the ascendant historian

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the ascendant historian

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I am thrilled to present this years edition of *The Ascendant Historian*, the University of Victoria's undergraduate history journal. The papers in this volume are an excellent example of the type of work produced by the students in the history undergraduate body at UVic. It has been my honour to work on this journal for the past year, and I am so excited to finally be able to share the finished product.

I would like to thank everyone who made the publication of this journal possible. Our peer review team, who evaluated all our original submissions to determine which papers would be selected for the final journal. Our faculty advisors, whose experience and insight provided our authors with invaluable feedback. Our editing team, who dedicated countless hours to reading and re-reading drafts. To our authors, than you for trusting us with your work and allowing us to present your ideas to a new audience.

Finally, thank you to you, the reader. The opportunities for young historians to publish their work can often feel inaccessible or daunting, but in picking up this volume you have helped each of our authors begin their academic careers.

Gwendoline Hodges, Editor in Chief, June 2025

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

I am delighted to introduce the 2025 issue of the University of Victoria History Department's undergraduate journal, *The Ascendant Historian*. In this volume, readers will find an impressive range of original and innovative scholarship by UVic History students. Topics range from military to social history, from gender norms to revolutionary dynamics, from the ancient to the modern. Yet all of these papers illustrate our students' intellectual curiosity and nuanced analysis at a time when the world is badly in need of both.

Over the past few months, rising trade conflicts and US-Canadian tensions have reminded us all of the importance of historical knowledge and perspective. They have also reminded us of the dangers of superficial thinking and unreflective nationalism. And no discipline better prepares us to understand and navigate these perils than history. Although the messages emanating from media and society seem to emphasize only the need for scientific and technical education, our world is greatly in need of those trained to think historically.

As in previous volumes of *The Ascendant Historian*, the articles in this issue offer superb examples of this form of thinking. On behalf of my colleagues in the History Department, I salute the authors, editors, and peer reviewers of *The Ascendant Historian* for once again producing a superb collection of scholarship by our young historians. You make us all proud.

Jason Colby, Department Chair, April 2025

COVER IMAGE NOTE

This photo captures the remarkable archaeological site of Chichén Itzá, which I had the privilege of visiting over winter break this year. In HSTR 376E: The History of the Aztec, Inka, and Maya, Dr. Beatriz Alba-Koch introduced the class to the thriving capital of the Itza people. During the age of faltering Mayan Kingship, Chichén Itzá utilized *Mul Tepal* or 'joint rule' to create a thriving city and a cosmopolitan nobility. When I heard that my family would be traveling to Mexico over winter break, I immediately knew that I had to see the site — now considered one of the 7 wonders of the world— for myself!

Fiona McVeigh

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Agriculture on the Lombard Plain: A Medieval and Early Modern Overview

Stefano Buckley

Abstract

Examining the composition of a particular landscape is a fruitful framework by which to understand its human history. The Lombard Plain, in northern Italy, is no exception. This paper identifies key forces which shaped the region during the medieval and early modern period, such as the ambitions of the ducal families of Milan, an emphasis on intensive agriculture, commercial interests, and the development of canals. It also argues that despite praise for Lombardy's fertility and productivity, one must consider the influences of disease, war, and the oppression of the rural population in order to provide a balanced understanding of this landscape.

In his book *Crisis and Continuity* (1979), Domenico Sella describes how by the sixteenth century the northern Italian region of Lombardy had become "one of the most prosperous corners of Europe".[1] The Duchy of Milan, especially, boasted an especially rich agricultural landscape.[2] However, it had not always enjoyed this position. The road to bounty had been paved by a series of topographical alterations carried out over centuries by the inhabitants of Lombardy. These inhabitants had such an extensive role in transforming the terrain that, according to Filippo Brandolini, it had become an "entirely artificial landscape" by the twentieth century.[3] In this paper I will focus especially upon those efforts of the Middle Ages and early modern period whose effect may still be seen on the Lombard landscape. I will analyze how the people of this region exerted their will on the landscape it resided in (particularly on the region's low plain), and in turn how one may read this landscape to understand the developments of said people.

I will first provide a brief overview of the region as a whole, which as Douglas Dowd explains is "unusually varied in its physical attributes."[4] I will then examine how the geography of the low plain was converted from an unworkable marsh to one that could sustain a population density nearly unmatched in Europe.[5] As this tale of transformation is interwoven with the political aims of Milan's ducal families, studying the area's canals and irrigation projects demonstrates how societal changes precluded changes of the land. However, the bulk of this paper, will concentrate on the rural economy—the food and textiles it produced, the agricultural systems implemented to do so, and the people who executed these systems. I shall conclude with a discussion of the hardships which assailed the inhabitants of the Lombard plain, to emphasize that it required exacting effort to make this land productive for cultivation. Ultimately, it is my intention to provide a perspective on the historical and topographical conditions of the Lombard plain: a consideration of how the landscape influenced, and was influenced by, the culture that lived in it.

For much of the medieval and early modern period, Lombardy, for much of the medieval and early modern period, was synonymous with the lands controlled by Milan. Milan was large compared to other contemporary Italian states, and was topographically diverse.[6] Though the focus of this essay is upon *la bassa*, the low plain

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[1] Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity: The Economy of Spanish Lombardy In The Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Filippo Brandolini and Mauro Cremaschi, "The Impact of Late Holocene Flood Management on the Central Po Plain (Northern Italy)," *Sustainability* 10, no. 11: 5. doi.org/10.3390/su10113968.
[4] Douglas F. Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy, 1300-1500: A Study in Political Stimuli to Economic Change," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 21, no. 2 (June 1961): 148. www.jstor.org/stable/2115185.
[5] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity,* 3.
[6] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 144.

between Milan and the Po River,[7] it is helpful to study Lombardy's other zones as comparisons.

The hills north of Milan were generally heavily forested, remaining so up until the twentieth century.[8] Even in the late sixteenth century, the valley of Valtravaglia had only one-third of its land under cultivation, the remainder being occupied by dense woods.[9] One should recall this low-intensity land use when considering the sheer density and agricultural organisation of space that existed in *la bassa*.

