

# **HISTORY MATTERS**

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## **Abortion and Motherhood in the Motherland: Transformations in Soviet Family Law in Stalinist Russia, 1918-1941**

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Victoria University of Wellington

**S**tate-sanctioned violence, oppression, and control marred the Stalinist era as every aspect of Soviet life was uprooted and remolded from the factory line to the family. Under Stalin's regime, the social and legal role of the family was radically transformed through legislative and social shifts. Through the analysis of the 1918 Family Code, the 1920 Edict on Abortion, and the 1936 Family Code, this paper seeks to explore the impacts and motivations behind these significant pieces of legislation. These reforms highlight the ideological shift of the state away from aspirations of a socialist utopia and towards a focus on economic transformation at the cost of the individual under Stalin. Due to the breadth of changes and experiences, this study will focus on Russia in the years between 1918 and the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War in 1941.

The formation of the new Soviet state in 1917 broke from the conservative status quo of the tsarist regime politically, economically, and socially. One of the first reforms introduced by the Bolshevik government was aimed at eliminating "those

old laws that kept women in a position of inequality.”<sup>1</sup> While experiences varied widely between social classes in the late tsarist period across the nineteenth century, Imperial Russian law gave the patriarch complete authority over family life, women could not undertake employment without their husbands’ permission, and there were few pathways for divorce.<sup>2</sup> In October 1918, the legal standing of marriage, divorce, parentage, and inheritance was fundamentally transformed when the Code of Laws Concerning the Civil Registration of Deaths, Births and Marriages, colloquially known as the 1918 Family Code was brought into law by the Bolshevik government.<sup>3</sup> The Family Code of 1918 codified principles that had first been published in 1917.<sup>4</sup> The new code established that marriage must be founded in “mutual consent” and it loosened the previous divorce laws to allow either both or only one party to petition for divorce.<sup>5</sup> Further, the Code ruled that illegitimate children must have equal rights and protections as children born from registered marriages.<sup>6</sup> Later, in February 1920, the Bolshevik government issued an edict legalizing elective abortion and permitting “operations to be made freely and without charge.”<sup>7</sup> The edict was a radical change from previous laws, and while it denounced abortion as an “evil,” the legislation recognized that prohibition of

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “The Tasks of the Working Women’s Movement in the Socialist Movement” in *V.I. Collective Works, Volume 30* ed. George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 40.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in fin-de-Siecle Russia*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), 32.

<sup>3</sup> “Collection of Laws and Decrees of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government 1918, Nos.76-77, art.818” in *The Family in the USSR: Documents and Readings*, ed. Rudolf Schlesinger (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1949), 33.

<sup>4</sup> “Decree Concerning Marriage, Children, and Registration of Civil Status December 1917, s.1.” in *International Conciliation* (New York: American Association for International Conciliation, 1919), 444.

<sup>5</sup> “Collection of Laws 1918 s.a70, 87,” 33-34.

<sup>6</sup> “Decree Concerning Marriage 1917 s.10,” 446.

<sup>7</sup> N.A. Semashko, *Health Protection in the USSR* (London: Gollancz, 1934), 83.

abortion drove people underground and “made the woman a victim of mercenary and often ignorant quacks.”<sup>8</sup> The edict justified legalizing abortion as minimizing the risks to a procedure that will occur irrespective of its legality and, critically, will affect the oppressed classes most.<sup>9</sup> It is noted within the edict that fifty percent of women who underwent an illegal abortion contracted an infection and four percent died.<sup>10</sup> This edict marked a dramatic departure from traditional approaches to family, motherhood, and women’s health. In the late tsarist period, the Imperial government classified abortion as premeditated murder.<sup>11</sup> The previous 1845 Code described abortion as “a crime of choice, not desperation.”<sup>12</sup> The early Soviet edicts and Family Code removed the legal bonds which bound the family together and underpinned the traditional social order of the tsarist period.

Integral to the implementation of the 1920 Edict on Abortion was the acknowledgment that many families could not support another child and forcing them to do so would be to the detriment of society. Contemporary Soviet demographer S.A. Tomilin stated that the USSR “should aim for an *optimum* rather than a *maximum* population.”<sup>13</sup> He argued that due to the poor economic conditions of the USSR, it would be better to have children born into families who can support them, over “peasantry’s ignorance and poverty.”<sup>14</sup> As a result, the edict proposes that with the instantiation of socialism and the alleviation of the “difficult economic conditions of the present”, the USSR will observe a “gradual disappearance” of abortions.<sup>15</sup> Many within the Bolshevik government saw the

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<sup>8</sup> Semashko, *Health Protection*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Semashko, *Health Protection*, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Semashko, *Health Protection*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, 337.

<sup>12</sup> Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, 337.

<sup>13</sup> Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum, and Irina Troiskya “The History of Abortion in Russia and the USSR from 1900 to 1991”, *Population: An English Selection* 7, (January 1995): 48.

<sup>14</sup> Avdeev, Blum and Troiskya, “History of Abortion,” 48.

<sup>15</sup> Semashko, *Health Protection*, 83.



family and abortion as dying institutions, which would become obsolete through socialism.<sup>16</sup> The Bolshevik government argued that the family would lose its social function when dependants are sufficiently cared for by the state, and unions would be based on mutual love, rather than shared responsibility.<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, while it is impossible to speak to the true motivations of the Soviet state in passing these radical and liberal laws, it could be argued that the Bolshevik state intended the new laws to strip any connection between the imperial state and the new communist regime by removing “any trace of the inequality of women” from their official policy.<sup>18</sup> Prior to the revolution, Lenin declared that the existing laws were “nothing but the hypocrisy of the ruling classes” which were “especially painful for the oppressed masses.”<sup>19</sup> Further, Lenin argued that there would never be “equality between the oppressed and the oppressors, between the exploited and the exploiters... as long as there is no freedom for women.”<sup>20</sup> Leninist principles equated the oppression of women as another “*form* of exploitation” under the capitalist class, and hence the enemy of socialism.<sup>21</sup> The attempted dissolution of traditional family ties through the liberalization of marriage, divorce, and abortion was not only integral to the practical implementation of socialist ideals, but distanced the new state from the previous patriarchal and hierarchical system. In this sense, the 1918 Family Code and

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<sup>16</sup> Becky L. Glass and Margaret K. Stolee, “Family Law in Soviet Russia, 1917-1945”, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 49, no.4 (November 1987): 894.

<sup>17</sup> Ekaterina Mishina, “Soviet Family Law: Women and Children (From 1917 to the 1940s)”, *Russian Law Journal* 5, no.4 (2017): 72.

<sup>18</sup> Lenin, “The Tasks of the Working Women’s Movement,” 42.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “The Working Class and Neomalthusianism”, *Pravda*, June 16, 1916 in *V.I. Collective Works, Volume 19*, ed. Robert Daglish, trans. George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 237.

<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Soviet Power and the Status of Women”, *Pravada*, November 6, 1919 in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 30, 1919-1920*, ed. George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 121.

<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Capitalism and Female Labour”, *Pravda*, May 5, 1913 in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 36, 1900-1923*, ed. Yuri Sdobinkov, trans. Andrew Rothstein (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 230-231.

the 1920 Edict symbolically divorced the new Bolshevik state from their connections to the imperialist past and affirmed that individuals' social roles are now to be determined not by their gender, but by their utility and class.

Entering the 1920s, the 1918 Family Code and Abortion Edict further uprooted a society already destabilized by revolution and civil war. These legal liberations broke Russian society from the traditional mold of family life, earning the era the title of "the decade of 'free love'."<sup>22</sup> The family laws emancipated women from traditional restraints of the domestic sphere, allowed marriages to be formed and dissolved quickly, and abortions were freely available.<sup>23</sup> Socialist-libertarians applauded this as a positive shift towards sexual liberation and the transformation of the family.<sup>24</sup> However, others, including Leon Trotsky, expressed public concern over the instability of partnerships and the loosening of sexual morality.<sup>25</sup> He described the early 1920s as "the collapse of morality" as the "fleeting ties" that bound families together threatened to snap.<sup>26</sup>

In response to the wave of "free love", the state imposed various amendments to their family laws, the details of which are beyond the scope of this study.<sup>27</sup> However, it is important

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<sup>22</sup> Vera Sandomirsky, "Sex in the Soviet Union", *The Russian Review* 10, no.3 (July 1951): 200.

<sup>23</sup> Sandomirsky, "Sex in the Soviet Union," 200.

<sup>24</sup> Wendy Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences: The Debate on the Soviet Family Code of 1926", *Russian History* 11, no.4 (Winter 1984): 363, 364.

<sup>25</sup> Leon Trosky, *Women and the Family* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970): 22.

<sup>26</sup> Trosky, *Women and the Family*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> For more detail on the legislative amendments and the debates surrounding abortion policy during the 1920s, see Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 370-373; Glass and Stolee, "Family Law in Soviet Russia," 896-898; Susan Gross Solomon, "The Demographic Argument in Soviet Debates over the Legalization of Abortion in the 1920s", *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 33, no.1 (January-March 1992): 59-66; Mark Savage, "The Law of Abortion in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

to recognize that there was considerable conversation between the public and the state as to the sexual morality of the union.<sup>28</sup> Introduced in January 1924, one significant amendment imposed some restrictions on who could obtain an abortion. Priority access to abortions was based on where the state identified the most urgent need and regional abortion commissions were established.<sup>29</sup> These commissions evaluated a woman's physical and financial ability to continue her pregnancy, and preferential access was given to women who were single, unemployed, and dependent on state support.<sup>30</sup> This prioritization of cases was largely because of insufficient state hospitals and medical staff capable and willing to conduct abortions.<sup>31</sup> Two years later, in 1926, a new Family Code was established. The details created considerable public scrutiny and debate, specifically around the redefining of de facto marriages as being equal to registered ones.<sup>32</sup> De facto marriages, defined by cohabitation and a common household, gave partners the same protections in the case of separation as registered married partners.<sup>33</sup> Supporters of the 1926 Family Code asserted that de facto marriage would protect partners from abandonment, an issue that predominantly affected women.<sup>34</sup> The 1926 Family Code also included provisions to increase the marriage age, new paternity guidelines, and introduced new divorce laws.<sup>35</sup> Divorce law became so liberal the public nicknamed them "postcard divorces" with divorces so easy to obtain, you could be told of your own through a postcard.<sup>36</sup> In the first ten years of the Soviet government, the

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and the People's Republic of China: Women's Rights in the Two Socialist Countries", *Stanford Law Review* 40, no.4 (April 1988): 1038-1048.

<sup>28</sup> Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 362.

<sup>29</sup> Solomon, "Demographic Argument," 61.

<sup>30</sup> Savage, "The Law of Abortion," 1040.

<sup>31</sup> Savage, "The Law of Abortion," 1040.

<sup>32</sup> Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 362.

<sup>33</sup> Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 370, 269.

<sup>34</sup> Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 367.

<sup>35</sup> Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 367.

<sup>36</sup> Goldman, "Freedom and its Consequences," 369.

family had been broken free from the gendered and conservative restraints of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While these changes were not without concern or controversy, the Soviet public widely adopted them.

Tracking the success of the 1918 Family Code and Abortion Edict is limited by the lack of statistical data from the early years of the policy. As with many other areas of Soviet history, there are many gaps in time, geographical coverage, and voices due to political censorship, the destruction of records, or even because of the difficulty in recording data to begin with. It is critical to regard all records from the USSR, as with all nations, with appropriate scepticism and analysis. From the surviving records, some broad generalizations on the impact of the early family laws can be drawn. The Commissariat for Health surveyed 1,000 female textile workers and concluded that, on average, between 1900 and 1913, ninety four percent of pregnancies ended in childbirth.<sup>37</sup> Between 1917 and 1919, this dropped to eighty five percent, then after the legalization of abortion for the years 1920 to 1922, only seventy seven percent of pregnancies ended with birth, and in 1924, this dropped again to seventy one percent.<sup>38</sup> These numbers only reveal a part of the story, and do not reveal how many pregnancies ended in miscarriage, abortion or stillbirth. However, the general trends suggest that more women were getting pregnant without giving birth. Notably, over this period, infant mortality dropped from fifty percent between 1914 and 1916 to seventeen percent in 1924.<sup>39</sup> The First World War and the concurrent economic hardships may inflate the 1914-1916 figures. Nevertheless, both the data on infant mortality and the outcomes of pregnancy show a considerable shift in the number of births and the health of infants following the Soviet law change.

A number of physicians reported their observations following the 1920 Edict, including one Dr. Tikhnadse of Tbilisi who reported that by 1924, abortions compromised

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<sup>37</sup> Avdeev, Blum and Troiskya, "History of Abortion," 52.

<sup>38</sup> Avdeev, Blum and Troiskya, "History of Abortion," 52.

<sup>39</sup> Avdeev, Blum and Troiskya, "History of Abortion," 52.

“fifty percent of all births in Leningrad”, and forty three percent in the Grauerman maternity hospital in Moscow.<sup>40</sup> Further, statistician Dr. A. B. Genss demonstrated a rapid rise in reported abortions in Russia’s urban centers. 1914 records show 5,537 abortions in Moscow, a rate of ten abortions per 100 births.<sup>41</sup> By 1921, this had risen to nineteen abortions per 100 births, and in 1925, it had hit thirty-one.<sup>42</sup> In 1927, 40,001 abortions were recorded, a 622 percent increase from 1914, and the rate of abortions had reached seventy-five per 100 births.<sup>43</sup> A similar trend is observed in Leningrad, where from 1921 to 1928 the number of officially reported abortions increased 726 percent and the rate of abortions per 100 births increased from twenty-one to 139.<sup>44</sup> These statistics indicate that throughout the USSR, women were seeking and undergoing abortions safely and in high numbers.

By the late 1930s, the USSR looked profoundly different from the state that was the first to legalize abortion. Famine, purges, and economic hardship had marked the intervening years. Critically, Joseph Stalin consolidated his power and became dictator of the USSR in the late 1920s. Beginning in 1928, Stalin introduced his First Five Year Plan to modernize the USSR.<sup>45</sup> Stalin purported that the USSR was “fifty to one hundred years behind the advanced countries” and the USSR must catch up in the next decade, “else they will crush us.”<sup>46</sup> Widespread collectivization, industrialization, and dekulakization characterized the late 1920s and early 1930s under the Five Year Plan.<sup>47</sup> However, the “frantic speed” of collectivization and industrialization caused prevalent social

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<sup>40</sup> Solomon, “Demographic Argument,” 65.

<sup>41</sup> Frederick J. Taussig, *Abortion, Spontaneous and Induced: Medical and Social Aspects* (London: Henry Kimpton, 1936), 410.

<sup>42</sup> Taussig, *Abortion, Spontaneous and Induced*, 410.

<sup>43</sup> Taussig, *Abortion, Spontaneous and Induced*, 410.

<sup>44</sup> Taussig, *Abortion, Spontaneous and Induced*, 410.

<sup>45</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 72.

<sup>46</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 86.

<sup>47</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 72.

issues.<sup>48</sup> Worker wages dropped, the urban population struggled to feed their families, and many in rural Russia starved.<sup>49</sup> In the main cities, there was greater urbanization and more people had access to higher education.<sup>50</sup> Stalin's Five Year Plan not only transformed the agricultural landscape, but had deep social ramifications within Russia.

In the mid-30s, the state imposed conservative family policies that sought to stabilize and strengthen the nuclear family. In 1936, the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissaries of the USSR released a decree that prohibited abortions, except where continuing the pregnancy would critically threaten the mother's health, or if there was significant danger of a disease being passed from parent to child.<sup>51</sup> The decree argues that the economic prosperity of the state and "the adequate material security of women and their children" means that the benefits of abortion no longer balanced the risks.<sup>52</sup> As suggested above, the state proposed that abortion is a disease of poverty and exploitation, so having addressed the material concerns of the worker, abortion became redundant (in theory). The 1936 edict also introduced additional support and incentives for families. Both office workers and manual workers were granted four months maternity leave, the amount new parents receive from State Social Insurance increased to 45 rubles, the edict protected pregnant women from workplace discrimination, and

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<sup>48</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 88.

<sup>49</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 88.

<sup>50</sup> Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> M. Kalinin, V. Molotov, and I. Unshlicht, 'On the Prohibition of Abortions; Increase of Material Assistance to Mothers; Establishment of State Assistance to Large Families; Increase of the Number of Maternity Homes, Creches and Kindergartens; Increase of Punishment for Non-payment of Alimony, and some Amendments of the Divorce Law', *Izvestia*, 28 June 1936, 1 in "Soviet Legislation (XVII)", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 15, no.44 (January 1937): 459.

<sup>52</sup> M.Kalinin, V. Molotov, and I. Unshlicht, "Prohibition of Abortions," 1.

established mother allowances for large families.<sup>53</sup> The mother allowances were, in the words of Frank Lorimer, a “blatant pro-natalist program, rather than a plan designed to meet the economic needs of families.”<sup>54</sup> The economic incentives coincided with an outpouring of propaganda reclassifying motherhood as a form of Stakhanovite labor and women’s patriotic duty.<sup>55</sup> The title of “mother heroine” was awarded to women who gave birth and raised ten or more children, the “Order of Glory of Motherhood” was given to mothers of seven to nine, and mothers of five or six children received the “Motherhood Medal.”<sup>56</sup> In propaganda, the image of the idealized Soviet woman transformed from a focus on economic productivity to one centered on fertility and motherhood.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of the attempts to raise the national birth-rate, abortions did not stop after 1936; rather, they were pushed into secrecy. First-hand accounts place the cost of an illegal abortion between 200 and 500 rubles in rural areas, and up to 1,500 in cities.<sup>58</sup> To contextualize this, the average worker in the late 1930s received 200 to 300 rubles per month.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> M. Kalinin, V. Molotov, and I. Unshlicht, “Prohibition of Abortions,” 2.

<sup>54</sup> Frank Lorimer, “Population Policies and Politics in the Communist World,” in *Population and World Politics*, ed. Philip Hauser (Illinois: The Free Press, 1958): 224.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Buckley, “Women in the Soviet Union,” *Feminist Review* 8, no.1 (1981): 94.

<sup>56</sup> Buckley, “Women in the Soviet Union,” 94.

<sup>57</sup> Paula Michaels, “Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban,” *Feminist Studies* 27, no.2 (Summer 2001): 323.

<sup>58</sup> Case 449, interview by M.F., February 1951, transcript, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSS), Schedule B, Vol.22, Harvard University Widener Library, 17; Case 1700, interview by M.F., n.d., transcript, HPSS, Schedule B, Vol.2, Harvard University Widener Library, 10; Case 1379, interview by M.F., n.d., HPSS, Schedule B, Vol.22, Harvard University Widener Library, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Case 149, interview by A.P., n.d., transcript, HPSS, Schedule A, Vol.34., Harvard University Widener Library, 11; Case 351, interview by

However, despite the high risks and cost, many continued to seek out abortions as they remained cheaper than raising a child in poverty. The dangers of illegal abortions permeated the public consciousness, even finding their way into popular Russian literature such as the second part of Mikhail Sholokhov's epic *And Quiet Flows Home to the Sea*.<sup>60</sup> In the text, Natalya, a wife and mother of two, dies at the hands of "the old woman [who] used an iron hook" after "necessity forced her to it."<sup>61</sup> Beyond the literary, one gynecologist in the USSR described a young patient who, when turned away, "went to some ordinary woman, a factory worker, who used a dirty knitting needle with dirty hands."<sup>62</sup> Instances such as this were rife. The gynecologist commented that "after this law, there was an endless flow of infections due to unsterile abortions."<sup>63</sup> Following the prohibition, women arrived at hospitals suffering from "infection and fever, peritonitis, perforation and haemorrhage."<sup>64</sup>

Irrespective of the dire outcomes, women resisted seeking health care as doctors were obliged to report the crime to the state, and the woman, her family, and her contacts would be investigated.<sup>65</sup> Doctors observed thousands of women performing abortions on themselves in unsterile conditions, but typically by the time doctors reached them they "were

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A.P., n.d., transcript, HPSS, Schedule A, Vol.18, Harvard University Widener Library, 6; Case 430, interview by A.P., n.d., transcript, HPSS, Schedule B, Vol.5, Harvard University Widener Library, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Mikhail Sholokhov, *The Don Flows Home to the Sea*, (Great Britain: Mackays Limited, 1940), 518.

<sup>61</sup> Sholokhov, "*The Don Flows Home*," 516, 512.

<sup>62</sup> Case 1758, interview by M.F., n.d., transcript, HPSS, Schedule B, Vol.2, Harvard University Widener Library, 48.

<sup>63</sup> Case 1758, interview by M.F., 49.

