had ordered Bierce’s depleted brigade of 1,500 men, led by General Hazen, to attack

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7 Bierce, Collected Works, Volume I, 272.
9 Bierce, Collected Works: Volume I, 278.
the right flank of Johnston’s army. In his essay, “The Crime at Pickett’s Mill,” written in 1881, Bierce scathingly recalls Union General Thomas J. Wood telling General O. O. Howard to “put in Hazen and see what success he has.” He continues blisteringly, “In these words of General Wood to General Howard we were first apprised of the true nature of the distinction about to be conferred upon us.”

Although the brigade fought so well that Confederate General Johnston thought his men were fighting the entire Fourth Corps, not just one brigade, the battle was a Confederate victory. Bierce believed that by sending a depleted brigade to fight, Wood and Howard were criminally negligent. The Battle at Pickett’s Mill was significant to Bierce because it showed him that the judgment of his superiors was not always infallible. Not only was this realization significant to Bierce’s own military career, but it was one of many factors that shaped his perception of the war. These perceptions guided Bierce later in life as he penned his incredibly insightful short stories.

After being initiated to the war at Shiloh, living through the horror of Chickamauga, and observing criminal negligence at Pickett’s Mill, Bierce recalled his impressions of the war in his work as a journalist, poet, memoirist, and most notably, a writer of short stories. These stories typically end with an ironically tragic revelation that reverberates with the reader. One such example is “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” one of Bierce’s most well-known short stories. This story first appeared in Bierce’s In the Midst of Life: Tales of Soldiers and Civilians in 1891, and was later published in Part II of Bierce’s Collected Works in 1909. After a brazen attempt to burn a Union bridge at Owl Creek, a Southern civilian named Peyton Farquhar finds himself hanging from a noose above the bridge. He falls into the water, unbinds his cords, and swims to safety amidst a sea of snipers’ bullets. After making his way home, he tries to take his wife in his arms, but she fades away into nothing—for Farquhar is swinging from a noose above Owl Creek Bridge. Scholar Peter Morrone notes Farquhar’s experience in “The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” echoes the experience of the child in Bierce’s “Chickamauga.” Just as the deaf-mute child of “Chickamauga” wanders into the aftermath of the battle while pretending he is a soldier, the Southerner in “The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” “enters the wilderness driven by dream-like delusions and idyllic aspirations only to be awakened suddenly by the reality of the

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10 Bierce, Collected Works: Volume I, 283.
11 Ibid., 284.
hellish nightmare thrust upon him.” In both stories, Bierce creates a character whose romantic ideal of war blinds him to the gruesome reality of battle until it is too late. This use of irony, which is typical of Bierce’s works, gives his stories their edge and forces readers to acknowledge the brutality of battle in a society that romanticizes war.

Arguing that Farquhar is seduced into his foolish attempt to burn the bridge by a romanticized perception of war, Morrone calls attention to the forces of ideology and propaganda that drive Farquhar to action. Bierce writes that Farquhar “chafed under the inglorious restraint” of his civilian status, “longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction.” Morrone calls this longing a “civilian’s fantasy of war.” He writes that the mission to burn the Owl Creek Bridge “entails espionage, danger, and courageous action”—all “romantic elements” of martial duty and heroism “manipulating an impressionable mind.” Like so many new recruits, Farquhar is totally ignorant of what war is really like, and this ignorance leads him to his own demise. Next, Morrone posits that Bierce’s exposure to military propaganda shapes his description of Farquhar’s almost fanatic desire to participate in the war. He claims Bierce’s experiences as a soldier “supplied the propaganda-like slogans he interlaced seamlessly in his text.” Farquhar’s model for “martial masculinity,” Morrone continues, is based on his attraction to “chivalric abstractions.” As a member of the slave-owning class, Farquar would have been exempted from serving in the Confederacy. However, although he had no obligation to fight, Farquhar felt the call of duty and desires to serve the Confederacy anyway. Driven by a misguided perception of war based on the abstract concepts of honor and duty, Farquhar represents the civilian population, which Bierce portrays as utterly ignorant of the realities of the war.

After fighting in the war, “Bierce translated the grim realities of battle into a literary corpus that rejects rhetoric romanticizing war,”

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14 Bierce, Collected Works: Volume II, 32.
16 Ibid., 318.
according to Morrone. Bierce’s story “The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” reflects this rejection of traditionally romantic war rhetoric, as Farquhar’s tragic act of patriotism ends in his senseless and unnecessary death. Indeed, every horrific image on the battlefield that scarred Bierce’s psyche would come back to haunt his literary works on the Civil War. As Bierce rose to fame for his Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, the first version of his Collected Works, newspapers across the country took notice. On June 22, 1892, the St. Paul Daily News quoted one author’s description of Bierce’s style, calling it “as brilliant as his ideas are original and unconventional.” This verdict did not stand alone. The Los Angeles Times called Bierce “epigrammatic”—a reference to his short works, which characteristically end with an ingenious turn of thought—on January 15, 1890. The Philadelphia newspaper The North American took this praise a step further on June 23, 1892, comparing Bierce’s literary genius to Edgar Allen Poe’s. The article, entitled “Ambrose Bierce: An American Genius Discovered at Sixty Years of Age,” quotes the same author mentioned in the St. Paul Daily News, who commented that Bierce’s stories “are unique in contemporary literature. If they suggest any influence at all, it is that of Edgar Allen Poe….He has, too, like Poe, resolved the difficulty of creating an atmosphere of horror.”

In addition to praising his literary promise, the press recognized that Bierce’s short stories were not only significant to the Civil War, but also to the Spanish-American War. On April 3, 1898, just twenty-two days before the United States declared war on Spain, The Morning Oregonian noted in its review of the second edition of Bierce’s Tales of Soldiers and Civilians that “[t]he book could not be received at a more opportune time, when there are so many who, in the excitement of the moment, forget that ‘War is hell.’” The author of this review positions Bierce’s stories, which are largely critical of war, as a foil to the recent provocations of an incendiary press. Not only were Bierce’s stories well

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18 Ibid., 310.
received by the press, but they also spoke to the psychological trauma experienced by soldiers who fought in the Civil War.

Although Bierce’s Civil War stories are unique, his sense of disillusionment and disgust with the war are not. In *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, James M. McPherson explains that many recruits, both Union and Confederate, were motivated to enlist by a desire to “see the elephant”—a contemporary phrase that meant to experience something grand. McPherson notes that once “they had seen the elephant, few Civil War soldiers were eager to see it again. Whether or not they had passed this test of ‘manhood’ with ‘honor,’ their curiosity about the nature of battle was fulfilled.”23 Confronted with widespread death and destruction, soldiers quickly abandoned their romantic impressions of war. One letter written by a Union recruit reveals the traumatic impact and sense of disillusionment soldiers experienced. McPherson quotes the young man, a teenager who enlisted in the Ninth Indiana Cavalry in 1864: “I got to see the Elephant at last and to tell you the honest truth I don’t care about seeing him very often any more, for if there was eny fun in such work I couldn’t see it…It is not the thing it is braged up to be.”24 This letter exemplifies the reaction of a typical soldier after his first days in combat. Bierce alludes to this concept of “seeing the elephant” in his essay “What I Saw of Shiloh”: “There was, I remember, no elephant on the boat that passed us across that evening, nor, I think, any hippopotamus. Those would have been out of place.”25 Although the allure of fighting for their country persuaded the men who fought in the Civil War to leave their homes and families in pursuit of a higher ideal, these men found that the realities of war did not match up with their romantic expectations.

McPherson also examines how first-time combat experiences impacted Civil War soldiers psychologically. To do this, he draws upon the reports of psychiatrists who studied soldiers in World War II. McPherson notes one psychiatrist’s comments: “The men seldom have any real, concrete notions of what combat is like. Their minds are full of romanticized Hollywood versions of their future activity in combat, colored with vague ideas of being a hero.”26 McPherson argues that if

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“Hollywood” were substituted here for “Currier and Ives,” a nineteenth-century printmaking company that produced images of patriotic and historical events (including Civil War battles), this psychiatrist’s report “would serve as an accurate description of Civil War soldiers.” Just as soldiers in World War II served their country in pursuit of the ideals of patriotism and duty, soldiers who enlisted in the Civil War were guided by similar romantic notions. Yet the psychiatrist quoted by McPherson noted that these ideals failed to hold up in situations of actual combat: “They are not at all prepared for the nightmare experiences in store for them. Combat is always a surprise and a shock, because there is no way of preparing for the emotional impact short of actual experience.” McPherson maintains that this period of shock, described by psychiatrists during World War II, was doubtless also experienced by Civil War soldiers. McPherson illustrates this psychological shock in a letter from by a private in the Sixth North Carolina Regiment to his father after the first battle of Manassas: “Such a day the booming of the cannon the ratling of the muskets you have no idea how it was I have turned threw that old Book of yours and looked at the pictures and read a little about war but I did not no any thing what it was.” This reference to “look[ing] at the pictures” and “read[ing] a little about war” suggests that like many other soldiers, this private was disillusioned with the reality of war, which failed to meet his expectations. Another soldier from Ohio wrote to his wife, “Mary I went into the fight in good hart but I never want to get in another it was offal [awful].” After enlisting with the hope of “seeing the elephant,” soldiers of the Civil War found the actual experience of fighting to be far less glamorous, and far more horrible, than they had anticipated.

Considering these psychological effects experienced by soldiers during the Civil War, Bierce’s dark short stories seem less exaggerated and truer to the bleak experiences of Civil War soldiers. In fact, Bierce’s short stories are a direct reaction to what Morrone calls “America’s enduring popular romance with war and military fiction.” Instead of reinforcing the image of the soldier as the “embodiment of our culture’s heroic ideals,” Bierce’s works counteract this image by exposing the horrors of war and exploring how men reconcile their conscience to the conflicting demands of wartime. In “A Horseman in the Sky,” one of Bierce’s most famous short stories, a Union soldier sees a Confederate soldier astride a horse...
overlooking a cliff. After hesitating to shoot the Confederate soldier because of the serenity of the scene and the man’s noble appearance, the soldier eventually shoots. At the end of the story, it is revealed that the man the Union soldier shot was his father.32 “A Horseman in the Sky” questions just how far a man will go to fulfill what he perceives to be his duty to his country. Although the soldier’s shooting his own father in defense of his cause can be seen as noble, Bierce directs his reader’s attention to the tragedy, and not the valor, of the act. Bierce is primarily concerned with the “psychological landscape and conditioning agents shaping a soldier’s cognition,” argues Morrone, and although his stories take place on the battlefield, “the true settings evident in his writing are situated in the minds of his protagonists.”33 Just as Poe exposed what he saw to be an innate spirit of perverseness in the subjects of his short stories, Bierce explores just how far a man’s sense of duty will lead him in wartime. In the case of “A Horseman in the Sky,” this sense of duty can even lead a soldier to kill his own father.

However, this sense of duty to one’s country—a phenomenon Morrone calls Bierce’s “warrior ethos”—may arise from something beyond the typical Civil War soldier’s romanticized perception of war. Drawing upon the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, Morrone explains that “martial disciplinary efforts” indoctrinate Bierce’s protagonists with a “particular ethos or mode of conditioning that Bierce characterizes as self-surveillance discipline.”34 This self-surveillance system instills within soldiers a habit of monitoring their own behavior, and judging whether it meets the standards imposed by the military system. In *For Cause and Comrades*, McPherson observes this phenomenon in American G.I.s during World War II, again comparing these soldiers with men who fought in the Civil War. McPherson notes that as these G.I.s prepared for their next mission after the Invasion of Normandy, they failed to show the enthusiasm or urgency they had demonstrated before D-Day. Yet, despite their reluctance to engage in combat again, “fight they did, again and again, sustained by grim determination and unit pride.”35 McPherson posits that these soldiers overcame their weariness of war, at least superficially, to respond to their country’s military needs. In doing

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so, Morrone would argue, these men subscribed to the demands of their military system’s dominant ideology, which Gramsci would call “hegemonic.” Just as these G.I.s were compelled to look past their weariness of war in order to continue serving their country, soldiers who fought during the Civil War made a similar choice. This is true of the many Civil War soldiers who wrote home that they never wished to see another battle, yet continued to fight with their regiments, often voluntarily enlisting for a second term of service. In Bierce’s short stories, Morrone argues, the principal characters “reveal a behavioral pattern contoured by their immediate military power dynamic. Their psychological condition and subsequent physical responses to their environment are by-products of martial discipline.”  

A talented writer and a perceptive humanist, Ambrose Bierce authored a series of short stories that confront some of the most difficult moral questions faced by soldiers during the Civil War. Anchored in his own experiences as a soldier during the war, Bierce’s short stories, characterized by their distinctly ironic flavor, ask his readers to look beyond romanticized notions of war that pervaded Victorian Era ideology. After fighting in major battles such as Shiloh and Chickamauga, Bierce received a taste of the atrocities of war that would permanently color his view of the world, and this discoloration would become strikingly evident in his short fiction. Bierce’s “Chickamauga” reflects the horrific experiences of the Civil War soldier; “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” considers the danger of overly romanticizing the cultural ideals of war, chivalry, and duty; and “A Horseman in the Sky” asks just how far a soldier will go to defend his cause. Bierce’s darkly insightful writing did not escape critical notice, as newspapers across the country praised his striking short stories for exposing the horrors of war and probing the recesses of human nature. Yet Bierce was not alone in his disillusionment with the war. As James McPherson writes in *For Cause and Comrades*, soldiers in the Civil War suffered from shock after engaging in combat for

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the first time. Encouraged to fight for their country by romanticized ideologies and propaganda, these men experienced disillusionment after the promise of “seeing the elephant” proved a sham. Yet, just as the young soldier knowingly shoots his own father in Bierce’s “A Horseman in the Sky,” soldiers of the Civil War often looked past the horrific scenes around them in an act of willful allegiance to their country. In his Civil War fiction, Bierce not only seeks to contrast romanticized notions of war with war’s grim realities, but also strives to call attention to the consequences that can result from a soldier’s choice to ignore his moral doubts while serving his country. Casting a perceptive glance upon the American Civil War, the works of Ambrose Bierce not only claim artistic distinction but also make a significant contribution to the genre of literature concerned with the nature of war.
Nothing to Do But Serve: British Officers and their Servants in the First World War

By Blake McGready

Blake McGready graduated from SUNY New Paltz in 2013 with a degree in history. Blake was inspired to study soldier-servants in the war through the writing of J.R.R. Tolkien, who served in the British Army and used the batman-officer relationship to inform his writing and express a sense of deep camaraderie between characters in his stories.

Graham Seton served as an officer of the British Army in the First World War, receiving both the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross. Like many officers of the British Army, Seton enlisted the aid of a soldier-servant, commonly called a batman, while in the trenches. Moved by the friendship and memory of his servant Peter, he revisited their combat experiences in a short memoir entitled Biography of a Batman, published over a decade following the 1918 armistice. He wrote:

Peter became my batman, a faithful servant, a friend and counsellor, an ever-present companion, to give me confidence in the darkness of a dangerous night, and good cheer, when fortune favoured a visit battalion headquarters, and a quick run along the disused tramway from Houplines to Armentières to refresh the company mess-box and perchance a bath.¹

Peter’s obedience and amity profoundly affected Seton, providing not only the necessities of a servant, but also a comrade.

Wilfred Owen rose to fame as a tragic figure of the First World War and British literary history. Like Seton, he served as an officer in the British Army and utilized a soldier-servant. “My servant has nothing else to do but serve, so that is satisfactory,” wrote Owen.² Later in the war he wrote to a friend, “I have nothing more to tell you except that I’m rather glad my servant was happily wounded: & so away from me.”³ Compared to Seton, Owen was remarkably less genial, and expressed a cold,

¹ Graham Seton, Biography of a Batman (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1929), 5.
³ Ibid, 582.
utilitarian attitude toward his servant. Officers’ opinions of their batmen roughly fell into these two categories, one of warm praise and another of distant detachment. However, these divisions manage to communicate important similarities.

A batman was a working class soldier, assigned servant to an officer in every respect. He executed assigned tasks and may have acted as a companion or confidant. Responsibilities were numerous, demanding a wide range of abilities. Former British officer Denis Oliver Barnett wrote of his batman, “In the morning he brings me cocoa or tea when he wakes me, takes my clothes and brushes them, cleans my boots and equipment, and looks after all my stuff. … I shout for him if I want anything, and altogether he is a very useful little man.” A batman would perform physical, laborious tasks too, including cleaning trenches and roofing dugouts. Acclaimed British First World War writer Siegfried Sassoon recollected in Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man, his semi-autobiographical novel that “my faithful servant Flook always contrived to keep me supplied with oranges when we were up in the trenches.” These duties and others fell into the realm of what was expected of a batman at war. In addition, officers and batmen provided an intimate look at the effects of social class in the British trenches.

Already divided by military rank, British social order also separated officers and their soldier-servants. Enlisted soldiers and servants hailed from the poor working classes, urban lifestyles and such low educational standards that at the time eleven percent of the British Army was classified illiterate.

Officers were of much higher social classes, well educated, and relatively wealthy. Historian Jay Winter wrote,

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6 Siegfried Sassoon, Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1929), 375. This novel, as well as Sassoon’s Memoirs of an Infantry Officer and Sherston’s Progress tell the story of fictional British War officer George Sherston and his service during the war. Although they are not purely autobiographical accounts, they reflect Sassoon’s experiences in the British Army. For the purposes of my paper, Sherston’s experiences will be used as substantial source base and should be understood although fictitious, an accurate depiction of the war and the relationship between officers and their batmen.
Social class position determined military rank in the early days of the war. Men from upper and upper middle classes were likely to enlist earlier than men of more modest means; elites passed rudimentary medical examinations at greater rates and joined the officer corps largely because they were deemed the right sort of people to do so.8

Before even arriving at the front, officers and batmen were already products of the immense disparity in British society. The war voices of officers were readily available, while the writings and memoirs of batmen were virtually non-existent. Officers from well-educated backgrounds were more likely to be able to write and have access to publishing options, compared to poorly-educated enlisted soldiers. 9 As a result, the voice of the batman was almost inaccessible. Complicating this analysis is a lack of distinct historiography, as historians have yet to examine the day-to-day lives of soldier-servants during the First World War.