Below the hill zone exists the high plain, which sits between 150m-300m in altitude and covers roughly ten percent of Lombardy. Its soil was poor, and overall, it was a dry landscape,[10] yet despite this about three-quarters of its area was being directly cultivated.[11] The agriculture there was different from that of the hills or the low plain. For example, both the hill zone and the high plain incorporated a fallowing system, whereas fallowing was not done on the low plain.[12]

Lastly, there is the low plain, that land of exalted fertility.[13] The city of Milan was the urban heart of this zone, a fact which its earlier Latin name suggests. *Mediolanum*, likely meaning *Middle Plain*, indicates the ancient city's location as the plain between the Ticino and Adda rivers.[14] Likely due to its location, severed from the sea, and the conveniences that a coastal position would have brought,[15] Milan exerted a great effort to connect itself to the surrounding country by way of canals. These canals were also used for irrigation, they directed water from the Alpine rivers which crossed the low plain and distributed it to other rural zones. This plentiful supply of water was to be the foundation of all of Milan's agricultural endeavours.[16] However, these watercourses which watered the low plain in winter completely dried up during the summer.[17] This dramatic contrast between flooding and drought should be recalled when considering the lives of the people who worked the land prior to industrial machinery. As Fernand Braudel advises, one should forgo notions of climatic clemency which often accompany ideas about the Mediterranean.[18] Such an effort to control the land was a response to the precariousness which geography and weather allotted.[19]

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[7] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 3.
[8] Ibid., 5.
[9] Ibid., 9.
[10] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 5.

[11] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 149.
[12] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 6. Fallowing is an agricultural practice in which an arable field is not cultivated for a period of time to allow it to replenish soil nutrients, break pest life cycles, and so on.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Serena Ferrando, "Water in Milan: A cultural History of the Naviglio," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* Vol. 21, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 375.
[15] Ibid., 376.
[16] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 149-50.
[17] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London: William Collins Sons & Co), 72.
[18] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 238.
[19] Ibid., 241.

Changing *la bassa*'s terrain had begun long before the period examined in this paper.[20] Canals (most notably the *Vecchiabbia*) around Milan were already being constructed during the early second 2nd century.[21] This countryside under the Romans had indeed been intensively managed, yet much of this productivity was lost when rainfall became more frequent during the Dark Age Cold Period (roughly 400 CE - 750 CE), resulting in an expansion of wetlands.[22] It was only in the tenth century that work was resumed to reclaim the wetlands for human use.[23] This fact follows a change in climate as well: between 900 CE and 1300 CE, the Medieval Warm Period allowed the population of Europe to triple.[24] Such a surge demanded an increase in food production, requiring more land to be put to the plough, more forests cleared, more marshes drained, and irrigation systems developed.[25] Besides draining the lowland swamps, altering *la bassa* involved the difficult tasks of flattening its land and directing Alpine glacier water to drier areas.[26] Despite this new need for more cultivable land being a broader European trend, Braudel contends that its unfolding on the Lombard plain is the best example of land-improvement anywhere in the Mediterranean.[27]

This work is perhaps best understood by studying Lombardy's *navigli*, its canals, whose construction was begun in the twelfth century and not ceased until the nineteenth.[28] During the twelfth century, Milan had built its famous Naviglio Grande for irrigation,[29] though its canals could also serve a defensive purpose, such as the *Fossa Interna* (the 'Inner Ditch') that was built in 1160 to protect the city from the martial advances of Frederick Barbarossa.[30] As previously mentioned, another key function of the canals was their ability to connect the various regions of Lombardy. To Milan, surrounded by land and not afforded the luxury of a major river flowing through the city as Florence or Rome had,[31] the *navigli* played an integral role in joining rural with urban.[32] With the 1456 Martesana Canal, Milan was linked to Lakes Como and Maggiore,[33] as well as to the Ticino and Adda rivers by way of the Naviglio Bereguardo—creating a continuous water network 88 kilometres long.[34] This made Milan a transport hub, connected by its canals to the more distant reaches of the state.

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[20] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 66.
[21] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 150.
[22] Brandolini and Cremaschi, "The Impact of Late Holocene Flood Management," 15.
[23] Ibid., 4.
[24] Ibid., 1.
[25] Brandolini and Cremaschi, "The Impact of Late Holocene Flood Management," 2.
[26] Ibid., 72.
[27] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* 72. I would note that the term 'improvement' is intended solely for an agricultural purpose - the ecological effects of this process might be interpreted differently.
[28] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity,* 6.
[29] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 151.
[30] Ferrando, "Water in Milan: A Cultural History of the *Naviglio*," 375.
[31] Ibid., 383.
[32] Ibid., 387.
[33] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 73.
[34] Ferrando, "Water in Milan: A Cultural History of the *Naviglio*," 376.

The story of *la bassa*'s canals is largely a product of the changing political climate of medieval Milan. Preceded by a waning of the commune system[35] during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Milanese dukes in the Visconti and Sforza families realized they could consolidate their power by limiting the political influence of the old aristocracy and giving it to an emerging middle class.[36] It was primarily this new middle-class, rurally-focussed but wealthy, that made Lombardy's land more suitable for cultivation.[37] Yet it should be emphasized that this endeavour was still ultimately led by Milan's dukes, due to the great expense of making the land more suitable for farming.[38] Substantially developed by the city's dukes, and run by wealthy agriculturalists, the canal-based agricultural system was pivotal to the political ambitions of the Visconti and Sforza.[39]

This also demonstrates the extent to which the social and economic conditions of European regions were strongly influenced by the landscape.[40] According to Braudel, a "more free civilization on the American pattern" emerged in northern Europe, where one could prepare land for farming by clearing woodlands with axe and pick. However, it was more difficult to convert land around the Mediterranean, with its extensive marshes and deeply entrenched social hierarchy. This meant that such works were only carried out by the wealthiest—by landowners who could enforce the very hierarchy they benefited from.[41]

In the sixteenth century, agricultural workers made up between sixty to seventy percent of the region's population.[42] Even before 1600, *la bassa* was dominated by commercialized forms of agriculture. Large estates that were worked by day labourers specialised and focussed on growing cash crops, a model which had developed due to the demand of urban centres.[43] The situation that Sella describes in *Crisis and Continuity* is one of intensive levels of resource-extraction, in which the production efforts of rural Lombardy were focused above all on satisfying the demand of urban consumption.[44] This demand gave rise to an intricate system of husbandry which allowed for impressive amounts of cultivation. It was for this reason that the Burgundian writer and diplomat Philippe de Commines, visiting in 1495, compared the plain to the Low Countries.[45] His comparison extends beyond the use of irrigation, as

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[35] The commune was a system of mutual protection sworn among the members of medieval towns.
[36] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 144, 152. It should be noted, however, that some of these new businessmen were in fact members of the old aristocracy who had been more flexible in the face of change (p. 158).
[37] Ibid., 154.
[38] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 68.
[39] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 149.
[40] That the environment influences human society is true for all inhabited parts of the world, though that is beyond the scope of this paper.
[41] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 75.
[42] Ibid., 27.
[43] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 10.
[44] Ibid., 2.
[45] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 2.

the Low Countries were also the only other region in Europe that could rival Lombardy's population density.[46] It was an intensive agricultural infrastructure that allowed both regions to support a society more numerous than anywhere else on the continent at the time.