<sup>64</sup> A.A. Verbenko, S.E. Il'in, VN Chusovaja, T.N. *Al'shevskaja, Aborty i protivozhna chatochyne sredstva*, (Moscow, 1968), 8, quoted in Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum, and Irina Troiskya "The History of Abortion in Russia and the USSR from 1900 to 1991", *Population: An English Selection* 7, (January 1995): 45.

<sup>65</sup> Case 1379, interview by M.F., 23.



usually in bad shape, already poisoned.”<sup>66</sup> It is impossible to know how many women underwent, suffered or died because of illegal abortions as the risks of persecution led many to lie, or suffer in silence. Doctors would commonly lie on their reports by listing heavy lifting or manual labor as the cause of miscarriage.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the risks, the number of abortions remained high. The aforementioned Soviet doctor, Case 1758, argued that the Soviet system “drove you into criminal acts” as you are put “in a conflict between your professional conscience and your human feelings.”<sup>68</sup> While there were some increases in maternal care, and incentives for child-rearing, the state failed to address one critical problem: housing. Throughout the firsthand testimony, the lack of adequate housing was a recurring issue. The doctor described “very low living standards” that convinced mothers their child “would be born only to suffer.”<sup>69</sup> One male engineer detailed how children were an “added burden” when there was “frequently from five to eight persons [...] in one room.”<sup>70</sup> A female student explained that she and her husband did not have a room of their own, and should they fall pregnant she would have had to leave the Institute, and “probably [leave] Moscow because there is nowhere to live.”<sup>71</sup> Throughout the memories of Soviet escapees are tales of people wishing for a better life for their children, hindered by the lack of housing and material stability within the USSR. Another doctor, Case 1379, says she knew “no other reason than economic” for the high numbers of women aborting.<sup>72</sup> Even in the good years, she reiterates, you would attend to a mother dying from a self-performed

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<sup>66</sup> Case 1379, interview by M.F., 22.

<sup>67</sup> Case 1379, interview by M.F., 23.

<sup>68</sup> Case 1758, interview by M.F., 41-42.

<sup>69</sup> Case 1758, interview by M.F., 43.

<sup>70</sup> Case 396, interview by J.O., January 30, 1951, transcript, HPSS, Schedule B, Vol.2, Harvard University Widener Library, 17.

<sup>71</sup> K.B., “Letter from a Student (“I Object”)", *Izvestiia*, 29 May, 1936, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Case 1379, interview by M.F., 27.

abortion who already had “poor, hungry, naked” children.<sup>73</sup> The deprivation and desperation was clear, women throughout the USSR, but particularly in rural areas, could not bring another child into the world due to their extreme poverty.

Simply, the 1936 Code was unpopular, and ultimately ineffective at increasing the Russian population.<sup>74</sup> An analysis of fertility trends in the USSR revealed that while political events including war, famine, and legislation had “profound short-term effects”, long term fertility behavior developed almost completely independently from any “period disturbances.”<sup>75</sup> One argument is that a population panic within Stalin’s government may explain the 1936 reforms. Many European countries in the interwar years introduced interventions to increase their birth rate as a large population was seen as critical for national power – both socially and economically.<sup>76</sup> In light of the emergence of mass warfare, and the building tensions in Europe, maintaining a large population became synonymous with military might and security.<sup>77</sup> Historically, Russia had maintained a high fertility rate throughout the nineteenth century, but the cataclysmic death counts from the First World War, Civil War, famine, purges, and other political and military conflicts threatened to destabilize the USSR’s population.<sup>78</sup> Through 1928 to 1935,

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<sup>73</sup> Case 1379, interview by M.F., 27.

<sup>74</sup> For more information on the unpopularity of the 1936 Abortion, see Savage, “The Law of Abortion,” 1048; and *Izvestiia* articles published between 26 May 1936 and 27 June 1936. In particular, “Discussion”, *Izvestiia*, May 29, 1936, in which the aforementioned “Letter from a Student” derives.

<sup>75</sup> Sergei Scherbov and Harrie Van Vianen, “Marriage and Fertility in Russia of Women Born Between 1900 and 1960: A Cohort Analysis”, *European Journal of Population* 13, no.3 (2001): 292,293.

<sup>76</sup> David L. Hoffmann, “Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context”, *Journal of Social History* 34, no.1 (October 2000): 35.

<sup>77</sup> Hoffmann, “Mothers in the Motherland,” 36.

<sup>78</sup> Hoffmann, “Mothers in the Motherland,” 36.

the birth rate continued to decline, as divorce, abortion, and industrialization increased.<sup>79</sup> Our World in Data compiled fertility data and estimates that the total fertility rate in Russia decreased from 7.36 in 1900, to 6.8 in 1924, and again to 4.96 in 1938.<sup>80</sup> Again, it is important to consider the limitations of Soviet data, especially that of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. While we cannot be confident in the exact birth rate, this drop is consistent with global trends of industrialization's impact on birth rate. As Russia industrialized, urbanized, and underwent collectivization under Stalin's regime, there was greater poverty, a shortage of urban housing, and an increasing number of women in the labor force.<sup>81</sup> Scholars consider these factors to be determinants of a falling birth rate.<sup>82</sup>

It is suggested that the faltering birth rate compounded the pressures of an imminent war produced a population panic. The 1936 Code responded with overt pro-natalist legislation such as the re-criminalization of abortions, the tightening of divorce laws, and parenthood incentives. However, what this argument fails to answer is why the return to the traditional family unit was necessary enough for state intervention. Men were the most significantly impacted by the high casualty events of the 1920s and 1930s, and as a result, the ratio of men to women heavily favored women. In 1939, there were eight million more women than men and these numbers were only exacerbated by the Second World War as by 1946 there were 25.9 million more women than men.<sup>83</sup> If the state's goal was purely to boost the population, then it would have been

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<sup>79</sup> Glass and Stolee, "Family Law in Soviet Russia," 898.

<sup>80</sup> Max Roser. "Fertility Rate." Our World in Data. February 19, 2014. Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate>.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Field, "The Re-Legalization of Abortion in Soviet Russia", *New England Journal of Medicine* 255, no.9, (August 1956): 422-423.

<sup>82</sup> Geeta Nargund, "Declining birth rate in Developed Countries: A radical policy re-think is required", *Facts, Views & Vision in Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 1, no.3 (2009): 192; Michael J. White et al., "Urbanization and Fertility: An Event-History Analysis of Coastal Ghana", *Demography* 45, no.4 (November 2008): 804.

<sup>83</sup> Buckley, "Women in the Soviet Union," 80.

disadvantageous to restrict the number of sexual partners one man could have, or to restrict the years in which he could produce offspring to the fertile years of his wife. For this reason, it is necessary to think beyond population concerns to understand why the Soviet Union reversed its policy so drastically.

Historian Wendy Goldman proposed that the state resurrected the family to address the millions of *besprizorniki* (homeless children) in Russia.<sup>84</sup> The demographic crises of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in many orphaned and destitute children, and by 1922, there were 7.5 million homeless children in Russia.<sup>85</sup> This was an increase from approximately 50,000 only six years prior.<sup>86</sup> Many *besprizorniki* were cared for in centrally organised children's institutions, although, with space limited, many sought refuge on the streets.<sup>87</sup> In 1926, the Soviet government estimated it would cost at least 7.5 million rubles to house the 550,000 *besprizorniki* on the streets, excluding the cost to feed, clothe, and educate them.<sup>88</sup> Further budget would be needed to provide for *besprizorniki* housed in children's homes, of which there were 23,570 in Moscow alone.<sup>89</sup> Goldman argues that in the 1930s the Soviet government recognized that the family could perform these essential functions without a significant cost to the state.<sup>90</sup> It is proposed that Goldman's thesis can be expanded beyond the *besprizorniki* to suggest that the Stalin's regime strengthened the family unit to reduce the liability it held towards dependants, including women and children. Millions of women entered the workforce under the Soviet system, but

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<sup>84</sup> Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993), 59.

<sup>85</sup> Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Jeannie A. Stevens, "Children of the Revolution: Soviet Russia's Homeless Children (Besprizorniki) in the 1920s", *Russian History* 9, no.2/3 (1982): 246.

<sup>87</sup> Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 91.

<sup>88</sup> Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 95.

<sup>89</sup> Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 94.

<sup>90</sup> Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 97,100.

their opportunities were often restricted to “low status, low paying jobs in factories.”<sup>91</sup> Further, women were most vulnerable to losing their jobs or experiencing job insecurity. When the New Economic Policy was introduced in the early 1920s, women comprised seventy percent of the cutbacks.<sup>92</sup> As such, the family performs a role that the socialist regime failed to play. By strengthening the bonds between the father, who had a higher, more stable income, and his dependants, the economic burden of supporting children and unemployed women shifted from the state to the patriarch. In short, the 1936 Code can be understood as a way to liberate the state from some of its financial obligations at the cost of abandoning Leninist principles of social welfare. This is consistent with other aspects of Soviet life as the state turned away from “the path to socialism” and towards “economic modernization” under Stalin.<sup>93</sup>

These strict restrictions on abortion remained until Khrushchev’s government repealed them in 1955. It is impossible to know how many illegal abortions occurred, or how many women subsequently died in the intervening nineteen years. Most remember Stalin for his brutality, the purges, and his totalitarian grip on power. Through the analysis of how family laws transformed under the Stalinist regime, it becomes apparent that these themes were present in every corner of the Soviet Union. Every individual, marriage, mother, and infant felt the oppressive touch of the state. When recognizing the victims of Stalin, history must not forget the women, children, and families destroyed by his economic mismanagement and, critically, his legislation.

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<sup>91</sup> Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, “Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change” in *Stalinism: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Hoffman, (Hoboken; John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 214.

<sup>92</sup> Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 367.

<sup>93</sup> Glass and Stolee, “Family Law in Soviet Russia,” 898.

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## **Korean Peasant Uprisings of the Interwar Period: A Rorschach Test for American Paranoias**

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**F**ollowing the end of World War II, the United States Army occupied the southern part of the Korean peninsula. While their Soviet counterparts occupied the northern half, the Allied Forces proclaimed that this occupation was merely an intermediary step to Korea's full independence from the colonial yoke of Japan; despite Allied overtures regarding independence and liberation of the Korean people, it was not long before United States rule ran into local opposition. Peasant uprisings began in 1946 and continued throughout US occupation—including the infamous Jeju Uprisings during the Korean War. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Korea observed in 2010, the response by both the US Military government in Korea (hereafter USMGK) and the Republic of Korea's first president Syngman Rhee was exceedingly violent.<sup>1</sup> The violent response to these protests makes them an ongoing point of memory and reconciliation, as is evidenced by the very

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<sup>1</sup> "AP: U.S. Allowed Korean Massacre In 1950," CBS News (CBS Interactive), accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ap-us-allowed-korean-massacre-in-1950/>.

formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005.

Many leaders of the American occupation believed the most important cause of unrest to be foreign communist influence from the Soviets and North Koreans, this included the top official in the USMGK, Lieutenant General John Hodge. From the 1946 Autumnal Uprisings to the Jeju Uprising of 1948 and beyond, protests were assumed to be a direct result of Soviet and North Korean attempts to destabilize American-occupied South Korea. This paper examines a selection of Soviet and North Korean sources that acknowledge foreign attempts to empower South Korean communists and sow dissent, but ultimately shows doubt as to whether or not those attempts were successful. Rather than being foreign-influenced, protests were primarily the result of domestic issues—ones that the American military government had knowledge of and failed to properly address. The latter portion of this paper argues that anti-communist hysteria and Orientalism worked in tandem to draw American deception away from these domestic causes, and finally, that the attribution of protests to foreign causes served as a justification for looking the other way on an exceedingly violent response by the Rhee government.

### **Conflicting Accounts of Foreign Communist Influence**

After picking General MacArthur to head the occupation of Japan, the Truman administration selected Lieutenant General John Reed Hodge to lead the military government set up in South Korea. The historian of his corps referred to him as a blunt man “without prose or affection,” and his writing about Korea and Koreans reflects that observation.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after arrival, he told his superiors that the Koreans he met were ‘politically immature’, that they were ‘backward and unruly’ and that Washington had ‘bet on the wrong horse’ in reference to

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Matray, *Hodge Podge: American Occupation Policy in Korea, 1945-1948*, pg. 5 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23719137>

its joint occupation of Korea with the Soviets.<sup>3</sup> When Koreans protested America's occupation of southern Korea Hodge assumed the problem was that they were unable to read. Otherwise, he argued, they would know that freedom had been promised 'in due course and not immediately.'<sup>4</sup> Given the time period, Hodge's racist descriptions of Korea are unsurprising. Additionally, given the context of the larger Cold War and American domestic politics, Hodge's concern about foreign communist influence in Korea comes as little shock.

From the outset of the Autumnal Uprisings of 1946, General Hodge suspected Pyongyang and Moscow were responsible for the South Korean protests. In his work on the origins of the Korean War, Bruce Cumings described the reaction of Hodge and his colleagues toward peasant protests as 'outright panic.'<sup>5</sup> Another example of panic about foreign influence can be seen in the Special Representative in Korea John Muccio, who wrote back to Washington about the Jeju Uprising of 1948.<sup>6</sup> Muccio asserted that the Soviets were directly involved in the protests—that they had quite literally hopped off boats to foment unrest, but he utilized only a single eyewitness account as proof. The writings of Hodge and Muccio are one instance of a larger trend among American observers to assume that unrest in Korea was due solely to foreign communist influence rather than authentic distaste for American occupation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Kraus, "American Orientalism in Korea," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 22, no. 2 (2015): pp. 147-165, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-02202004>.

<sup>4</sup> Kim, Monica. "The Intelligence of Fools: Reading the US Military Archive of the Korean War." *Positions : East Asia cultures critique* 23, no. 4 (2015): 695–728, pg. 702.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Volume 1*, pg. 351

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, *The Political Adviser in Korea to the Secretary of State*, April 9, 1949, John Muccio, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v08/d567>

<sup>7</sup> Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House Paperbacks, 2004). For more examples anti-communist paranoia see: Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*; Wada Haruki, *International History of the Korean War*; Kraus, *American Orientalism in Korea*

American actors showed near-universal insistence on the importance of foreign influence in the peasant protests, but let us see the view from the other side of the Cold War. In January 1946, a report from Soviet Lieutenant Colonel Federov sent to General-Lieutenant Kalashnikov summarized the first few months of Soviet occupation of North Korea.<sup>8</sup> Federov's main concern was about the lack of a local communist presence in the North. He notes that there are "...no Communists in the villages. There is no social movement among peasants if one does not count the 'Peasant Union' created by the Communists here and there in district capitals." Moreover, Federov worried that the leadership of the Korean Communist Party was ill-prepared to carry through on the land reforms that the Soviets expected of them. In addition to Federov's observations, Kim Il Sung is known to have concealed his ideological orientation as a communist from the public in northern Korea until 1946.<sup>9</sup> Federov's observations and Kim's strategy of concealment beg the question: if the northern half of the peninsula showed little evidence of communist sentiment under Soviet rule, how much of that sentiment could be found in the southern half of the peninsula?

In the moments where Japanese occupation was ending and American occupation was beginning, a number of People's Committees sprouted up throughout Korea.<sup>10</sup> People's Committees were locally organized attempts at self-governance. In the protest movement against American occupation, People's Committees were important vectors for organizing protests and making material demands. American intelligence quickly concluded that these People's

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<sup>8</sup> "Untitled memorandum on the political and morale situation of Soviet troops in North Korea and the economic situation in Korea," January 11, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archives of the Russian General Staff, op. 480, 29, st. 5, p. 2, pa. 21, k. 35. Translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114893>

<sup>9</sup> Yumi Moon, "Korean Uprisings in 1946: Was the US Occupation Responsible for the Korean War?" <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/korean-uprisings-1946-was-us-occupation-responsible-korean-war>.

<sup>10</sup> Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*

Committees—and subsequently the protests that they organized—to be socialist in nature. Federov would have balked at this characterization, instead describing the People's Committees as “a parody of government bodies.” In the North, these bodies were largely dominated by bourgeois landowners, *not* a class-conscious proletariat. Federov goes so far as arguing that these landowners were working inefficiently on purpose to hinder Soviet progress. These depictions of People's Committees clash with those of the ones that Americans encountered and squashed in the South. If the makeup of the People's Committees in the South was even remotely similar, then it appears unlikely that the primary motivation of the People's Committees was communist zeal; the image of wealthy landlords collaborating with Soviet masterminds to wage a martyrsome guerilla war against American imperialism is one that is difficult to picture.

Pessimism regarding South Korean communism was also in the air in Pyongyang. In 1949, Kim Il Sung visited Stalin and mentioned, among other things, Northern efforts to infiltrate the Southern army.<sup>11</sup> Kim noted that there indeed was a Northern presence in the South Korean army, however, Pak Heon-yeong—Kim's most important advisor at the time—points out that within the army, the communists were too few and far between to actually achieve anything substantial. In a Soviet telegram from later on in September 1949 the Soviet Foreign Ministry discusses the merits and downsides to a Northern invasion of the South.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, even after four years of occupation and attempts to support the existing socialist elements in South Korea, Kim Il Sung was still not

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<sup>11</sup> "Notes of the Conversation between Comrade I.V. Stalin and a Governmental Delegation from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea headed by Kim Il Sung," March 05, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, fond 059a, opis 5a, delo 3, papka 11, listy 10-20, and RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 346, ll. 0013-0023. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112127>

<sup>12</sup> Telegram from Tunkin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Reply to 11 September Telegram," September 14, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Papka 11, listy 46-53. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112132>



confident they would be helpful to a Northern invasion. Pak Heon-yeong disagreed, claiming there would be a great upsurge of support from the dispossessed left of the American-occupied South. This opinion is one for which he was ridiculed after the Korean War, leaving him disgraced in the Korean Communist Party.<sup>13</sup> Overall, despite American insistence, there is far too much disagreement within the Soviet and North Korean camps to conclude that their attempts to aid Southern leftists were successful. It is likely that foreign influence played a complimentary role in protests, but that American perception was skewed in this regard. Examining the domestic causes of resistance will make this skew even clearer.

### **The Domestic Causes of Resistance**

If foreign communist influence played a secondary role in causing the Autumnal Uprisings, the question remains: what was the primary cause? In November of 1946, American Political Adviser in Korea William R. Langdon wrote a summary of conditions in Korea over the past few weeks.<sup>14</sup> In addition to listing various sites of unrest, Langdon reports that protesters in Busan agreed to meet with American generals to “...look into the causes of the disturbances and make recommendations for corrective action.” Writing to Secretary of State Byrnes in Washington, Langdon listed three causes for unrest: vitriol for the police and especially for former Japanese collaborators, delay in forming Korea’s independent provisional government, and the collapse of the rice collection and distribution program.<sup>15</sup> In the days following the meeting, Langdon writes that American administrators attempted to address these concerns and formed a committee to investigate solutions.

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<sup>13</sup> Suh, Dae-Sook. *Korean Communism, 1945-1980: a Reference Guide to the Political System*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981.

<sup>14</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, *The Political Adviser in Korea to the Secretary of State*, April 9, 1949, William R. Langdon, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v08/d567>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

These three concerns were noted by the United States in a number of reports,<sup>16</sup> but throughout the American occupation and the Rhee presidency, they were never adequately addressed. First, the police forces in Korea continued employing former Japanese colonial police.<sup>17</sup> The colonial police were a visceral reminder of decades of violence and repression by Imperial Japan and the American occupiers turned a blind eye to their continued power. Given their military and political control over the peninsula, the American military government certainly had the authority or leverage to dramatically reduce or outright ban their employment. Former collaborators also made up a substantial portion of the Korean Army that the US was training—with six whole divisions being led by officers who had served Japan.<sup>18</sup> Americans continued observing widespread hatred for this policy clear through the bloody Jeju Uprising that occurred years later,<sup>19</sup> with other reports acknowledging that disagreements over prosecuting Japanese collaborators were a main issue within the elected government.<sup>20</sup> Despite all this opposition, American policymakers never deemed it worthwhile to systematically address the historical grievances of Koreans who had been harmed by Japanese colonialism.

With regards to allowing an independent government, it is no surprise that the 1948 United Nations-backed elections were unsatisfactory to Koreans.<sup>21</sup> The UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) arrived to observe in 1948, and among its members were representatives of the Philippines and Nationalist China—both governments that

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<sup>16</sup> See declassified American Central Intelligence memoranda: *The Situation in Korea* (1947), and *The Current Situation In Korea* (1948) among others

<sup>17</sup> Ceuster, Koen de, *The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea*

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, pg. 228

<sup>19</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, *The Special Representative in Korea to the Secretary of State*, January 27, 1949, John J. Muccio, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v07p2/d214>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> *Korea's Place in the Sun*, pg. 227

could be counted on to follow American directions—as well as Australia, and Canada, who were also firm US allies. Despite the fact that this delegation was made up of allied states, the US military government was less than welcoming to their efforts at certifying fairness in Korean elections.