Batmen were part of a larger group of common enlisted soldiers, and historians have argued over exactly how officers and their other ranks comingled. Some historians describe officers or rankers as symbiotic and cooperative, characterizing subordinate ranks as awe-inspired under the command of an officer or ‘real gentleman.’ Historian John Baynes argued there was little to no tension between officers and enlisted ranks, claiming between the groups there was ‘remarkable harmony.’10 Likewise, British social historian David Cannadine wrote, “In the trenches, the owners of great estates and the bearers of illustrious names lived side by side with their men in novel circumstances of easy camaraderie and extraordinary squalor.”11 Baynes and Cannadine, acknowledged distinct class differences, yet maintained that fighting the First World War made these differences less important. Other historians have refuted these ideas, looking narrowly at social disunity in the British Army. In Leadership in the Trenches, G.D. Sheffield examined the disparity between officers and rankers. Sheffield wrote how the ethos of the officers derived from “landed interest” and “country house values.”12

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11 David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 83-84.
12 Sheffield, Leadership in the Trenches, 2.
were of a different world, with little to no social contact among upper classes. And now, rank and file soldiers received orders directly from these unfamiliar, upper class elites.

A combination of these two schools of thought can be found in Eric Leed’s *No Man’s Land*, an analysis of soldiers’ identities in World War One. Leed’s analysis reached further than Sheffield, discussing how the erosion of class differences was an illusion. Cross-class harmony, according to Leed, was a product of “pre-war naivety and nationalism.”¹³ The war opened the gentile classes to the “common burdens of never ending labor” and the “spontaneous expression of a self-sacrificing sense of community.”¹⁴ Leed reestablished the idea that the wartime community was one where the barriers previously imposed by higher classes were suddenly lost.

Social class also played out in the day-to-day experiences of officers and their batmen. In fact, the officer-batman relationship allows historians to reexamine the debate about class in the trenches and explore questions about social divisions at war. What does the officer-batman relationship tell us about the role of social class on the front during the First World War? Did the relationship reveal that the experience of the trenches reinforced class barriers or somehow broke them down?

Despite the varied ways in which officers described their relationship with batmen, the master-servant relationship pervaded these accounts. The officer-batman connection reinforced domestic class-based attitudes in the trenches, constantly demanding servitude and reverence of elites. Beyond the subjection of social class, this master-servant bond also reinforced national identity, strengthening Britishness by adhering to traditional, time-honored values about class superiority. Regardless of the ways that officers treated their batmen, either as a friendly companion or a submissive necessity of warfare, both parties expressed themselves through a class-based system.

At the heart of the officer-batman relationship lay ingrained values of class superiority. Wartime obituaries, correspondence, journals and even published novels and autobiographies by some of Britain’s best-known war writers reveal themes that demonstrated the social class supremacy officers exploited over their servants. Those themes are a batman’s reverence, passion for work and resourcefulness, domestic background, simplistic kindheartedness, and the officers’ paternalism over their batmen. No matter the officers’ opinion of his batman’s work or

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personality, each discussed his servant with strict, class-based dialogue that perpetuated the domestic social order. In turn, strict adherence to social class was essential to maintaining British identity. Cannadine wrote,

Britons generally conceived of themselves as belonging to an unequal society characterized by a seamless web of layered generations, which were hallowed by time and precedent, which were sanctioned by tradition and religion, and which extended in a great chain of being from the monarch at the top to the humblest subject at the bottom.15

When officers discussed their servants, the weight of British history and social discipline pervaded their outlook.

Reverence

Reverence implies a deep respect continuously owed to superiors, and an admiration and respect for a system larger and more powerful. An individual is revered when they represent an institution greater than themselves. Batmen revered their officers not only because of their military status, but also because they represented the officer corps, which in turn symbolized an assembly of upper class individuals destined to lead the British army to victory. Soldier-servants transplanted the domestic class ideology onto the image of their officer, and maintained a strong sense of British identity at the front.

Leadership, the outcome of the war, and wartime pressures on the upper classes all burdened British officers. Many Britons believed that to win the war the upper class sons had to lead the lower class rabble. A National Geographic article published in 1918 claimed Britain provided the war effort with, “moral leadership, the instant courage, the true perception of the underlying issues,” characteristics that were perceived to be reflected in the British officer corps.16 Officers had to distinguish themselves from the men they commanded, or risk their reputation. A wartime officers’ handbook authored by former officer B.C. Lake, stressed the importance of treating soldiers with decorum, stressing that “men must be treated justly and with absolute firmness: never with familiarity.”17 Connections and relationships with lower soldiers undermined an officer’s credibility and authority. Officers maintained separation from their

16 Judson C Welliver, "What the War Has Done for Britain," National Geographic, October 1918, 279.
subordinates, adhering to a code that discouraged informality between the ranks and symbolized a strict division that was not to be interrupted.

Batmen scarcely wrote in the First World War; however, some batmen wrote after their officer was killed in action and paid tribute to his memory. “Lieutenant Vance, who was in charge of two platoons, directed the men to leave the trenches, and gave the command to charge,” wrote one servant. 18 “His words were, ‘Come on, men! Charge the bounders!’ Taking the lead, he was shot through the abdomen. The action had a victorious result.”19 According to this soldier-servant, leadership was crucial to the final moments of his officer’s life. Another recollection from the same collection read, “…he was a brave officer and a gentleman, he led his men into action without any fear, and his heart was at the right place.”20 Important qualities of an officer in the eyes of his batman were bravery and reputable gentility.

Other servants remembered their officers in similar ways. William Binning was an officer who perished in 1916, and upon his death his parents received a letter from his batman. His soldier-servant J. Dyce recalled memories of Binning defending his soldiers when they were accused of disobedient behavior.21 The soldier-servant keenly remembered Binning’s relationship with the men, recollecting a character who, while clearly their superior, developed a favorable reputation among his soldiers. Dyce measured Binning’s character by this integrity and charity toward the lower ranks, reinforcing class-based attitudes.

When batmen failed to perform their duties they regretted failing to meet their officers’ established expectations. In Good-Bye to All That, Robert Graves recounts an experience with his soldier-servant named Tottie, a man discharged from the company for drunkenness. Graves wrote, “I shall never forget the look my quiet, respectful, devoted Tottie gave me. He wanted to tell me that he regretted having let me down, and his immediate reaction was an attempt to salute.”22 Tottie, shamed of his action and fearful of Graves’s discipline, reacted with a salute, acknowledging his officer’s superiority, and departed with no further

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid, 49.
discipline. Tottie’s reverence seemed to have spared Tottie punishment, satisfying his commander who was content to see himself as the superior in the relationship.

Military power was almost always the supreme method to controlling social power at home as well at the front. Divisions at home generally translated to divisions in the trenches and vice-versa. Batmen writing of their officers demonstrated adherence to traditional upper class perceptions of virtue – acknowledging an officer’s bravery, gentility, and kindness to their inferiors. Officers adhered to traditional upper class values in the field, and in turn, demanded respect from lower class subordinates. Within this structure that required absolute obedience and conformity, soldier-servants were powerless. The batman was a prime example of a subordinate lower class individual who willingly submitted to these traditions that had an entire history of adherence to class leadership; the officer corps personified that leadership.

Passion for Work / Resourcefulness

The duties of officers varied all across the front, determined by an officer’s rank, the position of his command, and the specifics of the situation. Paul Fussell described several of these duties in The Great War and Modern Memory, noting that while leadership was one of the objectives of officers, a large part of their job was clerical – such as “censoring letters” and having to sift through “quantities of official inquiries.” Enlisted men endured the mud and anguish of the front lines, while a significant portion of the officer’s tasks removed him from the worst of the trenches for less strenuous deskwork. His batman performed the menial duties of cleaning, clothing, and calling on the officer, and other tasks most British officers viewed beneath their purpose at war.

Despite the tedious nature of these tasks, officers expected their servants to appreciate their duties and approach them with enthusiasm. An article in The Times published in December of 1917 entitled “The Perfect Batman” made several references to the batman’s obligation to his duties. The batman, simply referred to as H was quoted as saying, “I was never afraid of hard work,” and to the officer, “H always represented an

The anonymous officer described H as having a “devouring passion for work.” What separated H from the average soldier or soldier-servant was his commitment to his responsibilities. The readiness and steadfast appreciation of his job characterized H as admirable in the eyes of his officer.

Officers highly prized resourcefulness in their batmen. Graham Seton discussed his servant Peter’s resourcefulness and wrote, “Peter with complete unconcern, borrowed a great wooden mallet with which to drive the baulks of timber destined to hold a flimsy parapet; and he returned it, too.” In this example, the batman was not only handy and inventive, but also honest and responsible. “He is of thrifty temperament,” wrote the poet William Noel Hodgson of his batman, Pearson. Resourcefulness was a major theme of Hodgson’s biography of Pearson, who was upheld as an exceptional example of a soldier-servant. Of all Pearson’s qualities, Hodgson’s piece fervently acknowledged Pearson’s ingenuity. The poet wrote in conclusion, “A good soldier-servant is one of the greatest marvels of our modern civilization. To possess one is better and cheaper than living next door to Harrods.”

Beyond resourcefulness, officers expected thriftiness as well. “A Company’s servants were scroungers of the first order,” wrote Captain C.F. Hitchcock, “and not the risk of the severest penalties would keep them from getting firewood—even had it meant looting the A.P.M.’s very bed!” Likewise, Wilfred Owen alluded to similar characteristics, noting that his soldier-servant, “…thieves me wood with much cunning.” In The Good Soldier, Archibald Wavell references similar qualities in his servants, quoting his batmen who was able to obtain shaving mugs, “There they are sir, that’s all you need to know, and you needn’t be afraid to find your friends missing them.” Wavell remarked that the best soldiers had a keen sense of ‘devilry.’ Officers viewed batmen as thieves, an unfortunate necessity to surviving life in the trenches, stealing items on the

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27 Ibid.
28 Seton, Biography of a Batman, 4.
30 Harrods was a famous department store that provided everything to shopper, with no manual labor required. Hodgson, 61-62.
32 Owen, Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters, 426.
33 Wavell, The Good Soldier, 48.
34 Ibid.
front. Officers frequently defamed theft, a lower class activity, and noted when items were obtained righteously or by robbery.

Batmen were passionate for the work that the officers were not willing to do. Clerical work and valiant leadership were primary directives; cleanliness and order were beneath the jobs performed by an officer. The work demanded that batmen were constantly in the presence of the officer’s world. An officer was not complete without his batman just as a batman was not complete without his officer. In addition, resourcefulness and thievery were attributes associated with the lower classes. Sons of the upper classes hardly knew poverty, and thus had never been required to develop the same kind of ingenuity. The thrifty qualities of batmen served as links to their lower-class activities and background.

**Domestic Background**

Officers regarded the duties of their batmen with condescension, avoided the menial tasks of daily trench-life, and instead chose to focus on their primary duties of leadership. Hindsight demonstrates how misplaced this focus was, yet does not clearly describe why officers were so convinced that batmen would excel at their tasks. Officers regarded batmen as low-working class, the type of people who came from similar tedious duties. Upper-class Britons not only discussed their servants as lower working class, but also officers overwhelmingly were able to identify their batman’s pre-war profession or employment. In addition, officers frequently highlighted their servants’ lower class activities, in contrast to the sophisticated pastimes of elites. Domestic background connected batmen to the type of work they performed, establishing a direct connection between their life before the war and their duties at the front.

When discussing their servants, officers constantly named precisely what job they performed with impressive specificity. Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon recollected their servants worked in factories, on the railway, as barbers, and as skilled metal workers.35 Graham Seton described the pre-war origins of several of his servants, “All good fellows, my batmen in other walks had been an insurance clerk, a foundry worker, a gas-meter collector, and a silversmith.”36 Wilfred Owen wrote in a letter that “…my new servant, who has been a chemist’s assistant, has turned out not only clean & smart, but enterprising and inventive.”37 With a few exceptions, namely Owen’s chemist’s assistant

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and Seton’s insurance clerk, these soldier-servants were from working-class professions.

Identification of a servant’s domestic job strengthened his working-class identity, reinforcing what his position was in pre-war society. Graham Seton lauded his servant Peter and complimented him on his work and character. However, when he spoke of his batman’s mother, Seton wrote that “she is stricken with poverty,” and was careful to mention that Peter was a “man of humble origin.” Seton chose to emphasize Peter’s domestic background in the midst of a biography that applauds his work ethic at the front. Seton in connecting his batman’s lower-class past to his exceptional work at the front, called attention to the fact that perhaps his achievement on the front was not something to be expected of someone so low in society. Pre-war origins were an effective caveat with which an officer could compliment his servant and applaud his noble virtues, while ensuring no confusion that the servant was noble himself.

In their writings, British officers often made strong associations between batmen and lower class activities. Two predominant negative lower class characteristics of batmen were drunkenness and lust. In multiple memoirs, officers reprimanded their batmen for drinking to excess on the front. Captain C.F. Hitchcock wrote in his journals how servants at Ypres were intoxicated. Graves discharged his servant Tottie due to ‘drunkenness in the field.’ It is noteworthy that Graves himself drank to excess at the front multiple times, including enough at the Battle of the Somme to impair his memory of the fight, and suffered no similar discipline. The British army held soldier-servants to a different standard, where batmen were punished more severely and officers were exonerated for similar missteps.

Likewise, officers believed that lust, sexual drive and comparable characteristics permeated soldier-servants. Siegfried Sassoon described ‘a rank animal healthiness’ among his servants who constantly sought the attention of French women, in what he referred to as a “primitive courtship.” Sassoon was careful to emphasize the driving lust behind the servants’ intentions. In another one of his memoirs, he described servants who vied for women’s affections trying to impress ladies with ‘stammering’ French. Graves described his soldier-servant’s experiences

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38 Seton, Biography of a Batman, 11, 2.
39 Hitchcock, “Stand To”: A Diary of the Trenches 1915-18, 42.
40 Graves, Good-Bye to All That, 176.
41 Ibid, 163.
42 Sassoon, Infantry Officer, 41-42.
in a brothel, claiming his batman returned so often, he had memorized the prices for admittance. 44 However these attributes of drunkenness and lust were not exclusively lower-class behaviors. Officers identified these qualities in their batmen for two reasons. One, association between batmen and these lower class pastimes demonstrated that a servant’s class-based behavior was not only linked to their previous domestic employment. Social class was a broader personality problem, not merely a professional one. Secondly, officers themselves often fell victim to similar characteristics, and were more than willing to heap the disgust on their servants while failing to criticize their own shortcomings in combat.

Although officers began to understand the experiences of the lower classes fighting side by side in the trenches, they were always careful to point out lower class shortcomings. The continual acknowledgement of domestic employment and the distasteful pastimes of their servants demonstrated how officers were quick to identify their servants’ lower class status. In the filth and pain of the trenches, all soldiers, regardless of class or background faced the same daunting presence of the war. Domestic employment and lower class activities were already existing connections to pre-war ‘British-ness.’ The war challenged conscripted upper classes to reassert their identity, principally their privilege over others, in a world where all soldiers faced the same horrible dangers of war. Furthermore, since officers were more likely to be killed in combat than enlisted men, 45 it may have been appealing for officer to hearken back to a life in which privilege did not indicate a greater chance of death.

**Simplistic Kindheartedness**

The officer corps regarded themselves as mannered gentility and the lower ranks as meek and docile persons. Many officers discussed their servants as unassuming, kindhearted folks, and used traditional lower class stereotypes to describe the men who served them directly. Simplistic kindness was inherent in a class-based view of the war, along with other characteristics described by historian David Cannadine:

> A Briton’s place in this class hierarchy is also determined by such considerations as ancestry, accent, education, deportment, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing, and style of life… it is these formal and informal hierarchies of prestige and status that

44 Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 120.
people often have in mind when they speak of the British class system.\textsuperscript{46}

Simplicity alluded to lower class characteristics. The ‘informal hierarchy’ of the British class structure during the war was partly expressed in the simplistic kindheartedness of the lower class.

A batman who failed to perform assigned duties was described as simplistic. Wilfred Owen was notorious for complaining about his servants and mentioned that his batmen failed to respond promptly to his orders, clean his clothes, cook him an adequate meal, or provide him a cup of tea.\textsuperscript{47} “Socks most specially valuable,” wrote Owen, “as my servant forgot to put any spare in my Trench Kit.”\textsuperscript{48} Owen was not the only officer to point out his servant’s shortcomings. An excerpt, from a Canadian war propaganda pamphlet said, “Moreover, the Army Commander had an attack of cold feet, owing to his batman having mislaid his footwarmer.”\textsuperscript{49} “I was surprised and annoyed to find my buttons unpolished and only cold water for shaving; it made me late for breakfast,” wrote Graves.\textsuperscript{50} These excerpts demonstrate that batmen could be forgetful, tardy and often-times poor servants to their officers. What was more damning, however, was that batmen failed to meet the standards of punctuality, obedience, and discipline respected by the officer corps. Essentially, batmen were no more forgetful or tardy than any other soldier at the front. Yet in the eyes of the officers, soldier-servants could not live up to their high standards. Unlike any other lower rank enlisted man on the front, a batman’s quality was exclusively measured in light of officer expectations.