Much of Lombardy's lowland plains operated on a system of 'convertible husbandry,' characterised by a continuous rotation of arable and livestock farming, and an absence of fallowing.[47] This was something else that de Commines had noted in his travels, remarking that "the soil here never rests."[48] Fallowing was unnecessary on the low plain because of a system in which cereals were routinely alternated with a hay-crop, or flax.[49] Proof for the success of this system is that one could harvest hay on *la bassa* seven or eight times per year, as opposed to the three harvests which one could expect elsewhere in Italy.[50]

By the 1640s this emphasis on producing hay was becoming predominant, a response to the higher price meat could fetch at market compared to cereal crops.[51] There was also an ecological aspect of this intensive, non-fallowing system. As opposed to more northern regions, the soils of the Mediterranean could only remain highly fertile when kept under regular cropping.[52] The Mediterranean as a whole has very little topsoil, which water and wind can easily erode.[53] Keeping soil in place, by having the land constantly under cultivation, was as important a use for the land as the produce it could grow. Furthermore, taxes had to be paid every year whether or not harvests had been good or the land was being cultivated, so it was logical to keep it regularly productive.[54] These demands made the Lombard plain a place that visitors, like de Commines, frequently noted for its intensive cropping.

Grasses and grains were not the only crops grown on *la bassa*. To augment the already-high amount of cultivation, it was common to line the fields and hay-meadows with trees grown with grapevines.[55] Usually, the trees lining these fields would have been mulberry, which speaks to another primary cash crop of the plain: silk.[56] Lombardian silk was exceptionally fine,[57] and the presence of mulberry, along with flax (for linen) and woad (for dyeing),[58] points to the importance of textile-crops on *la bassa* into the early modern period.

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[46] Ibid. The Duchy's population was 1,200,000 by the end of the following century.
[47] Ibid., 105.
[48] Ibid., 2.
[49] Ibid., 6.
[50] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 150.
[51] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 120.
[52] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 243.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 125.
[55] Ibid., 2. Generally it was the hill zone which specialized in vines, a crop which found a better home here than on the low plain.
[56] Ibid., 123. This was especially the case by the 17th century.
[57] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 156.
[58] Ibid. Woad largely replaced madder in the 13th century.

It is important not to overlook this emphasis on commerce. Even the smallest of villages were connected to the broader economy no matter how great a role subsistence farming played in their lives.[59] Trade in textiles extended far beyond the reach of Italy (Lombardian wood was being exported to Spain, England, and the Low Countries).[60] Additionally, trade was common between Lombardy's various geographical zones.[61] These zones capitalized on the products they were most successful in producing. For example, as the low plain was better suited for cereals, a large portion of its grain was exported, primarily to the Swiss Confederacy.[62] The canal-irrigated hay-meadows also made Milan a great producer and seller of dairy products.[63] We may conjecture that the hill zone's vines and chestnuts likely had buyers in the Lombard plain, where such goods were harder to produce. Even the alpine areas, which could not produce much grain, chestnuts, or vines, could still sell the products of its pastoral economy, as well as wood.[64] Wood was, in fact, an expensive commodity, due to the scarcity of the Mediterranean's forests which had, at an early date, been extensively diminished.[65]

What must be stressed here is the presence of a robust economy, one which was both local and far-reaching. This economy was already strong by the thirteenth century, and it remained so until the early seventeenth century, when a combination of poor harvests, disease, and warfare wreaked ruin on the area.[66] Failed harvests in the late 1620s (and followed by ones in the 1640s) caused food prices to skyrocket, and resulted in economic crisis.[67] An outbreak of bubonic plague in 1630-1 further devastated Lombardy.[68] Thus, the Lombard landscape, though certainly bountiful to its inhabitants, also brought challenges. Not only was it a breeding ground for malaria, but Milan's position in the middle of the Po Valley, and at the meeting of many trade routes, made it a frequent site of battle.[69] As such, it was nearly always kept ready for war, with constant garrisons and fortifications to be found everywhere.[70]

Though generally the economy of the countryside endured the turmoil of the seventeenth century with remarkable fortitude,[71] such disruptions still dealt a high toll to Lombardy. The "once-thriving trade centre" of Sontino, for example, did not hold its weekly market once between 1620-40.[72] These local weekly markets had been an

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[59] Ibid., 7.
[60] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 156.
[61] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 7.
[62] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 11.
[63] Ibid., 2.
[64] Ibid., 107.
[65] Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, 239.*
[66] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 159-160.
[67] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 25-6.
[68] Ibid., 26. One should bear in mind, though, that this was only an infrequent occasion in the Mediterranean Malaria, which thrived in the marshland around Milan, was the more constant danger.
[69] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 42. Indeed, it was the most frequent battle site in Italy.
[70] Ibid., 44.
[71] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 105.
[72] Ibid., 108.

important component of peasant life, allowing them to sell their agricultural surplus,[73] and the interferences of war must have proved a heavy burden. Furthermore, high taxes (the salt tax, cavalry tax, and the crop-levy called *imbottato*—all of which urban folk were exempt from)[74] and the obligations of the rural population to billet soldiers during such times,[75] were worsened by the fact that crops could not fetch as high a price as before.[76] Such strain was reflected in the landscape, just as the growth of the medieval population and the requirements of cities had done in more fortunate times. Between 1630 and 1647, the cultivated countryside around Lodi had lost seven percent of its agricultural land, and in Novara it had dwindled down to a shocking thirty-three percent of its former area. Both were the result of its peasants dying or abandoning their farms.[77]

Besides war and disease, an imbalanced system existed in the Duchy of Milan which privileged city-dwellers. As previously mentioned, the state's rural inhabitants were in a position of inferiority compared to their urban counterparts, with much of their efforts bent towards satisfying the latter's needs, and their wages half that of urban workers.[78] Thus, it is essential not to conflate the agricultural bounty of Lombardy's countryside with a presumed prosperity amongst the peasantry, who lived largely in poverty.[79] The region's prosperity came at a high price, the brunt of its relentless cultivation borne by rural labourers[80] whose harvests only rarely escaped the perils previously mentioned, in addition to drought, locusts, and flooding.[81]

High rainfall and its consequence, flooding, was endemic to the low plain. The region was notorious for its torrential showers, especially in winter, where flooding in the lowlands could spell disaster to spring sowing.[82] When heavy rains fell across the Balkans in 1601 and destroyed its crops, an observer compared the floods "to those of the Po and of the large rivers of Lombardy."[83] Winter rain would swell lowland rivers, sweeping bridges away and cutting off access to agricultural lands.[84] When Marquess Francesco Guidoboni Cavalchini's land was devastated by an un-embanked Curone River in the early 1680s, the countryside's houses were washed away, and its famed *marcite* (temporarily-flooded meadows that were used to increase the production of livestock forage) eroded.[85] This, of course, was another reason why those in the Po

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[73] Ibid., 15.
[74] Ibid., 32.
[75] Ibid., 67. Contemporaries viewed billeting as being the greatest trouble to both landowners and tenants in this time.
[76] Ibid., 69.
[77] Ibid., 53.
[78] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 28.
[79] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 28.
[80] Ibid., 27.
[81] Braudel, *The mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, 244.*
[82] Ibid., 243.
[83] Ibid., 271.
[84] Ibid., 247.
[85] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 128.