The army official who took charge of working with UNTCOK was Brigadier General John Weckerling. In one instance, Syrian delegate had quite understandably written a clause stating that UNTCOK would only support elections under free conditions. For this, he was harassed by Weckerling, who asked: “Have you been instructed to find them [electoral conditions in Korea] not free?”<sup>22</sup> Even the American-allied Australian delegate pointed out that the elections were being handled *almost entirely* by Syngman Rhee’s party, the right-wing Korean Democratic Party (KDP). In the end, because of outsized American sway in the United Nations, the Australian resolution that advised the UN against endorsing the elections failed.<sup>23</sup> Internal American memos cite high voter turnout for the election of Syngman Rhee as a sign of triumphant democratic success, but the outside skepticism of the KDP’s involvement throws doubt into this characterization, as do the following years of mass protest against Rhee’s tenure.

The third request outlined by protesters regarded the collapse of the rice management system; mismanagement by the military government is evident in a number of American documents,<sup>24</sup> but failure to live up to this request can more plausibly be attributed to the poor state of the Korean economy than the first two. Regardless, America’s handling of anti-collaborator sentiment and in setting up South Korea’s provisional government shows at best dismissiveness and at

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg. 227

<sup>23</sup> *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, pg. 228

<sup>24</sup> "Letter to General-Lieutenant Hodge on Northern Korea Providing Electricity to Southern Korea," January 01, 1947, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsAMO, Fond not listed, Opis 480c, Delo 25, listi 22-23. Obtained by Kim Dong-gil and translated by Aleksandr Gorokhov and James Person.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114896>

worst direct opposition to the desires outlined by Korean protesters.<sup>25</sup>

### Seeing the Protests Through Red-Tinted Glasses

With America's overvaluation of foreign causes and undervaluation of domestic causes in mind, it is important to explore exactly why American perception of the protests was so skewed. US domestic politics and rhetoric is one factor that could explain why foreign communist influence was so frequently used as a catch-all explanation. In his 1950 speech on US policy in Asia, Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared communist influence to be the "most subtle instrument of Soviet foreign policy ever devised" and that young and inexperienced governments—South Korea assumedly counted among them—are the most vulnerable to its creeping influence.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, communism's regional influence had recently taken an enormous step forward when Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China. It was upon this backdrop where America's impression of South Korean protesters was formed. With the specter of an ideological great power conflict on the American mind, it became easy to assume that financial and political support from the communist world overshadowed the domestic problems in South Korea.

The most famous wielder of this anti-communist hysteria is widely recognized to be Wisconsin Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R). In a now infamous 1950 address, Senator McCarthy implicated 205 supposed communist infiltrators and Soviet sympathizers within the State Department. He claimed that when democracies fall "it will not be from enemies from

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<sup>25</sup> "Central Intelligence Agency, ORE 15/48, 'The Current Situation in Korea'," March 18, 1948, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Record Group 263, Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, 1894 - 2002, NAID: 6924248, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6924248>. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/220065>

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson, *Crisis in Asia—An Examination of U.S. Policy*, January 12, 1950, remarks before National Press Club

without, but rather because of enemies from within.”<sup>27</sup> This particular strand of anti-communist discourse is applicable to American view of the protests: the *real* threat of communism comes from domestic citizens and officials who receive it from the Soviet Union. Moreover, given the public nature of this discourse, it is no coincidence that McCarthy and the anti-communist hysteria he exemplified are echoed within all these reports on the South Korean peasant uprisings. If the State Department itself could be infiltrated by the Soviets, then of course the Soviets had the capability to make a few thousand South Korean peasants their pawns.

Another factor that would complicate the views of American observers is self-preservation.<sup>28</sup> Following McCarthy’s speech and the radicalization of anti-communist sentiment, observers likely felt pressure to find evidence of communist influence abroad. A report that did not emphasize the role of the Soviet Union and communist ideology could have been seen as ‘sympathizing’ with communists and been a black stain on the observer’s reputation—if not cause for dismissal by their supervisors.

In addition to US politics, certain unique aspects of this protest movement could have led observers to faulty conclusions. In an analysis of 123 South Korean counties, Professor Shin Gi-Wook observed that there is a strong statistical linkage between the location of protests during Japanese colonialism and the size of protests during American occupation.<sup>29</sup> He argues that the more experience individuals gained protesting Japanese occupation, the more prepared they were to do the same under American military rule. After

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph McCarthy, “‘Enemies from Within’: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy’s Accusations of Disloyalty,” GMU Digital Archives (George Mason University, February 9, 1950), <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456>.

<sup>28</sup> Heale, M. J. *McCarthy’s Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965*. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1998, Chapter 1.

<sup>29</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, “The Historical Making of Collective Action: The Korean Peasant Uprisings of 1946,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 6 (1994): pp. 1596-1624, <https://doi.org/10.1086/230455>.

decades of Japanese occupation, there was plenty of protest experience to go around. Strikes would gather 8,000 railroad workers here or 30,000 students there, with crowds dwarfing the number of police and soldiers.<sup>30</sup> A reading of local Korean papers from this time by Professor Yumi Moon shows that many protests were also explicitly targeted at government buildings, officials, and the police;<sup>31</sup> these protests were not only large and organized, but clearly political in nature.

Those Koreans with the most protest experience were also heavily involved in People's Committees.<sup>32</sup> While the Soviet Union and North Korea displayed pessimism about the presence of doctrinal communism in Korean People's Committees, it is clear that these committees were anything but apolitical. Motivation to organize against Japanese collaborators and for democratic self-determination was sufficient to bring together large protests. Perhaps disorganized local unrest would have been perceived differently by Americans, but these protests were neither disorganized nor small. To an American viewing that kind of spectacle through the red-tinted glasses of McCarthyism, it could be nothing *but* a successful Soviet attempt at sowing unrest.

This concern about foreign communist infiltration is directly observable in American documents at the time. A 1950 CIA report on the capabilities of the North Korean regime claims that protests were both funded and directed by outside forces.<sup>33</sup> A 1947 report is full of handwringing over Soviet attempts to plan a revolt against American rule.<sup>34</sup> Again in

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<sup>30</sup> Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, pg. 355-360

<sup>31</sup> Yumi Moon, "Korean Uprisings in 1946: Was the US Occupation Responsible for the Korean War?," <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/korean-uprisings-1946-was-us-occupation-responsible-korean-war>.

<sup>32</sup> Shin, *Historical Makings of Collective Action*

<sup>33</sup> "Current Capabilities of the Northern Korean Regime," June 19, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Record Group 263: Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, 1894 - 2002. NAID 6924376. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6924376>  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/220050>

<sup>34</sup> *The Situation in Korea Memo*

1948, the South Korean left is characterized as having “lost its freedom of action” since allying with the Soviets.<sup>35</sup> Yet another 1947 briefing on Soviet objectives in Korea states that the threat of a Soviet-created “Communist underground in the South” was at an all-time high.<sup>36</sup>

### American Orientalism and Korean Protests

In the context of South Korean peasant protests, American anti-communist hysteria also collided with the oft-overlooked Orientalism that American observers brought to the peninsula. Orientalism is a manner of rhetoric that sets the West apart from the rest of the world; this rhetoric is largely informed by colonial narratives about non-European peoples, and thus is closely tied to socially constructed definitions of race and civilization.<sup>37</sup> During his time as the military governor of South Korea, the writings of observers like General Hodge were filled with racialized caricatures of the Koreans he ruled over.

One of the most common tropes was of ‘political immaturity’ that he used in reference to the People’s Committees and peasant protest of South Korea.<sup>38</sup> Among American analysts, the Orientalist tendency to view Koreans as politically incompetent ignores the political agency Koreans have historically exercised; for example, while Kim Il Sung urged Stalin to allow him to start the war, the documents reviewed in this study unanimously assume that Kim was acting on behalf of Stalin’s orders.<sup>39</sup> Ignoring the agency of the

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<sup>35</sup> *The Current Situation in Korea Memo*

<sup>36</sup> "Central Intelligence Agency, ORE-62, 'Implementation of Soviet Objectives in Korea'," December 18, 1947, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, National Intelligence Council (NIC) Collection, Document Number 0000256631, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0000256631>, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/220066>

<sup>37</sup> Charles Kraus, “American Orientalism in Korea,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 22, no. 2 (2015): pp. 147-165, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-02202004>.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Who’s Barbarism? Who’s Treachery? Race and Civilization in the Unknown United States-Korea War of 1871*.

<sup>39</sup> Kraus, American Orientalism in Korea

Kim government and placing all agency in the Soviet Union not only fell into an Orientalist line of thinking, but also harmed the potential for diplomacy and de-escalation of the war.

In general, American observers consistently deemphasized the agency of South Korean actors due to Orientalist presuppositions, while consistently overemphasizing Soviet influence because of anti-communist hysteria. At the intersection of both phenomena lies the peasant protests. As a result of past protest experience, the peasants of South Korea were able to put together large-scale, and surprisingly organized protests. For an American observer who thought Koreans were not ready to govern themselves, the level of political sophistication needed for mass protest would instead be attributed to foreign influence. Moreover, if the root causes were foreign, American policy did not feel compelled to address *known* causes of unrest in the police force and self-determination. Finally, the involvement of the People's Committees (branded as communist from the very start), and their broadly egalitarian demands made it even easier to situate peasant protests within a broader communist scheme.

Some may believe that the dissolution of the USMGK and the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948 under Syngman Rhee was a move away from the Orientalist thinking that opposed Korean self-determination. Unfortunately, this is far from the case. As discussed in the previous section, while the US and the UN both sponsored elections, the fairness of those elections is highly suspect. The decision by the US administrators to give Syngman Rhee tremendous institutional advantages over the rest of the field reflects two strands of Orientalist thinking. First, the US preference for Rhee shows favoritism toward a US-educated and wealthy candidate.<sup>40</sup> As a growing body of scholarship argues, US observers held a higher opinion of non-western people and societies that had attempted to westernize. In a related example, Japan was viewed as above the rest of the non-western world for its

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<sup>40</sup> Kim, *The U.S. Arrives*, pg. 277-278; Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Volume I*, pg. 138-140; Kwon, *Irish of the Orient*



successful industrialization. Not only that, but prior to WWII, imperial powers in the West were impressed by Japan's ability to colonize nations in the Asia-Pacific region. As a result of Japan's ability to adopt these two traits that were previously thought to be exclusively western, Japanese citizens were viewed as more mature, more orderly, and more politically mature than the Koreans that they ruled over. Syngman Rhee's education and development in the US made Americans view him similarly. When given the choice between a Korean leader that they did not know and one that had been civilized by a Western education, the choice was clear.

Second, the decision to skew elections in favor of Rhee also coincides with the strand of thinking that non-western societies are naturally inclined to 'oriental despotism'.<sup>41</sup> In one memo, Secretary of State George Marshall expressed concern that perfectly free and fair elections would result in disaster. In his view, Koreans held a natural "gravitation toward highly centralized government."<sup>42</sup> As William Langdon, the Political Advisor in Korea elaborated in a second memo, the highly centralized government in question was a communist government in the style of the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> In earlier elections that the US allowed at a local level, Langdon recommended banning multiple parties from running on the same ballot, otherwise he feared that leftist parties would have too great a chance of winning.<sup>44</sup> On the same topic in 1946, General Douglass MacArthur wrote a memo urging the Joint Chiefs of Staff to delay elections for as long as possible because the US was "not dealing with wealthy U.S.-educated Koreans" but instead "early, poorly trained, and poorly trained" ones.<sup>45</sup> Because of this, MacArthur agreed that "people of this type

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<sup>41</sup> Whelan, Frederick G. "ORIENTAL DESPOTISM: ANQUETIL-DUPERRON'S RESPONSE TO MONTESQUIEU." *History of Political Thought* 22, no. 4 (2001): 619–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26219778>.

<sup>42</sup> FRUS, Document 519, Secretary of State George Marshall to the Political Adviser in Korea

<sup>43</sup> FRUS, Document 518, Political Adviser in Korea Langdon to the Secretary of State

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> FRUS, Document 476, Letter by MacArthur to Chiefs of Staff

(Koreans)” would become communist if left to their own devices. Assumedly, by delaying elections and allowing the US to administer the peninsula for a time, Koreans would gain some maturity through some kind of political osmosis. Throughout these memos, there is unanimous agreement that Korean political culture holds certain deficiencies—deficiencies that are not a concern in the West. While US administrators believed the elections that Rhee were a sufficient response to the protests they faced, the structure and outcome of those protests reflect Orientalist strands of thinking that ultimately caused continued protests under the Rhee government’s reign.

### **Violent Repression of Protests**

This final section considers the relationship between American misperceptions and violent repression of the protests. Protesters were commonly met with violence by South Korean security forces, a regular occurrence during the Cold War, especially in the name of anti-communism. By the autumn of 1946, the United States had already begun to contemplate a global strategy of Containment. George Kennan’s famous *Long Telegram* from Moscow arrived in Washington earlier that year, and by the beginning of the Korean War, American policy priorities in East Asia had solidified into a robust version of Containment and the Domino Theory. Kennan’s memo argues that in foreign countries, communists will “work toward destruction of all forms of personal independence, economic, political, or moral.”<sup>46</sup> Kennan’s rhetoric departs from the realm of realpolitik; it is not merely a document describing *how* to deal with the Soviets, it also makes a strong moralistic evaluation of communism and the Soviet Union themselves. The moralizing

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<sup>46</sup> “George Kennan's 'Long Telegram',” February 22, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives and Records Administration, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Volume VI, Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 696-709.  
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>

rhetoric of McCarthyism and Kennan's memo justify a zero-tolerance policy with regard to communist infiltration. Even in self-proclaimed democratic pluralistic societies, out and about communists pose a threat to the freedom of all others.

Over the next few years, the effects of that memo can be seen in National Security Council documents. One 1949 memo argues that abandoning Korea to "Communist domination...would do violence to the spirit of every international commitment undertaken by the U.S....and which might damage irreparably American prestige and influence throughout the Far East."<sup>47</sup> Only a year later in 1950, the National Security Council discussed the American response to North Korea's invasion of the South, noting a need to counter the spread of Communist influence in East Asia.<sup>48</sup> These examples show the thought process of American policymakers in entering the Korean War. Whether or not Korea was important to American interests was irrelevant. Korea needed to remain capitalist because if *any* nation fell to 'communist domination' it would have been a tremendous blow to the credibility of both America and Capitalism.

A set of CIA memos display the same sense of urgency to combat the potential of a communist South Korea. Intelligence Memo No. 302 from July of 1950 notes that the US policy of containing communist expansion was already a well-established commitment.<sup>49</sup> That same month, Memo No. 304 cautioned against the withdrawal of United Nations forces

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<sup>47</sup> "National Security Council Report, NSC 8/1, 'The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea,'" March 16, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, President's Secretary's Files, The Korean War and Its Origins, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/position-united-states-respect-korea-nationalsecurity-council-report-81>.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116189>

<sup>48</sup> "National Security Council Report, NSC 81/1, "United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea," September 09, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Truman Presidential Museum and Library <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116194>

<sup>49</sup> Intelligence Memo No. 302, Central Intelligence Agency

from Korea, as doing so would ‘undermine’ the strength of the UN as a tool against “future Soviet-Communist aggression.”<sup>50</sup>

These Security Council and CIA documents convey three specific aspects of US anti-communism in Korea that are important when analyzing US responses to the peasant uprisings. First, Korea was on a stage. There was concern that the whole world was watching the clash of ideologies occurring on the peninsula, and that South Korea falling would be a blow for the whole US grand strategy. Second, the US viewed its partnerships with other nations as indispensable. Bilateral alliances were crucial, and a zero-tolerance policy for communism in allied countries was necessary no matter the cost. Finally, fighting communism was not merely motivated by cynical realpolitik. There was also a moral imperative motivating American policymakers to stop communism’s advances against “all forms of personal independence.”

The best example of the relation between America’s grand strategy of containment and the policy regarding South Korean protests was continuing support for Syngman Rhee. Rhee became South Korea’s first president after the previously discussed US and UN-backed elections of 1948. Even before his election, he regularly antagonized the United States; when discussing the transfer of power from himself to Rhee, General Hodge complained that “Rhee cannot get through his thick skull that in negotiating with me, he is negotiating with the U.S. Government.”<sup>51</sup> Hodge’s distaste for Syngman Rhee was not unique among American leadership, who were frustrated by him for decades, with Hodge going so far as to look for replacements for Rhee. Despite the distaste for Rhee among American policymakers, he remained in power for over a decade as a necessary headache. When relinquishing power in the election of 1948, the American Military Government not only turned a blind eye to the immense electoral corruption that Rhee’s party engaged in, but they brute-forced an endorsement of South Korea’s electoral conditions through the UN. Rhee stayed in power until 1960, well after the Korean

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<sup>50</sup> Intelligence Memo No. 304, Central Intelligence Agency

<sup>51</sup> *Korea’s Place in the Sun*, pg. 230

War. His saving grace in American eyes was that he was a staunch anti-communist. Whether or not Americans like Rhee, even a minor increase in Soviet influence in Korea was not worth replacing him with a better candidate.

American policymakers looked the other way not just on Rhee's hard-headedness in political affairs, but also in the brutal methods with which he used to fight protests. In Rhee's correspondence with Robert Oliver, one of his American colleagues, he asks his friend to join him as a trusted adviser to fight the communist threat.<sup>52</sup> Using similar language to that of McCarthy, Rhee shows alarm that dissent in South Korea is a sign that the Soviets are winning the Cold War in East Asia. The dissent that would have been fresh in Rhee's mind at the time was the Jeju Uprising, which occurred near the time of Rhee's election in 1948. In response to large-scale protests organized by the People's Committees of Jeju, Rhee declared martial law. Over the next 13 months, the death toll at the hands of US-backed security forces is estimated to be as high as 30,000 people—10 percent of the island's population.<sup>53</sup>

The US leadership in Korea had knowledge of the massacres Rhee supported, but failed to stop them. In January of 1949, Special Representative Muccio wrote back to Washington, noting that through photographs, he was aware that there were "unusual sadistic propensities on the part of both Government and guerrilla forces."<sup>54</sup> One can only assume this was an understatement. Furthermore, he notes that 'atrocities' had been reported, including "mass massacre of village populations, including women and children, accompanied by widespread looting and arson. In some cases,

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<sup>52</sup> "Letter, Syngman Rhee to Dr. Robert T. Oliver [Soviet Translation]," September 30, 1949, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Archive. Translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119385>

<sup>53</sup> Ha-Young Choi, "Korea's Jeju Massacre: Bringing America's Role to Light," NK News, April 7, 2015, <https://www-nknews-org./2015/04/koreas-jeju-massacre-bringing-americas-role-to-light/>.

<sup>54</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, *The Political Adviser in Korea to the Secretary of State*, April 9, 1949, John Muccio, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v08/d567>

the Army has been guilty of revenge operations against guerrillas which have brought down vengeance on unarmed villages.”<sup>55</sup>

Washington was aware of indiscriminate violence toward civilians by Rhee’s police forces and held tremendous power over Rhee’s administration, yet Rhee remained in power for years. While the Jeju uprisings were organized by the People’s Committees of Jeju, there was little reason to link them to the existential threat of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, influenced by McCarthyism and Orientalism, the Jeju Uprisings were just another instance of the creeping Red Menace, and due to the moralistic nature of anti-communism, Syngman Rhee’s violent methods could be stomached—even welcomed—if they furthered Containment.

## Conclusion

The South Korean peasant uprisings of the forties cannot be attributed to a single cause. A number of causes both foreign and domestic played a role in the large-scale, organized resistance that Americans met. However, it is clear from Soviet and North Korean documents that attempts at foreign influence saw questionable success. Despite this, Americans acted on Orientalist assumptions, obfuscating the domestic causes in favor of the perceived global threat: The Soviet Union. Unfortunately for the peasants of Korea, these obscuring factors caused American leadership to ignore their demands regarding Japanese collaborators and self-governance, instead allowing Syngman Rhee’s violence to run its course in the name of anti-communism.

Commenting on American perceptions of North Korea in 1999, the historian Bruce Cumings used the metaphor of a “thrice-cursed...Rorschach inkblot eliciting anticommunist, Orientalist, and rogue-state imagery”<sup>56</sup> to explain America’s misperceptions. Subtracting the rogue-state section, this analogy works well with regards to America’s perception of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pg. 127.

peasant uprisings of the 40s. When America saw peasant protests in South Korea, instead of seeing reality, they looked for what they were most afraid of on a global scale. It is not hard to imagine that if a similar set of protests occurred on a different American-Soviet fault line—like Eastern Europe—American observers would still have been in hysterics regarding Soviet influence. To combat this influence, America may well have supported brutal political violence, as they did in Korea.