In addition, superior officers often mocked ineptness. Siegfried Sassoon recollected a story concerning his batman Flook and wrote,

While we were sitting there, my servant Flook (who has been a railway signalman in Lancashire) blundered in at the door with a huge sack of firewood, which he dropped on the tiled floor with a gasp of relief and an exclamation, in the war jargon is difficult to remember, which made us all laugh.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} Cannadine, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain}, 23.
\textsuperscript{47} Owen, \textit{Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters}, 434.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 439.
\textsuperscript{50} Graves, \textit{Good-Bye to All That}, 176.
\textsuperscript{51} Sassoon, \textit{Fox Hunting Man}, 338.
In another one of his Sherston memoirs, Sassoon wrote “He [Flook] had come treading in with clumsy embarrassment...announcing in a hoarse undertone, ‘Ah’ve brought the stoof’.” Sassoon adjusted the writing to accommodate Flook’s folksy, rural accent. Bumbling, clumsy charisma was all part of the simplistic kindness of soldier-servants.

Music was another way that soldier-servants were seen to express their ‘simplicity.’ “An officer’s servant is whistling cheerfully,” wrote Siegfried Sassoon, “probably to a pair of brown shoes.” He later described his servant singing ‘Dixieland,’ and later notes that when nighttime came at the front he could hear, “…the servants singing by a bright shell-box fire in the gusty twilight.” In the same Canadian propaganda pamphlet, there was a passing reference an officer made to “…the melodious voice of his batman.” The melodies Sassoon described were far more likely singing drinking tunes than Handel. In the context of the officer-servant relationship, music alluded to an unsophisticated form of self-expression.

Officers also emphasized a batman’s connections to his folksy past, conjuring strong images of rural Britain. Nowhere is this sort of connection more apparent than in an account of “The Perfect Batman” in The Times. The anonymous author described his servant as a Hampshire man, and wrote, “There is something horsy about him,” further noting that he occasionally “may be seen as smoking a pipe, but with a shamefaced air, as if he thought that it impaired his working powers.” “He is a dark, medium-sized man,” wrote Denis Oliver Barnett of his batman, “with a face like a goat, and a heart of gold.” This description was typically rural in its reference to Hudson’s ‘face like a goat.’ Likewise, Seton wrote that as a child his batman was, “…sent to a school, set amid green fields and rolling hills on the outskirts of the city.” The imagery was palpable; officers associated these servants with a simple, rural attitude. This pastoral connection is not to be construed as the batmen being seen as wealthy landowners – but rather as an extension of their peasantry.

Kindness was one of a batman’s most admired characteristics. Officers emphasized how caring, gentle, and harmless their servants were. Second Lieutenant Arthur Conway Young described his servant O’Brien,
as a “...cheery, optimistic soul.” Seton wrote of his batman that “his belief in human charity was both astonishing and profound,” and Graves described Tottie as an ‘admirable servant.’ Seton also listed several qualities for which batmen were chosen, namely, “…cheerfulness and an unassuming friendliness which took complete possession of the necessary, though often inconvenient, affairs of life.” Half of what officers required of a soldier-servant amidst total war in the army of the world’s largest superpower was a batman’s charm and pleasantry.

“Darling Julian is so constantly beside me,” wrote Lieutenant the Hon. Gerald William Grenfell, “and laughs so debonairly at my qualms and hesitations. I pray for one-tenth of his courage.” In these examples, batmen are characterized as ‘darling’ and endearing, characteristics of the lower orders of society, not of reputable elites.

“He was an intelligent man, a marksman, and had a clean character sheet, so I asked him why he had not gone in for promotion. Too much trouble and responsibility was his only explanation,” wrote the Earl Wavell on his batman in *The Good Soldier*. Wavell’s lower class batman characteristically avoided responsibility. Sassoon, in *Sherston’s Progress*, concentrates a substantial portion of the book admiring the work of his servants:

That sort of reminds me of my servant and the numberless small worries and exasperations he has saved me from in the past few weeks. Nothing could be better than the way he does things, quiet and untiring. He is simple, humble, patient and brave. He is reticent yet humorous. How many of us can claim to possess these qualities and ask no reward but a smile?

Important qualities were a batman’s humility, simplicity, humor, and patience. Their folksy attitudes, clumsy ineptness, associations with music and kindness further contributed to this reputation. These qualities were all part of a larger umbrella of characteristics commonly associated with the unsophisticated lower classes, not the refined upper classes.

**Paternalism**

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61 Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 175.
64 Wavell, *The Good Soldier*, 49.
65 Sassoon, *Sherston’s Progress*, 179.
Paternalism, the restraint of the liberties or freedoms of one for the advantage of another, effectively highlighted the class-based attitudes of officers and batmen throughout the First World War. Officers as the superiors constantly acted in what they deemed the best interest of batmen, their subordinates. This behavior restricted servants’ liberty of choice. The previous themes were concerned with the idea that officers understood themselves as their batmen’s superior in every sense of the word. Paternalism was a distinct category on its own, one that specifically focused on an officer’s pride and a batman’s submissiveness.

Officers selected their batmen like items, hoping to claim the servant who would prove most useful at the front. Sometimes officers were unable to contract the soldier-servant they desired. Owen wrote,

My new servant has just gone on leave this afternoon, carrying with him some books and binoculars of mine, with instructions to call on you as he passes through Shrewsbury…This Howarth is a ‘scratch’ servant not my choice; but I rather hope he’ll call on you & tell you what he can.66

The phrase ‘scratch servant’ was used to mean a disposable servant, one an officer did not expect to be with for too long.

Choice was important when considering a batman’s assignment to an officer. Officers had the right to select which servant they wanted, sometimes out of an entire pool of enlisted soldiers. Owen described how he chose a batman handy with a bayonet, hoping this servant might protect him in close combat.67 Graham Seton used even greater possessive language describing the selection of his servant, and wrote, “I claimed him.”68 A servant could likely belong to several officers. In fact, one servant could belong to as many as ten officers.69 These situations demonstrate that servants were objects, and some objects were valued higher than others. The objectifying of soldier-servants manifested itself through possessive language used by officers.

Paternalist language ran throughout many British officers’ accounts throughout the First World War. Captain Hitchcock wrote of his servant Jackson, “My former batman, 8243 Jackson, had been temporarily looking after an officer in D Company, however, Poole got him back for me.”70 Siegfried Sassoon in Memoirs of an Infantry Officer was detached

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67 Ibid, 422.
68 Seton, Biography of a Batman, 5.
70 Hitchcock, “Stand To”: A Diary of the Trenches 1915-18, 134.
from his servant Flook for a portion of the memoir and wrote, “Poor Flook will be awfully worried about not being with his officer bloke, I though, imagining his stolid red face puffing along under a box of ammunition.”

Sassoon declared he knew how Flook felt detached from his officer. Granted, it was possible that a servant experienced disorientation upon returning to the front lines without his officer in the face of battle, yet it is just as possible that a servant felt liberated detached from his officer without the weight of his commander’s daily needs and assigned tasks. Paternalism fit right into the class-based dogma of many elites.

Paternalism also reared its head when the lives of soldier-servants were on the line. Captain Hitchcock describing soldiers selected for a raid, wrote of his servant, “Jackson had not been included in the actual raiders, much to his regret. I did not want to risk him being killed, and also, selfishly, I felt that if I was to come back he would still be there to look after me.”

Wilfred Owen wrote on the fatal casualties in his platoon, noting that “one of these poor fellows was my first servant whom I rejected. If I had kept him he would have lived, for servants don’t do Sentry Duty.” Owen blamed himself for this soldier’s loss of life. When a servant’s life was in question, and the stakes were highest for survival in war, paternalism was most visible.

Paternalism also existed within the minds of the batmen to a certain degree. Several servants assumed protective roles over their officers, modifying the traditional master-servant relationship, in the face of the incredible daunting weight of the war. The First World War was an incredible moment of vulnerability for upper class elites that shattered illusions about British superiority and more distinctly, upper-class British superiority.

A batman’s protectiveness aided upper class vulnerability. Captain Edward Gerald Venning, on why his servant rejected a promotion, wrote, “My servant also refused because he would not be able to look after me.” The batman insisted this particular officer-batman relationship continue. Unlike in a previous example in which Captain Hitchcock demanded his servant return to him, Captain Venning’s batman refused to be severed from his officer. “I’m feeling full of buck and looking after myself well,” wrote Captain Barnett, “besides being looked after by a jolly good servant.” Had Barnett not provided adequately for himself, his

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71 Sassoon, Infantry Officer, 59.
72 Hitchcock, “Stand To”: A Diary of the Trenches 1915-18, 243.
73 Owen, Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters, 428.
74 Cannadine Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, 84.
75 Housman, War Letters of Fallen Englishmen, 282.
76 Barnett, Denis Oliver Barnett in Happy Memory, 72.
servant Hudson ensured the captain’s necessities were met. The actions of these servants represented the vulnerability of upper class sons, now relying on their batmen for support and comfort in the presence of war.

The most poignant example of this phenomenon comes from the Sherston memoirs of Siegfried Sassoon. Sassoon wrote, “Somehow Flook with his rough and ready devotion, had seemed my strongest link with the Battalion. When I shook his hand and said goodbye, he winked and advised me, confidentially, not to be in too much of a hurry about getting back. A good rest would do me no harm, he said.”77 Flook is the same batman whom George Sherston mocked for ineptness in a previous memoir, and by the time of this piece, Flook embodied Sherston’s ‘strongest link to the Battalion.’ Flook advises Sherston to rest, and in this case the traditional role of an officer and his servant reversed. Flook’s care for Sherston demonstrated familiarity between the ranks to such an extent that the officer is heeding advice from the servant.

Batmen’s protectiveness was not an overhaul of the class system; in fact it was the greatest acceptance and recognition the class system. A batman cared for his officer out of obligation, which distinguished him from the paternal motivations of an officer. Soldier-servants were compelled to care for the needs of their officer the exact same way officers required servants to clean their dug out or serve them tea. Batmen recognized the strict obligation to their officer, and demonstrated that obligation by a protective care of their officer’s interests. Soldier-servants acted with a fierce loyalty, which persisted even under the pressure of war and a restrictive class system.

At the dawn of the First World War paternalism was entrenched in what it meant to be British. A poem printed in the opening pages of B.C. Lake’s manual for officers, entitled “Freedom” and written by British poet William Wodsworth, reads:

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In our halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible Knights of old
We must be free or die
Who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake
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These imperial attitudes exemplified British paternalism. The nation embraced an elitist superiority, in which the only way to live was the British way. The truly British way was epitomized in the lives of the upper class. Officer corps’ paternalism reflected everything that British

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77 Sassoon, *Infantry Officer*, 91.
class based society meant to its citizenry. Upper class superiority permeated not only the officer-batman relationship, but the entire concept of British identity. Hugh Montagu in Housman’s collection of *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen*, wrote “…they’ll [enlisted soldiers] go like lambs as long as they’ve got an officer with them. The curious thing is that in civilian life they probably cursed us out as plutocrats, out here they look fairly to us.” A batman experienced the war as a working-class soldier, forced servant to an upper class officer, who adopted an attitude of protective care over an elite individual.

**Conclusion**

For upper classes, the First World War was the dramatic national conflict they had so desperately desired in order to prove their worth as Britons, and as privileged elites. The war was the moment when the weight of British tradition, a weight based on social class, was to be harnessed to achieve its full potential. “They knew how to lead, how to command, and how to look after the men in their charge,” wrote Cannadine. “Here, then, was their chance to demonstrate conclusively that they were…the patriotic class of knightly crusaders and chivalric heroes, who would defend the national honour and the national interest in the hour of its greatest trial.” These noble sons would soon learn the shortcomings of their interest, when faced with the daunting burden of war.

For working classes, the war was quite different. Combat experience continued to instill the strict British social hierarchy, even in the face of horrific conflict. It was not until after the war the working classes in Britain began to win successes. It was not until after the First World War that British working classes achieved major victories, with a sudden increase in trade union membership and the establishment of the Labour Party in 1918. As the party grew, awareness about the great gulf between the working and upper classes began to substantially increase. It took a war, and upper class recognition about the plight of the lower classes, to make this realization come to fruition.

Following the realization of war’s cruelty, officers failed to avail themselves of the fundamental human companionship of a batman. The batman was a vehicle of support, almost as if British military tradition predicted that the landed elites would feel powerless and vulnerable in

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80 Cannadine in *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 73-74.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid, 7.
combat, and required an individual to lean on for camaraderie. As proven, even when officers did befriend their servants, they failed to see their batman as an individual, but instead as a lower class object. To elite Britons, hierarchy was more than a way of life; it was a vehicle of self-perception and worthiness. Lower class Britons owed allegiance to hierarchy, and even in fierce combat demonstrated fierce loyalty to their duty and place in British society.

The master-servant relationship pervaded British modes of self-expression, even in fundamental understandings of British identity. All individuals had a place, and that societal position was inextricably related to layers of British society, from prime ministers to working classes. “And one learns to be a servant. The soul is disciplined,” wrote Captain Charles Hamilton Sorely of the war, but the same holds true for British identity. Servitude is fundamental to understanding British thought.

Class has consistently been central to a Britons understanding of their history, from the bourgeois revolution of the English Civil War towards twentieth century Thatcherism. This relationship between an officer and his batman has significant weight with regards to that social class understanding. At a time when the vulnerability of the upper classes was surging, and the stakes for survival had never been greater, Britons still fell on the crutch of their hierarchy to provide them the stability needed to endure the disaster of total war.

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84 Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, 5-7, 19-20.
For the Soviet Union, World War II was a four year long ordeal that cost them over twenty-five million casualties, eight million of which were Soviet troops.1 Despite this high cost of human life, the Soviets fought tooth and nail the entire war, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. The most important factor in the Soviet war machine was the contribution of the individual soldiers themselves. The question of who these men and women were and why they fought as they did still remains with us today. The legend of the average Soviet soldier has been shrouded in mystery until quite recently, thanks to improved access to Soviet documents and recent scholarship.2 The Soviet soldiers’ motivation was not solely blind idealism to the regime; in fact few fought for that reason. Many fought for Russian nationalism, hatred for the Germans, and among other reasons, for their very homes and villages.

To understand the individual Soviet soldiers and their perspectives on the war, it is necessary to examine the major events leading up the war: the Great Purge (1937-38) and the Winter War (1939-40). The Great Purge that occurred profoundly impacted the mentality of the people living in the Soviet Union. In total, as many as 680,000 people were killed during Nikolai Yezhov’s reign of terror.3 The effect these purges had on the military was devastating. Forty-five percent of all senior officers and political officials were dismissed or executed, including 720 commanders. Of the eighty-five senior officials who sat on the Military Council, seventy-one were dead by the time the Germans invaded the Soviet

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1 Alexander Kirilian, Authorities to Update Number of Soviet Casualties During WWII, The School of Russian and Asian Studies, Jan. 15th, 2010 http://www.sras.org/update_in_number_of_soviet_ww2_casualties 1
The psychological effect this had on the average Soviet soldier fighting in World War II was significant. The Great Purge did not help instill faith in the average soldier. Boris Gorbachevsky noted in his memoir, *Through the Maelstrom*, “In my experience, the officers who commanded by the swear word, bottle, or fist were those lieutenants and majors who had risen in the ranks during Stalin’s peacetime purges of the military.”

Stalin had “adopted an almost hostile attitude toward the armed forces, particularly the officer corps,” and partly out of paranoia, had decided to purge the Red Army’s officer class to bring it under his control. Stalin also reintroduced political deputies into units above divisional strength as a further method of control.

The weakened leadership that remained in conjunction with political deputies who attempted to instill rigid idealism in troops through coercion and fear, eroded the confidence Soviet troops had in their commanders. The disasters that occurred between 1939 and 1941 during the Winter War reinforced the low morale that permeated the armed forces of the Soviet Union, yet the Red Army never crumbled. The Winter War was fought between Finland and the Soviet Union from November 30, 1939 to March 12, 1940, and is widely regarded as having been disastrous for the Soviet Union. Despite the massive inequity in regards to the sizes of their respective militaries, the Soviets took almost four months to achieve victory and at the cost of high casualties. The Finns exposed the inefficiencies and weaknesses of the Soviet Union army to the world, setting the precedent for Germany’s low opinion of the Red Army. In essence, it was a prelude to what would occur in the Soviets’ war against the Germans: massive failure right from the start, a period of regrouping, and eventual victory. The initial failures of the Red Army can be traced to their arrogant approach toward fighting the Finns. The commissars of Leningrad were quoted saying, “victory over the enemy shall be achieved with little blood.” Yet the Finnish campaign was a “disaster” for the Red Army and it “exposed to the world how feeble was the offensive capability of the purged forces…”

Some of the factors that bogged down the Soviets were their initial overconfidence, their lack of preparation for

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7 Overy, *Russia’s War*, 32.
9 Ibid., 33.
10 Overy, *Russia’s War*, 56.
facing the Finnish defenses, the bad weather, and the inadequate leadership. One soldier remembered, “we were returning to our camp. . . the first thing we saw was. . .a field kitchen and a cook, stuffing snow into his pot. Someone from our group told the cook that it had been a bad idea to come so far out, that the Finns were close. ‘What Finns? I’ll get them with my scoop.’”¹¹ Such was the nonchalant, initial attitude of the Soviets until they encountered real opposition by the Finns.