Valley put such effort into canals, dams, and dykes, like that of the 1218 Tagliata Canal, whose primary function was flood protection.[86]

Despite the myriad of difficulties involved in working Lombardy's lowland landscape, the period did produce certain positive outcomes. For example, by the 1630s, one already sees change regarding the contracts between landlord and tenant. Due to the risk of war and onerous taxation, landlords recognized that the only way they would be able to find new tenants was to supply their peasants with *scorte*. These *scorte* (essential capital such as tools, seedcorn, and beasts of burden, which had been so difficult to acquire in times of unrest) were essential to continuing agricultural production during periods of crisis.[87]

Another mark that the depression of the seventeenth century left on the landscape was the new importance of rice as a crop on the Lombard plain. It is appropriate to conclude this research with rice because it is in many ways a distillation of the key topics I have mentioned above. Its cultivation was only made possible due to the low-lying wetland character of *la bassa*, and the extensive establishment of its irrigation canals.[88] These canals also allowed for Lombardy's *marcite*, which with their ability to support extensive herds of cattle meant that there was a constant supply of fertiliser to be used for the rice fields.[89] Lastly, rice did not require a large number of workers to grow, as wheat or rye did.[90] This lack of high maintenance found favour among a population brought low by the war and disease of the early decades of the century.

However, the introduction of rice to Lombardy proved a contentious issue. While it was relatively easy to grow and had a high demand in the cities, its ideal growing conditions are low swampy land.[91] To a culture that had spent enormous effort to eradicate wetlands, as it was unfavourable to most agriculture and a breeding place ground for disease, it is not difficult to see why the new promotion of marshes seemed like a step in the wrong direction.

This paper concludes with my primary contention: the current landscape of the Lombard plain is an amalgam of the needs of its historic inhabitants. Their political aims, efforts to control disease, and population profoundly altered the land they lived in. They transformed it into a flourishing agricultural region, one that was highly commercialised and whose products were exported far beyond its bounds. However, as I have repeatedly stressed, this abundance was achieved by a labouring class whose

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[86] Brandolini and Cremaschi, "The Impact of Late Holocene Flood Management," 15. Interestingly, Brandolini opines that this sort of medieval flood-management was more environmentally sustainable than its Renaissance equivalent. Due to how the process at these earlier stages would have been carried out more gradually than the dramatic modifications of the 15th and 16th centuries, he explains that the landscape would have had an easier time of adapting to its human alteration.

[87] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 129.

[88] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 157.

[89] Ibid. Milan's sewage was also used for this purpose.

[90] Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, 121.

[91] Dowd, "The Economic Expansion of Lombardy," 157.

near -servitude to Lombardy's cities kept them in a position of poverty, and who were frequently beset by disease, flooding, and warfare. The interplay of people and place has resulted in a landscape not only rich in agricultural produce but in a crop of historical insight, inextricably bound to the physical geography it created.

This paper was written in the Winter semester of 2022 for Dr. Matthew Koch's HSTR 337A:The Birth of the Renaissance.

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The Panama Canal, Cocaine, and Communism: An Analysis on the Timing of the U.S. Action Against General Manuel Noriega

Peter Kruschke

Abstract

This paper examines the timing of the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, codenamed Operation Just Cause. This often overshadowed event ties together and highlights two pivotal episodes in 20th-century American history: The War on Drugs and the Cold War. It analyzes why the U.S. government chose to act as late as 1989, given that the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs became aware of Noriega's involvement in drug trafficking as early as 1971. Namely, this essay argues that the U.S. government's decision to create and maintain a relationship with Noriega was part of a larger geopolitical strategy that prioritized the containment of communism in Latin America over the trafficking of illicit drugs. The decision to oust Noriega only occurred as the Cold War was ending and U.S. public opinion had shifted from a desire to contain communism to combating drug traffickers. This made Noriega, who had amassed a personal fortune through such activities and had begun to garner an image in the U.S. as a despotic dictator, a perfect target.

On the morning of 27 December 1989, members of the United States Marine Corps began blasting Van Halen's "Panama" and "I Fought the Law (and the Law Won)" outside the Vatican embassy in Panama City. This was done to force Manuel Noriega–the former de facto leader of Panama–to come out.[92] Other tactics, such as using low-flying helicopters to rattle the embassy's windows or using an armoured personnel carrier to nudge the embassy's gates menacingly, were also employed.[93] This attempt at psychological warfare proved successful as a beleaguered Noriega eventually surrendered and exited the embassy on 3 January 1990, where he was then taken into U.S. custody and extradited to Miami to face several criminal charges including money laundering, racketeering, and drug trafficking. These charges seem long overdue, however, when one considers that the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs became aware of Noriega's involvement in drug trafficking as early as 1971.[94] This means there was an 18-year gap between the U.S. government becoming aware of Noriega's criminal undertakings and it taking decisive action to end them. Moreover, given that the enormity of evidence collected against Noriega in his indictment made his culpability in drug trafficking explicitly clear, the question moves from 'Why did the U.S. arrest Noriega?' to 'Why did the U.S. arrest Noriega *when* they did?' This essay will argue that the U.S. government only chose to act against Noriega when the harm caused by his actions began to outweigh the benefits of his cooperation. From the 1960s until the mid-1980s, Noriega was able to create, develop, and maintain a relationship with the U.S. intelligence community. Noriega's usefulness in the Panama Canal Treaty talks and his ability to assist the U.S. in fighting against the spread of communism in Latin America meant that some of his nefarious activities, including drug smuggling and giving intelligence to bitter enemies of the U.S., went ignored. Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, Noriega had shown himself to be a despotic dictator who was willing to use fraud and violence to stay in power, as many of his criminal undertakings became known to the U.S. public. As the Cold War ended, U.S. policy in Latin America shifted from being characterized by a desire to contain communism to fighting the War on Drugs, which made a dictator who had amassed a personal fortune through drug trafficking a perfect target.