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## **“Culprits of Disorder”: The FBI, COINTELPRO, and the Race Riots of 1964**

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**T**he history of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is a well-documented but contentious story. The iconic American institution, while officially tasked with maintaining justice, law, and order, has simultaneously struggled to free itself from a background of scandal and prejudice. From its discriminatory pursuit of Black boxer Jack Johnson in the 1910s to its controversial infiltration of Latin American governments during the Cold War, the FBI has committed more than its fair share of unjust, unconstitutional, and improper acts. On the surface, such instances appear simply as cases of institutional failure and goal displacement; however, in analyzing such cases, one finds a deeper complexity of influences clouded in uncertainty and ambiguity. Perhaps the most notable of such cases is the Bureau’s counterintelligence program from 1956-1971 entitled “COINTELPRO,” a large bureaucratic effort encompassing a variety of unlawful surveillance, disruption, and disinformation activities against numerous domestic political groups. The subjects of such activities varied from individual political figures to large social movements to ordinary citizens, all of

whom suffered frequent violations of their civil and political rights. Such instances of corruption and abuse rightfully demand explanation and inquiries into motive. Past literature has noted the importance of race as a strong motivating factor to the Bureau’s counterintelligence operations, as the context of Jim Crow segregation, Director J. Edgar Hoover’s personal prejudices, and the broader racial tensions of the 1960s manifested in a variety of harmful FBI actions against the civil rights movement.<sup>1</sup> This consideration of race is crucial to understanding the broader narrative of COINTELPRO and FBI domestic intelligence, as it provides insight into institutionalized racial biases, racially motivated operations, and events of discriminatory policing.

This paper has two primary goals. First, building from this discussion of race, I intend to dive deeper into the intricacies of racially motivated counterintelligence actions by analyzing the Bureau’s institutional justifications of anti-civil rights efforts, highlighting important distinctions among the variety of racial groups and minority individuals subject to discriminatory surveillance, and considering contradictory cases in which the Bureau promoted civil rights justice. Second, I intend to demonstrate the relevance of the broader political context to FBI counterintelligence actions by considering the influence of the contemporary political establishment’s goals on federal expansions of bureaucratic power, the proliferation of the Bureau’s involvement in domestic intelligence overtime, and the mobilization of the FBI by key political actors. Finally, considering the interrelated racial and political contexts of the 1960s, I argue that a convergence of racial motivations and broader political incentives served as the primary impetus for the mobilization of the counterintelligence program, and that such incentives intensified when met with threats to the political order (i.e., legitimate or overstated perceptions of civil disorder, subversion, or violence). To illustrate this argument, I conclude by analyzing the executive handling of the race riots

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of a well-respected work emphasizing this racial framework, see Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

of 1964, an important case study encompassing both racial and political intelligence incentives and their proliferation in the face of disorder.

When the story broke to the public in 1971 that the FBI had been actively engaged in spy operations against various domestic political groups during the 1960s, the media quickly jumped to push the story to the forefront of national political discussions.<sup>2</sup> Amidst a plethora of ongoing racial and political tensions, the newly released evidence of suspect government activities complicated the national political environment, resulting in congressional investigations, public shock, criticism, and questions of motive still pertinent to historical analysis.<sup>3</sup> According to documents declassified following the discontinuation of COINTELPRO, the stated goal of the campaign against the civil rights movement specifically was to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities” of individuals and groups associated with the cause.<sup>4</sup> The subjects of surveillance ranged from openly aggressive groups to peaceful social movements to innocent Black neighborhoods; however, amidst such diversity, the Bureau consistently claimed that its central motivation was to counter any potential for “civil disorder” or violence. Civil disorder itself is a relatively broad and ambiguous term, lacking a certain degree of specificity necessary to justify violations of

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<sup>2</sup> Ongoing public discussions continued for years following the initial leak of COINTELPRO by the Citizens’ Commission to Investigate the FBI, which in 1971 infiltrated the Bureau’s field office in Media, PA to publicize confidential documents. Two contemporary newspaper articles detailed the controversy as “harassment” and a corrupt government “ploy:” John M. Crewdson, “Levi Reveals More Harassment by the F.B.I.,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1975; Josh M. Goshko, “FBI ‘Hoodwink’ Ploy Detailed,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> The following report from the 1975 Senate “Church Committee” covers the abuses of FBI domestic intelligence in detail: U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Affairs with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book II: Final Report*, 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1975, S. Rep. 94-755.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *File on COINTELPRO Black Extremists Section 1:100-448006*, by C.D. Brennan, FBI Counterintelligence Program, Albany, NY, August 25, 1967, 3.



political rights and acts of unconstitutional surveillance. For example, civil disorder could simultaneously refer to nonviolent acts, such as civil noncompliance or protest, and to legitimate acts of violence such as destructive rioting or domestic terrorism. With undeclared racial and political motives, the Bureau capitalized on such ambiguity to improperly justify countless illegal and improper acts. Comparative analysis of the Bureau’s counterintelligence methods against the civil rights movement, including surveillance of peaceful social movements and innocent citizens, reveals that, despite the Bureau’s stated perceptions of threat and disorder, racial motivations consistently proved the most pervasive motive for action.

In 1967, the FBI opened a large sub-operation of COINTELPRO aimed at gathering information on potentially violent groups detailed as “Black Extremists,” which the Bureau perceived as threats to national security.<sup>5</sup> The file on Black Extremists and Black Nationalists explicitly cites its rationale for existence as “to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder,” and states that various members of “black nationalist organizations” had backgrounds of “immorality, subversive activity, and criminal records.” The Bureau adopted similar language in its justifications of counterintelligence programs against the Black Panther Party, Stokely Carmichael, Muslim Mosque Inc., the Nation of Islam, and Malcolm X.<sup>6</sup> While the Bureau’s stated motives appear to align with its central responsibility to protect the American public, the “vague standards” of the investigations resulted in an “excessive collection” of private information and the use of illegal or improper intel tactics.<sup>7</sup> The Bureau reportedly engaged in “anonymous attempts to break up marriages, disrupt meetings, ostracize persons from their professions, and

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<sup>5</sup> FBI, *COINTELPRO Black Extremists*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> FBI, *File on COINTELPRO Black Panther Party, NC – HQ 105-165706-8 Section 1*, June 1969, 103; FBI, *File on COINTELPRO Malcolm Little (Malcolm X)*, June 1964, 6; FBI, *File on COINTELPRO Stokely Carmichael – HQ 100-446080 Section 1*, August 1964, 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 5.

provoke target groups into rivalries that might result in deaths,” consistently violating citizens’ rights to lawful assembly, political expression, and individual privacy guaranteed by the First and Fourth Amendments.<sup>8</sup>

Operating under vague purposes, the Black Extremist initiative defined a broad spectrum of surveillance subjects as “Black Nationalist Hate Groups,” including peaceful organizations such as college Black Student Unions, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In its actions against such entities, the Bureau unconstitutionally sought to “deter citizens from joining groups, ‘neutralize’ those who were already members, and prevent or inhibit the expression of ideas.”<sup>9</sup> Throughout the duration of COINTELPRO, the Bureau’s prejudiced director, J. Edgar Hoover, consistently authorized acts of discrimination proliferating the unjust surveillance and discreditation efforts against peaceful civil rights organizers. The most notable of such orders was his authorization of the “racial matters program.” Beginning in the late 1950s as a broad domestic intelligence effort related to race relations, by the early 1960s the program included the surveillance of civil rights demonstrators and groups specifically involved in the “racial field.”<sup>10</sup> The initiative ultimately culminated in a smear campaign and qualified “war” against the iconic civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom Hoover and the Bureau believed was a demagogue, communist sympathizer, and “the most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country.”<sup>11</sup> From 1963 until King’s assassination in 1968, the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 214-15.

<sup>10</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation Manual Section 122, 1960, 5-6, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum from William C. Sullivan to Alan Belmont, December 24, 1963, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 11; A contemporary newspaper source covered the King incident

FBI sought to discredit and diminish Dr. King’s personal reputation and political influence, and to “gather information...in a counterintelligence move to discredit him.”<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the duration of its operations against the civil rights movement, the Bureau gathered intelligence through a variety of “illegal or improper means,” such as mail opening, wiretapping, warrantless break-ins, and informant programs.<sup>13</sup> A notable case of such methods is the Bureau’s discriminatory operation known as the Ghetto Informant Program, which included the infiltration of various lower-income communities and disproportionately Black neighborhoods from 1967-73, aiming to gather intel on unrest and “civil disorder” pertaining to race riots.<sup>14</sup> The program sought to establish “listening posts” in “ghetto areas” by employing local informants to collection information on the neighborhood’s “racial activities” or “racial situation.”<sup>15</sup> The Bureau reportedly implemented informants in ordinary public spaces, such as candy stores and barber shops, targeted the “owners, operators, and clientele” of “Afro-American type bookstores,” and sought intel on “purveyors of extremist literature.”<sup>16</sup> Like the Black Extremist and racial matters programs, the stated purpose of the initiative was to “keep abreast of any potential

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two years prior to the Citizens’ Commission break-in: Martin Waldron, “F.B.I. Agent Testifies at Clay Hearing That Bureau Tapped Dr. King’s Telephone for Several Years,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1969.

<sup>12</sup> Sullivan to Belmont, December 24, 1963.

<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth description of the Bureau’s “illegal and improper” surveillance means, see U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> FBI, *File 62-116395, Serial Scope: 522 – Bulkey*, by FBI Domestic Intelligence Division, August 17 – September 9, 1971, 166-67.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum from G. C. Moore to E. S. Miller, September 8, 1972; Memorandum from G. C. Moore to C. D. Brennan, October 27, 1970, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 75-76.

<sup>16</sup> Philadelphia Field Office Memorandum, Re: Racial Informant, August 12, 1968, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 76.

for violence;”<sup>17</sup> however, the Bureau’s efforts unconstitutionally subjected innocent Black communities to unjust surveillance based solely on their racial and socioeconomic composition. Following the declassification of COINTELPRO, contemporary “Bureau witnesses admit[ted] that many of the targets were nonviolent,” and that “nonviolent organizations and individuals” were selected for surveillance “because the Bureau believed they represented a ‘potential’ for violence” as opposed to a legitimate threat of violence.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the entirety of COINTELPRO, the FBI operated with disproportionately low racial diversity, having only recently accepted its first two black agents, Aubrey Lewis and James Barrow, in 1962.<sup>19</sup> This lack of diversity further complicates the validity of the Bureau’s stated justifications for actions against racial groups, as it signifies an inadequate presence of personnel and precautions to check institutional biases. Despite such uniformity, various discriminatory practices, and failures to uphold Black civil liberties, the Bureau did sometimes support civil rights justice during COINTELPRO, though such efforts were sporadic and less consistent than the contrary. In 1963, after the assassination of NAACP representative Medgar Evers, the FBI engaged in an investigation of Evers’ murder under the jurisdiction of civil rights law.<sup>20</sup> A year later in 1964, the organization opened a counterintelligence program against the Ku Klux Klan and white terror groups to “expose, disrupt, and otherwise neutralize the activities of the various Klans and hate

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<sup>17</sup> “Ghetto Informant Program, Extremist Matters,” Memorandum from Special Agent in Charge, Kansas City to FBI Acting Director, in FBI, *File on Ghetto Informant Program*, October 5, 1972, 3.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 213

<sup>19</sup> FBI, “Early African-American Agents,” FBI Database, February 15, 2011, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/early-african-american-agents>; Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History*, 220.

organizations.”<sup>21</sup> After the Bureau discontinued the program in 1971, it instituted an “individual case caption” program, in which ongoing counterintelligence recommendations on white terror were to be accepted on an “individual basis.”<sup>22</sup> From 1964-65, the Bureau ran a counterintelligence sub-operation entitled MIBURN, or “Mississippi Burning,” which employed federal investigators to bring justice to the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> Around the same time, while running background checks and gathering intel on the Freedom Riders in the early 1960s, FBI agents aided in the federal push to integrate interstate highways and rails by surveying discriminatory practices and actively removing them.<sup>24</sup> Such attempts to promote racial justice and equality complicate previous narratives of race and the FBI; however, they do not absolve the Bureau’s history of injustice. Rather, such instances show that the organization struggled with an imbalance of goals, riddled with contradictory actions and the failure to maintain consistency in its values.

The historical context of the 1960s-70s featured constant overlap of race and politics, and the broader political context surrounding COINTELPRO, from domestic political attitudes to contemporary political agendas, likewise proved to strongly influence the authorization of FBI action. The relationship between politics and the FBI has existed since its founding as a federal institution. In 1908, the Theodore Roosevelt administration established the Bureau with the intention of creating a centralized federal investigative law enforcement body to combat the growth of crime and corruption.<sup>25</sup> Shortly after its founding, the Bureau began its mission to promote

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the language of the file bears striking similarity to that of the Black Extremist program, see FBI, *File on COINTELPRO White Hate Groups Section 1: 157-9*, Atlanta, GA, September 2, 1964, 4.

<sup>22</sup> FBI, *File on COINTELPRO White Hate Groups Section 2: 157-9*, by W.C. Sullivan and C.D. Brennan, Albany, NY, April 28, 1971, 5.

<sup>23</sup> FBI, *File on MIBURN*, Atlanta, GA, 1964-65, 5-8.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth O’Reilly, “The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--from the Freedom Rides to Albany,” *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 2 (1988): 214-17, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2209399>.

<sup>25</sup> Jeffreys-Jones, *The FBI: A History*, 39.

order and stability by fighting mafia-type organized crime and gangsters such as Al Capone, John Dillinger, and “Baby Face” Nelson.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, the Bureau’s operations intersected with several major developments in the political order, resulting in formative expansions of the domestic intelligence program. Three major historical cases illustrating the proliferation of the Bureau’s interest in domestic intelligence overtime are as follows: the expansion of the federal bureaucracy under Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, the anti-communist investigation efforts of Senator Joseph McCarthy during the Second Red Scare, and Lydon B. Johnson’s handling of the race riots of 1964. The race riots case best highlights the intricacies of the counterintelligence program as it reveals the direct relevance of political and racial motivations to Johnson’s mobilization of the Bureau and illustrates how perceived threats of disorder intensify such motivations.

The first major development in the growth of the Bureau’s domestic intelligence program occurred under Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” a series of government reforms and programs from 1933-39 designed to recover the nation from the Great Depression. Alongside the establishment of the Social Security Board and a plethora of federal work programs, Roosevelt’s reform efforts resulted in significant growth in the size and responsibilities of the FBI, taking the Bureau from a small department of a few hundred agents to a thriving bureaucratic organization.<sup>27</sup> In addition to expanded domestic intelligence responsibilities aimed at crime mitigation, the reformed FBI included new discriminatory surveillance programs directed at Black Americans; however, in a contradictory fashion, the Department of Justice (DOJ)

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<sup>26</sup> FBI, “The FBI and the American Gangster, 1924-1938,” FBI Database, May 3, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/history/brief-history/the-fbi-and-the-american-gangster>.

<sup>27</sup> For a sweeping discussion of the relationship between FDR’s domestic intelligence policy and civil rights, see Kenneth O’Reilly, “The Roosevelt Administration and Black America: Federal Surveillance Policy and Civil Rights during the New Deal and World War II Years,” *Phylon* (1960-) 48, no. 1 (1987): 12, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274998>.

authorized the creation of a new body, the Civil Rights Unit (CRU), tasked with investigating civil rights violations.<sup>28</sup> This contradiction, like the Bureau’s aforementioned approach to the 1960s civil rights movement, reveals elements of goal displacement in the American justice system: the DOJ sought to eliminate civil rights violations through the CRU while simultaneously violating Black Americans’ civil liberties with unprovoked and unconstitutional FBI surveillance. Thus, the Bureau’s civil rights activities in the 1930s laid the contextual foundation for future civil rights operations, as the New Deal’s expansion of bureaucratic power granted the DOJ the opportunity to either promote or hinder civil rights moving forward.<sup>29</sup> As previously mentioned, such contradictions and tensions culminated roughly thirty years later during COINTELPRO: the Bureau aided Black America in its struggle for equality by fighting the Klan and promoting civil rights through investigations such as MIBURN, yet simultaneously hurt Black America with its damaging counterintelligence programs against the civil rights movement.<sup>30</sup>

The second political case resulting in the proliferation of FBI domestic intelligence occurred during the Cold War, as the anti-communist efforts of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his mutual relationship with Director Hoover laid the foundation for future counterintelligence programs. A cultural distaste for communism had existed in the United States since the early twentieth century, arising out of perceived threats to American liberalism and individual liberties. However, the domestic response intensified in the early 1950s as communism consolidated in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (USSR)

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 13-17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>30</sup> For examples of pro-civil rights operations, see FBI, *File on MIBURN*, Atlanta, GA, 1964-65, or FBI, *File on COINTELPRO White Hate Groups Section 1: 157-9*, Atlanta, GA, September 2, 1964. Anti-civil rights operations are thoroughly detailed in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 71-72.

engaged in the detonation of nuclear weapons.<sup>31</sup> During this uncertain and troubling Cold War context, McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) rose to prominence, launching a fear campaign of alleged communist infiltration known as “McCarthyism,” a piece of the larger Second Red Scare. McCarthy and the HUAC, strongly fueled by accusations of communist subversion by Director Hoover, reportedly worked alongside the FBI to handle “subversive political groups.”<sup>32</sup> The Bureau had been actively operating anti-communist efforts since the 1930s under FDR’s expansion of federal law enforcement duties.<sup>33</sup> However, such efforts increased during the McCarthy years as Hoover’s anti-communist actions expanded to include the illegal surveillance of various alleged communist sympathizers, including the American Communist Party, left-wing activists, labor organizations, and civil rights groups. During the “red scare” phenomenon, McCarthy and the Bureau’s alliance intensified the U.S. government’s domestic response to communism as the Bureau’s activities helped heighten the public hysteria against communist infiltration and McCarthy’s outspoken anti-communist push helped to justify and expand illegal FBI surveillance.

The integration of anti-communist politics and FBI action under the McCarthy-Hoover coalition set a crucial precedent for the expansion of anti-communist measures during COINTELPRO. In the 1960s-70s, Hoover authorized counterintelligence actions against a variety of domestic political groups, including the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party, and the New Left, and international programs against Cuban and Russian communism. Keeping with the rash tradition of McCarthy’s HUAC, Director Hoover’s political paranoia resulted in a complex bureaucratic

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<sup>31</sup> The influence of American anti-communism on FBI intelligence is thoroughly detailed in Cathleen Thom and Patrick Jung, “The Responsibilities Program of the FBI, 1951-1955,” *The Historian* 59, no. 2 (1997): 347, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24449973>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-48.

<sup>33</sup> O’Reilly, “Roosevelt and Black America,” 347; Thom and Jung, “The FBI 1951-1955,” 13.



undertaking to disinform, discredit, and neutralize groups and individuals accused of socialist or communist leanings. In an attempt to hinder collaboration between the Socialist Workers Party and the American Communist Party, the Bureau launched a disinformation campaign to disrupt the activities of both groups by attempting to set them against one another.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in an operation entitled “Hoodwink,” the FBI ran a disinformation campaign against the Sicilian mafia, “La Cosa Nostra,” and worked to set it against the American Communist Party.<sup>35</sup> The Bureau further established international espionage programs against Cuba and the USSR, seeking to diminish the growth of the communist movement and to neutralize its sympathizers.<sup>36</sup> Overall, the sociopolitical context of anti-communism in the United States manifested in a full-fledged ideological war, establishing a tradition of anti-communist political motives integral to the Bureau’s operations for roughly two decades following the end of the Second Red Scare.

The third political case concerning the proliferation of FBI counterintelligence is President Lyndon B. Johnson’s handling of the race riots of 1964, a critical case study featuring the propagation of pervasive racial and political motives in the face of threats to the national political order. Less than three weeks after Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an off-duty police officer, Lt. Thomas Gilligan, shot and killed black fifteen-year-old James Powell, a ninth grader enrolled in summer school at Robert F. Wagner Junior High School in the Bronx.<sup>37</sup> Despite witness testimonies to the contrary, Gilligan maintained that Powell had threatened and pursued him with a knife in hand. In front of the victim’s friends and other

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<sup>34</sup> FBI, *File on COINTELPRO Socialist Workers Party 100-436291, Section 1, Serials 1-86*, by SAC, New York, SWP Disruption Program, January 18, 1963, 16-21.

<sup>35</sup> FBI, *File on COINTELPRO Hoodwink 100-446533*, by SAC, New York, Internal Security, May 29, 1968, 3.