The Soviet soldiers were frankly unprepared to deal with the opposition presented to them by the Finns. Within the first few weeks of fighting, several Soviet divisions were more or less obliterated.¹² Despite the demoralizing nature of the Soviet’s setbacks, it served as a testament to the character of the Soviet fighting force. The Soviet soldiers fought on despite losing 126,875 in a short four month time frame.¹³ Soviet soldiers were more likely than not to refuse to surrender to the Finns, even when in a position where surrender was the most logical decision.¹⁴ When encircled by Finnish troops, the 34th Light Tank Brigade suffered over 2,050 dead and only 58 soldiers were taken prisoner.¹⁵ In 1941, eighty thousand Soviets were taken prisoner by German forces.¹⁶ It is likely that the Soviets continued to underestimate the Finnish, believing it was still possible to break out of the encirclement. But the Soviets were hampered by the lack of experienced higher level leadership. Historian Reese argues that “based on these three major battles of encirclement…we can conclude that vast numbers of soldiers were lost due to doctrinal and command failures, not troop-level military ineffectiveness.”¹⁷

Who were the people who made up the ranks, where were they from, what did they think, and what did they feel? The ranks of the Soviet Union were made up of men and women from all walks of life. The Red Army in reality was much more diverse than how it is stereotypically portrayed. Soldiers were drafted from all over the Soviet Union, including non-Slavic minorities from Central Asia, western Ukraine and Belorussia, the Baltic States, and Bessarabia among other areas.¹⁸ While this vast array of soldiers offered the Soviet Union much needed manpower, it also

¹¹ Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 33.
¹² Ibid, 33-34.
¹³ Overy, Russia’s War, 56.
¹⁴ Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 35.
¹⁵ Ibid, 36.
¹⁶ Ibid, 79.
¹⁷ Ibid, 81.
¹⁸ Ibid, 96.
Report, 52

presented several problems to the Red Army. Due to cultural and geographic differences, many of these Central Asian soldiers not only had different customs but even different languages than the Russian troops in the Red Army. In his memoirs, Boris Gorbachevsky recalls a discussion he had with another soldier about their inability to communicate with the Uzbek troops and how much trouble it caused.19

In fact, it was difficult to get the ethnic minorities of the Soviet Union to enlist at all. The opposition from ethnic minorities to conscription extended from their alienation from Russia geographical and its brutal regime. According to Reese, it was a combination of geography and politics that played into the opposition to conscription. Reese notes that the social and economic lives of the ethnic minorities were “located primarily outside the Russian-oriented mainstream. . . besides feeling little or no attachment to the Soviet state, the men of Central Asia and the Caucasus doubted the Soviet government’s ability to enforce conscription, and they were willing to test it.”20 Reese attributes the resentment the satellite nations felt toward the Soviet Union to their lack of independence, forced collectivization, and antireligious campaigns. Further, the areas from where the ethnic minorities came were not immediately threatened by the German armies. The ethnic minorities of the Soviet Union had plenty of reasons not to want to fight and, predictably, a majority of them did not fight.

There existed an image, though, of the stereotypical Soviet soldier: a young, urban, Russian soldier prepared to fight off the invading fascists. Many Russian youth volunteered for the army out of a sense of nationalism or idealism at the beginning of the war. These Russian urbanite youth made up the bulk of the Soviet army, having been raised on nationalistic movies during the 1930, which depicted war as inevitable.21 Their service was attributed to idealism and loyalty to the state. However, many went to battle to defend their country, not the regime. In many cases, soldiers fighting for the Soviet Union had been victims of persecution by the government, but they fought anyway. One soldier in particular stated, “In all honesty, I did not want to go to war and fight. . . I would not do any favors for the Soviets. . . in 1941 my uncle was arrested. . . however, later I decided that Kremlin bastards come and go, but the Motherland stays forever.”22 It was exactly this mindset that convinced many young Russians to go to war; not to fight for their government and communism, but to fight for their country. This is contrary to the

19 Gorbachevsky, Through the Maelstrom, 73.
20 Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 141.
21 Ibid, 105.
22 Quoted in Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 107.
stereotype of the fearless Soviet soldier going to war to fight the fascists due to a sense of duty to the state and communism. In reality, there was little loyalty to the state or communism. Rather, it was a hatred of German atrocities and love for their country that inspired Russians into joining the military to fight off the invaders.

However, insufficient numbers of Russians volunteered to fight for their country. Many were either coerced into service by peer pressure or conscripted into the battle. Volunteerism tapered off near the end of 1941, as people realized that the war with Germany would not be as short or easy as many of the young idealists had first believed. Peer and societal pressure supplied much of the motivation once idealism proved to be too superficial to motivate sufficient numbers. Former Soviet soldier Vladimir Shliakhtermann recalls that “in August 1942, when the Germans were tearing at Stalingrad, I got the notion that I needed to fight in order to be able to comfortably answer the question, ‘What did you do during the war?’” The simple question of, ‘what did you do during the war?’ would be enough to send many to the local recruiter to avoid being labeled as unpatriotic or a coward. Soon the Soviet soldiers, volunteer or conscripted, idealistic or jaded, found themselves on the front, facing a determined enemy in the invading Germans.

The German operation Barbarossa began on June 22, 1941. It was the largest military operation in history, involving over three million Germans and their allies. The invasion came as a shock to Stalin, despite repeated warnings from spies that a German invasion was going to occur. Stalin ignored information up to the day before the invasion, when a German soldier crossed into the Soviet Union warning of the impending invasion; Stalin ordered the soldier shot. The first year of the war was a disaster for the Soviet Union. The Germans rapidly advanced, destroying everything in their path. Over 1,200 airplanes were destroyed and 200 ammo dumps captured out of 340. It was in this demoralizing context that Stalin issued Order No. 270, which decreed that there would be harsh penalties for deserters and repercussions against their families. One soldier from Leningrad, Josef Finkelshtein, recounted an execution that occurred in October, 1941. “There were three deserters. . . ‘shoot the

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23 Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 121.
24 Ibid, 111.
25 Overy, Russia’s War, 72-73.
26 Ibid, 71.
27 Ibid, 76.
traitors of the motherland,’ commanded the senior officer.”28 Such draconian measures were taken throughout the war to ensure the loyalty and obedience of the Soviet troops. In wake of the high increase in violence against Soviet troops by their officers, Stalin eventually issued Order No. 391, which attempted to curb the excessive violence practiced by the officers.

The prevailing mood of the Soviet soldier at this time was certainly one of pessimism. Order No. 270 instilled a deep fear in Soviet troops of being labeled as deserters or cowards. The penalty for desertion would either be the gulags or execution along with a threat to the deserter’s family. Order No. 270 was not the only thing that Soviet soldiers had to fear from their own side. On June 27th, 1941, General Zhukov and Marshal Timoshenko signed Directive No. 35523, which authorized the use of blocking detachments, which became infamous in 1942.29 By the end of 1941, it was looking grim for the Red Army and the Soviet Union. Leningrad was under siege, the Germans were on the verge of taking Moscow, and Soviet forces had taken heavy losses. Despite these signs of imminent defeat, the Red Army managed to hold together and continue to fight the Germans, holding off what would have been inevitable destruction. Desperate determination kept many of the Soviet soldiers going. Hatred of the Germans was another motivating factor. Inciting such hatred was not a particularly difficult task for the Soviet Union propaganda machine. The factors of Soviet hate stemmed from both anti-Nazi propaganda due to the differing ideologies and the simple fact that the Germans had just invaded the Soviet Union. Poet Ilya Ehrenburg commented that “for us the German soldier with a rifle in his hand is not a human being, but a Fascist. We hate him.”30 For those who didn’t want to fight for socialism, Stalin, or even the Soviet Union, they fought to destroy fascism. Nazi atrocities against the Soviet citizens were exactly what Stalin needed to invoke this sentiment of hatred against the Nazis in his troops.31

By the beginning of 1942, Moscow was experiencing momentary reprieve, but over three million soldiers had perished and another three million were captured.32 With the entire military still reeling from the blow dealt by the German invasion the previous year, the Soviet Union found itself in a position of vulnerability. It was this year that Stalin issued Order No. 227, the infamous ‘Not One Step Back’ order. This directive

28 Quoted in Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 161.
29 Ibid, 169.
30 Quoted in Reese, Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought, 179.
31 Ibid.
32 Overy, Russia’s War, 154.
was met with mixed reactions by the Soviet troops. Boris Gorbachevsky recalls the fateful day and the reactions hearing this order. “Listening to the strange lines of the order, everyone froze on the spot, and I could see how the faces of the men in the formation paled. . .this order, it seems to me, is the most revealing and honest document from Stalin during all the years of the war.”  

Indeed, this year saw both the beginning of the Stalingrad campaign and the inability of the allied forces to open a second front to relieve some pressure off the Soviet Union. Hopelessness was widespread. Gorbachevsky speaks of this late in 1942, noting that “the conviction is widespread that our people. . .never lost hope in ultimate victory. That isn’t so. In actuality, confidence in victory over the enemy began appearing only in 1943—after the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk.”

It was during this time before Stalingrad and Kursk that desertion to the enemies was a substantial problem for the Soviet army. This was due to the consistent losses, the seemingly uncaring attitude of the officers and High Command toward the frontline troops, and enemy propaganda. It was not hard to imagine the thoughts racing through the heads of Soviet soldiers. Death at the hands of the Germans or death at the hands of their own government; there was little relief or comfort for the demoralized army. Between 150-200 Soviets across the entire front went over to the German side a day, which adds up to close to 6,000 men a month; the equivalent of an entire Soviet interior division lost solely to desertion on a monthly basis. Despite these demoralizing figures, the tide was about to turn for the Soviet army and the determination of the Soviet troops would be reignited and fuel them all the way to Berlin.

The Soviet campaign in 1943 started out with a stunning victory in Stalingrad. In early January, General Paulus’ men had become encircled in Stalingrad by Soviet troops. On January 31, 1943, Paulus was forced to surrender to the Soviets, who took 91,000 prisoners after inflicting over 147,000 casualties on the German forces within Stalingrad. This is commonly seen as the major turning point of the war.

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33 Gorbachevsky, *Through the Maelstrom*, 97.
34 Gorbachevsky, *Through the Maelstrom*, 176.
36 Overy, *Russia’s War*, 185.
on the Eastern front, as the Soviets now had a real reason to believe that they could actually defeat the Germans. Poet Ilya Ehrenburg summed up the current mood best by stating, “Up till then one believed in victory as an act of faith, but now there was no shadow of a doubt: victory was assured.”37 The Soviets now saw that the German army was, in fact, beatable. The morale and confidence of the Red Army soared with this victory. It is also important to note that the Western allies began Operation Torch in February of that year, which may have helped to relieve some pressure on the Soviet Union. It was not the scale of relief that a second front in Western Europe would have created, but it was helpful to the Soviets due to the timing of Operation Torch relative to the victory at Stalingrad. The outcome of the Battle of Kursk, which occurred between July and August of 1943, sealed the fate of the Germans on the Eastern Front. The Battle of Kursk was crucial to both the Soviets and the Germans. On the Soviet side, 1,336,000 men, 3,444 tanks, 2,900 aircraft, and 19,000 guns were pitted against 900,000 German troops, 2,700 tanks, 2,000 aircraft, and over 10,000 guns. The Red Army had about 40% of its manpower and 75% of its armored taking part in this single battle.38 On the morning of July 12, the largest tank battle of the war took place between the Soviet army and the German army, involving more than 1,450 combined tanks on both sides.39 By the 15, the German tank army had suffered too many losses to break through the Soviet defenses. This victory was exactly what the Soviet troops needed to boost morale and all but ensure in their minds that victory was at hand. Indeed, the Battle of Kursk was seen to have ended any hope of German victory on the Eastern front.40

By the end of 1943, the tides had turned on the Eastern front. The German army was now on the defensive, being driven back by a Red Army that was growing more and more confident with every victory. While desertion was still a problem among Soviet troops, it would never be what it was in the first two years of the campaign. Now the soldiers had confidence in themselves and their leaders as well as confidence in their ability to survive and be victorious. However, the Soviets paid a high price in 1943, with 470,000 lost at Stalingrad and 70,000 at Kursk.41 Despite the losses they suffered, the Red Army continued the push west, driving the Germans back. As Overy notes, “the mood throughout Russia

37 Quoted in Overy, Russia’s War, 185.
38 Ibid, 201.
39 Ibid, 208.
41 Ibid, 212.
was one of growing elation.”42 The people were behind the soldiers and
with growing support from home, the troops grew more determined and
steadfast in their commitment to defend their Motherland from the
Germans. Their time had come to drive out the invaders by the end of
1943.

By 1944, the Soviet army was slowly but surely pushing the
German forces out of Russia, reaching the National Border in 1944.
Gorbachevsky recounts this momentous occasion, stating, “Everybody
rushed to embrace each other. Some fell to their knees, raising their arms
toward the sky.”43 It was pure jubilation felt by the front line troops at
finally freeing their Motherland from the grips of the German army. Now,
it was time for the Red Army to rush into foreign lands and avenge the last
three years of German occupation. With every freed village on their
minds, Soviet soldiers’ determination for retribution grew. By August,
Soviet forces were penetrating deep into Poland, on the outskirts of
Warsaw and the pro-German government in Romania fell.44

By 1945, as the German army was in disarray and fighting a two
front war, the Soviets pushed forward with fire in their hearts and hate in
their minds. As the Soviets marched into East Prussia in January of 1945,
violece occurred on a massive scale. Gorbachevsky recalls one account
of violence that occurred in the first German city his division took.
“Unexpectedly, a tall, hale old man hopped out of a partially destroyed
building. . .he rushed to meet our column. One of the Red Army soldiers. .
. stepped out of the column and with all his might, smashed the German’s
head with his rifle butt.”45 This brutal murder of a German citizen, who
happened to be a member of the Communist party, is a testimony to what
sort of vengeance the Soviet soldiers handed out to the Germans who they
associated with the brutalization of their homeland. Gorbachevsky recalls
how soldiers would break into houses and destroy everything in a furious
rage.46 This outright violence against the Germans was not condemned by
Soviet officers at first. It is likely that even if the officers had attempted to
crack down on such violence against Germans by Soviet soldiers it would
have been very difficult to halt the atrocities. The Soviet soldiers had had
three and a half years of propaganda and had suffered considerably during
the German campaigns on Soviet soil. Gorbachevsky’s account confirms

42 Ibid, 211.
43 Gorbachevsky, Through the Maelstrom, 328.
44 Overy, Russia’s War, 250.
45 Gorbachevsky, Through the Maelstrom, 359.
46 Ibid, 359.
that he and his unit were influenced by the propaganda and the feelings of vengeance, remarking that “the elements of hatred and revenge had by the end of January 1945 become a raging, inundating river.”

In April of 1945, the Red Army encircled Berlin and by May 2, the Germans unconditionally surrendered Berlin to the Soviets and the Western Allies. The Soviet Union had finally claimed victory over the Germans. Gorbachevsky recalls the feelings he and his comrades had when they found out the war had finally ended: “without any orders, in a single bound we officers and soldiers, who had been standing by our vehicles, spontaneously rushed to meet our comrades and exchanged celebratory hugs and kisses with them.” Joy and happiness were pervasive amongst the Soviet soldiers.

The answers to who the Soviet soldier was and for what reasons he fought are complex. The Soviet soldier came from men and women of all walks of life. They were primarily Moscow youths, but they also consisted of Ukrainian farmers, Uzbek peasants, and every corner of the Soviet Union. While problems may have arisen initially due to the vast differences among the troops, this also made the Red Army one of the most diverse armies in World War II. In spite of cultural differences that existed between the soldiers of the Red Army they fought and died for one another in battle.

The motivations these soldiers had for fighting is even more complex than who they actually were. Some joined out of idealism and loyalty to the state and Stalin. Some volunteered out of a sense of nationalism to Russia and the need to protect the Motherland. Some joined due to an intense hatred of fascism and a burning desire to seek vengeance against those who had invaded their nation and inflicted so much damage to their homeland. Some joined out of societal peer pressure, hoping to have a good answer when confronted with ‘what did you do during the war?’ Some soldiers didn’t even join voluntarily, but were conscripted into service in the Red Army. Despite the varying degrees of commitment and the different sources of motivation, the Red Army persevered and was eventually victorious against the Germans in 1945 – thanks to the common soldier. Even in the darkest days of the war for the Soviet Union, the Red Army soldier fought on and forced a victory out of what had seemed to be certain defeat.

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48 Ibid., 391.
DIVIDING CHRISTENDOM: PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGY, AND GEOPOLITICS IN THE FIRST CRUSADE

By Francis Ambrogio

Francis Ambrogio is a junior at the United States Military Academy and is an International History major with a minor in Grand Strategy. This paper was originally written for a course on the history of world religions. Francis is interested in Medieval history and the Crusades, especially in the First Crusade, in which one of the largest contingents was from Southern Italy, where his father’s family comes from. Additionally, he has a deep interest in the history of the Christian faith, particularly in the relationship between Eastern and Western Christianity.