To understand the U.S. motivation for ousting Noriega, it is useful to understand why he was needed in the first place. Noriega's relationship with the U.S. began during the Cold War when the U.S. was determined to prevent the spread of communism in Latin America. Although sources differ on when Manuel Noriega's relationship with the U.S. exactly began, it is generally agreed upon that by 1960, when he was attending Peru's military academy, he was receiving payments from the U.S. for informing on

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[92] Frederick Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator: America's Bungled Affair with Noriega* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1990), 406.
[93] Ibid., 405.
[94] Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall, *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America, Updated Edition* (berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1992), 66.

communist students.[95] From 1966 to 1967, at the behest of his political mentor Omar Torrijos, Second Lieutenant Noriega attended the U.S.-created School of the Americas twice, where he was trained in jungle and counterintelligence operations.[96] During this period, he was also tasked with heading the National Guard's intelligence operations in Panama's North Zone, which enabled him to relay information to the U.S. regarding the formation of socialist unions in plantations owned by the United Fruit Company.[97] While these events demonstrate that Noriega had a blossoming relationship with the U.S. throughout the 1960s, it was the 1968 coup, in which Noriega's ally and mentor Omar Torrijos seized power, that Noriega's personal career and relationship with the U.S. truly escalated.

In August 1970 Noriega was rewarded for his loyalty towards Torrijos by being promoted to the command of G2, the newly expanded intelligence arm of the National Guard.[98] Noriega would use this position to provide the U.S. with intelligence regarding Torrijos' renegotiation of the Panama Canal treaties, while also using it to consolidate his power base in Panama. In 1973, when Torrijos went to Cuba as part of his larger plan to gain international support, which would later result in the U.S examination of the Panama Canal issue, Noriega debriefed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on Torrijos' intentions.[99] Moreover, when Torrijos gave Noriega the task of organizing demonstrations outside of the U.S. embassy in Panama that would apply further pressure on the U.S. government, he did so while also relaying information on said protests to members of the U.S. Military Intelligence Corps.[100] Scholars differ on how much Noreiga was paid for these services. Margaret Scranton states that the CIA rewarded his intelligence-gathering capabilities by putting him on a monthly payroll in 1971,[101] while Frederick Kempe states that these payments had reached over $100,000 annually by 1976.[102] Whatever the case, it appears that Noriega made *at least* $400,000 from U.S. sources throughout his career, given that a federal prosecutor stated this in Noriega's indictment, as a rebuttal to Noriega's lawyers' claim that he had received over $10 million.[103] Noriega's relationship with the U.S. was not without tension, however, as the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs became aware in 1971 that Noriega had overseen the transportation of drugs from across Latin America into Panama, where it was then trafficked into the U.S.[104] The Nixon administration was so concerned

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[95] Andrew Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" *Radical America* 23, no. ⅔ (March 1989): 8.
[96] John Dinges, *Our Man in Panama: How General Noriega Used the United States and Made Millions in Drugs and Arms*. 1st ed. New York: Random House, 1990, 38-39.
[97] Andrew Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" 8.
[98] Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 49.
[99] Ibid., 78.
[100] Ibid. 81.
[101] Margaret E. Scranton, *The Noriega Years: U.S.-Panamanian Relations, 1981-1990 (Boulder, Colorado: L. Rienner Publishers, 1991), 14.*
[102] Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 90.
[103] Steven Albert, *The Case Against the General: Manuel Noriega and the Policitics of American Justice*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1993, 223.
[104] *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America*, 66.

by these reports that it devised several plans in 1972 to eliminate Torrijos and Noriega, including by killing them, although these plans fizzled out after the Watergate Scandal came to national attention.[105]

Under the Ford administration, Noriega became an indispensable part of the American intelligence apparatus in Latin America. This is demonstrated by the fact that by 1976, Noriega acted as the liaison to the CIA, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Customs, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and several other military intelligence agencies.[106] The Carter administration similarly chose not to act against Noriega, partly out of a desire to see the Panama Canal Treaty talks, which had lasted 14 difficult years under four different administrations, succeed. This is seen poignantly in how the Carter administration handled the "Singing Sergeants" affair. In October 1977, only a month after the Treaties had been signed, Congress became aware that Torrijos' office had been bugged by U.S. agents since 1974 to discover any communist ties, and that Noriega had bought some of the tapes from at least one U.S. Army sergeant.[107] When a subcommittee, composed of senators who opposed the Canal Treaties, issued subpoenas to investigate whether or not the information sold to Noriega had affected the outcome of treaty negotiations, they were denied by Attorney General Griffin Bell, a close friend of Carter's, and the hearing was forced to cancel.[108] If it had come to light that Noriega had taken advantage of a U.S. intelligence apparatus that was not supposed to exist in the first place, it may have soured bilateral relations to the point that the talks would be abandoned. After the treaty talks were ratified, the Carter administration was presented with yet another reason to protect Noriega and Torrijos in 1980 when Panama agreed to take in the exiled Shah of Iran.[109]

A bigger reason for protecting Noriega emerged in 1979 when the left-wing Sandinistas took control of power from the dictator Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. When Reagan entered office on a staunchly anti-communist platform in 1981, he immediately looked to Noriega to assist in sending aid to the Contras, the right-wing paramilitary fighting in Nicaragua. From 1982 to 1985 Noriega participated in Operation Black Eagle, in which Reagan's administration exploited a loophole in the Boland Amendments, which sought to limit U.S. support for the Contras, partly by using Panamanian airfields to ferry supplies to the Contras.[110] Noriega also allowed the U.S. to run an espionage operation out of the Howard Air Force Base in Panama; in addition, three more bases were used as training grounds for Contra Troops.[111] In exchange for Noriega's cooperation, U.S. officials chose to ignore the fact that Noriega had begun to use the arms transportation network to ship marijuana and cocaine into

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[105] Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 77-80.
[106] Albert, *The Case Against the General*, 211.
[107] Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 91.
[108] Ibid., 92.
[109] Steven, *The Case Against the General*, 211.
[110] Scranton, *The Noriega Years,* 12.
[111] Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" 9.

the southern United States.[112] The CIA also put him back on a monthly payroll, which had paused under Carter's administration.[113] With the birth of the Medellin Cartel in 1981, Noriega's trafficking activities would reach new heights.