<sup>36</sup> FBI, *COINTELPRO Cuba*, August 1970, 3-61; FBI, *COINTELPRO Espionage 1/3: USSR*, 1964-65, 1-8.

<sup>37</sup> “Funeral Held for Slain Boy in New York,” *The Terre Haute Tribune*, July 20, 1964.

witnesses, Gilligan fired four shots: one as an alleged warning and three directly into the body of James Powell, killing him immediately. In September 1964, Gilligan was acquitted by a grand jury.<sup>38</sup> Discontent with the state of racial justice in the United States, rioters first rose up in Harlem, New York City on July 16, 1964, and in the subsequent week riots spread to upstate New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and Pennsylvania.<sup>39</sup> The unrest not only reflected the limited success of the recent Civil Rights Act in healing the nation's racial divide but likewise posed a direct threat to the viability of the Johnson administration in the upcoming 1964 election. In an act of political preservation, Johnson called on Director Hoover and the Bureau to mitigate the riots, gather intel on the perpetrators of the unrest, and reestablish “law and order,” requiring further expansion of the Bureau's domestic intelligence program.<sup>40</sup>

The deeper political context for Johnson's mobilization of the Bureau is two-fold. First, the unjust killing of James Powell and the subsequent riots threatened Johnson's “Great Society” policy, as the ongoing instability signified a failure to uphold the administration's promises to ensure racial justice and social equality. Second, the unrest associated with the riots bolstered the “law and order” narrative of Barry Goldwater and the Republican right, who opposed Johnson in the upcoming 1964 election. Johnson's political opposition had adopted a “tough-on-crime” approach, while ongoing instability contributed to the public perception that the Johnson administration was “weak” and incapable of maintaining order.<sup>41</sup> Similar to the McCarthy case, during which the goals of a national political actor overlapped with Hoover's desire to expand bureaucratic power, President Johnson and Director Hoover joined forces

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<sup>38</sup> “Police Board Absolves Gilligan In Slaying of Negro Teen-Ager; No Violation of Rules Found-Shooting Led to Riots in Harlem and Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1964.

<sup>39</sup> We owe much of our discussion on the politics of the riots to O'Reilly's comprehensive account, see Kenneth O'Reilly, “The FBI and the Politics of the Riots, 1964-1968,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1889656>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

in a mutual coalition against the rioters: Johnson mobilized the Bureau to ensure political favor and Hoover took advantage of the president's political troubles to expand his domestic intelligence program. Johnson's political goals, election incentives, and desire for order certainly perpetuated domestic intelligence operations; however, pervasive racial motivations likewise influenced the Bureau's handling of the riots. Hoover's report found that communist infiltration had allegedly occurred after the initial riots had begun, which he argued was indicative of a communist plot to encourage violence and heighten disorder.<sup>42</sup> However, Hoover's political justifications simply compounded upon existing racial motivations, as the investigations concluded that increasingly violent "Negro organizations" were the "culprits of the civil disorder," maintaining that peaceful political groups such as the NAACP and CORE, as well as Black Muslims, Communists, and Maoists were the instigators of the unrest.<sup>43</sup>

While racial and political motivations consistently influenced the Bureau's intelligence actions during COINTELPRO, the civil disorder and instability resulting from the riots presented the Bureau with a newfound opportunity to expand racially and politically motivated operations under the disguise of valid efforts to counter violence and chaos. President Johnson's political desire to maintain order legitimized the Bureau's declared counterintelligence rationale and resulted in the subsequent justification, mobilization, and expansion of the Bureau's domestic intelligence framework. Thereafter, improper surveillance continued to serve the political order, as Johnson employed the FBI to "gather and report political intelligence on the administration's political opponents in the last days of the 1964 and 1968 Presidential election campaigns."<sup>44</sup> Shortly following the race riots, Johnson administration aide Bill

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<sup>42</sup> O'Reilly, "Politics of the Riots," 96.

<sup>43</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, "Communist Involvement in Racial Disturbances," *FBI File: Riots Summer 1964*, September 14, 1964, cited in O'Reilly, "Politics of the Riots," 97.

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 227.

Moyers corresponded with the FBI to perform opposition research against the 1964 Goldwater campaign with “name checks” on employees of Senator Goldwater’s office.<sup>45</sup> Later, during the 1968 campaign, Johnson personally requested an “FBI check of Vice-Presidential candidate Spiro Agnew’s long distance telephone call records.”<sup>46</sup> The Nixon administration likewise employed the FBI to gather political information on a variety of individuals and groups, such as Joseph Duffy, the chairman of the Americans for Democratic Action, and Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, the leader of the SCLC.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of partisan affiliation, the desires of the political establishment proved to be powerful forces in the proliferation of federal intelligence efforts, ultimately manifesting in the delegation of improper bureaucratic action to achieve purely personal and political goals.

The intricacies of the federal response to the race riots of 1964, the broader goals of the counterintelligence program, and the subsequent politicization of FBI surveillance point to the inherently political nature of COINTELPRO. The true essence of the counterintelligence program was that of a political weapon ultimately aimed at maintaining order, either through the mitigation of legitimate violence and unrest, or through the prejudiced targeting of those deemed politically disadvantageous by the contemporary regime. Such “culprits,” whether beloved civil rights figures, peaceful organizations, or innocent citizens, all experienced the crushing weight of the federal bureaucracy in response to their impositions on the status quo. While the *raison d'être* of the Federal Bureau of

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<sup>45</sup> Memorandum from Director Hoover to Presidential Aide Bill Moyers, October 27, 1964, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 228.

<sup>46</sup> Deposition of FBI Executive Cartha DeLoach, November 25, 1975; FBI Summary Memorandum, Subject: Mrs. Anna Chennault, February 1, 1975, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 228.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from J. Edgar Hoover to John D. Ehrlichman (Counsel to President Nixon), October 6, 1969; Letter from Hoover to Vice President Spiro Agnew, May 19, 1970, cited in U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 230-31.

Investigation was to protect, promote, and serve the interests of national security, law abiding citizens, and the Constitution, the Bureau deviated drastically during the COINTELPRO era and in fact directly compromised all which it was designed to defend. In 1975, following the declassification of the counterintelligence program, the U.S. government quickly pushed to “right its wrongs” with a set of hearings and policy recommendations from the “Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities.” The final report of the bipartisan effort, chaired by Democratic Senator Frank Church and Republican Senator John G. Tower, as well as one-time presidential candidates Barry Goldwater and Walter Mondale, identified a large number of constitutional violations and recommended formative changes to federal intelligence operations moving forward.<sup>48</sup> With such failures and corrections taken into account, one may discern that COINTELPRO clearly converged several contradictory and complex pieces of American life, from ongoing racial tensions, to powerful political incentives, to questions of constitutional law, civil rights, and morality. From a certain view, the contentious story of the Bureau’s counterintelligence program is analogous to the story of American justice, a compromise between conservation and change, a balance between chaos and order, and a complex struggle between professed moral philosophy and the genuine assurance and extension of that philosophy to all people.

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<sup>48</sup> For the full list of the Select Committee’s ninety-six recommendations, see, U.S. Senate, Governmental Affairs Committee, *Intelligence Activities*, 289-343.

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## **Untying the Knot: Marriage in Senegal, 1850-Present**

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**I**n 1910, La société antiesclavagiste de France conducted a survey on family life in French West Africa. The official report, published in 1930, indicates as much about French understandings of family and marriage as it does about the people it was intended to survey. One quotation in particular illustrates not only French opinions on Senegalese marriage practices but also the larger social dynamics at play in many of the discussions of marriage during the colonial period.

« Mais ce qui manque ici, comme chez tous les noirs, c'est l'amour, le lien de cœurs que le christianisme peut seul faire naître dans ces âmes primitives, bien que nous ne le voyons malheureusement pas régner dans toute la société

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chrétienne. Il faut attendre plusieurs générations pour pouvoir espérer lui voir modifier les mœurs. »<sup>2</sup>

[“But what is missing here, as among all the blacks, is love, the connection between hearts which Christianity alone can engender in these primitive souls, although unfortunately we do not see it reign in all Christian societies. It is necessary to wait several generations before we can hope to see it modify the customs here.”]

Besides its clear illustration of the interconnections between French colonialism, Christianity, and anti-black racism, this quotation raises an important question for a study of marriage: what is the goal of marriage? Is marriage a tradition intended to find love, to produce children, to create economic alliances, or something else? Throughout the history of Senegal, various iterations of marriage illustrate that marriage is all these things, but it is above all a means of working through larger social conflicts. Marriage is not simply a personal decision, but rather a reflection of large-scale social dynamics, played out on a personal scale. In a nation such as Senegal, whose history has been defined by foreign influences—as illustrated by the above quotation—marriage exists as a site of not only local conflicts, but also larger ideological battles about race, religion, and gender.

Hence, this essay does not attempt to chart the entire history of marriage in Senegal. Rather, I focus on marriage as a means of advancement, transactional marriage and its rigidity, and marriage as a confluence of religious ideas. To illustrate these three aspects of marriage, I concentrate on three phenomena in Senegalese history and their relations to marriage practices: *signares* and mixed-race marriage, cash cropping and the cash economy, and Islam and family law. In doing so, I illustrate how marriage practices have been both a result of conflicting influences and a marker of social change in Senegal. In Senegal and globally, marriage reveals how

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<sup>2</sup> Delafosse, *Enquête coloniale dans l'Afrique française, occidentale et équatoriale* (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes, et coloniales, 2003), 433.

society has transformed in ways that other phenomena—e.g., the economy and politics—do not; ultimately, marriage is revelatory because it unifies economic and social forces, religious beliefs, and the intimate, personal aspects of the family. As a confluence of numerous factors, marriage is not a static practice, but rather a dynamic reflection of society, religion, and culture.

### **Part 1: Signares, the Métis Community, and Mixed-Race Marriages**

The case of the *signares* illustrates how marriage became a means of both economic and social advancement for Senegalese women. Beginning with the arrival of the first Portuguese traders and continuing into the twentieth century, powerful women in Senegal used marriage to form economic alliances with European traders. These women, called *senhoras*—“free women of property and consequence”—in Portuguese and later *signares* by the French, benefitted from their husbands’ positions in the Compagnie du Sénégal, which administered Saint-Louis and Gorée. At the same time, signares furnished their husbands with trade connections and the resources to live comfortably in an unfamiliar climate.<sup>3</sup> Crucially, these *mariages à la mode du pays*—according to local custom—were usually temporary, with women often remarrying when their husbands returned permanently to Europe.<sup>4</sup> This practice differed greatly from existing traditions among the Wolof people, an ethnic majority in Senegal, which did not allow for such temporary arrangements.<sup>5</sup> Despite their

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<sup>3</sup> George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 206.

<sup>4</sup> George E. Brooks, “The Signares of Saint-Louis and Gorée: Women Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-Century Senegal,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, eds. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1976), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Hilary Jones, “From Mariage à la Mode to Weddings at Town Hall: Marriage, Colonialism, and Mixed-Race Society in Nineteenth-Century Senegal,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38, no. 1 (2005): 36.

temporary nature, *mariages à la mode*, which required the consent of the man, the woman, and her relatives, often resulted in strong partnerships, and women were reportedly more faithful to their husbands during the marriage.<sup>6</sup>

While the most well known—and consequentially, the most well studied—signares were wealthy and powerful, marriages between younger, less powerful Senegalese women and European men were not uncommon in the mid to late nineteenth century. These women married men with less power and wealth, often hoping to gain European goods with which to trade as well as knowledge of European language and customs. For many women with low social status, such as *jam*, people of slave descent in the Wolof and Lebou ethnic groups, these marriages were particularly appealing because they provided an opportunity for social mobility that otherwise would have been impossible.<sup>7</sup> Thus, while signares are most often characterized as highly powerful and influential, the practice of mixed-race marriage was not exclusively reserved for elite women, but instead also served as a means of gaining power for women with lower social status.

The practices of signareship and mixed-race marriage created a small but influential community of métis, or mixed-race, people in the towns of Saint-Louis and Gorée. Much like signares in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, métis people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries acted as cultural and commercial intermediaries between European merchants and African traders in the interior of Senegal.<sup>8</sup> French colonial policy furthered the division between residents of the Four Communes, including Saint-Louis and Gorée, who were French citizens, and residents of the interior, who were colonial subjects.<sup>9</sup> Métis individuals, whose fathers were French, were thus French citizens, a

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<sup>6</sup> George E. Brooks, “The Signares of Saint-Louis and Gorée: Women Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-Century Senegal,” in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 24).

<sup>7</sup> Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*, 212-13.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, “From Mariage à la Mode to Weddings at Town Hall,” 30.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, 34.

distinction which challenged French understandings of race and legal status in the colonies.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the success of signareship in building trade alliances and in creating cultural intermediaries, the practice was subject to criticisms from its inception. These criticisms illustrate how transactional forms of marriage are often viewed as suspect because they do not conform to understandings of marriage as a family, or at least personal, bond. Initial criticisms of signareship were not based on cultural or religious arguments, but rather economic ones. Signares' marriages allowed them to engage in illegal commerce with the help of their European husbands, who could access company resources for their own and wives' personal gain, and early criticisms of signares thus focused on limiting theft from the Compagnie du Sénégal. In 1733 and 1734, following ineffective attempts to crack down on signares profiting from their husband's positions in the company, the governor of Senegal and the advisory council considered sanctioning marriages so they could more easily control the illegal commerce stemming from them. Thus, just as signares' marriages were motivated by economic gain, early attempts to regulate marriages also had economic intentions, as regulating marriage was ultimately a means to regulate commerce. In 1763 French botanist Michel Adanson claimed that European men were marrying signares because they were not allowed to bring their wives to Senegal, and thus were vulnerable to African women, "a sex as dangerous as it is attractive."<sup>11</sup> Adanson's characterization of signares as both beautiful and powerful points to the dual nature of signares' relationships; while these marriages were certainly economic alliances, as Adanson discussed, they were also relationships founded on the great beauty and social influence which signares possessed and to which French men were attracted.

With the beginning of formal French colonial rule in Senegal, criticisms of mixed-race marriages increasingly emphasized religious and racial arguments as opposed to

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*, 210-12.



economic ones. Often, official concerns about immoral, un-Christian marriages thinly veiled concerns over interracial sexual relationships and, perhaps more importantly, the mixed-race children they produced.<sup>12</sup> Formal colonial rule required a clear division between colonizer and colonized, and mixed-race people, who often held the same civil status as French citizens, challenged this dichotomy.<sup>13</sup> Colonial authorities thus increasingly encouraged residents of the Four Communes, who were afforded French civil status and included the majority of the Senegalese métis population, to choose official, Christian marriage. The Catholic church further reinforced this position, warning against informal marriages, such as those in *mariage à la mode*, which produced children considered illegitimate by the church and the state but who were legally French citizens.<sup>14</sup> This encouragement was largely successful in métis communities, who sought to use official marriage to reinforce their status as citizens of the French republic, as opposed to colonial subjects.<sup>15</sup> Métis couples sometimes even legitimized earlier *mariages à la mode*, often shortly before their adult children themselves officially married, in order to render their children's marriages more acceptable in French eyes.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the official condemnation of *mariage à la mode*, the practice did not entirely die out in the second half of the nineteenth century, illustrating its continued economic and political usefulness. Louis Faidherbe, the governor of French Senegal, temporarily lived and had a son with signare Nkounda Siadibi before separating in 1858 upon Faidherbe's return to France; this relationship both concerned Catholic clergy and continued a long-standing tradition of marriages between powerful Senegalese women and powerful European men.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of official condemnations of the practice, *mariage à*

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<sup>12</sup> Hilary Jones, "Religion, Marriage, and Material Culture," in *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 77.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, "From Mariage à la Mode to Weddings at Town Hall," 36.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, "Religion, Marriage, and Material Culture," 88.

*la mode* remained one of the most effective ways for European men to gain influence with the local population. Attempts to institutionalize what previously would have been illegitimate marriages, such as métis couples' decisions to legitimize earlier *mariages à la mode* thus reflects both concerns about the appearance of these relationships and an awareness of their efficacy in creating powerful economic alliances in an effort to reap the benefits of *mariage à la mode* in an acceptably French way.

Mixed-race marriages continued throughout the French colonial period, but these relationships differed from relationships between signares and powerful European men. While signares were attractive to European men both because of their beauty and because they were older and more experienced, with large households, large numbers of enslaved people, and established trade relationships, Senegalese women in the twentieth century were attractive to French men for nearly opposite reasons: they were often young, and generally lacked power and connections.<sup>18</sup> Thus, despite their similarity as mixed-race relationships, the reality is that métis families in the 1800s and mixed-race families in the 1900s reflected very different social and political situations, and thus held very different social positions. As Bryant notes, “ideas about race hardened in France and across the empire,” creating rigid categories where they did not previously exist.<sup>19</sup> Maintaining the distinctions between white colonizers and black colonized people grew increasingly important to the French colonizers, and thus, even as the practice of mixed-race relationships flourished and was in fact endorsed by colonial authorities at times due to its political and economic usefulness, mixed-race children posed an ideological challenge for France. While the vast majority—roughly 90 percent—of these children were abandoned by their French fathers, they were often still legally recognized before abandonment, giving them French civil

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<sup>18</sup> Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*, 270-71.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly Duke Bryant, “French Fathers and Their “Indigenous Children”: Interracial Families in Colonial Senegal, 1900–1915,” *Journal of Family History* 42, no. 3 (2017): 311.

status.<sup>20</sup> These children's status as Frenchmen complicated the colonizer-colonized, white-black dichotomy which propped up French colonialism. Efforts by French fathers to access educational opportunities in France for their mixed-race children illustrate how larger social dynamics affected these fathers' relationships with their children. In one letter requesting financial support from the colonial authorities, French colonist Andre Latrilhe referred to himself as "an old colonist who strongly desires that [his] children become good subjects."<sup>21</sup> Even as Latrilhe demonstrated fatherly concern for his children's futures, he also referenced larger social dynamics in calling his children "subjects," not French citizens. Latrilhe and other French fathers of mixed-race children thus both appealed to colonial understandings of race and internalized these ideas, viewing their mixed-race children as both legitimate family members and colonial subjects.

In summary, the case of the signares and *mariage à la mode* illustrates how marriages can serve as forms of social advancement. For the signares and for other less powerful women, marriages with European men were paths to economic, social, and political power, regardless of how long or short the marriages were. The children of these partnerships, who made up Senegal's métis community, lived with the effects of this social advancement. However, their increased wealth and access to opportunity did not negate their status as mixed-race people in a French colony, demonstrating that even effective forms of social advancement like marriage remain limited by social hierarchies and political realities.

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<sup>20</sup> Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa 1895-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37.

<sup>21</sup> Duke Bryant, "French Fathers and Their "Indigenous Children"," 319.

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## Part 2: Cash Cropping, Migration, and Engagement Practices

The case of cash cropping and the cash economy illustrates how marriage can function as a transactional practice which is rendered more rigid—and hierarchical—by monetization. For men in colonial Senegal, monetization made marriage a way to assert adulthood, while the transaction increasingly defined women’s social status as lower than men’s. Thus far, this paper has focused mostly on urban areas and policies which directly affected a small percentage of usually elite Senegalese women. Now, I will examine how marriage changed for the vast majority of Senegalese people and illustrate how contact between established practices and new colonial policies transformed marriage and, in turn, Senegalese society. These colonial policies were rarely focused specifically on marriage, but their impacts on the economic and social landscape of Senegal altered a variety of institutions, including marriage. In particular, this section examines how the introduction of peanuts as a cash crop shaped the political economy of marriage. The Portuguese first introduced peanuts to Africa in the sixteenth century, and by the 1840s they were being cultivated for export in Senegal.<sup>22</sup> Peanut farming in Senegal and other parts of West Africa helped fulfill the increasing demand for fats and oils for British and French soap and candlemakers, who by the 1830s were mostly dependent on imports of these products.<sup>23</sup> The French thus encouraged peanut farming in Senegal both passively through increased taxation, which drove Senegalese farmers to grow cash crops which would allow them to pay taxes, and actively through propaganda promoting peanuts. In the lower Casamance region, for example, the head tax doubled from five to ten francs between 1918 and 1920, and the SIP, the Société indigène de prévoyance, distributed peanut seed, requiring that loans be repaid in kind and with interest. Despite these

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<sup>22</sup> Brooks, “Peanuts and Colonialism: Consequences of the Commercialization of Peanuts in West Africa, 1830-70,” *The Journal of African History* 16, no. 1 (1975): 30, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Brooks, “Peanuts and Colonialism,” 38.

exploitative practices, peanut cultivation was often relatively undisruptive to daily life and complemented existing subsistence farming practices in many regions of Senegal, even as it prompted disruptive social changes.<sup>24</sup>

In order to understand how peanut cultivation ultimately impacted marriage practices, it is important to understand the large-scale social effects of the practice. Peanut cultivation in Senegal encouraged migration, as laborers from within Senegal and other parts of French West Africa traveled to the peanut fields for one or more seasons before returning home with cash and consumer goods.<sup>25</sup> The existence of these migrant workers, called *navetanes*, was not unprecedented. In many regions of Senegal, both men and women had been migrating for work since before the 19th century. In the early 1900s, men and women from the Casamance region commonly traveled to the port city of Ziguinchor to load ships, a job which was eventually dominated by women. During World War I, young men's efforts to avoid military recruitment further drove migration.<sup>26</sup> This is to say that seasonal migration for labor was by no means a new phenomenon in Senegal when people began to migrate for peanut cultivation. What made cash cropping in particular transformative, however, was how the migration it encouraged coupled with a new cash economy.