The Byzantine Empire stood on the brink of collapse and the Latin West was torn between Pope and Antipope. In 1095, Pope Urban II called upon Christians to take up the cross and the sword in order to deliver the Holy Sepulcher from the forces of Islam. In the preceding centuries, Arab armies had swept across the Middle East and the Mediterranean, penetrating into Western Europe as far as France, and since then were being driven back bit by bit by Christian forces. Meanwhile, the Byzantine Empire bore the brunt of the Muslim tide from the beginning of its wave of conquest. At the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, the Turks annihilated a Byzantine army, and as a result seized the majority of Asia Minor, a region which would eventually bear their name – Turkey. This was a devastating blow to the Byzantines that sent shockwaves throughout the Empire and all of Christendom.¹

The concept for Pope Urban II’s intervention came from contact between the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus and Robert, Count of Flanders, while the latter was on a pilgrimage. Robert later sent some of his knights to serve Alexius, who was greatly impressed by the martial prowess of the Flemish chevaliers. The Emperor’s daughter, Anna Comnena, remarked, “a Frank on horseback is invincible, and would even make a hole in the walls of Babylon.”² Alexius expanded his request for assistance in fend off foreign and internal foes from Count Robert, a

significant but peripheral western lord, to the Pope himself, arguably the most powerful man in western Christendom.³

Alexius was in dire need of this assistance. His strategic position was “not so much desperate as catastrophic,” with external threats from foreign foes and internal threats from factions who were losing faith in his ability to protect the Empire.⁴ He got more than he bargained for. To honor his request, the Pope called for a war to liberate the Holy Land from the Turk, which became a far more ambitious end than the military supplementation that Alexius had requested. Rather than amalgamating western knights and soldiers into Byzantines armies, multitudes of Christians embarked upon the warlike pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The first wave was a rowdy rabble led by the preacher known as Peter the Hermit, followed by the Crusade proper, made up of the hosts of the great lords who embraced the cause and the masses of pilgrim followers. A complex political situation emerged: pious warriors joined forces with ambitious adventurers to reconquer lands neither they nor their forbears had ever held, in a holy war called for by a western Pope at the request of an eastern Emperor who likely viewed most of those lands as out of reach. Additionally, the Latin view of the conflict was fundamentally different from that of their Byzantine coreligionists. The First Crusade was a tremendous success, despite the divisions in the Christian ranks. It was fortuitous timing that they invaded the Near East during a period of deep disunity in the Islamic world.⁵ The clashing designs of the various Christian leaders and their relationships with the Byzantines also contributed to the divided nature of the Crusade. The differing perceptions and strategic goals of the Latin Franks and Byzantine Greeks were the defining factors in the decision to begin the First Crusade and the nature of the alliance that reconquered Asia Minor and the Levant for Christendom.

The nature of Christendom was an open question in the eleventh century. Its western, or Latin, and eastern, or Greek, halves had been drifting apart for centuries. The ghost of the universalist Roman Empire hung over the Christian world, providing a framework for the concept of empire and a source of political authority. The Byzantines, direct heirs of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, perceived their empire as holy and as universal. The Emperor was head of the Church, counting “Isapostolos” (“Equal to the Apostles”) among his titles. It was his right

and duty to appoint the Patriarch of Constantinople, as well as the other Patriarchs of the East. The only great churchman independent of this Caesaropapist system was the Bishop of Rome – the Pope – whose office, over the centuries, had developed far more independent of Imperial control than its eastern counterparts. When the rotting body that was the Western Roman Empire finally collapsed, it was the Church and the Papacy that “saved all that could be saved” of high Roman civilization.

The existence of the Holy Roman Emperor in the West, in reality a German monarch, was a threat to the exclusive status of the eastern Emperor and the religious significance and centrality of Constantinople. In the West until the eleventh century, the Emperor was for all purposes the senior member in the relationship between himself and the Pope. The Popes, particularly Gregory VII, after whom this “Reform” or “Revolution” is named, asserted their political independence and sovereignty by targeting a number of church practices, including clerical marriage, simony (the selling of church offices), and lay investiture (the investing of bishops by lay authorities).

The particular issue of lay investiture developed into the “Investiture Controversy,” pitting the Pope against Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, with Henry going so far as to appoint an Antipope, Guibert of Ravenna, who called himself Clement III. This struggle continued past Gregory’s tenure as pontiff, and was a major factor in Urban II’s reaching out to the Byzantines and his call for holy war. Urban faced an Antipope and the monarchs of Europe, threats to both his moral and political legitimacy. In response he reached out to the East, developing a healthy working relationship with Emperor Alexius. His alignment with the Byzantines was part of a “wider scheme to establish himself at the heart of Christendom.” To Urban, the Crusade was an assertion of his sovereignty; to Alexius it was a desperate play for survival.

The practice of Byzantine Emperors requesting military assistance from the west was well-established by the time of the First Crusade. Alexius’ request for troops was not unusual, although after the fact some

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9 Peter Frankopan, The First Crusade – The Call from the East, 24.
10 Ibid., 25.
western chroniclers exaggerated his requests to fit with the magnitude and devotion of the response. The Great Schism of 1054 was not between all Christians of the Latin and Greek Churches. Eastern and Western Christians still saw each other as brethren in faith. Eastern Orthodox bishop Kallistos Ware explains that “the two parts of Christendom were not yet conscious of a great gulf of separation between them, and men on both sides still hoped that the misunderstandings could be cleared up without too much difficulty.” At Antioch, the Crusaders reinstated the Greek Patriarch, who in turn consecrated a Provençal as bishop of an eastern see. Though differences existed, they were not barriers to cooperation. Indeed, for centuries, despite the widening gap between the Latin and Greek Churches, “co-operation between east and west was the norm rather than the exception.”

November 27, 1095, was the fateful day on which Urban lit the world on fire in order to save it. The Council of Clermont consisted of more than the calling of the Crusade, but the preaching of the pilgrimage was its lasting effect. Sources differ on exactly what Urban said that day, but taking all of them into account it is clear that he made reference to both the cause of liberating the Holy Land and relieving the pressure on the Byzantine Empire. What made the call to arms at Clermont so important was that it was the culminating point of a fundamental transformation of the geopolitical role of the Latin Church. Clermont and the response to it showed that the Church had evolved into a sovereign actor on the world’s stage. International relations scholar Andrew A. Latham writes that “the Church was decisively reconstituted in both law and the collective imagination of Latin Christendom as a geopolitical actor with a legitimate authority to wage war.” While the Papacy did not directly control the Crusading forces, Latham explains that “states [in this era] typically did not exercise either a clear monopoly over or strict control of the legitimate use of force…the difference between… states and the Church…was one of degree rather than kind.” Additionally, he states that “sovereignty was not uniform in that sometimes it was exercised through intermediary
Indeed, he says that “for all intents and purposes, the Church was just as much a war-making unit as the kingdoms and lesser principalities that populated the late medieval Latin geopolitical system.”

But no kings answered Urban’s call to arms. The west’s monarchs were either fighting the Moors in Spain or at odds with the Pope himself; the French and German monarchs were actually excommunicated. Instead, a collection of the great lords of Europe roused themselves to war. Although many powerful men joined the movement, including Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy and brother of the King of England, and Hugh of Vermandois, brother of the King of France, the three principal leaders of the Crusade were Godfrey de Bouillon, Bohemond of Taranto, and Raymond of Toulouse.

Godfrey de Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine was the picture-perfect Crusader – devout, dedicated, and renowned for his skill in single combat. He was also broke. Godfrey’s devotion to the Crusade was widely acclaimed. His brother Baldwin accompanied him, and would prove to be one of the Crusaders seemingly more interested in new titles than in Jerusalem – ironic for a man who once prepared to be a cleric. Historian Edward Gibbon notes, “of the chiefs and soldiers who marched to the holy Sepulcher, I will dare to affirm, that all were prompted by the spirit of enthusiasm; the belief of merit, the hope of reward, and the assurance of divine aid. But I am equally persuaded, that in many it was not the sole, that in some it was not the leading, principle of action.”

Godfrey seemed to have been a more well-intentioned Crusader, and was certainly viewed as such, but he did become King of Jerusalem at the end of the Crusade (although he technically deferred from being called “King,” saying that the only King of Jerusalem was Christ Himself). It is useful to view Baldwin, however, in light of Gibbon’s observation.

Count Bohemond of Taranto, like Baldwin, was one of the more temporally-motivated Crusaders, regardless of whatever religious motivations he may have had. A Norman from Italy, he exemplified the daring, cunning, and determination for which the Normans were so renowned. Count Bohemond was well known to the Byzantines. He spoke multiple languages, and was clean-shaven with short, neat hair, unlike his peers, whom the Byzantines considered barbaric. With his

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17 Ibid., 134.
18 Ibid., 117.
cultivation came ruthlessness. Princess Anna provided a memorable description of him:

“he was a marvel for the eyes to behold, and his reputation was terrifying… [he was] perfectly proportioned…A certain charm hung about this man but was partly marred by a general air of the horrible… . His wit was manifold and crafty and able to find a way of escape in every emergency. In conversation he was well informed, and the answers he gave were quite irrefutable. This man who was of such a size and such a character was inferior to the Emperor alone in fortune and eloquence and in other gifts of nature.”

It should not escape attention that the Normans seized Bari, the Empire’s final foothold in Italy, in 1071, the same year as the disaster of Manzikert. During the 1080’s Bohemond and his father, Robert Guiscard, even struck into Balkans and Greece, the heartland of the Empire. If any single man could be called the sworn enemy of Emperor Alexius Comnenus, it was Count Bohemond. Bohemond was hated and mistrusted, and was rightly believed by many to have been seeking new territory.

Raymond of Toulouse was a wealthy, powerful, and pompous man. He ruled large territories in southern France and prior to the Crusade had gained a strong reputation as a champion of the Christian faith by supporting the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula. Raymond was thoroughly committed to the Crusade and made sure everyone around him knew it. Pope Urban reached out to him before the Council of Clermont, and Urban’s representative, the warlike Bishop Adhemar of Le Puy, rode with him. It was by virtue of his reputation that many others joined the Crusade. Thus, Raymond saw himself as the expedition’s natural leader.

Command of the Crusading army was always in contention. Alexius keenly comprehended both the passions that had been unleashed by the Crusading movement and the fact that some of the west’s most powerful men were leading it. His grasp of the situation led him to demand oaths of fealty from the Crusader lords. The very fact that he dealt directly with them was remarkable, since meeting any sovereign, let alone the Byzantine Emperor, was rare. Alexius intended to impress the

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23 Ibid., 118.
24 Ibid., 128.
Crusaders with his majesty, and he certainly did. Some of the lords required persuasion to accept Imperial authority – Godfrey received a hefty sum, and Bohemond received a room packed so full of treasure that he could scarcely step into it. The Franks saw the Empire as a viable political framework – “some [Normans even] entered the ranks of the Byzantine ruling class” – so these agreements were not unordinary. Alexius’ terms, in general, were that conquered lands would be returned to the Empire, and that he would provide military assistance. That Alexius was able to forge these agreements is a testament to his political adroitness, since the relationship was strained from the start – the Crusaders and the Greeks came to blows frequently on the road to and at the walls of Constantinople, engendering a great deal of mistrust and suspicion.

Raymond, however, refused to swear fealty, declaring that he only served God. He did end up making agreements with Alexius, but not directly swearing fealty. Bohemond was clever enough to set himself up as the mediator between the two, thus winning over his former (and future) rival for the time being and showing the ranks of the army that he was committed to keeping the pilgrimage moving towards Jerusalem. He also distanced himself from Raymond. Bohemond was able to align himself more closely with the northern French faction, which included his Norman kinsmen, whereas Raymond and his southern French chafed with both the northern French and Bohemond’s Italians.

The Crusaders’ expectations of military support from the Emperor were fulfilled in the short term. Robert the Monk, the most popular chronicler of the First Crusade, shares that it was in fact an explicit part of Alexius’ oath to them. Alexius actually considered leading the campaign himself. Yet, he decided against doing so, considering the Latins “fickle…unstable…[and] faithless.” He also had far fewer soldiers than

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25 Ibid.
26 Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, 266.
30 Robert the Monk, *History of the First Crusade*, 100.
they did. Alexius warned the Crusaders about the Turks’ martial prowess and quickly sent them on their way, making sure to keep the various contingents as separate as possible until they had crossed the Bosporus and were safely away from Constantinople.

There was more behind Alexius’ decision to not assume command, however. He alerted Muslims, probably the Egyptian Fatimids, that the Franks were coming and that they had designs on Jerusalem itself. From the account of Ibn al-Qalanisi, it seems that he was using the Crusading army as diplomatic leverage against his Muslim rivals – without their knowledge, of course. Thomas Asbridge notes that “By avoiding direct involvement, Alexius was able to maintain a thin façade of impartiality, leaving a door open for diplomacy and détente with [the Turks]…” The Byzantine Emperor acutely recognized his tenuous geopolitical situation and intended on covering his bases.

Once the Crusaders crossed into Asia Minor they laid siege to Nicaea. This engagement was the high point of cooperation between the Greeks and the Franks. Alexius attached a small force under his general Taticius to the Crusading army and provided siege equipment and naval support in order to assist in the siege. After roughly a month, the Byzantine general Manuel Butumites took the city by treachery, and once inside he restricted the Franks’ access to the city. Chronicler Guibert de Nogent wrote, “[the Crusaders’ anger at this] was not unjust… [since] they carried, ‘the burden and heat of the day.’” Nicaea started out as a successful allied operation and ended as a source of friction.

Antioch was the focal point of the campaign for the Byzantines. They had not ruled Jerusalem for centuries, and Alexius did not think it was likely the Crusaders would get close to reaching it. The siege of Antioch was a struggle of epic proportions. The Byzantines provided naval support and supplies via the sea, but that was the last material assistance the Crusaders received from them.

The Turks did not sit idly by during the siege. Kerbogha, the Turkish ruler of Mosul, set out with a large relief force. Upon hearing this news, the Crusader Lord Stephen of Blois abandoned the army. Alexius, meanwhile, was on his way to Antioch with his own army, presumably to help take it and further his legitimate claim to the city. Stephen crossed

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Alexius on the road, and told him that all hope was lost. His exact reaction to the news is unclear. Robert the Monk tells us that “[he] was extremely upset...his princes and magistrates...were saddened and wept for the death of our men.”

Guibert de Nogent, whose main source was the anonymous but likely Norman author of the *Gesta Francorum*, describes Alexius as “the traitor” and “the tyrant,” saying that he “was undoubtedly pleased with himself, because he had heard that those whom he hated no less than the Turks had been killed.” Whatever actually happened, Alexius’ decision to turn around was the most devastating breach of faith between the Latins and the Greeks. From this point onward the Crusaders felt that they were no longer obliged to pay homage to the Emperor. If he was abandoning them, they would abandon him.

This highlights the very different way in which the Crusaders and the Byzantines perceived the oaths they swore at Constantinople. The Byzantine view of these agreements was that they had essentially amalgamated the Crusaders into the Imperial war effort. The Emperor was the absolute authority and did not bargain for loyalty, even if he might award titles and lands to ensure it. The Crusaders, on the other hand, came from the feudal west, where government was by mutual agreement between lord and vassal. The vassal was subject to the lord, and the lord was responsible for governance and protection. Both were expected to contribute to military campaigns. The agreement could be considered broken if either side failed to live up to its end of the bargain. To the Crusaders, Alexius’ abandonment constituted such a failure. Bohemond’s brother Guy, himself a member of the Byzantine Court, gave Alexius a prescient warning upon receiving the ill news from Stephen of Blois: “If it becomes known that you have permitted profane hands to deliver [the Crusaders] to a horrible death, whom will you find willing to obey your commands, since everyone will judge you unable to defend your own people?”

Meanwhile at Antioch, Bohemond was scheming to seize the city for himself. He bribed the guard of one of the city’s towers to sneak the Crusaders into the city, but kept the agreement a secret from his peers. First, he tricked Taticius into leaving the army so as to remove the Emperor’s representative, and then he told the other Crusaders that if he could take Antioch, he should be able to keep it. He reasoned that immediate action was necessary or they all would be crushed between the

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36 Guibert de Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*, 105-106.

Turks within Antioch and the advancing forces of Kerbogha. The other lords, barring Raymond, agreed, and Bohemond went ahead with the attack over the city walls, seizing most of the city very quickly. After the nearly miraculous defeat of Kerbogha outside the walls (it had been an extremely precarious situation), Bohemond declared himself Prince of Antioch. Alfred Duggan contends that this particular title “meant that [he] did not regard himself as the vassal of any secular ruler…”38

However, Bohemond’s claim was not universally recognized. Alexius, naturally, was displeased by his old Norman enemy claiming his own principality in lands that he considered his, but he was far enough away to not have much say in the matter. More presently, Raymond offered intense opposition, with his men holing up in one section of the city while Bohemond’s holed up in another. Thomas Asbridge notes that as long as the situation was so, “Bohemond could be nothing more than the city’s partial-ruler or ‘half-prince.’”39 In August of 1098, Bishop Adhemar, long a mediator between the Crusader lords, died. The holy mission that had kept the various Latin factions working together was not the binding force that it had been before, at least not for the Crusade’s leadership.

A year was spent in Antioch debating the city’s future. Together, the lords penned a letter to Pope Urban, inviting him to come to Antioch, take personal command of the Crusade, and lead it to Jerusalem. This was an unrealistic invitation. For political reasons Urban could not leave the west, and besides, it would take far too long for him to even arrive in Antioch. All of them must have realized that, so the letter itself may have been a negotiation tool to ease tensions within Antioch. Supplies were thin, and the Syrian countryside was almost void of anything worth raiding at that point. Finally, the rank and file of the Crusading army stirred their leaders to action, threatening to proceed to the Holy Sepulcher without them. In January of 1099, Raymond set off for Jerusalem, to be followed by the majority of the army. Bohemond ensured the continued logistical support of those who went onward by courting the Italian maritime states as replacements for the now-estranged Byzantines. The seafaring Italian merchants were more than eager to support the holy cause and to make a profit.

The Siege of Jerusalem was a cataclysmic ordeal that ended in the slaughter of many of the Muslims inside the city. Many, if not most, of the Crusaders went home afterwards, their vows fulfilled.40 By his

presumptuousness and pomposity, Raymond had managed to distance himself from his peers so profoundly that he was denied the Crown of Jerusalem, which instead went to the respected and uncontroversial Godfrey. It is worth mentioning that Godfrey was succeeded by his brother Baldwin, who, like Bohemond, stayed in his own newly carved out fief in Syria and missed the Siege of Jerusalem and the decisive Battle of Ascalon that ensured the very survival of the Kingdom. Baldwin and Bohemond were much alike in their quest for personal gain.