Following Torrijos' death in a plane crash in 1981, Noriega took de facto control of Panama in 1983 by transforming the National Guard into the Panamanian Defence Forces (PDF). Noriega expanded the role of the PDF to include customs and immigration services and took total control of Panama's entire transportation network.[114] At the same time as this was occurring, the Medellin Cartel was experiencing a crackdown in Colombia and was looking for foreign partners; Panama fit the perfect description.[115] Aiding this relationship was the fact that Panama had created a robust international banking centre–partly at the behest of the U.S. who believed it would deter the country from communism–that would also be conducive to large-scale money laundering.[116] Thus throughout the early 1980s, Noriega made large sums from drug trafficking and money laundering for the Medellin cartel as he accepted bribes, "cuts" on loads delivered, and protection money, with 1984 serving as the peak year of Panamanian involvement in the drug trade.[117] However, throughout the early 1980s Noriega also took steps to make his informal assumption of power more palatable to the democratic government in the U.S.

In 1984 Panama held presidential elections in which the U.S.-favoured candidate, the former vice president of the World Bank Nicky Barletta, won. Although Barletta didn't actually win as Noriega skewed the election results in Barletta's favour, the election nonetheless represented to the U.S. that Panama was taking concrete steps towards democratic government.[118] The path to Panamanian democracy was short-lived, however, as Barletta was forced to resign by the PDF after the discovery of Dr.Hugo Spadafora's body in September 1985. Spadafora, a known critic of Noriega, had publicly stated in 1984 that it was a national disgrace to have Panama governed by an international drug trafficker.[119] Likely as a response to this criticism, Noriega ordered the PDF to have Spadafora brutally tortured, before he was beheaded and had his headless body placed into a U.S. mail sack.[120] National and international outrage pressured Barletta into stating that he would establish an independent commission to investigate the murder.[121] As a response to Barletta's statements, Noriega deposed him

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[112] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 12.
[113] Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, 90.
[114] Steve C. Ropp, "Explaining the Long-Term Maintenance of a Military Regime: Panama Before the U.S. Invasion," *World Politics* 44, no. 2 (January 1992): 227.
[115] Scranton, *The Noriega Years,* 14.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" 8.
[119] Steve Ropp, *General Noriega's Panama, Current History* 85, no. 515 (1986): 422.
[120] Bruce Watson and Peter Tsouras, eds., *Operation Just Cause: The U.S. Intervention in Panama* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 36.
[121] Ibid.

and installed a more amenable president, Eric Devalle. While the murder of political opponents certainly led to a deterioration of relations between the U.S. and Noriega, the American media also played a significant role.

In June 1986 *The New York Times* investigative journalist Seymour Hersh released a series of articles containing damning accusations against Noriega. The articles cited Noriega's long involvement in drug transactions on the Isthmus, his offering of protection to drug traffickers, involvement in election fraud, political violence, supplying left-wing revolutionaries, and his passing on intelligence information to both Cuba and the United States for 15 years.[122] Although none of this was necessarily news to insiders, the series did spark a temporary surge in coverage that shocked the U.S. public and forced the U.S. government to reconsider its policy towards Panama. This is demonstrated by the fact that a senior Reagan administration official is cited as saying that while "in the past, we needed Noriega, but now Hersh's charges might force a reevaluation of that relationship."[123] But the media's role was not over yet. In June 1987 Diaz Herrera, the Panamanian Chief of Staff and second only to Noriega, became aware that Noriega was preparing to oust him and responded by launching a series of interviews and press conferences in which he accused Noriega of similar crimes. Herrera stated that the PDF was heavily involved in drug trafficking, that Noriega had orchestrated the 1981 death of Torrijos, rigged the 1984 election, and had participated in the illegal sale of visas to Cubans.[124] The U.S. Senate responded to public outrage over these accusations against Noriega by passing Resolution 239 on 26 June 1987, in which they called on Noriega to step down pending an investigation into Herrera's claim of election fraud.[125]

Thus by 1987 Noriega had cultivated an image in the U.S. as being a duplicitous, despotic dictator who was willing to use both violence and the U.S. intelligence apparatus to further his objectives. Moreover, the U.S. public was made aware of Noriega's involvement in cocaine trafficking at a time when public opinion was increasingly centred on tackling the drug problem, as cocaine-related hospitalizations began to soar across the country. In a January 1985 Gallup Poll, only two percent of Americans listed drug abuse as the most important issue facing the country.[126] By November 1989, when the U.S. public had become well aware of Noriega's activities through the media, this figure had risen to 38%.[127] Therefore, there was enormous pressure to act against drug traffickers like Noriega, and the U.S. government responded by issuing two federal indictments against him in February 1988, in which he was charged with a plethora of drug-related offences that could have landed him up

[122] Ropp, *General Noriega's Panama*, 424, 431.
[123] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 95.
[124] Watson and Tsouras, eds. *Operation Just Cause,* 38.
[125] Ibid., 39.
[126] Ibid., 36.
[127] Ibid.

to 165 years in prison.[128] Noriega continued on with his oppressive tactics, however, as he first annulled the May 1989 presidential election, then squashed a coup attempt organized by PDF officers against him in October 1989.[129] The immediate justification for a U.S invasion was given when members of the PDF killed a U.S. marine officer at a roadblock on 16 December 1989, just a day after Panama had declared that a state of war existed with the U.S.[130] This incident, and others like it that occurred in December 1989, convinced President Bush that a new level of violence was occurring, as Panamanian soldiers were out of control and Noriega was egging them on, and that action needed to be taken.[131] Bush authorized the invasion of Panama–codenamed Operation Just Cause–on 16 December 1989, and in a television address to the American nation, he stated its objectives: to protect American citizens in Panama, combat drug trafficking, defend Panamanian democracy, and protect the integrity of the Carter-Torrijos Panama Canal Treaties.[132]

Noriega's relationship with the U.S. was extremely complicated and experienced many highs and lows, even before he assumed *de facto* control in 1983. Noriega began receiving payments from U.S. intelligence agencies in the 1960s due to his gathering of information on fellow students at the Peruvian Military Academy.[133] Noriega received training from the U.S. at the infamous School of the Americas, where he became educated in matters related to counterintelligence and psychological warfare.[134] Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s Noriega aided the U.S. in achieving various geopolitical objectives: ratifying the Panama Canal Treaties, providing aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, and providing intel on communist activities in Cuba. As a reward for his cooperation, U.S. officials chose to ignore, and sometimes conceal, Noriega's corruption, acceptance of drug pay-offs, and assistance in money laundering through Panamanian banks.[135] By the mid-1980s–particularly after the murder of Spadafora in 1985–the benefits of cooperation, once deemed essential, were now overshadowed by the negative consequences of supporting a dictator widely regarded as a violator of human rights and a facilitator of drug trafficking. In light of this overwhelming information regarding Noriega's long relationship with various parts of the U.S. intelligence apparatus, Operation Just Cause appears to be a strange, if not downright deceptive title, given that the U.S government–through its dealings with Noreiga–played a fundamental role in creating the unjust conditions under which the invasion was justified.