The new cash economy and the unique form of migration it caused were particularly transformative for women. Before the introduction of cash cropping, as previously discussed, women participated in seasonal migration for labor and trade. In her report on women and the family in French West Africa in the 1930s, Denise Savineau discussed various instances in which women regularly traveled distances of up to five hundred kilometers to trade cloth, rice, palm oil, and other

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Mark, "Urban Migration, Cash Cropping, and Calamity: The Spread of Islam among the Diola of Boulouf (Senegal), 1900-1940," *African Studies Review* 21, no. 2 (1978): 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Brooks, "Peanuts and Colonialism," 47.

<sup>26</sup> Mark, "Urban Migration, Cash Cropping, and Calamity," 7.

goods in established trade patterns.<sup>27</sup> Thus, migration was not a new phenomenon for women when cash cropping was introduced in Senegal. In the same report, however, Savineau discussed how large scale peanut plantations, started in French West Africa in response to the Great Depression, often led to an increase in women's unpaid labor, writing that "La vie des femmes autrefois était plus douce parce qu'on cultivait moins et on ne se "promenait" pas beaucoup" [In the past, women's lives were gentler because people farmed less and did not travel much.].<sup>28</sup> As men dedicated more time to farming cash crops—sometimes at home, and sometimes in other regions as migrant laborers—it fell upon women to perform more of the labor required to run a household, labor to which their husbands used to contribute more.<sup>29</sup> This increase in women's labor, coupled with the changing role of bride wealth which I will soon discuss, meant that women found themselves in marriages with an increasingly transactional quality.

To understand the influence of the cash economy on marriage for both men and women, it is important to understand that, in many ethnic groups in Senegal, marriage functions as a marker of adulthood. In his description of the None people, belonging to the Serer ethnic group in Western Senegal, Delafosse wrote of young men that "le mariage seul les émancipe" [marriage alone frees them].<sup>30</sup> While this quotation perhaps exaggerates what marriage "frees" young men from, it accurately illustrates how marriage functions as a practice that both gives participants adult status and is mediated by elders and other family members. Thus, marriage is both a practice by which people, particularly young men, free themselves and become adults and a way for families and communities to transition men into adulthood. In his study of the Diola people in the Casamance region of Senegal, Peter

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<sup>27</sup> Ghislaine Lydon, "The Unraveling of a Neglected Source : A Report on Women in Francophone West Africa in the 1930s," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 37, no. 147 (1997): 569.

<sup>28</sup> Lydon, 570.

<sup>29</sup> Lydon, 570.

<sup>30</sup> Delafosse, *Enquête coloniale dans l'Afrique française, occidentale et équatoriale*, 431.

Mark discusses how the cash economy gave men independence which was previously inaccessible to them. Peanut farming and urban migration gave men the money needed to start families earlier than their parents had, bringing these men's aspirations of adulthood into conflict with traditions which dictated when men could marry. Many of these men ultimately converted to Islam, which afforded them greater freedom to marry when they chose and better matched their newfound financial independence.<sup>31</sup> This same social transformation occurred throughout Senegal, as individuals who previously could not access property—specifically women and young men—gained financial independence through the cash economy.<sup>32</sup> This newfound access to the market altered existing social dynamics as previously disempowered individuals gained financial, and thus social autonomy.

While the idea of “autonomy” in marriage often implies greater freedom and independence—in other words, positive qualities—to Western audiences, the reality is that the greater autonomy introduced by the cash economy also brought less family support and marriages which were increasingly transactional and exploitative for women. These changes largely occurred because of changing understandings of bride wealth. Bride wealth, formerly called bride price, paid by the future husband to his wife's family, is intended to replace the labor which a woman provides for her family, as well as that of her future children. Bride wealth is thus not a payment for a wife, but rather a way of valuing women's labor and contributions to their household. Prior to the introduction of the cash economy, bride wealth was paid in both goods and services, but was then slowly replaced by livestock and then by money. In her report on women and the family in French West Africa, Savineau discusses how increased wealth—a product of the cash economy—led to an increase in both polygamy, as men could afford to support multiple wives, and bride prices.

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<sup>31</sup> Mark, “Urban Migration, Cash Cropping, and Calamity,” 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> Brigitte Reinwald, ““Though the Earth Does Not Lie”: Agricultural Transitions in Siin (Senegal) under Colonial Rule,” *Paideuma* 43, no. 1 (1997): 158.

For many young men, the increasing bride wealth made marriages increasingly inaccessible, even as their own increased wealth gave them more independence.<sup>33</sup> Thus, paradoxically, the cash economy both empowered many young men to become independent sooner and made adulthood in the form of marriage increasingly inaccessible for ordinary young men.

In addition to making marriage out of reach for many young men, rising bride wealth also distorted the original intentions of the practice. Husbands who paid high bride wealth in cash, unlike their parents and grandparents, began to view this payment as a price for complete authority over their wives, as they saw a direct relationship between bride wealth payments and a husband's control over his wife. Similarly, fathers began to treat bride wealth as a price for their daughters' virginity and police their daughters' behavior to a greater extent, as their future sons in law were paying a large sum for a "good" wife.<sup>34</sup> Thus, a practice originally intended to value women altered to make marriages more rigid, both in the eyes of husbands—who viewed their wives as permanent possessions—and families—who viewed marriage as an end to their relationships with their daughters. Generally, increased bride price led both families and husbands to view women as objects and marriages as rigid, permanent transactions, even though the practice was originally intended to acknowledge women's value. Savineau further describes the impacts of rising bride wealth, writing that "Il [the father] ne dira pas de sa fille: « Je l'ai vendue », mais de sa bru il dira: « Je l'ai achetée»."<sup>35</sup> Fathers would not say they sold their daughter, but might say they bought a daughter in law, and generally cared much more about their own daughters than their daughters in law. This insight demonstrates how rising bride wealth created increasingly exploitative marriages, as women became objects and lost many of the protections which they formerly held—e.g. support from their natal families should they be mistreated

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<sup>33</sup> Denise Savineau, *La Famille en A.O.F.: Condition de la femme, rapport inédit* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Savineau, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Savineau, 16.



by their husbands. The autonomy created by the cash economy often gave men more control in the engagement process, but it also stripped women of many of the benefits which their connections to their families used to provide them in marriage, as bride wealth began to function as a price for the effective ownership of a woman and her labor.

In contrast with the example of the signares, who participated in temporary marriages for social and economic advancement, the case of the cash economy and the changes it brought to marriage illustrates that marriage can serve as another form of transaction. While the signares marriages were certainly transactional, they were also fluid. The cash economy and the rising bride wealth it produced created marriages that were transactional and rigid, limiting marriage to certain men and restricting how women were viewed as wives. The distortion of bride wealth into the effective price for a bride created a view of women, and of marriage, as rigid and permanent. Thus, while the signares illustrate marriage's fluidity and role as a form of social negotiation, the impacts of the cash economy on marriage practices demonstrate marriage's potential to serve as a rigid, socially limiting practice.

### **Part 3: Islam, Family Law, and Senegal Post-Independence**

The case of Senegal's Code de la Famille demonstrates how marriage functions as a site of legal contestation through which the state defines gendered social roles and responsibilities. In 1972, Senegal passed its Code de la Famille, which outlines laws relating to marriage, divorce, and inheritance, among other matters. Before 1972, family matters in Senegal were subject to several different law bases and could be tried in various arenas: French colonial courts, traditional courts, and Islamic courts. The 1972 Code de la Famille thus represents an effort to create a national civil law which derived from all three systems, although the resulting law drew most heavily from the French and Islamic ones.<sup>36</sup> To understand this body of law,

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<sup>36</sup> Lucy Creevey, "Islam, Women and the Role of the State in Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 3 (1996): 297.

however, it is important to understand the history of Muslim courts in Senegal, as the same issues which arose in the colonial period became salient during debates over family law post-independence.

Senegal's first Muslim court, the Muslim tribunal of Ndar or Saint-Louis, was founded in 1857. The tribunal operated in an uneasy coexistence with the French colonial courts, as the colonial government permitted its existence while simultaneously maintaining controls over its power. Colonial authorities selected the *cadis*, or Muslim judges who presided over the court, from among notable Muslim families in Saint-Louis, and as they were selected by colonial authorities, they were chosen largely because they were judged to be more likely to rule in France's interest. The colonial government also set limits on the tribunal's jurisdiction, so the court only addressed cases of marriage, divorce, and liquidation of assets and inheritance of less than one thousand francs.<sup>37</sup> Despite these formal limits, the tribunal was able to function with some degree of autonomy, even as it operated within the colonial system. This autonomy was largely protected by the fact that court proceedings were conducted in Arabic. Few colonial administrators spoke Arabic, creating a linguistic barrier which protected the judges' ability to make judgements according to Muslim law. However, in 1911, the court was required to switch to French, removing some of its autonomy.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of its complicated position as a colonially-sanctioned Muslim court, the Saint-Louis tribunal's role in adjudicating cases of marriage and divorce illustrates much about how Muslim law operated in colonial Senegal, and by extension how the colonial government attempted to restrain Islam's influence. It is first important to note that the tribunal primarily served women, as men had only to declare a divorce publicly—in the presence of witnesses—for it to be valid

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<sup>37</sup> Ghislaine Lydon, "Droit Islamique et droits de la femme d'après les registres du Tribunal Musulman de Ndar (Saint-Louis du Sénégal)," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des études Africaines* 41, no. 2 (2007): 292-93.

<sup>38</sup> Lydon, 295.

under Muslim law.<sup>39</sup> Thus, women took to the tribunal to advocate for their own divorces in large numbers. This disproportionately high number of cases initiated by women was not unique to Senegal, but rather occurred in the majority of colonial courts across French West Africa, as in one colonial court in Burkina Faso of which stated: “Sans les femmes, on pourrait fermer le tribunal” [Without women, we could close the tribunal.]<sup>40</sup> This gender imbalance illustrates how the tribunal often helped women advocate for themselves in ways they otherwise could not, even as it operated within the context of Muslim laws which generally gave men more power than women.

The divorce cases handled by the Saint-Louis tribunal illustrate both Senegalese Muslim understandings of marriage and how colonialism changed marriage for many Senegalese couples. More than sixty percent of the cases the tribunal handled were cases of divorce, and, of these, divorces because of abandonment were the most common. In other cases, women argued that they should be allowed to divorce their husbands because they were failing to fulfill their responsibility to maintain their families and provide them with food, lodging, and other necessities, called *nafaqa*.<sup>41</sup> Divorces because of abandonment became more common at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to the separations caused by conscription in the First World War, couples were increasingly separated—and wives thus abandoned—for economic reasons as men traveled to work in agriculture and in Senegal’s growing cities.<sup>42</sup> Cash cropping and the cash economy also impacted the financial aspect of divorces, as women were usually expected to repay their bride wealth—essentially, to buy themselves back—to obtain a divorce. In some cases, women were even expected to repay all gifts their husbands had given them in addition to the bride wealth itself.<sup>43</sup> These cases

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<sup>39</sup> Lydon, 291, 297-98.

<sup>40</sup> Lydon, 305.

<sup>41</sup> Lydon 298-99.

<sup>42</sup> Lydon, 300.

<sup>43</sup> Lydon, 303.

illustrate how Muslim courts attempted to address the changing marriage landscape in keeping with religious understandings of marriage, and they highlight which aspects of marriage would be most important later in independent Senegal.

When Senegal passed the Code de la Famille in 1972, the concerns of the Saint-Louis tribunal remained relevant. The code outlines marriage in much the same way as the tribunal: a relationship in which spouses are obligated to provide for one another and their children. The code speaks of “l’obligation alimentaire entre époux et des époux envers les enfants,” emphasizing this obligation as central to marriage.<sup>44</sup> The code also states that “le mariage crée la famille légitime”;<sup>45</sup> thus, marriage legally creates a family, and married people are obligated to maintain this family. Unlike in the rulings of the tribunal, however, the code gives both husbands and wives responsibility to maintain their family, as opposed to a focus on husband’s responsibilities as head of the household.

This aspect of the code illustrates how Senegal brought together Islamic law and Western influences in defining marriage. The code similarly combines traditions in its provisions on monogamy and polygamy. Couples are given “l’option de monogamie ou de limitation de polygamie éventuellement,” so they may choose the form of marriage which best reflects their beliefs, and, perhaps more importantly, so Senegal can balance traditions of polygamy with concerns surrounding the practice.<sup>46</sup> While this law theoretically protects women’s right to choose if they want polygamy—as in Islam, where women are supposed to consent when their husbands take another wife—Creevey notes that, in reality, marriages could happen without couples formally making a decision between monogamy and polygamy, in which case polygamy was considered the norm. In addition, women had no real legal recourse besides divorce should their

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<sup>44</sup> *Code de la Famille, La Loi No. 72-61*, Gouvernement du Sénégal, Art. 262, juin 1972.

<sup>45</sup> *Code de la Famille*, Art. 155.

<sup>46</sup> *Code de la Famille*, Art. 65.

husbands take additional wives despite a contract for monogamy.<sup>47</sup> Thus, despite efforts to create a civil code which reflected Senegal's conflicting interests, this code often fell short, both on paper and, more often, in practice.

As to be expected from a piece of legislation which attempted to bring together three traditions, the passage of the Code de la Famille brought debates over the law's origins and biases. These debates over expectations for marriage and the family underlie both Senegalese women's efforts toward equality and larger anxieties over women's political and financial power. Some opponents called the Code de la Famille the "Women's code" and claimed it was too French and Christian without enough respect for Islam.<sup>48</sup> These primarily Muslim opponents argued that the code divorced Sharia from the family, reducing Islam to moral precepts without applications.<sup>49</sup> Of particular concern to Muslim leaders were several laws relating to divorce. The code made it significantly more difficult for men to divorce their wives, since it required them to go to formal court for divorce proceedings, as opposed to both Muslim and existing Senegalese divorce traditions.<sup>50</sup> Remember that early Islamic courts, like the one in Saint-Louis, were used primarily by women, as men did not need to go to court to divorce their wives. Another concern for Muslim leaders was a provision which required divorced men to pay support to their former wives and children indefinitely, creating worry that men would be exploited by ex-wives who no longer even needed support. The 1989 revision of the code altered this requirement, limiting it to women who needed support and men who could afford to pay.<sup>51</sup>

Despite claims that it was a "women's code," the code actually caused much complaint from women's rights activists

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<sup>47</sup> Creevey, "Islam, Women and the Role of the State in Senegal," 300.

<sup>48</sup> Creevey, 298.

<sup>49</sup> Creevey, 301.

<sup>50</sup> Loretta Bass and Fatou Sow, "Senegalese Families: The Confluence of History, Ethnicity, and Social Change," in *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century*, eds. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi and Baffour K. Takyi (Westport, Praeger Publishers, 2006), 86.

<sup>51</sup> Creevey, "Islam, Women and the Role of the State in Senegal," 302.

in Senegal. Of particular concern was the way the family code wrote patriarchal practices into Senegalese law. Bass and Sow note that “Islam seems to regularize older traditional practices,” and that the arrival of Islam made patriarchal values more pronounced in several Senegalese ethnic groups. Both the Sereer and Wolof ethnic groups had dual inheritance systems based on caste which were skewed toward the patriline with the rise of Islam.<sup>52</sup> In addition to this general concern over the patriarchal nature of the family code, women’s rights activists also expressed concerns over several specific provisions which gave husbands the right to dictate where the couple lived and if their wives were allowed to work.<sup>53</sup> These provisions were removed in the 1989 revision, which was largely believed to have liberalized the code to women’s benefit. However, continuing debates over marriage and family law in Senegal illustrate the continued role of larger social questions, be they of gender equality or of the role of the church and the state, in Senegalese marriage practice and policy.

The case of Senegal’s Code de la Famille illustrates marriage as a site of legal contest. Since the first Muslim courts in French colonial Senegal, marriage has operated as a locus of larger debates over family obligations, gender roles, and women’s opportunities. The Code de la Famille solidified these debates into a codified text, creating a body of law in which the state—and, indirectly, religious and other leaders—defines social roles and responsibilities. The codification of these laws, however, has not ended debate, illustrating that marriage in Senegal continues to operate as an arena for the discussion, reproduction, and reinterpretation of social practices and gender norms.

## Conclusion

Senegalese marriage law and practice raise questions about how the nation has been shaped by larger historical dynamics,

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<sup>52</sup> Bass and Sow, “Senegalese Families,” 87.

<sup>53</sup> Creevey, “Islam, Women and the Role of the State in Senegal,” 299-300.

namely French colonialism and the spread of Islam from the Middle East. The three marriage dynamics which I examine in this paper—marriage as a means of social advancement, marriage as a rigid transaction, and marriage as a site of legal contest—illustrate marriage’s dynamism. Beginning with the arrival of the first Portuguese traders in what is now Senegal and continuing through the French colonial period, marriages between Senegalese women and European men acted as economic partnerships, allowing Senegalese women to advance socially while simultaneously challenging and reinforcing French understandings of race and nationality. For the children of these partnerships, French cultural racism was something to be at once rejected through displays of power and wealth and confirmed through allegiances to French cultural practices and standards for “correct” forms of marriage. Thus, the métis children of these marriages continued to grapple with mixed race marriages as a complicated form of social advancement. These same questions of colonial influence arise when we consider the role of cash cropping in the development of not only the Senegalese economy, but also marriage practices and the treatment of women. For young Senegalese men and women in the first half of the twentieth century, marriage operated as a monetized social transaction, as the practice of bride wealth distorted into the implied price for a wife. Further, monetization created a rigid understanding of marriage—unlike that of *mariage à la mode* and the temporary marriages of the signares—in which women were effectively owned by their husbands and permanently disconnected from their natal families. Finally, the spread of Islam within Senegal, and its impacts on marriage, both countered colonialism and its practices and directly impacted Senegal’s marriage practices, as evidenced by debates over the privileged role of Islam in the Senegalese family code. These debates illustrate how marriage also functions as a site of legal contest in Senegal, through which religious and social groups attempt to define and redefine social roles and responsibilities. In particular, in both Senegal and globally, marriage is a locus of gendered legal

debate whose conflicts underline anxieties and hopes about women's roles and liberation.

While marriage and family are deeply personal aspects of life, they are also formed by religious teachings, cultural traditions, and economic influences. Only by studying marriage as a dynamic practice in a particular context can we understand how these teachings, traditions, and influences have combined to shape life for Senegalese people. If we limit our understanding of marriage to that of a partnership between two individuals or families, or to a practice intended to create and raise families, we miss the countless other iterations of marriage as negotiation, debate, compromise, and opportunity. The Senegalese case illustrates the dynamism of marriage particularly well, but marriage is dynamic in all societies. By separating marriage from our traditional understandings of the practice and examining marriage as it actually manifests, we can gain new insights into not only marriage and family life, but also broader social and cultural trends.

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## **Mythos of the State: The Creation of National Narratives in Kemalist Turkey and Nazi Germany**

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**W**orld War I was a traumatic moment for many countries, bringing new, horrific experiences of death and defeat on an industrial scale, experiences which undermined faith in the old order. The subsequent dismantling of empires made national struggles existential in a terrifying new way and bred deep anger and resentment among the losers towards those victors who claimed moral legitimacy in conflict that seemed free of morality. In the aftermath of this destruction, new forms of government, of nationhood, and of society seemed possible. The regimes that emerged in Turkey and Germany in reaction to this seismic shift bear similarities borne from their similar origins.

While Nazi Germany emerged a decade later from the collapse of Weimar democracy, both regimes can trace their roots to immediate post-war resentment. Nazi Germany and Kemalist<sup>1</sup> Turkey both sought to institute a state mythology that justified the regime. They promoted a nationalist narrative that extended far beyond the traditional investment of citizens

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<sup>1</sup> Kemalist Turkey refers to the era of dictatorial rule by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers.

in the state, and instead envisioned the ideal citizen as an active and enthusiastic participant in the political, ideological, and ethnic community. Both assembled a cult of personality around their leader, both dredged into the mists of pre-history to find an epic origin for their race, and both saw hidden enemies plotting national annihilation for their people.