The starkly different perceptions of the First Crusade and the rivaling personalities and strategic visions of the Christians involved defined the conflict. Pope Urban and Emperor Alexius reached out to one another in order to secure their own positions in their own realms. For the Emperor, it was a matter of survival. For the Pope, it was a matter of asserting his political sovereignty and religious authority. His status was greatly increased now that the eastern Emperor had begged for his aid. Those who answered the call had liberated Jerusalem from the Muslims, and they had done it on their own. The Emperor’s authority was less respected in the West as a result. Likewise, the Byzantines harbored ill will towards the West, viewing the Crusader lords as impudent and faithless violators of sacred oaths to the august Emperor. This breach in the alliance between East and West deepened the divide between the Eastern and Western Churches, a divide which lasts to this day. These divisions shaped the Crusade as a war and defined its lasting effect upon Christendom.
Sarah Fontin, in her second year at McGill University in Montréal, Canada, is double majoring in History and Religious Studies. This paper was written in response to a seminar on Natural and Cultural Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic World. She became interested in how colonial interests took shape in Europe and decided to explore the use of propaganda by one power in order to elevate their own position and demean their opponents.

Introduction

While an analysis of colonial processes during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries shows that cruelty was carried out by all European countries engaging in colonialism, Spain is still often held up as the epitome of colonial cruelty. This negative image was exacerbated by English interpretations of the writings of Spanish Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas published Brevísima Relación in 1552, in order to advocate a change in Spanish policies towards the Native population. In it, he described the horrendous and gruesome actions the Spanish perpetuated against the Natives. However, this text has been used as evidence for the Black Legend, an anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic body of literature that demonizes both Spain and Catholicism. Las Casas’ work was used, particularly by the English, to provide textual evidence of Spanish cruelty, packaged within one short text, for their own national and colonial benefit. Interpretations of Las Casas’ Brevísima Relación fueled anti-Spanish sentiment in England at a time when tensions were strained between Protestants and Catholics.

For English Protestants to use Las Casas’ Brevísima Relación for their own purposes, they had to translate it first. Beyond translating the work, English editors were able to frame the way the text was read with the prologue. Each prologue for the translated editions starting in 1583 reflect contemporary Protestant English positions towards Catholic Spaniards as well as reveal their motives and intentions vis-à-vis Catholic Spain. The major editions of the Brevísima Relación that still exist in modern times are from 1583, 1656, 1689, 1699, and 1745. This paper will examine the prologues of each of these translations to shed light on the way English Protestants used Las Casas’ Brevísima Relación to vilify the Spanish, justify the notion of English superiority, and provide justification for English actions against both Spaniards and Catholics in general. English Protestants took the arguments of Las Casas
out of context and twisted them into anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic rhetoric, contrary to Las Casas’ original objectives. The English used Las Casas to pit Protestantism against Catholicism, turning the Protestant and Catholic religious divide into a political and diplomatic issue. They also leveraged Las Casas in the construction and justification of the Black Legend.

**Bartolomé de las Casas and Brevísima Relación**

Bartolomé de las Casas is best known for championing the Natives of the New World, but he started his career by taking part in the conquest of what is now Cuba in 1502. He received an *encomienda* in return, using Natives as slaves to maintain it. Though a priest by 1510, he did not start to fight for Natives’ rights and proper Catholic methods of colonization until 1514, and continued to do so until his death in 1566.¹ Las Casas wanted to “protect the Indians from cruel treatment and exploitation by his fellow countrymen, and [he insisted] that the newly discovered natives were human beings who should be Christianized by peaceful means alone.”² This is an important part of Las Casas’ work, but it is often forgotten by later English Protestants, who simply focused on his descriptions of Spanish cruelties. Las Casas’ own emphasis on the cruelties of his people provided justification for his message, which was that colonization should take place within the parameters of Catholicism. Las Casas came from a strongly Christian background, and believed that Catholicism should be at the heart of conquest and that colonization and treatment of the Natives should be carried out in a humane way.³ Subsequent English Protestants often focused on the evils of Catholicism, twisting the original message of Las Casas. They used Las Casas’ descriptions of Spanish cruelties to show how terrible Catholic methods were, when what Las Casas was describing in *Brevísima Relación* was not Catholic methodology at all. The text of Las Casas is deeply rooted in Catholicism and a plea to God to save the souls of the Natives.⁴ He was always firm in the fact that the Natives could easily be converted to Catholicism and that they were actually open to it.⁵ In light of Protestant translations, this aspect of Las Casas is nearly all but forgotten, resulting in the vilification of Catholicism instead. Las Casas focused on Spanish cruelties in such detail not only to plead for his Catholic methods of

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² Ibid., 26.
⁵ Porter, The Inconstant Savage: England and the North American Indian 1500-1600, 156.
Report, 72

colonization, but also to shock Spanish officials in order to change the policies.6 As such, Las Casas’ figures concerning how many Natives were killed were grossly exaggerated, and in actuality represented the number of Natives as a whole, not how many were killed.7 These numbers, and Las Casas’ text as a whole, are described by E. Shaskan Bumas as being a “misrepresentation.”8 Basically, the English Protestants based their accusations upon exaggerations written by a Spanish priest interested in catalyzing policy change in Spanish colonial practices. They misunderstood and misinterpreted Brevísima Relación for their own political agendas.

Spanish and English Relations: Virtuous Protestantism and Cruel Catholicism

Spain and England had very tempestuous relations for most of their common history. The Age of Discovery simply served to escalate tensions further; both Spain and England became colonial powers and the Spanish exerted a strong influence on the creation of England’s Empire.9 The English turned colonization into a competition with the Spanish, and branded their Empire as “pure and insular” in contrast to the Spanish Empire.10 They found ‘hard’ evidence of this in Las Casas’ Brevísima Relación. English Protestants used the descriptions of Las Casas of Spanish atrocities to reinterpret English colonization as spiritually righteous in comparison.11 A constructed image of Catholic Spain contributed to an inherently Protestant English colonial identity.12 Spain was presented as profoundly evil because of its connections to the Papacy. Therefore, England and English colonization could be seen to exist in response to “the papal Antichrist and his Spanish legions.”13 In fact, “Protestants would paint the Spaniards as accomplices to cannibals-running a butcher ship selling choice cuts of human meat-or as the cannibals themselves.”14 Such a statement painted the Spanish as absolutely and

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10 Ibid., 176.
11 Ibid.
13 Hodgkins,”“The Uses of Atrocity: Satanic Spaniards and Hispanic Satans from Las Casas to Milton,” 177.
inherently evil. The Protestants English might have taken this kind of rhetoric from Las Casas’ descriptions of Spanish cruelties, and simply expanded them to suit their own purposes, as if to say that if the “Spaniards spoke so ill of another, the English could scarcely be blamed for doing likewise!”

Though Las Casas was in fact promoting Christianity, that did not stop the Protestant English from completely manipulating his words to their advantage: “Christians became Spaniards and then Catholics.” The significance of this is that the Protestant English only saw in Las Casas what they wanted to see. England saw Protestantism as the one true faith, especially in opposition to the evils of Spanish Catholicism. The opposition of Catholicism and Protestantism influenced the way England and Spain approached colonization and their state policies. At the center of this opposition were anti-Spanish sentiments that could not be separated from Protestant identity. For the English, Spain represented religious oppression and all-around cruelty, a perception they saw grounded in such examples as *Brevísima Relación*. It was believed that Spain was an existential threat to English Protestantism, both on the domestic and international, or colonial, levels. Not only did the prevalent religious and national tensions between Spain and England motivate some the Protestant English to create an image of Spanish Catholicism based on the atrocities depicted in *Brevísima Relación*, the tensions also resulted in the interpretation of Las Casas’ descriptions of Spanish cruelties as applicable to all Spaniards. In this way, “the cruelest conquistadors [were] no longer breaking rules of Spanish character but defining those rules.”

**English Editions of *Brevísima Relación*: 1583**

The first English translation of Las Casas’ work was published in England in 1583, entitled *The Spanish Colonie, or Briefe Chronicle of the Acts and Gestes of the Spaniardes in the West Indies*, by M.M.S. By this time, the perception of Spanish cruelty already existed in England, but it was strengthened

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19 Ibid., 116.
20 Hodgkins, “The Uses of Atrocity: Satanic Spaniards and Hispanic Satans from Las Casas to Milton,” 176.
by the translation of Las Casas. In 1583, the position of Protestantism within England was stronger, but the road to that position had not been easy. After the reign of Henry VIII, creator of the Anglican Church, and the early death of his only son, his Catholic daughter Mary gained the throne in 1553, and brought Catholicism back to prominence in Britain until 1558. Mary, who was married to the Catholic Spanish King Philip, ordered the burning of three hundred Protestants at the stake, earning herself the title of Bloody Mary. Queen Elizabeth I’s reign from 1558-1603 cemented England as a Protestant power and saw the persecution of many Catholics. It is within this context that the first edition of the *Brevísima Relación* was published. Religious tensions were quite high across Europe as well, as evidenced by the Protestant Dutch Revolts against Catholic Spain and the tacit support Elizabeth and her nobles provided them. Anti-Spanish sentiment was very strong in both England and in the Dutch Countries at this time. The divide between Protestants and Catholic became deeper.

The prologue of the 1583 edition was targeted at the Dutch Countries: “I do dedicate to all the prouinces of the Lowe countreys,” wrote the translator. This showed that there was a common anti-Spanish sentiment between separate Protestant countries. The dedication of the translation may indicate that the author was aiming his argument at an audience for whom the tension between Protestants and Catholics was greater.

The prologue criticized Spain and Spanish colonization. The author of the prologue began with a reference to God’s judgment, claiming that God would punish the Spanish for their cruelties. This theme is revisited throughout the entire prologue. The author emphasizes the fact that God would punish the wicked and uphold the right; “In as much as God is iust, he will graunt victorie to the right, and will ouerthrowe the wicked.”

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22 Hodgkins, “The Uses of Atrocity: Satanic Spaniards and Hispanic Satans from Las Casas to Milton,” 179.
26 Casas, Bartolomé De Las, and M. S. M. The Spanish Colonie, or Briefe Chronicle of the Acts and Gestes of the Spaniardes in the West Indies, Called the Newe World, for the Space of Xl. Yeer, Writte in the Castilian Tongue by the Reuerend Bishop Bartholomew De Las Cases or Casaus, a Friar of the Order of S. Dominicke. And Nowe First Translated into English, by M.M.S. (London: By Thomas Dawson for William Brome, 1583)
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
the author intended to foretell eventual English superiority over the Spanish. The author presents a negative opinion of Spain, confessing that “I neuer loued that nation generally, by reason of their intollerable pride.”

The author continued with his critique of Spain, mentioning the Sarazin conquest of Spain in the eighth century, noting that “they might soone haue caught hold vpon France, & so vpon the rest of christe~dom, had not God raised vp that mightie Duke of Brubant, Charles Martel.” There seems to have been a subtle sort of warning here to Spain about the coming end of their colonization practices, with England replacing Charles Martel in saving Christendom. The author eventually got to the heart of the matter, asking “For I pray you what right had the Spaniards ouer the Indians: sauing that the Pope and giuen them the said land, and I leaue to your iudemente [judgment] what right hee had therein.” At first glance, he seemed to have argued against Spanish possession of the lands, but at a deeper glance, it can be said that his argument was against Catholic possession of the lands and Catholic authority. Consequently, this prologue reveals more about the tensions between Protestantism and Catholicism than the anti-Spanish rhetoric that was apparent in subsequent versions.

This particular prologue differed from the others by its appeal to English morality, even as it engaged in harsh criticism of Spain and Catholicism: “It is certaine that wee are not thereby to iudge that our selues shall haue the victorie ouer our enemies, because our cause is the better, for we are replenished with vice enough, whereby to leaue vnto god sufficient matter to punishe vs.” The author warns the English to be careful in their endeavors, and not to be so caught up in their perceived superiority over the Spanish that they themselves commit the same crimes they accuse the Catholic Spaniards of committing.

**English Editions of Brevísima Relación: 1656**

The 1656 English edition of *Brevísima Relación* is the most historically significant of the English edition because of its application in English public policy at the time. The *Brevísima Relación* figured prominently in Oliver Cromwell’s justification for his anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic policies and actions.

The years from 1642 to 1660 were highly turbulent ones for England. The major issue was the tension between the throne and parliament, which came to the forefront when Charles I tried to assert monarchical authority over Parliament. At the time, problems with the Puritans surfaced, resulting in a four-

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29 Ibid.
30 Casas, Bartolomé De Las, and M. S. M. The Spanish Colonie.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
year long civil conflict, after which the Puritans united under Oliver Cromwell. Following the execution of King Charles I in 1649, Cromwell nominated himself Lord Protector in 1653.

The Cromwellian era edition of the *Brevisima Relación*, entitled *Tears of the Indians: Being an Historical and True Account of the Massacres and Slaughters of Above Twenty Millions of Innocent People: Committed by the Spaniards in the Islands of Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, &c. As Also, in the Continent of Mexico, Peru, & Other Places of the West-Indies, To the Total Destruction of Those Countries*, was published a short three years later, in 1656. While possibly coincidental, it is more probable that Cromwell leveraged the text to establish his legitimacy as a moral and just actor in the face of such Catholic Spanish cruelty.

Anti-Spanish sentiments were quite strong in England in the early 17th century. Under Cromwell, these sentiments became policy. In 1654, Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector launched what was intended to be a simple attack against Spain’s colonies in the West Indies, followed by a call to what could be called a religious crusade in 1655 to “liberate all of Spanish America.”

Previously in 1654, Cromwell and England joined with other countries to form a Protestant crusade against Catholicism. This in turn strengthened the call to liberate Spanish America and proselytize for Protestantism instead. Cromwell was in fact advised to not attack the Spanish Indies in order to take them for England, but he dismissed this advice. In the end, the attack was a complete disaster. Robert Segwick considered it a sign that “God is angry”, and Cromwell himself believed that it was a divine punishment for England.

The translated text of Las Casas, now called *Tears of the Indians*, may have influenced Cromwell’s justification of his anti-Spanish colonial rhetoric. Paradoxically, while Cromwell used this anti-Spanish and pro-liberation of the Native Americans rhetoric, he was pursuing extremely cruel policies in Ireland and Scotland to subject the population there. In fact, historian E. Shaskan Bumas argues that “Oliver Cromwell was at war with Ireland and Scotland and

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34 Ibid., 500-2.
37 Ibid., 102.
38 Maltby, The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish sentiment, 1558-1660, 118.
39 Latimer, Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How piracy forged an empire, 118.
40 Hodgkins, “The Uses of Atrocity: Satanic Spaniards and Hispanic Satans from Las Casas to Milton”, 183.
could use some excuses for his own cruelty against Catholics."41 These excuses were mainly pulled from Las Casas’ *Brevísima Relación*, especially as in the Protestant English imagination, Spaniards had become synonymous with Catholics.42 In fact, Cromwell leveraged rhetoric calling for revenge; these actions and crimes against Catholics were to avenge the crimes said Catholics perpetuated against the Indians.43 Oliver Cromwell’s “deep and abiding hatred of Spain” had found itself an outlet and the perfect justification.44

Oliver Cromwell’s hatred of Spain also extended to a hatred of Catholicism. Initially focused on France, Cromwell changed his focus to Spain, despite a tendency of the time to emphasize tensions between the French and English.45 One of the reasons why Cromwell decided to turn to Spain was because Spain “was more anti-Protestant.”46

The 1656 prologue was actually divided into two--the first part was written to the Lord Protector, the second written to all Englishmen. It reveals a great deal about the Cromwellian era and detailed how Las Casas’ *Brevísima Relación* was being manipulated. One of the first lines of the prologue noted that “The cry of Blood ceasing at the noise of Your great transactions, while You arm for their Revenge.”47 Cromwell leveraged these existing sentiments of to justify his policy of avenging the Natives. In such an interpretation of Las Casas, Spaniards were equated with Catholics, and the acts depicted in *Brevísima Relación* were representative of all Spaniards.

Further, the entire opening of the prologue cast Cromwell in the best possible light. This was not surprising, as the author of the prologue was the nephew of John Milton, who was Cromwell’s Latin Secretary at the time.48 Milton’s nephew emphasized in the prologue that Oliver Cromwell was divinely motivated, writing in the section addressed to him that “while the Divine Deitie bequeathes You back again immediate Recompences; crowning You, like his

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42 Ibid., 112.
43 Ibid., 124.
45 Ibid., 117.
46 Ibid.
holy Warriour David, with the highest degree of earthly Fame.” This high level of religiosity attributed to Cromwell went beyond oppositional forces between Protestantism and Catholicism. Here, Oliver Cromwell was recognized as having Divine Right, and given divine powers to “extol Your just Anger against the Blody and Popish Nation of the Spaniards.” Such sentiments expressed in the prologue revealed some of the true motivation behind Cromwell’s foreign policy and how Las Casas’ text was used to feed deep hatred towards Catholic Spain.

The second part of the prologue was dedicated to “all true Englishmen,” implying that to be true meant to be Protestant, nationalistic, and strongly anti-Spanish. The first part devoted to the Lord Protector did not mention Las Casas at all, and he was only briefly mentioned in the second section. This is indicative of the translator’s intention to use the translation of Las Casas’ Brevísima Relación for a political agenda that almost completely ignored Las Casas himself and his own motives for writing the text. The highly emotional and descriptive language of the prologue, with phrases such as “the intention of these men was Murder” and “Drown’d in a Deluge of Bloud,” were intended to strike an emotional chord in the reader. This appeal was reinforced in the following section:

In this vivid description of the barbarous and devilish atrocities committed by the Spanish, the author equates Spain with Catholicism and reinforces the idea of Protestant superiority, contributing to the justification of anti-Catholic policies. The statement effectively damned Catholicism – and Spain along with it.