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[128] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 128.
[129] Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" 11.
[130] Scranton, *The Noriega Years,* 199.
[131] Ibid.
[132] "A Transcript of Bush's Address on the Decision to use Force in Panama: The President." *New York Times,* Dec. 21, 1989.
[133] Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" 8.
[134] Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 38-39.
[135] Zimbalist, "Why Did the U.S. Invade Panama?" 9.

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Death From Above: An Examination of the German Airborne Invasion of Crete

Justin Lucoe

Abstract

Operation Merkur, German for "Operation Mercury", was the first large-scale airborne invasion in history. This operation was conducted by Nazi Germany on the Greek island of Crete in May 1941. In a bold and costly attack, thousands of German paratroopers launched a new form of warfare: airborne assault. Though the operation resulted in a German victory, a multitude of factors led them to abandon large-scale airborne operations for the remainder of the war. Conversely, the battle's tactics and outcome influenced Allied forces and continue to shape military doctrine today. "Death from Above" analyzes Operation Mercury to uncover why it dissuaded further German airborne operations; while simultaneously demonstrating enough tactical promise to inspire future operations by other nations. Drawing on primary sources and firsthand accounts from both German and Allied perspectives, this paper breaks down the operation's events and evaluates its lasting impact on modern military strategy.

Throughout the history of warfare, the brunt of fighting and invasions has been endured by the foot soldiers of the infantry who had to traverse long distances to reach their objectives and battles. This would change drastically during the Second World War with newly created airborne infantry dropping from the skies behind enemy lines, introducing a new kind of fighting with increased speed and movement. The German airborne invasion of the Greek island of Crete was the first instance in military history of an invasion where the vast majority of troops were parachuting into combat. The battle for Crete raged from the 20th of May 1941 to the 1st of June 1941, as a part of the joint German and Italian offensive to gain control of all Greek territories. The invasion of Crete was a smaller-scale battle compared to the multitude of other major engagements in the Second World War, however, it created many lasting impacts. The study of first-hand accounts, tactics, preparations, and battle details yield a good insight into how the airborne units operated. This battle and the actions of the airborne troops heavily influenced both German and Allied usage of airborne troops later in the War.

Additionally, it set the early framework for air assault operations that are still in practice. However, although victorious in Crete, German airborne units were decimated by a lack of preparation, deficient supplies and coordination, and the misjudgement of resistance strength. This resulted in the suspension of any major German airborne operations for the rest of the war.

Airborne operations were still in their infancy during this time, so the use of airborne troops *en masse* was daring and revolutionary. There were no standard tactics established on how to effectively utilize airborne units in order to fulfil their missions. Unlike standard infantry and armoured units of the day, these units did not have the luxury of a constant supply chain and therefore had to strike hard and fast to secure their objectives. This meant that only a certain type of audacious soldier would be selected to hold the title of paratrooper.

Revered as elite soldiers, the German *Fallschirmjäger* (paratrooper[s]) underwent rigorous training in all aspects of airborne warfare. The *Fallschirmjäger* were led by the most competent and experienced officers, making them some of Germany's finest troops.[136] The soldiers felt distinguished from the ordinary infantry units of the Army as they were highly motivated, extremely physically fit, and very disciplined.[137] Moreover, the men's training in infantry, survival and support skills was superior to most other German military units. The troops received a wide variety of training to be a self-sufficient unit. Their often-isolated nature of operations behind enemy lines, away from the main force and support, required the men to be proficient in a vast array of skills in order to be a self-sufficient unit. Every *Fallschirmjäger* would undergo specialized training in a variety of roles, many of which were often reserved as

[136] Mark Edmond Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete and the Importance of Intelligence and Logistical Planning in the Rapid Deployment of Light Units," *Army History*, no. 21 (1991): 32.
[137] Ibid.

singular positions in the rest of the Army. An example of the diverse experience and knowledge possessed by the *Fallschirmjäger* was *Gefreiter* (Lance Corporal) Erich Lepkowski. Besides the standard airborne infantry training, he was a qualified combat engineer, skier, driver, radio operator, and locomotive engineer.[138] This level of skill would only be enhanced after combat in Crete. The main task of the *Fallschirmjäger* was to land behind enemy lines, secure key positions, and hold out until a larger force would meet and relieve them. With limited use thus far in the invasions of Western Europe and Scandinavia, the Island of Crete would come to be the defining moment for the German airborne infantry.

On the 28th of October 1940, led by Benito Mussolini, Italy invaded Greece and was met with stiff resistance that pushed the Italians back into Albania.[139] This growing Italian and German interest in the Mediterranean brought the island of Crete to the forefront of Allied military commanders and planners. The Allies could use the island and its airbases to launch attacks on German-held Romanian airfields and serve as a possible launch point for an Allied invasion of mainland Europe from the south.[140] On the contrary, if held by the Germans, it would enable them to strike Cyprus, the Suez Canal and the British Naval fleet harboured at Alexandria in Egypt.[141] As a result, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered immediate defences built on Crete as the Italians, now aided by the Germans, resumed an all-out invasion of Greece in April 1941.[142] The British, along with Commonwealth troops and Greeks once again mustered a brave defence on the mainland, prompting Churchill to remark about the Greeks' heroism; “Hence, we will not say that Greeks fight like heroes, but that heroes fight like Greeks.”[143] However, this fortitude was no match for the combined German-Italian onslaught which swept across the Greek mainland. The stage was now set for the next clash, this time on the small island of Crete.

The Germans felt confident and ready after a string of victories across Western Europe throughout the previous spring of 1940 in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway. The idea of an airborne invasion of Crete is credited to *Generaloberst* (Colonel General) Kurt Student, who presented it to Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering, Air Force Commander-in-Chief, in April 1941.[144] The idea was approved and would see the German Air Force, the *Luftwaffe*, taking over the main role in the invasion from the Army. Codenamed *Unternehmen Merkur* (Operation Mercury) and

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[138] Franz Kurowski, *Infantry Aces - The German Soldier in Combat in World War II*, (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2005), 192.
[139] Heinz A Richter, “Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete,” *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, no. 16 (2013), 147.
[140] H. W. Koch, “The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany: The Early Phase, May-September 1940.” in *The Second World War,* ed Nick Smart (London: Routledge, 2017), 125.
[141] Clark, “The German Invasion of Crete,” 32.
[142] Richter, “Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete,” 147.
[143] Chris Moorey, “The Battle of Crete and Occupation: 1941 to 1945,” in *A History of Crete* (London: Haus Publishing, 2019), 251.
[144] Clark, “The German Invasion of Crete,” 31.