While comparisons between Nazi Germany and Kemalist Turkey have become increasingly common in recent years, especially due to the work of Stefan Ihrig, most scholars have approached the topic from the German perspective, attempting to uncover a missing link in the Nazi genealogy,<sup>2</sup> or with a narrow focus on connections and comparisons between the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide.<sup>3</sup> Given Ihrig's work asserting that the Nazis perceived the Kemalist state as being cut from the same cloth as National Socialism, this paper will weigh the accuracy of these Nazi perceptions through a comparative analysis of the political and ideological similarities of the two regimes.

### **Sevres Syndrome and International Jewry**

Conspiratorial thinking was central to the national narratives of both Nazi Germany and Kemalist Turkey. Unable to explain the current state of their nations by conventional accounts, Turks and Germans turned to alternative explanations for their defeat. While both the Nazis and the Turkish nationalists conceived of Western powers and minorities as working together to undermine the nation, they differed on their exact nature and relationship. The Kemalists saw the Western powers as ambitious threats to Turkish sovereignty, who were willing to manipulate national minorities into rebellions that ultimately served the aims of European imperialism. The Nazis, instead, saw all the enemies

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<sup>2</sup> Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk In the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 6-9.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Kiernan, *Blood, and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

arrayed against the German people as antagonists in a metaphysical race war, a war masterminded by the Germans' ultimate menace: the Jews.

The course of the 19th and early 20th centuries had primed Turks for assuming all minorities were in league with foreign adversaries. A series of ethnic and national revolts, some backed by foreign powers, had resulted in the loss of much of the empire's territory.<sup>4</sup> Although the relationship between the Ottoman state and various minorities varied both on the changing Ottoman administrations and the minority in question, the growth of nationalist identities and the failures of reform generally led to a growing sense of hostility, including, famously, a series of massacres and violent actions committed against the Armenians in the late 19th century.<sup>5</sup>

While the last decades of the Ottoman Empires saw increasing repression and scrutiny against national minorities during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the subsequent Young Turk regime, the events of World War I exacerbated the fear and paranoia of the Turkish state.<sup>6</sup> The Arabs, under the leadership of Hussein Bin Ali, colluded with the British to oust the Ottomans from the Arabian Peninsula,<sup>7</sup> and Armenian volunteers aided Russia during the Caucasus campaign.<sup>8</sup> The fear and paranoia directed towards the

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.

<sup>5</sup> Hanioglu Şükrü, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Dogan Gurpınar, *Conspiracy Theories in Turkey: Conspiracy Nation* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2021), 6-12.

<sup>7</sup> Alia El Bakri, "Revolutions and Rebellions: Arab Revolt (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)", in: *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, (Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2018-05-25), DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11267.

<sup>8</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 71-73; Baskın Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006 Facts and Analyses with Documents* (Johanneshov: TPB, 2011), 96-97. While the Russians certainly promised to aid Armenian revolts against the Ottomans, the actual degree of coordination between Russia and Ottoman Armenians is debatable. Russia did not take proactive steps to

Armenians in particular culminated in a program of systematic death marches and massacres that would come to be known as the Armenian Genocide. After the war, the European occupation of Constantinople justified itself, at least in the eyes of Turkish nationalists, on the promise to protect Christian minorities and enact vengeance on the Turks.<sup>9</sup>

Resentment of claims of moral certitude by Westerners in the aftermath of the war led to the conviction that the only reason the actions of the Turks in particular drew so much ire was to justify long-plotted Christian imperialism.<sup>10</sup> Halide Edib, who ran an orphanage where “Armenian children were systematically deprived of their Armenian identity and given new Turkish names, forced to become Muslims and beaten savagely if they were heard to speak Armenian,”<sup>11</sup> wrote that Turkish children were in turn stolen and Christianized by Armenians and westerners:

There were a large number of Turkish orphanages in Anatolia filled with Turkish children whose parents had been the victims of the Armenians. These orphanages had taken Armenian children as well and made them Moslems (which was wrong). The rest of the Armenian orphans were taken by the Americans. Apart from this, some Turkish families had taken Armenian children out of kindness and pity without any desire to make them Moslems: for the Moslem Turks do not have the missionary instincts of the Christians of the West. That the Armenians should want their children back from those orphanages, and

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assist Armenian revolts. Russian policy seemed to view the Armenians as a diversion to prevent Turkish offensives. After the Bolshevik Revolution and the end of World War I, the new Soviet state diplomatically allied with the Turkish Nationalists against the Entente, and as a result abandoned the previous government’s promises to aid the Armenians.

<sup>9</sup> Halide Edib Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal* (New York, NY: The Century Co., 1928), 5.

<sup>10</sup>Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Fisk, “Robert Fisk: Living Proof of the Armenian Genocide,” *The Independent* (Independent Digital News and Media, March 9, 2010), <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-living-proof-of-the-armenian-genocide-1918367.html>.

that the British should help them, was very natural. Indeed, so much were these orphanages suffering from want and misery that I believe they were glad to have their hands free of them. Anyway, Turkey seemed a country where the number of orphans and their suffering were pitiful to see. *Somehow the Turkish orphans got the worst of it.... [Turkish children] were being Armenianized daily.* The children who were brought to the association were left in the care of the Armenian women, and these Armenian women, either by persuasion or threats or hypnotism, forced the Turkish children to learn by heart the name of an Armenian woman for their mother and the name of an Armenian man for their father.<sup>12</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that anything like what Edib suggests occurred on any large scale.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Edib's writings illustrate how disparate fears of European imperialism, distrust of minorities, and despair at losing the war coalesced into a coherent narrative that served as the foundation of the Kemalist state. The early Kemalists held the belief that some antagonist associated with the West (Europe, capitalists, the Catholic Church, etc.) secretly schemed to destroy the Turkish state as part of a Christian imperialist agenda, drawing upon anxiety about the fate that befell North Africa in the late 19th century.<sup>14</sup> The West usually is perceived to have recruited some faction within Turkey to carry out this destruction. The group identified as being pawns of the West varies depending on who produced this iteration of the theory, but they are often religious and ethnic minorities, occasionally including Turkish Jews.<sup>15</sup>

While the Turkish nationalist movement had an explicitly conspiratorial flavor, the Nazi use of conspiracy was more

<sup>12</sup> Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal*, 12-13. Emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1999), 121.

<sup>14</sup> Gurpinar, *Conspiracy Nation*, 12-18.

<sup>15</sup> Türkay Salim Nefes, "Understanding Anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey through the Sèvres Syndrome," *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 4 (2015): pp. 572-587, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1084876>.



incidental. The archetypal Nazi world view was so totalizing and ideological, that while their rhetoric resembled conspiracies in form, their metaphysical and spiritual nature distinguished them from the more materialist and literal Turkish theories. To the Nazis, the exact nature of the scheme against Germany was vague and ephemeral, but behind each scheme was always the Jew. Jews were responsible for everything from international finance,<sup>16</sup> to communism,<sup>17</sup> to high prices on fertilizer.<sup>18</sup> Nazi rhetoric was less intentionally conspiratorial than it was apocalyptic or millenarian.<sup>19</sup> Nazi ideology operated on a spiritual rather than material plane, casting Germany and the Jews as characters in a religious war of complete annihilation, and by fact of its radicalism it necessarily implied belief in a number of material conspiracies.

The worldview of the Nazis was not derived from conspiracy theories, rather it produced conspiracy theories as a byproduct of the Nazi belief in spiritual race war. Rather than posit individual theories that could be debunked or disproved, Nazi ideology instead constructed a total worldview that incorporated some incidentally conspiratorial elements. Indeed, Hitler occasionally rejected more mundane conspiratorial framings of issues, preferring instead to connect back his grand narrative of racial war and spiritual decline. In a speech given in 1932, he dismissed the idea that the harsh reparations of the treaty of Versailles were responsible for

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<sup>16</sup> Randall Bytwerk, "The Jew, by Joseph Goebbels," German Propaganda Archive (Calvin University, 1997), <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/angrif03.htm>. Originally published 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Randall Bytwerk, "The Swindle of the Bolsheviks, by Heinz Franke," German Propaganda Archive (Calvin University, 2011), <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/schwindel-des-bolschewismus.htm>. Originally published 1932.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Taylor, *The Rise of Hitler: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany, 1918-1933* (New York, NY: Universe Books, 1983), 83-84, transcript of a Nazi pamphlet.

<sup>19</sup> James M. Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1980); David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008).

Germany's plight, instead blaming German internal divisions and lack of will.<sup>20</sup> Richard Evans, in his book *The Hitler Conspiracies*, argues that Hitler and his inner circle were not inclined towards the promotion of conspiracy theories, but that their political ideas drew upon pre-existing conspiracies and concepts without explicitly referencing them.<sup>21</sup>

While both the literal theories of the Kemalists and the spiritual theories of the Nazis proclaimed the existence of a "hidden hand" driving the course of history, the nature of that hand is profoundly different between them. The Kemalists imagine a literal meeting of the state's enemies to secretly carve up Anatolia, covertly incite rebellion, and steal Turkish children. By contrast, the Nazis believe that the forces of history are metaphysical in nature. This they have in common with their Italian fascist neighbors; the actualism of Giovanni Gentile and the "morphological history" of Oswald Spengler both assert that history is guided by the spiritual and esoteric character of a people, rather than material events.<sup>22</sup> The Nazis and the Kemalists both used conspiracy theories, but only the Kemalists derived their national mythos from those theories.

## Racial Theories

Race played a significant role in both Nazi and Kemalist conceptions of a national community.<sup>23</sup> All Nazi policy revolved around a racial theory of Aryanism and antisemitism. All other government policy was secondary to the primary objective of carrying out the perceived racial mandate of the

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<sup>20</sup>Roderick Stackelberg and Sally Winkle, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (London: Routledge, 2002), 108.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Evans, *The Hitler Conspiracies : The Protocols - the Stab in the Back - the Reichstag Fire - Rudolf Hess - the Escape from the Bunker*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), Accessed April 6, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>22</sup> Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 47; Oswald Spengler and Charles Francis Atkinson, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality* (New York, NY: A.A. Knopf, 1970), 38-40.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Pine, *Hitler's "National Community": Society and Culture in Nazi Germany* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

German people. “Racism,” writes Dr. Christopher Browning, “was the fixed point of the system” around which all economic, military, and political concerns revolved.<sup>24</sup> In sharp contrast, while racial theories were integral to the national mythology of Kemalist Turkey, they were designed and deployed only to serve the interests of the state, and often sought to expand, as opposed to contract, the national community. Rather than racial theories driving government policy, government policy dictated racial theories.

Nazi racial theories drew upon both scientific and mythological pseudo-history to construct the Aryan race. Aryanism predated the Nazis, but Hitler enthusiastically promoted and used the theory in Nazi racial theories. Aryansim held that a superior race, the Aryans, were the progenitors of the modern Nordic and German people. Aryan racial characteristics were strictly better than other races, and thus interbreeding represented the dilution and destruction of the race. The Nazis viewed the ancient Aryan race both as a mythological, almost supernatural force, but also as an objective scientific phenomenon. To the Nazis, racial purity could be assessed by the diameter of one’s skull, but also by one’s spiritual and idealistic nature.<sup>25</sup> These two notions of race, the enlightened scientific program of the eugenicist, and the emotional Romanticism of the nationalist, coexisted uncomfortably together in Nazi racial thought, and different elements of the regime held differing views on race. However, the work of racial science was often subjugated to justify pre-existing notions of what Dan Stone calls “race mysticism,” the Romantic, volkisch and ineffable knowledge of ethnic characteristics that emerged from German nationalist narratives.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching The Final Solution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>25</sup> Johann Chapoutot and Richmond Miranda Mouillot, *The Law of Blood: Thinking and Acting as a Nazi* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 51-53

<sup>26</sup> Dan Stone, “Race Science, Race Mysticism, and the Racial State,” in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell, (Washington, DC: German Historical

In the archetypal Nazi worldview, race was the central determinant of membership in the national community. To call someone a German Jew, or a German Roma was a contradiction in terms. If one is Jewish, or Roma, or Black, one is definitionally not a German. To claim dual ethnic identity is to claim dual loyalty. The state's claim to legitimacy was its claim to represent a discrete racial stock in its entirety. The state is the natural outgrowth of the racial nation. A nation state could no more "decide" to include a previously excluded ethnic group as a person could decide to include another person's limb as a part of their own body. To indulge in medical metaphor, as the Nazis themselves often did, when one shares a body with another living being, that being is a parasite, and must be removed and destroyed by force.<sup>27</sup> While antisemitism obviously predates Nazi racial theories, the Holocaust only makes sense in the context of a Manichaean worldview in which the Jewish people are inherently corrosive to Aryan civilization.<sup>28</sup>

This is not to portray Nazi racial ideology as an unchanging monolith, nor to say that wartime Nazi policy could be extrapolated solely from pre-war Nazi theory. Elements on the periphery of the Nazi worldview shifted in response to political and military pressures, such as the elevated racial status of the Japanese or the degraded rank of the Poles.<sup>29</sup> These, however,

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Institute, 2017), pp. 176-196, 184. "The point is not that race was unimportant to the Third Reich, but that it was too important to be left to the race scientists." That concepts of behavior and spiritual factors weighed more heavily in Nazi conception of race than biological factors is demonstrated by the behavior of the SS during wartime, as shown in Gerhard Wolf, "Volk Trumps Race: The Deutsche Volkliste in Annexed Poland" in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell, (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2017), pp. 431-450.

<sup>27</sup> Chapoutot and Mouillot, *Law of Blood*, 291.

<sup>28</sup> Randall Bytwerk, "The Creators of the World's Misfortunes, by Joseph Goebbels," German Propaganda Archive (Calvin University, 2001), <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb64.htm>. Originally published 1945.

<sup>29</sup> Ricky W. Law, *Transnational Nazism Ideology and Culture in German-Japanese Relations, 1919-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

were only rearranging the least important components of the worldview, without challenging the two essential constants: the deified Aryan and the demonized Jew. The destruction of the Jews was the overriding objective of the Nazi state, beyond prosperity, beyond security, and, arguably, even beyond the military effort needed to prevent the annihilation of the regime.<sup>30</sup>

While Kemalism portrayed itself as a racialist and ethnic movement, it practiced a civic and religious form of nationalism that was thinly veiled by racist mythology. Kemalism, however, was not a benevolent and egalitarian ideology. On the contrary, Kemalism brutally suppressed minority groups throughout Turkey, such as the forced internal displacement of the Kurds.<sup>31</sup> However, rather than forcibly exclude racial groups from Turkish racial identity, as Germany did to Jews and other minorities, Kemalism instead sought to forcibly include certain racial groups into Turkish racial identity. The definition of Turkishness was expanded by the use of racial mythology, as long as that expansion served the needs of the state.

This pragmatic racial outlook can be seen most obviously in the use of racial pseudo-history in the language purification process, which was an attempt to rid Turkish of foreign, especially Arabic and Persian, loanwords. The process ran into a problem however: “the campaign had been carried out with such haste that many words had been purged from Turkish, without a publicly accepted replacement in place. Most people were unable to understand pure Turkish.”<sup>32</sup> In response to this crisis, the regime deployed the Turkish Historical Thesis,

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2020); John Connelly, “Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice,” *Central European History* 32, no. 1 (1999): 1–33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4546842>.

<sup>30</sup> Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, 59–78.

<sup>31</sup> Ungör Uğur Umit, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108–169.

<sup>32</sup> Soner Cagaptay, “Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2004): pp. 86–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0026320042000213474>, 91.

which was a pseudo-historical myth that proposed that in their migration from central Asia to the Middle East, the Turkish race had spread civilization from east to west, inspiring the Egyptians, Greeks, and Persians.<sup>33</sup> This myth, much like Aryanism and the Nazis, predated the Kemalist regime, dating back to the father of Turkish nationalism, Ziya Gökalp,<sup>34</sup> but was appropriated to rationalize the policies of the state. Since all languages descended from the far older Turkish, the Kemalists argued, the removed words were Turkish loanwords stolen by other languages.<sup>35</sup>

A similar sleight of hand was used to justify assimilation policies towards non-ethnic Turks who were otherwise citizens in good standing. The regime held that the ancient Anatolian Hittites were actually Turkish, and therefore all current inhabitants of Anatolia were partially Turkish because of racial mixing over the centuries.<sup>36</sup> It would require only that the minorities in question participate in Turkishness by renouncing their old ethnicities and languages and speaking exclusively Turkish. Non-Turks were simply “Turks that needed to be

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<sup>33</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2016), 103.

<sup>34</sup> Ziya Gökalp and Niyazi Berkes, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 267. “The earliest founders of the Mediterranean civilization were Turanian peoples, such as the Sumerians, Elamites, Phoenicians, Hittites, Scythians, the Hyksos, and the Cumans. There was a Turanian Age in history before the ancient ages. The early inhabitants of Western Asia were Turks. The ancient Turks, who were attacked by Semites from the south and by Aryans from the north, were forced to turn temporarily towards the Far East. But this temporary Eastern affinity does not prove anything against our affinity towards of Western civilization. The earliest founders of the early Mediterranean civilization were our forefathers. Much later, Muslim Arabs, Persians, and Turks again improved this civilization and became the teachers of the uncivilized Europeans.”

<sup>35</sup> Çağaptay, “Race, Assimilation, and Kemalism,” 88-91; İlker Aytürk, “H. F. Kvergić and the Sun-Language Theory,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 159, no. 1 (2009): 23–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13173/zeitdeutmorggese.159.1.0023>. This linguistic theory was known as the Sun Language Theory.

<sup>36</sup> Çağaptay, “Race, Assimilation, and Kemalism,” 97.

reminded of their ancestry.”<sup>37</sup> Jews in particular were targeted for “Turkification;” they were seen as a model minority that remained loyal even as other minorities rebelled. Some of the most famous statements of Turkish national pride imply this nominalist definition, such as the slogan “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” and the quote from Atatürk, “Happy is the one who says, ‘I am a Turk,’” repeated each morning by school children as part of the “Students’ Oath” to this day.<sup>38</sup>

While Kemalism was inclusive when it served the state, it could also be racist and antisemitic when it was in the interest of the regime. The official stance of the national Kemalist government was that antisemitism would not be tolerated, but local officials received little pushback from Ankara when implementing racist and antisemitic policies. In 1934, mass violence and pogroms broke out in Eastern Thrace, possibly due to the influence of Nazi-funded antisemitic publications, and while those government figures held responsible were briefly arrested, none were ever charged.<sup>39</sup> The Ankara government also implemented forced labor and wealth tax initiatives that, while not explicitly targeting Jews, were associated with antisemitic rhetoric, claiming that those communities which had gathered wealth due to exemption from military service in the Ottoman Empire were to be subject to a special tax. Local governments disproportionately selected Jews to bear the brunt of these measures.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Iker Aytürk, “The Racist Critics of Atatürk and Kemalism, from the 1930s to the 1960s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 2 (2011): pp. 308-335, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009410392411>, 331.

<sup>38</sup> Çagatay, “Race, Assimilation, and Kemalism,” 96; “Court Rules Student Oath Should Be Reinstated in Turkey,” *Ahval*, 2018, <https://ahvalnews.com/education/court-rules-student-oath-should-be-reinstated-turkey>.

<sup>39</sup> Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 62-63.

<sup>40</sup> Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 70-81. Under Islamic law, non-Muslims were subject to the *Jizya*, a special tax that compensated for being relieved from mandatory conscription in times of war. However, the *Jizya* was relatively small, and non-Muslims often became somewhat wealthy.

Kemalism also suppressed calls for including ethnic Turks outside Turkey in Turkish identity. Large Turkish minorities lived in the constituent republics of the Soviet Union and Greece. While Turkey never used military threats to claim territory, the Turkish state instead engaged in population transfers with Greece as part of a larger reconciliation effort, displacing and expelling ethnic Greeks in return for ethnic Turks.<sup>41</sup> These limited ambitions were sharply curtailed, however, in situations where they would jeopardize Turkey's security. The Soviet Union contained several republics that were ethnically majority Turkic, and the Soviets feared that an ethnic nationalist movement could lead to rebellion. Not wanting to upset their vastly stronger neighbor, Turkey agreed to suppress Turkic solidarity in return for the Soviets refraining from attempting to spread communism to Turkey.<sup>42</sup> From at least 1931 onwards, the Turkish state censored all calls for unity with Soviet Turkic peoples.