The prologue concluded with the warning that “you are not uow to fight against your Country-men, but against your Old and Constant Enemies, the Spaniards, a Proud, Deceitful, Cruel, and Treacherous Nation, whose chiefest Aim hath been the Conquest of this Land, and to enslave the People of this

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49 Casas, Tears of the Indians.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Casas, Tears of the Indians.
This statement was a clear call to nationalism. It must be noted that all of this accompanied a text which described Spanish Cruelties in the New World, in a very specific situation far removed from England and the English. Taken out of context and twisted beyond recognition of the original intent, Las Casas’ *Brevísima Relación* was a mere excuse for the promoting a hateful anti-Spanish agenda.

**English Editions of *Brevísima Relación*: 1689 and 1699**

The next two available English editions of the *Brevísima Relación* were published in 1689 and 1699. From 1685 to 1688, the Catholic King James II held the English throne, a drastic change from the Protestant political leadership that had previously ruled England. James II’s main goal while on the throne was to bring tolerance and equality to Catholics, and reinstitute Catholicism as England’s religion. This did not sit well with the English Protestants, however, who strongly believed in England as a Protestant nation and who continued to hold strongly anti-Catholic sentiments. In 1688, the English Parliament invited the Dutch Protestant William, and his English wife Mary, to assume the crown, which led to the Glorious Revolution and the reestablishment of a Protestant England.

The 1689 English edition of the *Brevísima Relación*, entitled *Popery Truly Display'd in Its Bloody Colours, Or, A Faithful Narrative of the Horrid and Unexampled Massacres, Butcheries, and All Manner of Cruelties, That Hell and Malice Could Invent, Committed by the Popish Spanish Party on the Inhabitants of West-India Together with the Devastations of Several Kingdoms in America by Fire and Sword, for the Space of Forty and Two Years, from the Time of Its First Discovery by Them*, was published during this period of transition between Catholic and Protestant rule. Consequently, it is quite different from any other prologues, which were usually staunchly Protestant and anti-Catholic.

The author of this prologue started with an acknowledgment of Las Casas being a religious person; “The Reverend Author of this Compendious summary was Bartolomaeus de las Casas alias Casaus, a Pious and Religions person.” This was not something that the other authors had mentioned, as they

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56 Ibid.
60 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Popery Truly Display'd in Its Bloody Colours, Or, A Faithful Narrative of the Horrid and Unexampled Massacres, Butcheries, and All*
did not want to point out that the author of the work upon which they were relying was actually Catholic himself. The author of the 1689 edition continues with the observation that Las Casas used the *Brevísima Relación* for the “promotion of the Christian faith.” This is unusual considering the motivations of many English Protestants using Las Casas to support their argument about the inferiority of Catholicism. The other prologues ignored the Catholic nature of the account, and certainly did not acknowledge that a Catholic priest could be Christian in his purpose.

The author of the prologue then went into an in-depth discussion of Las Casas’ personal history, and what motivated him to write this work. To a certain extent, it glorified Las Casas. This was not unusual, as he had become a familiar reference to the English reader. While the 1689 author extolled Las Casas’ virtues, previous editions focused on his descriptions of Spanish cruelties. What is more, the prologue paid homage to Prince Philip, the son of Charles V and a Spaniard, “the most Illustrious Prince Philip the Son and Heir of his Imperial Majesty Charles the Fifth.” Such an introduction for the prince of Spain was completely out of place in an English edition printed in England, whose foreign policy had been consistently anti-Spanish. It seemed a bit at odds with the title as well, which included the phrase: “Popery truly displayed in all its bloody colors.” Further, the author emphasizes “unlimitted and close fisted Avarice” as the cause of the Spaniards’ actions in the New World. Nowhere is Catholicism or Popish foolery cited as being the root of this evil, which was rare considering previous editions and general Protestant sentiment at the time. It is likely that the author was sympathetic to the cause of King James II given the year and political climate in England when this edition was published.

The English edition of *Brevísima Relación* published in 1699 was entitled *An account of the first voyages and discoveries made by the Spaniards in America: containing the most exact relation hitherto publish’d, of the unparallel’d cruelties on the Indians, in the destruction of above forty millions of people: with the propositions offer’d to the King of Spain to prevent the further ruin of the West-Indies, to which is added The Art of Travelling, shewing how a Man may dispose his Travels to the best advantage*. By 1699, England was

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Casas, Popery Truly Display'd in Its Bloody Colours.
back under Protestant rule, and consequently, the prologue reverted back to the norm.

The prologue opens with the observation that the Natives showed kindness to the Europeans, viewing them as gods, who responded with cruelty. The author then asserts that the cruelties described by Las Casas must be true, as they were “attested by the Spaniards themselves.” The author uses the credibility of Las Casas’ account coming from a Spaniard to strengthen his anti-Spanish arguments. He highlights that the author “writes with such an Air of Honesty, Sincerity, and Charity, as would very well have become one of a better Religion than that in which he had the unhappiness to be educated.” Tensions between Catholics and Protestants were still strong, and this statement showed yet another attempt by the Protestant English to distance Las Casas from his Christian context.

The prologue continued its attack on Catholicism by denouncing the entreaties of Las Casas for a more Catholic approach to colonization, proclaiming that “what the Bishop says here and there in favor of his own Religion, is so weak, and has been so often exploded here and everywhere else where the Reformation has obtain’d, that ‘twould be unnecessary to confute any of those Popish Fancies in this Preface.” Underlying this statement is the contention that Catholicism had no importance in Protestant countries. Finally, the author concludes by quoting from Revelations, saying that it was “no difficult matter to discern to what Church that Prophetick Character agrees, that in her was found not only the Blood of Prophets and of Saints, but of all that were slain upon the Earth. Rev. 18. 23.” Spain was equated completely with Catholicism, while other countries, such as France, were not. More moderate in its attack against Spain and Catholicism, the prologue may have reflected the fact that the shock value from these assertions was lessened as the sentiments were not new. Nevertheless, the 1699 prologue framed *Brevísima Relación* in an anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish light, and distanced Las Casas from Catholicism and Catholicism from Christianity.

**English Editions of Brevísima Relación: 1745**

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65 Bartolomé de Las Casas, An account of the first voyages and discoveries made by the Spaniards in America: containing the most exact relation hitherto publish’d, of the unparallel’d cruelties on the Indians, in the destruction of above forty millions of people: with the propositions offer’d to the King of Spain to prevent the further ruin of the West-Indies, to which is added The Art of Travelling, shewing how a Man may dispose his Travels to the best advantange. (London: Printed by J. Darby for D. Brown, J. Harris, and Andr. Bell, 1699).

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.
This 1745 edition of *Brevísima Relación* was very different from the others. In fact, it did not seem to even be an edition of *Brevísima Relación*. The title is attributed to Bartolomé de las Casas, but nowhere in the 68 page text is there any hint of it being his work. Entitled *Liberty and Property, and No Pretender, or The Miserable Case of Protestants in Great Britain Under a Popish Prince, If any shall happen to wear the Imperial Crown of that Nation, In which it is provided, That a Popish Prince and a Protestant Nation cannot subsist together*, the 1745 edition was misattributed to Las Casas. The “popish prince” seemed to be a reference to England’s last Catholic monarch, King James II. However, he reigned sixty years before this edition was published. William and Mary were followed by another Protestant ruler appointed by Parliament: Anne, Mary’s sister. Catholicism and Catholic rulers were out of the question, which frustrated and upset the mostly Catholic Scots and Irish, who wanted the Catholic King James II’s lineage to return to the throne, leading to Jacobite uprisings that continued into the 1740s. As such, this 1745 edition of anti-Catholic text attributed to Las Casas fits perfectly in context. It is particularly significant that this text was credited to Las Casas, even though he was not the author. This misattribution demonstrates how closely Las Casas became linked with anti-Catholic discourse in the English consciousness.

**Conclusion**

Bartolomé de las Casas’ *Brevísima Relación* underwent major transformations in Protestant England. The text was translated and presented in various English editions in a way that undermined Las Casas’ original intention: to persuade the Spanish to use more Catholic methods to colonize. It became a text to showcase Catholic cruelties and to justify anti-Catholic policies and actions in Protestant England. The prologues to each edition reflect strong religious tensions, but also reveal how desperately some English Protestants were to provide justification for their ideologies and policies. This desperation was at its strongest in 1656, when *Tears of the Indians* was published. The other prologues from 1583, 1699, and 1745 were more moderate in tone, while the prologue from 1689 was an anomaly. Nevertheless, the prologues of these editions of *Brevísima Relación* played an important role in England’s formulation of propaganda for their own colonial methods and project, in opposition to that of the Spanish.

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70 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Liberty and Property, and No Pretender, or The Miserable Case of Protestants in Great Britain Under a Popish Prince, If any shall happen to wear the Imperial Crown of that Nation, In which it is provided, That a Popish Prince and a Protestant Nation cannot subsist together*. (London: Printed for Jacob Robinson, at the Golden Lion in Ludgate Street, 1745)

An Uncommon Saint: Socialism and Dorothy Day

By Peter Geppert

Peter Geppert is a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is double majoring in History and Finance. Peter chose this topic after learning of Dorothy Day through a social justice course at his Jesuit high school. He then took a “History of Socialism in the United States” at UW-Madison, and became interested in developing a narrative of how socialism affected Day’s later work with the Catholic Church. He would like to thank his social justice teacher Mr. Nick Luppino for giving him the knowledge and inspiration to write the paper.

Introduction

In November of 2012, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) formally endorsed the cause of sainthood for Dorothy Day. Praised by those in the Church as a model for someone who can go on to live an extraordinary life despite a sinful beginning, Day stands as a prominent figure in the history of American Catholicism. The social democrat Michael Harrington referred to Day as, “the most important lay Catholic in the history of the United States.”

Receiving such glowing praise in this modern context suggests that the possible saint has had a profound influence on the current identity of American Catholicism.

While Day has a celebrated legacy of activism in the name of Catholic social teaching in today’s Church, at the most active points in her years as an advocate for the poor and working class, she was a lightning rod for controversy. A pacifist when it was considered un-American to be one, an anarchist in a time of intense political scrutiny and a converted communist, Day’s work was a source of unrest in the ranks of religious activists. Day formed the Catholic Worker movement around these political attitudes and simultaneously gave rise to a new faction in the application of Catholic political thought called the Catholic Left. While looked to today for its thoughtful application of the Church’s social teaching to American society, the Catholic Worker movement was initially met with hostility from both the left and right ends of the political spectrum. Although it faced opponents from within and outside of the U.S. Catholic Church’s leadership at its inception, the Catholic Left has survived today to become one of the more distinct niches within the faith.

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As a recent phenomenon only relevant in the last fifty years, the Catholic Left has given voice to a previously ignored faction of the American Catholic Church. Today this portion of the Church is well known for challenging Catholics to relate to the poor in the same spirit of radicalism as Day. The rise of this movement has led historians to revisit the life of the woman who had such a profound impact on the formation of this new intellectual niche within the Church. Countless Catholic historians have revisited and reevaluated the now well-established life narrative of Day. Analysis of her life has centered on how her activism came to influence the U.S. Catholic social agenda of the 20th century, and the example she set for future left-leaning Catholics.

Different academic works on Day have focused on different aspects of the Left that she influenced. In *American Catholic Pacifism*, Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts attribute the noticeable anti-Vietnam War activism on the part of Catholic clergy during the 1960’s to the radical pacifism that Day displayed at the onset of World War II. Marquette University’s collection of essays in the form of *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* presents a balanced analysis of both the impact of Day’s political thought as well as the actions she undertook on behalf of the Church from a variety of academic perspectives. Other works have taken into more careful consideration her reservations about the social climate of the Church following her conversion and the role those feelings played in the founding of her movement. These works focus on Day as someone who “brought to United States Catholicism a distinctive social conscience, rather than an ideology.” Understanding this complex portrait suggests that scholars categorize Day as either a socialist saved by Catholicism or a radical informed by Catholic social teaching.

Having a historiography grounded in her actions as a faithful Catholic and having left a legacy within the Church marked by extraordinary attentiveness to living a Christian life, it is easy to forget the Dorothy Day who existed prior to her religious conversion in 1927. As a dues-paying member of a socialist group, as a student at the University of

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2 *Who Cares About the Saints?*, directed by James Martin (2012; Los Angeles, CA: Loyola Productions, 2004), DVD.
4 William J. Thorn, Phillip M. Runkel and Susan Mountin, edit., *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2001).
Illinois, and as a writer for two socialist publications in New York City, Day is less remembered for the experiences that led her to Catholicism and how she became the founder of the Catholic Worker movement. However, it is exactly these experiences that came to form her Catholic political identity and made her and her movement a departure from the norm of the Church.

Moved by the struggles of the working class in the early 1920s, she formed her political attitudes in the mold of prominent American socialists of the time period. It is from this perspective that this paper breaks from the traditional historiography of Day and the Catholic Worker movement. Taking into consideration the Catholic political climate in the 1930’s along with her personal writings and of those that knew her, this paper assesses how Day’s initial political formation as a socialist affected her later work in the name of the Catholic faith. For the purposes of this paper, socialism and the left will be used interchangeably to refer to people who have identification with an economic system based on co-operative management of the means of production. As a person who began her life interest in social activism on the far left, Dorothy Day’s distinct political identity as a Catholic was materially formed because of, not in spite of, her experiences with socialism prior to her religious conversion.

Day is Rising

Studying the lives of the saints gives context to how unlikely the rise of Dorothy Day to one of the most influential women lay Catholics in the history of the Church truly was. While many saints came from a background of intense spirituality, it was Day’s secular background and later conversion to Catholicism that helped her to have such a large impact on the Church. Dorothy Day was born in 1897 in Brooklyn Heights, New York, into a family of journalists. When she was a young girl her family moved to the bay area in California so her father could cover horseracing as a sports reporter. As a teenager brought up in a family of non-practicing Episcopalians on the streets of Berkeley, Day found herself drawn to the writings of radicals such as Peter Kropotkin and Pierre-Joseph.6 It was this initial exposure to radical literature that drew her to secular philosophy; Day felt a calling to activism and developed an affinity for working among the poor.

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After her family moved to a modest, six-room tenement in Chicago, Day began to develop her own love of writing and started to see herself as a member of the Left. As a child of a conservative-nativist father who especially despised Jews and Catholics, Day’s first exposure to leftist activism came from her older brother Donald. It was his writing for *The Day Book* newspaper, a publication that ruthlessly exposed factory conditions in industrial Chicago, which first led Day to learn of Eugene Debs and the Industrial Workers of the World. Day officially came to identify with the left when she attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on scholarship in 1915. There she became a member of the University’s socialist student organization and developed her writing abilities in an elite leftist writing club.

Day’s affinity towards writing and the newspaper industry enhanced her contribution to the Catholic Church after her conversion. After moving to New York City with her parents in 1917, she eventually found herself writing for the socialist newspaper *The Call* after a prolonged job search. *The Call* editor Chester Wright hired the young Day after she offered to live on five dollars a week in response to a trend among urban elites who mocked those on welfare by doing so. Her articles struck readers as both sarcastic and empathetic, emphasizing the struggles of the poor while disdaining the type of conditions that kept people from living a fulfilling life.

Although Day identified with the struggle of the poor, her style of writing transformed as she matured and began to separate herself from other leftist newspaper reporters. While appalled by the misery she witnessed on a daily basis in the neighborhoods of the poor immigrants she visited, she maintained a positive outlook that was unique to writers in socialist publications of the time. At the debut of her hunger squad series, Day wrote, “We hear an awful lot of barren statistics, but you never get the real thing.” For her it was not enough to be a reporter who chronicled the struggles of the poor, she also had to experience their hardship firsthand.

In a life filled with selfless activism, it was struggles in her personal life that led Day to convert to Catholicism. As a young woman living in New York City, Day was fully engaged in an active social life.

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8 Ibid., 21-30.
9 Ibid., 26.
with her predominately male coworkers. Considered by men who worked with her to be an extremely beautiful woman, Day could also hold her own socially. Those who knew her well during this time said that she could “drink anyone under a table.” Unfortunately for Day a string of unhealthy relationships eventually led to an abortion, a divorce, and a child born out of wedlock. In her last relationship that ended in the birth of her daughter, Tamar, it was the experience of having a child that drew her into a renewed spirituality. Having an unquenchable spiritual desire to be close to God again, she decided to convert to Catholicism in 1927.

Of all things that led to her conversion to Catholicism specifically, it was Day’s early exposure to Protestantism. Growing up in a nominally Episcopal family, she was exposed to the driving twentieth century Protestant belief in perfectionism. Movements such as prohibition were fueled by Protestant fervor and a belief that human evils could be corrected. Day’s experience on the streets of New York led her to fundamentally reject this “Social Gospel,” and instead embrace Catholicism.

Having an unquenchable spiritual desire to be close to God again, she decided to convert to Catholicism in 1927. Those within the Church saw her conversion as an opportunity to trumpet the triumph of Catholic social teachings over Marxist philosophy, but according to Day, the reasons for her conversion were purely spiritual. Although it was spiritual fulfillment that initially drew Day to the Church, her legacy within her faith was her thoughtful application of the principles that initially caused her to identify as a socialist. It would not be until six years later that she rose to found the Catholic Worker movement and shake the U.S. Catholic Church community to its core.