Genuine racialist intellectuals, most famously the novelist and journalist Nihal Atsız, were seen as dangerous threats to the regime. Atsız was a proponent of pan-Turanism, which held that Turks around the world should unite into a single political unit.<sup>43</sup> They critiqued Kemalist racial theory as considering Jews, Greeks, and Arabs within Turkey to be racial Turks, while simultaneously completely ignoring the large, ethnically Turkish regions occupied by the Soviet Union on their border. Racists resisted the expansion of Turkishness and saw the leaders of the government as traitors to the Turkish race, if they were even Turkish at all.<sup>44</sup>

While Kemalist racialism uncomfortably tolerated the more radical racists for some time, Turkey's diplomatic realignment at the end of World War II ended the era of state sponsored racial theorizing. Once it became clear that Germany would lose the war, Turkey's policy of ambiguous

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<sup>41</sup> Baskın Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006 Facts and Analyses with Documents* (Johanneshov: TPB, 2011), 198-200.

<sup>42</sup> Ayturk, "Racist Critics," 328.

<sup>43</sup> Ayturk, "Racist Critics" , 308-335.

<sup>44</sup> Ayturk, "Racist Critics," 326. Some high-ranking officials in the Turkish government were ethnically Balkan. This was exploited by racists.



neutrality was abandoned in favor of closer ties to the West and strategic deference to the USSR.<sup>45</sup> In this geopolitical environment, racialism was a major liability to both those objectives. While elaborate racial theories were an asset in negotiations with Nazi Germany, they turned off potential Western allies.<sup>46</sup> Simultaneously, a militarized and paranoid Soviet Union continued to look with suspicion upon calls for a Turkish ethnic identity that superseded national borders.

In 1944, Nihal Atsiz, along with forty-seven other well-known racists were arrested in what came to be called the “racism-Turanism trials.”<sup>47</sup> While all participants were eventually acquitted under free speech laws, many were held in jail for up to three years awaiting trial. Meanwhile, the Kemalists abandoned their ethnic theories and ideas and renounced many of the pseudo-historical beliefs that previously were the state ideology.<sup>48</sup> The era of Turkish racialism was over, tainted by the reputation of the Nazis, who were alleged to have been funding several of the racist writers arrested in the 1944 trial.<sup>49</sup>

Nazi Germany and Kemalist Turkey both promoted and developed racial myths drawing on pseudo-history and pseudo-science. However, the role each myth played within their respective state varied widely. Membership in Turkish ethnicity was decided by participation in the state, not blood. In this way myths explicitly about racial superiority were repurposed into tools to promote a civic notion of citizenship. Unlike Nazi Germany, the ethnic boundary of Turkishness was seen as fluid, subject to negotiation and compromise. Rather than the state being under the control of the nation, the nation was under the control of the state.

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<sup>45</sup> Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 276.

<sup>46</sup> Ayturk, “Racist Critics,” 335.

<sup>47</sup> Uzer, *An Intellectual History*, 154-158; Ayturk, “Racist Critics,” 316; Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 276.

<sup>48</sup> Ayturk, “Racist Critics,” 335.

<sup>49</sup> Ayturk, “Racist Critics,” 316.

## Democracy and Dictatorship

One of the most striking similarities between Kemalist Turkey and Nazi Germany is the role played by their respective leaders. Both Hitler and Ataturk ascended beyond the normal sphere of political existence and acquired a spiritual image in the public imagination, and both deliberately cultivated their mythos into a cult of personality. Despite this commonality, the two regimes differed on what their leaders represented in the larger context of history. To the Nazis, much like their Italian Fascist progenitors, National Socialist dictatorship was the transcendent and ultimate form of government. Democracy had failed, and fascist dictatorship was the wave of the future. In Turkey, however, great pains were taken to portray Ataturk's 16-year reign as a unique phenomenon, a temporary crutch to develop Turkey before democracy could be achieved. While Ataturk and his followers portrayed him as above the fray of parliamentary politics, they did not disparage the concept of parliaments in general, and in fact made failed attempts to gradually create a multi-party democracy.

The Nazi party was anti-democratic since its inception and sought to end parliamentary democracy. This anti-parliamentary sentiment was so prevalent that Goebbels felt the need to defend the Nazi choice to run for the detested Reichstag:

We are an anti-parliamentarian party that for good reasons rejects the Weimar constitution and its republican institutions. We oppose a fake democracy that treats the intelligent and the foolish, the industrious and the lazy, in the same way. We see in the present system of majorities and organized irresponsibility the main cause of our steadily increasing miseries. So why do we want to be in the Reichstag?

We enter the Reichstag to arm ourselves with democracy's weapons. If democracy is foolish enough to give us free railway passes and salaries, that is its problem. It does not concern us. Any way of bringing about the revolution is fine by us... Do not believe that

parliament is our goal. We have shown the enemy our nature from the podiums of our mass meetings and in the enormous demonstrations of our brown army. We will show it as well in the leaden atmosphere of parliament.

We are coming neither as friends or neutrals. We come as enemies! As the wolf attacks the sheep, so come we.<sup>50</sup>

Democracy, to the Nazis, was a weak, inefficient system of government that had been tried, in the form of the Weimar Republic, and had failed. The role of the dictator was central in Nazi ideology and fascist philosophy in general. Democracy split the people, they argued, creating fractious mobs out of the national unity. Dictatorship, by centralizing power into one person's hands, allowed the national will to be accurately translated into national action.<sup>51</sup> This is an optimistic view of dictatorship, but it reflects that dictatorship was not an accidental byproduct of the Nazi state, but rather a primary element of the regime.

Turkey under Ataturk exhibited equally dictatorial features to Nazi Germany. Ataturk, using the threat of a Kurdish revolt as a pretense, banned the opposition party and seized control of the press in the 1925, and executed most remaining opponents by 1926 in reaction to an alleged assassination conspiracy.<sup>52</sup> Ataturk faced little to no practical limits on the exercise of power within Turkey. However, rather than glorify

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<sup>50</sup> Randall Bytwerk, "The Miracle, by Joseph Goebbels," German Propaganda Archive (Calvin University, 2020), <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/angrif21.htm>. Originally given as a speech in 1926.

<sup>51</sup>"We have seen through all the hypocrisy of the democracies, and we know only one person who is able to speak for us, and if necessary act for us: our Führer Adolf Hitler!" Summary of a speech given by Robert Wagner, *Gauleiter* of Baden, in 1938. Randall Bytwerk, "The True Face of the Democracies, by Robert Wagner," German Propaganda Archive (Calvin University, 2011), <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/robert-wagner2.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 180-187; Erik Zürcher, *Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic: The Progressive Republican Party, 1924-1925* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 116.

this centralization, it was instead concealed and excused. While Atatürk was designated as the permanent President of the regime, this was supposedly so that he could enjoy political stability while preparing the Turkish people for a democracy that would take effect after his death.<sup>53</sup> Turkey, the regime claimed, was simply not ready for free and fair elections. The great mass of the people were still enthralled by Islamist fanaticism or “İrtica.”<sup>54</sup> According to the Kemalists, “democracy should be delayed in order to protect it from fanatics or enemies of the regime who use religion for political ends.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the dictatorship of Atatürk was a regrettable necessity, embarrassing to the larger ideological project.

The relationship between Atatürk and democracy can best be illustrated through the founding and subsequent dissolution of the Free Republican Party<sup>56</sup> in 1930. Hoping to create a center-right loyal opposition to the ruling center-left Republican People’s Party,<sup>57</sup> Atatürk ordered several of his closest advisors and even some of his family members to form a new party. However, as the only legal party other than the Republican People’s Party, the Free Republican Party attracted conservatives, Islamists, and other groups the Kemalists wanted to keep out of power. This startled the ruling party, and Atatürk ordered the Free Republican Party to be disbanded, and several candidates to be arrested.<sup>58</sup> The Kemalists wanted a free democracy, but it had to be a free democracy within the permitted boundaries of political discourse; political actors too far outside the spectrum of acceptable opinion were dealt with harshly.

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<sup>53</sup> Donald Everett Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk* (Philadelphia, PA: AMS press, 1939), 173.

<sup>54</sup> İrtica translates roughly to reaction in the political sense, but with the implication of conservative views on gender and democracy in particular. In the context of Turkish politics it is usually associated with radical Islamist resistance. Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası, or S.C.F.

<sup>57</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, C.H.P.

<sup>58</sup> Zürcher, *A Modern History*, 186-187.

Despite this crucial difference in their outlooks on despotism, Nazi Germany and Kemalist Turkey both engaged in the creation of a mythical cult of personality around their leader. However, while in Germany the Hitler cult was very much intertwined with the Nazi movement, in Turkey the cult of Atatürk was mostly unrelated to his ideology or party and was predicated on apolitical achievements during the War of Independence. Atatürk's cult of personality was an alternative way for the state to appeal to citizens for whom the broader Kemalist agenda was not popular. While educated doctors, lawyers, and industrialists needed no additional incentive to sign onto Atatürk's westernizing and secularizing reforms, rural peasants and devout Muslims instead bought into Atatürk's mythos and reputation as a war hero and were both apathetic to and ignorant of the ambitions of Kemalist reforms.<sup>59</sup> M. Sucru Hanioglu, in his biography of Atatürk, recalls an incident in 1954:

A young shepherd was leading his flock out to pasture in the remote village of Yukarı Gündeş in the eastern Turkish province of Ardahan. As the sun set, a shadow falling on a nearby hill seemed to trace the exact profile of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic. Convinced that he had been vouchsafed a religious experience, the incredulous shepherd reported his encounter to the local authorities, who wasted no time in publicizing this rare natural phenomenon nationwide as a miracle. Local excitement did not die down with the passage of time and, in 1997, it was finally decided to launch on this spot a festival that drew enormous crowds of spectators eager to witness the phenomenon for themselves.<sup>60</sup>

Atatürk's image was cultivated to bridge the wide gap between east and west within Turkey, and to make the westernizing program more palatable to an audience still thought to be in

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<sup>59</sup> Zurcher, *A Modern History*, 202.

<sup>60</sup> M. Sukru Hanioglu, *Atatürk - an Intellectual Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 1.

the grips of İrtica.<sup>61</sup> This apolitical cult had such broad appeal that in the years after his death the moderate Islamist Democrat Party, which was in direct competition with the Kemalist Republican People's Party, concocted increasingly ostentatious ways to honor his legacy, such as banning insulting his memory in 1951.<sup>62</sup> Hitler, by contrast, had no appeal outside the normal ideological limits of Nazism, and fanatical Hitler worship was synonymous with fanatical Nazism.

### Unrequited Fascination: Turko-German Relations

The similarities between the Turkish and Nazi regimes did not go unnoticed at the time. The Nazis saw Turkey as a positive example and even a role model in rejecting the post World War I global regime, and the success of the Turkish War of Independence as proof that the German military was stabbed in the back. If the Turkish military was able to rally despite their civilian leadership surrendering, there was no reason the Germans could not do so as well. Throughout the era of Nazi rule, German leadership were optimistic that Turkey could be persuaded to join the Axis and invested resources into cultivating positive relations and sponsoring Nazi friendly Turkish writers. For their part, the Kemalists were wary of Nazi expansionism, and kept Germany at arm's length diplomatically. The Turkish state portrayed itself with strategic ambiguity, as a western-style democracy in the making to the Allies, and as a revolutionary ethnostate to the fascists of Europe.<sup>63</sup>

The German right of the late 1910s and early 20s saw a kindred spirit in the nascent Turkish nationalist movement. Both were founded out of anger at the civilian governments of their respective empires, and out of a sense that the war had

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<sup>61</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 190.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Mango, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002), 36.

<sup>63</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, "Review of Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30, no. 3 (2016): pp. 560-562, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hgs/dcw074>.

not been lost on the battlefield but in treaty negotiations by unworthy leaders, the stabbed in the back myth given a Turkish form condemning Christian minorities.<sup>64</sup> To the Germans, the Turkish War of Independence was “hypernationalist pornography,”<sup>65</sup> demonstrating that the treaties imposed by the Entente could be challenged and rejected. The German right-wing press fixated on the Turkish war, and explicitly called for a German Ataturk to arise and lead the Germans to victory.<sup>66</sup>

German nationalist interest in Turkey became a matter of national policy after the Nazis took power. German intellectuals saw Turkish Kemalism, Italian Fascism and German Nazism as examples of the same ideology across time and space. It was the SS, not the Wehrmacht, who formed the honor guard at the 10 year anniversary of the Turkish Republic.<sup>67</sup> Hitler wrote that “Ataturk was a teacher; Mussolini was his first and I his second student,” and that while Ataturk had completed Turkey’s national transformation, the transformations of Italy and Germany were still in progress.<sup>68</sup> While these are no doubt exaggerations designed to influence Turkish policy towards Germany, the mere fact that Hitler was willing to say such things demonstrates his willingness to give Ataturk lip-service. Ataturk’s dictatorship was seen as an example of the “Fuhrer Principle” at work, and Nazi newspapers often referred to Ataturk as the “Turkish Fuhrer.”<sup>69</sup>

German attempts to influence Turkey extended to cultural efforts as well. Germany funded Turkish intellectuals and publications thought to be more in line with the German agenda.<sup>70</sup> The German government also subsidized the sale of

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<sup>64</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 61.

<sup>67</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 119-123; John M. VanderLippe, *The Politics of Turkish Democracy: Ismet Inönü and the Formation of the Multi-Party System, 1938-1950* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>68</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 98-116.

<sup>69</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 153.

<sup>70</sup> Ayturk, “Racist Critics,” 316.

newsprint to Turkish newspapers, allowing German papers to undercut the prices charged by French or British publications. This led to an abundance of German political cartoons, editorials, and articles appearing in Turkish newspapers.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout their reign, the Nazis prioritized relations with Turkey. This was partially for economic reasons, as Turkey was a key supplier of chromium to the Third Reich, but ideological concerns also played a role.<sup>72</sup> Germany saw Turkey as a natural ally with shared interests and goals, namely to neuter the threat posed by the Soviet Union, and to reduce British and French influence on the Middle East.<sup>73</sup> German diplomacy placed Turkey on a high pedestal, with Turkish diplomats seated at state dinners next to Italy and Austria.<sup>74</sup> Despite these overtures Turkey maintained neutrality during the war, making economic deals with both sides. When pressured by Germany about taking a more firm pro-Axis stance, Turkey stated that the territorial ambitions of Germany's allies—first the Soviet Union, then Italy—made entering the war impossible.<sup>75</sup> Hitler held out hope that Turkey would join the Axis throughout the entire war, ordering his generals to avoid entering Turkish waters, vetoing any war plans that involved invading Turkey, and even defending Crimea from the Soviets longer than was strategically advisable in the hopes of trading it to Turkey in return for an alliance after the war.<sup>76</sup>

While there existed broad support for Germany during World War II among the Turkish populace and military, the administration took deliberate steps to keep newspaper coverage as neutral as possible throughout the war.<sup>77</sup> German territorial ambitions were seen as dangerous disruptions to the status quo, and a threat to Turkey's precarious position.<sup>78</sup> Turkey was weak militarily and, after continuous wars from

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<sup>71</sup> Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 250.

<sup>73</sup> Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 124.

<sup>75</sup> Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 240.

<sup>76</sup> Ihrig, *Nazi Imagination*, 220.

<sup>77</sup> Vanderlippe, *Politics of Turkish Democracy*, 44-95.

<sup>78</sup> Gurpinar, *Conspiracy Nation*, 15.



1897 to 1923 that reduced the population of Anatolia from 18 million to 14 million, was unwilling to fight again under any circumstances.<sup>79</sup> While Turkey conducted a great deal of trade with Germany, it also gave refuge to some German exiles who could serve as professors or scientists. Turkey did not, however, host any significant number of non-professional Jewish refugees.<sup>80</sup> The archives of the Foreign Office in Ankara remain sealed to this day, and the Turkish government sponsored state histories that exaggerated Turkish ignorance of the Holocaust and Turkish openness to refugees.<sup>81</sup> What Turkey knew about the Holocaust, and their level of coordination with the Nazi regime, remains unknown to this day.

## Conclusion

Kemalism and Nazism are ideologies of their era, constructed in the specific context of their national situation. Both nations were left crippled and humiliated by the end of World War I. Neither the Kemalists nor the Nazis were inevitable hegemonies of their respective political systems; the Kemalists narrowly seized victory in the War of Independence, and the Nazis managed to convert a parliamentary minority into complete power only through a series of unlikely events. Both blamed minorities and conspiracies for their defeat, and both created elaborate theories of race that included and

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<sup>79</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Frederic C. Shorter, "The Population of Turkey after the War of Independence," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 4 (1985): pp. 417-441, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002074380002941x>.

<sup>80</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews*, 83-106. Turkey has, over the years, acquired a reputation as a safe haven for Jews fleeing the Holocaust, despite passing laws forbidding Jewish immigration in the late 1930s. This is because Turkey acted earlier and more aggressively in recruiting exiled scientists and educated Jews than other countries, and these educated and wealthy Jewish emigres were in a much better position to write about their experiences than the large numbers of poor and unskilled refugees Turkey turned away. This was compounded by deliberate efforts by the Turkish state to rewrite their history.

<sup>81</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews*, 148-149.

excluded exactly who the state desired to either promote or marginalize. Both were led by “great men of history” whose personal will and desires served as the bedrock of the nation. These similarities emerged from the need for a new idea of the nation, disconnected from what came before. To the Kemalists, the Ottoman Empire represented an archaic, multi-ethnic chaos led by dogmatic zealots into total destruction. To the Nazis, the Weimar Republic was a decadent, lazy, corrupt regime that sold the German people out to Jewish capitalists. They shared a narrative of national rejuvenation won only by the collective will of the racially pure people. Where they differed, however, was in their enemies and needs.

The Kemalists sought to present Turkey as a modern, western nation, equal to France or Britain. As part of this effort, Turkey had to be an active participant in the international order it had so recently disputed in the Turkish War of Independence. The Kemalists wanted to preserve the status quo and become an unquestioned part of the European system. This meant disavowing territorial ambitions, suppressing reactionary movements, and retaining strict control over its racial ideology. The Kemalists found themselves caught between powerful external forces on the left, and dangerous internal forces on the right, meaning total ideological control and self-restraint were needed to avoid fomenting revolutionary zeal that would lead to annihilation. The Nazis, by contrast, were intent on the destruction of the world order. The Nazis were the most radical element of their political system, and so increasing ideological extremism only served the regime. Racial theories could be as obscure and exclusionary as necessary, conspiracy theories as unbelievable and esoteric as desired, and the Fuhrer could transcend mere mortality and become a godlike figure. All these were possibilities for the Nazis because they had no right flank to defend, no need for ideological delineation when there was no fear of being overtaken. The Nazis were more radical because their political environment permitted greater radicalism.

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# The history of *History Matters*

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## Appalachian State University, Department of History

Have you ever spent so much time and effort on something that you wanted to share it with other people? Have you ever felt unfulfilled receiving only a grade and your own satisfaction as rewards for your hard work? Have you ever wanted to get your work published?

For these reasons *History Matters* was founded. In the spring of 2003, Eric Burnette, a freshman at Appalachian State University, was looking for an outlet for his research paper. He was frustrated by the lack of venues for undergraduate research, and he figured that other students probably felt the same way. Dr. Michael Moore, who had edited *Albion*, a professional journal of British history, for more than 25 years, began advising Burnette on how best to go about starting an academic journal for undergraduate historical research. Another Appalachian student, Matthew Manes, was asked to join the interesting experiment, and together they laid the groundwork for *History Matters*.

Our first deadline was in late January 2004. For the editorial staff, it was an extensive and time-consuming process of reading, revising, and communicating with both the authors and the Faculty Editorial Board. In the end, the collaboration published one research paper, one research essay, and three editorial book reviews. This first issue of *History Matters: An Undergraduate Journal of Historical Research* was published online on April 28, 2004.

From the beginning, Burnette and Manes wanted to expand the journal. The more students who were involved, the more students who had the opportunity to be published and the better those papers would be. The 2004-2005 school year saw the participation of the University of North Carolina Asheville and Western Carolina University, as well as submissions from half a dozen schools nationwide. The 2005 issue was published with two research papers, one from Appalachian State University and one from a student at Villanova University. Five book reviews from all three participating departments were also published.

Since 2004, *History Matters* has grown drastically. Over the years our submission base increased from 11 papers in 2004-2005 to 136 papers in 2016-2017. We now receive submissions from all over the United States from distinguished universities including Yale, Harvard, Brown, Cornell, UC Berkeley, and Stanford. *History Matters* has also expanded internationally. We have received submissions from Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and South America while also employing international staff members as contributing editors.

Today, *History Matters* continues to grow and prosper thanks to a supportive faculty, department, university, and, most importantly, the students who have worked hard on their papers and work with us to get them published.

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