Upon converting to Catholicism, Day finally achieved the spiritual fulfillment that had drawn her to immigrant churches while writing for The Call initially. This period in Day’s life was characterized by “a religious faith and a social conscience, but no community.” The inflection point in her faith experience came on a visit to Washington D.C. as a part of a rally to end hunger in the United States. It was there that Day reconnected with

12 Martin, Who Cares About the Saints?.
16 Forest, All is Grace, 99.
her socialist friends, who were the primary political group present at the rally. Day, who had become disaffiliated with the movement in favor of a life of prayer, was ashamed that she was not a part of something that facilitated an active relationship with the poor. Shortly after she returned from this trip she met Peter Maurin, the man who co-founded the Catholic Worker movement with her. This friendship led her to eventually stand on the streets of Union Square on May 1st, 1933, handing out the first issue of *The Catholic Worker*.\(^{17}\)

**Catholics, Communists and the Catholic Worker**

As Day was deciding to found a worker-focused Catholic publication, American Catholics were in the midst of reconciling their religion with socialism. In this specific period, many Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, were becoming more receptive to the ideas of the Left. On May 1, 1933, the day *The Catholic Worker* debuted on the streets of New York, more than ten percent of people in the United States were unemployed. The nation as a whole was operating at less than half the industrial working capacity it had been laboring under only four years earlier.\(^{18}\) Under these circumstances in the early 1930’s, Catholic intellectuals felt that the state of their Church in the United States was threatened by the seductive promises of the Left.

With her prior experiences with socialism, Day was in the unique position within the Catholic Church – possessing a deep understanding of both ends of the spiritual spectrum. This was significant given the perceived threat the Catholic Church saw in the Left. During the years following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles and the days leading up to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Catholics in the United States were undergoing a time of rapid change. Like the rest of the nation, they prospered in the boom of the 1920’s and struggled at the crash. Their support for the New Deal cemented them as one of the key blocs of Roosevelt’s Democratic coalition. On the other end of Roosevelt’s broad coalition were groups of socialists and communists that also passionately pushed for New Deal reforms.\(^{19}\) As a consequence of the rise of New Deal politics, Catholics found themselves as strange bedfellows with leftist groups that philosophically wanted to do away with religious influences in the United States. The Left was in the midst of its golden age in terms of political involvement in the United States. Seeking to build a greater base

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 105-110.  
\(^{18}\) Forest, *All is Grace*, 1.  
with which to acquire votes, leftists saw an opportunity to lure dissatisfied Catholics away from a faith that had taken on a distinctly conservative tone under the popular Father Charles Coughlin. Communists charged that the Church was not against capitalism, but rather favored a return to a “commodity economy born out of dying feudalism.” The political threat that the Left posed to the viability of the American Catholic Church was real, causing Catholic leaders to see it as a threat that had to be aggressively dealt with.

The influence on New Deal politics by those on the left altered the way Catholics identified politically in the years after the start of the Great Depression. While Catholics supported the New Deal and by and large Roosevelt, their political identity was marked by a unique streak of conservatism, evident in the voices of commenting Bishops and other religious figures. Broad support for Spanish dictator Francisco Franco by American Catholics put them at odds with leftist movements that shared their economic sentiments. Furthermore, the U.S. Bishops’ stance on social issues was a constant source of friction between the two groups. The Catholics identified with the Left in terms of fiscal policy, but could not identify with the movement’s disdain for religious institutions.

While both movements had common economic goals, the gap in the theological perspectives of the two groups undermined their ability to work together. In the view of the committed communists, “only one conversion experience was legitimate in their eyes: to see the light of Marxism-Leninism.” This chasm in spirituality, in which secular philosophy mingled with faith, caused the two movements to become pitted against each other. Conservative and liberal Catholic commentators alike were committed to defeating a movement that threatened to pull immigrant Catholic laborers away from the Church. John Gilland Brunini wrote in his 1933 critique of communism that “Communist spellbinders

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20 Oakley Johnson, “Militant Phrases in ‘The Catholic Worker’ Hide Program of Fascism,” The Call, 2, August 18, 1934, Dorothy Day Collection, Rayner Library, Marquette University Archives.
22 Kazin, American Dreamers, 156.
weave emotion into their arguments; they play on injustices and interests which can alone be served by self.”

The Catholic Worker represented a publication that was run unlike any other in its time. Part-news focused with one eye pointed towards social commentary, the paper was molded truly in the ideals of its founders. An editor under Day, Robert Steed noted, “Sometimes Dorothy didn’t like something in an article and she’d cut it out and print the rest, without asking anybody…it wasn’t run like an ordinary publication.” While her immediate followers and staff may have seen Day as demanding, the activist was seen at large more as a determined advocate rather than an autocrat.

Generally, Catholic intellectual circles received the paper with enthusiasm. A previously unheard voice of the Church in the United States had been given a platform to express its views to a wide and captive audience. Furthermore, clerics within the Church were finally given a vehicle with which to inform their working-class parishioners of what Catholicism was doing to aid them in their struggle to gain power and respect in the work place. One supporter from the Knights of Columbus, a fraternal order of Catholics, declared shortly after its founding, “Its purpose is to fight Communism by fighting for social justice and by popularizing the Encyclicals of the Popes on the subject.”

Although many intellectuals in the time of the founding of The Catholic Worker saw it as the response of the faithful to a deceptive secular philosophy, what went ignored were the underlying motives of Day’s decision to cofound the paper. It is clear from the support that the publication received that those who promoted it saw it as a way to keep working class Catholics away from the seductive promises of the Left. Partisans from both the left and right ends of the Church political spectrum could support that initiative. Proposing an ideology to the working class that linked the dignity of human labor to spirituality, as The Catholic Worker did, provided Catholic commentators ammunition with which to fend off opponents. Looking closer at Day’s reflections, the influence of her experiences with socialism became more pronounced in the actions she took to fundamentally alter Catholic social action. Her prior exposure to

24 Riegle, Portraits by Those Who Knew Her, 16.
leftist philosophies made her an agent of change within the Church, distinct from her peers in the faith.

**Coughlin and Day**

Paralleling the rise of the Catholic Worker movement among working Catholics and Church intellectuals was an anti-communist attitude buoyed by a political tsunami of radio broadcasts from a booming-voiced priest from Royal Oaks, Michigan. Father Charles Coughlin skyrocketed from a simple parish priest into the living rooms of Americans with a charisma unmatched in his time. Politically, Coughlin was neither a supporter of capitalism nor communism. While he supported a minimum wage in an era where support for it meant identification with the Left, he believed that “communism is nothing more than a candied pill of glorified ‘doleism.’”

The popularity of his broadcasts solidified an anti-communist attitude in the psyche of Catholics during the time. This feeling spilled over into all leftist philosophies and created a counter-reaction in the Church against a philosophy that looked poised to lure Catholics away from their faith during the 1930’s. Through his media juggernaut of radio broadcasts that were unparalleled in popularity, national speaking tours, and his own *Social Justice* monthly publication, the aptly nicknamed “Radio Priest” became a dominant social commentator in a time when Catholics were coming into their own as a political demographic.

Coughlin’s influence made him the guiding voice for Catholics in the political arena. Fairly or unfairly, historians today have looked back and compared his politics along with his style of media commentary to that of current social commentator Glenn Beck. The historiography of Coughlin characterizes him as a propagandist, as someone who utilized hate and manipulation of the masses to achieve his political goals. What is forgotten in this modern evaluation of the implications of his political stances is that at his peak popularity he came to command one of the most influential political lobbies in the nation. That Coughlin drew one-third of Americans for his weekly CBS radio broadcasts reveals his status as one of

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the most important political commentator of his time. Coughlin exemplifies the uniquely conservative mode Catholics identified with in this era. Juxtaposing the popularity of the views of the Coughlinites is useful to distinguish the uniqueness of the contribution of Day’s Catholic Workers.

The influence of these two prominent Catholic activists coincided very closely with one another. In 1933, the same year in which The Catholic Worker was founded, a poll found that 55% of Americans identified Coughlin as the most politically useful person in the United States, outside of the president. While Coughlin and Day identified themselves on contrasting ends of the political spectrum, in many ways they held similar views. In a time when Day was setting up independent farming communities to help provide community for the rural poor, Coughlin was a heavy proponent of keeping small farmers at the forefront of New Deal policy. In addition, both were scrutinized by greater American society for questionable loyalties to the United States. Twice the FBI investigated Day because of her early ties to communism. At the dawn of World War II, Coughlin found himself under fire from the National Lawyers Guild for, “appealing to those subject to service in the armed forces not to serve, justifying the Axis and ‘New Order,’ and creating defeatism.”

Where the two broke though, was the way in which Day and Coughlin’s respective movements sought to gain followers. Many times the two groups found themselves face-to-face selling their respective papers outside of downtown Cathedrals after mass. In a 1976 interview with former Chicago Catholic Worker member Thomas J. Sullivan, there is evidence of a palpable tension between the two movements. Sullivan revealed that Catholic Workers viewed Coughlinites as “beneath us. They were a stupid, non-intellectual group of people, and here we were. We were on the front lines of the real radical movement.”

[25x565]Report, 92

30 The first time this was done at the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, the next on behalf of Senator Joseph McCarthy’sHUAC.
32 Thomas Sullivan, Unpublished interview with James and Joan O’Gara, manuscript, America Magazine, June 24, 1976, Dorothy Day Collection, Rayner Library, Marquette University Archives.
were more interested in recruiting politically active, slightly idealistic, young Catholics into the intellectual fabric of their movement. Coughlinites appealed much more to working class Catholics, who were receptive to the rhetoric of Coughlin.

While those who subscribed to and were active in the Catholic Worker movement saw Coughlinites as anti-intellectual, those who were readers of *Social Justice* saw Day’s followers as soft on Communism. His anti-Semitic views and stiff opposition to communism created a political climate in the Church that was hostile to anyone remotely identifying with the Left. One of the earliest members of the Catholic Worker reflected that “the Church was in a very conservative period, and we were considered communists who were ‘boring from within.’ So we weren’t acceptable in many places.”33 People such as Day, who had ties with those in the Left, were viewed with suspicion in Coughlin’s horde of followers, leaving no room for anyone with a non-conservative political identity.

**Turning Left**

Understanding American Catholics and their most prominent voices in the formative years of Day’s activism provides a contrast for better illuminating how her background as a socialist influenced how she understood her spirituality. Accounts of Day, most written by Catholics, focus on how her Catholic faith influenced her activism in the Church. However, the way in which her early activities as a writer for socialist publications in New York City and leftist activist influenced her political ideology receives little attention. Even in commenting on her autobiography, Day said, “I have never intended to write an autobiography, but wanted instead to tell of the things that brought me to God.”34 A closer examination of her early life suggests that while Day separated herself from the left through her affinity for religion, it was her early identification with socialism that had the greatest influence on her political beliefs.

It is clear in her biography that Day views her time in the socialist movement as sinful, but its influence in her politics after her conversion in 1927 is undeniable. Early in Day’s pre-conversion years, it was well documented in her writings for socialist causes that she identified heavily with the struggles of the working class. Articles that she wrote for *The

34 Thorn, Runkel and Mountin, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*, 243.
Call between 1916-1918 touched on topics such as how working class New York City housewives would have to use cornmeal as substitutes for flours, dog food was the main diet of immigrant families, and how veterans of American wars struggled to make a decent living after returning from combat. The topics of these articles and the way Day focused in on the struggles of the individual suggest that she was more concerned with the fundamental effects of the causes she was involved in rather than the ideological disputes that so many of her colleagues were caught up in. Seeing how her activism within the frame of the Church was so focused on the plight of the poor and marginalized, it is possible to infer that the seeds of this social concern were sowed through an early identification with socialism.

Although Day may have expressed her allegiance to the Left in ways different than other socialists, Day’s interests and behaviors nevertheless point to an early ideological identification with the movement. A unique interest of Day’s was her affinity for Russian writers, “[She] loved the Russian authors, particularly Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov.” It was Chekhov who concluded in his writings that man existed to work and serve his brothers. In an unpublished document on the philosophy of The Catholic Worker, Day stated that the philosophy of the movement was based around Personalism. Personalism, according to Day, meant, “that each man has an individual responsibility for the welfare of his less fortunate brother.” While Day came to enjoy Russian intellectuals through her experience in leftist movements, it is clear that this interest went on to affect her view of Catholic social teaching after her conversion. Recognizing the backdrop of these cultural figures in her activism helps to clarify with which themes she identified in her vision for social justice.

Further, it is her early relationships and work with the Left that helped drive her to activism within the Catholic Church. After the birth of her daughter and her conversion, Day distanced herself entirely from activism. In writing an account of Day’s life, the biographer Rob Coles quoted Day as saying, “I remember the envy I felt toward my radical

35 Dorothy Day Newspaper Clippings, newspaper, 1917-1918, box 3, folder 1, Dorothy Day Collection, Rayner Library, Marquette University Archives.
atheist friends; they were fighting on behalf of the poor.”38 While Catholic commentators came to see the formation of *The Catholic Worker* and its corresponding movement as a response to communist attempts to lure Catholic laborers, Day saw it as a way to introduce a social consciousness into the Church. In this way, Day hoped to intertwine socialism with the Catholic activism of the period.

As she became more invested in the success of the activism done on behalf of the Catholic Worker movement, Day distanced herself from the teachings of communism. Her writings on leftist causes revealed an increasing affinity with Catholic social teaching. While critical of Fascism for political reasons in her years writing for *The Call*, she came to extend her dislike for the political philosophy because, “although Fascism pretends to recognize religion, in practice it does not.”39 This distance though did not lessen her admiration for the passion of advocates for communism. Rather, Day sought to transfer some of the tactics she learned from her time in the socialist movement, and apply them to spreading the teachings of the Catholic Worker movement. In writing for *Queen’s Work* magazine on the qualities of communist propaganda versus Catholic activists, she came to note, “The communists not only distributed literature, but they followed up their distribution to find out the reaction. They had persistence in other words.”40 In stressing the accessibility of Catholic social teaching, Day sought to emulate the way in which communists made their materials so widely available to the masses. Her application of lessons she learned while a member of the Left to her distinctly Catholic movement shows that the base of Day’s activism was formed through her political experiences prior to her conversion.

Having the benefit of time to look back and reflect on her own involvement with socialism, Day came to realize that the import of the movement that initially drew her interest. Upon reflection in 1933, she concluded that “it is when the Communists are good that they are dangerous.”41 Rather than meaning this as a criticism, an understanding of

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39 *Dorothy Day Newspaper Clippings*, unpublished manuscript, 6, 1938, box 2, folder 3, Dorothy Day Collection, Rayner Library, Marquette University Archives.
41 Dorothy Day, “The Diabolic Plot,” *America Magazine*, April 29, 1933, 82, Dorothy Day Collection, Rayner Library, Marquette University Archives.
the Catholic meaning of the term “good” reveals an extremely nuanced insight into how she viewed the appeal of communism to young members of the working class. As a Church, Catholic theological teaching holds that the nature of what is good is tied to an unmoving truth. For Day, to say that a communist is “good” suggests that he is advocating for something that is truly virtuous in her eyes. Therefore, in the context of this sentence, Day is suggesting that communists are truly capable of affecting social change when they are driven by virtue. Having this succinct view of the Left at this point in her career suggests that at even this time Day looked back on her initial draw to socialism as an experience that shaped her ability to bring about social change.

Day remained a divisive figure in Catholic activist circles. While she may have started out with some allegiance to socialism in her early political thought, she came to identify with an original form of anarchism. This philosophy was characterized by a belief that the state would be unnecessary if people were willing to transform their lives in a Christian fashion and help the poorest among them. Going from secular socialist, to left-leaning Catholic activist, and finally to Christian anarchist, demonstrates a fundamental maturation of the way she sought to apply her own charitable principles. Working with her in the 1950s, the future socialist Michael Harrington criticized Day’s philosophy, commenting that “she was for works of mercy…And if everybody did that you wouldn’t need a welfare state. Where she was wrong is, don’t hold your breath until everybody starts to lead that kind of life.” Day also came under fire from other Catholics who described her way of thinking as, “slovenly reckless, intellectually chaotic, anti-Catholic.” Defenders of her came to note that this philosophy was similar to the famous early Catholic theologian St. Augustine, who in his book City of God comes to the conclusion that there are two kinds of cities. One in which people live for love of God, and the other in which people live for love of self. It is this comparison between Augustinian philosophy and the way Day applied her political thought to action that cemented a positive legacy of hers within the modern Church.

Conclusion

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43 Riegle, Portraits by Those Who Knew Her, 59.
45 Ibid.
Day’s political life reflects how her faith came to transform how she viewed the capabilities of her fellow human being. Identifying with socialists in her early life, she transferred the same fire and energy she had for helping the marginalized with her after her conversion to Catholicism. Her style of activism makes it possible to suggest that had Day been born a cradle Catholic, she may never have gone on to have the type of impact she did on the Church. For this reason, the story of Dorothy Day is less about a Catholic combating socialism through faith in action than it is about how seeds of the socialism came to influence the way Catholics in the United States applied Church social teaching.

Acknowledging that the same qualities that led Day to become a role model for lay Catholics everywhere were also the same ones that attracted her to socialism as a young adult allows for a more practical understanding of what motivated Day in relation to politics. As crucial as her initial exposure to leftist philosophy may have been to her political identity, her legacy is one marked by action rather than ideology. As a reporter for The Call to her decision to stay true to her pacifist principles in times of war, she always possessed a compassionate drive to help those less fortunate than her. Her own friend James W. Douglass came to reflect in 1961, “If everyone had Dorothy Day’s political views it would certainly be disastrous for us all, unless we were all Dorothy Days.”\footnote{Ibid.} Ultimately, for Day, it was about putting compassion into action, regardless of the political ideology she identified with.