set for May 1941, the Germans developed this invasion to launch initial coordinated shock assaults and secure strategic positions to bring in supplies via air and sea.[145] Confidence was high amongst the German ranks who had just routed the perceived weak enemy from mainland Greece and were primed to finish the remaining Allied soldiers off. Fueling the Germans' expectations of a quick victory. This perceived weakness of the Allies was not unfounded. Of the 58,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers sent to Greece to aid in its defence, roughly 2,000 were killed or wounded with another 14,000 captured, a nearly 28 percent casualty rate.[146] Moreover, the Allied Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Mediterranean General Freyberg reported: "I cannot hope to hold out with land forces alone, which as a result of campaign in Greece are now devoid of any artillery, have insufficient tools for digging, very little transport, and inadequate war reserves of equipment and ammunition."[147] Such human and material losses could not be easily replaced. Nevertheless, Churchill telegrammed a clear message to the Allied commander, stating: "The island must be stubbornly defended."[148] Although severely hampered, the Allies were determined to put up staunch resistance that the Germans were unprepared to meet.

On the 20th of May 1941, the battle began in what Churchill described as "a head-on collision with the very spear-point of the Nazi lance".[149] The Germans were set to secure harbours, airfields, and key crossroads on the initial landing so that supplies could be hurriedly brought up. Under standard military logic of the time, the paramount goal on either side was to hold key logistic positions for supply and transportation, which aided in movement and fighting capabilities. For these reasons, attackers and defenders paid close attention to possessing these locations. Perceiving this threat, the Allies built stronger defences around the island's three main airfields and harbour in Souda Bay which would have devastating effects on the invading force.[150] Nevertheless, Allied military planners believed the invading force would come from the sea, with the threat from above not being properly considered. This was due to the lack of knowledge and experience surrounding the implementation and effectiveness of airborne operations. On the contrary, the Germans' preparation was unusually rushed with only one month transpiring from when the plan was brought to Hitler's desk to when the battle began. The long-planned invasion of Russia was set to launch in June and would not be delayed for the Crete operation, forcing it to be rushed as units would be needed to take part in both. Minimal reconnaissance was conducted, a nod to the ignorance of the Germans already viewing the British, Commonwealth, and

[145] Richter, "Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete," 147.
[146] Moorey, "The Battle of Crete and Occupation," 252.
[147] Ibid., 253.
[148] Michael McGrady, "The Defence and Loss of Crete, 1940-1941, Part I" *The National Archives*, (6th August, 2020).
[149] Moorey, "The Battle of Crete and Occupation," 254.
[150] Richter, "Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete," 148.

Greek troops as a vanquished foe.[151] Therefore, all German battle plans were clouded by the idea of a swift victory. Roughly 500 transport planes would bring 15,000 *Fallschirmjäger* into battle from the air in two waves, as there was a lack of aircraft due to the rushed preparations.[152] There was little consideration given to the fact that many aircraft would be destroyed or severely damaged during the first wave, dramatically reducing the number available for the second wave. Regular doctrine in airborne drops dictated one or two waves with their own designated aircraft, however, aircraft returning to deliver more troops was not, unless logistically unavoidable. This lack of preparation by the German command put their *Fallschirmjäger* straight into the firing line as they jumped onto strongly defended positions and were forced to fight and wait until reinforcements and equipment arrived.

The preliminary jumps by the German parachutists and glider troops on the enemy strongholds resulted in major casualties. German *Fallschirmjäger* Helmut Wenzel recalled: "As the 'chute opens, I hear whistling in the air, all around me. It's bullets! The British are ready for us and greet us."[153] Due to the lack of thorough battle preparations and planning, many *Fallschirmjäger* found themselves highly vulnerable to enemy fire while landing in dangerous and contested drop zones. Dozens were killed in their parachute harnesses before they even reached the ground. For the German troops who survived the initial drop, the ordeal was far from over as they had to wait for more airborne support, which ranged from hours to days.[154] Due to the shock of the initial setbacks, the Germans delayed the second wave as rumours of the failures and casualties of the first attacks started to circulate. The battle hung on a knife's edge and anxiety spread amongst the waiting soldiers, including *Grefreiter* Erich Lepkowski.[155] Finally, the second wave was sent into the raging battle and once again landed near the strong points to reinforce the depleted first wave. The German command committed all their troops, a daring risk that could have resulted in the complete destruction of their force. Such a serious defeat would deal a major blow to German society and military operations, while uplifting the depleting Allied morale. *Grefreiter* Lepkowski landed near one of the airfields, was wounded and temporarily taken prisoner by the Australian soldiers defending it, a more fortunate series of events compared to many of his comrades.[156] The *Fallschirmjäger* who survived the initial jump, and were still able to fight, then faced their next major obstacle: supplies.

The Germans had planned to drop containers of equipment separately from the *Fallschirmjäger*, who were only equipped lightly.[157] The idea was that the troops would be able to make the jump, with landing and initial ground movements only lightly

[151] Richter, "Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete," 149.
[152] Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete," 34.
[153] Moorey, "The Battle of Crete and Occupation," 254.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Kurowski, *Infantry Aces*, 193.
[156] Ibid., 193-194.
[157] Richter, "Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete," 149.

weighted down, and later going to fetch the heavier equipment on the ground. In reality, this was an extremely deadly task to undertake while under fire. German transport planes, taking ground fire and in poor weather conditions dropped troops and equipment sporadically and rarely on their established and coordinated drop zones. This debacle resulted in many *Fallschirmjäger* being scattered with no knowledge of where they or their equipment containers were.[158] Medical supplies, food and water, ammunition, and weapons were being reduced in numbers by the hour and much had to be scavenged from Allied positions. After being rescued from Allied captivity by his comrades, *Gefreiter* Lepkowski continued in the fight. After taking control of an enemy machine gun dugout, he was ordered by an officer to: "Turn the machine gun around immediately" to face the other enemy positions.[159]

Even if both the *Fallschirmjäger* and the equipment containers were successfully dropped in the same area, it was not certain that they could be recovered. For example, near the bridge at Platanias in the northwest of Crete, most of the containers could not be reached due to the difficult rocky terrain and many had been destroyed before they even reached the ground due to Allied ground fire.[160] For many of the *Fallschirmjäger* with nothing left to fight with, this lack of supplies determined their fate. *Oberst* (Colonel) Alfred Sturm and the men under his command were dropped far from their intended drop zone without any equipment containers, and after a day and night of fighting, had run out of ammunition and were forced to surrender.[161] Their need for ammunition and supplies was insurmountable as the Germans faced a battle-hardened and determined enemy.

Due to the hasty preparation, German intelligence did not correctly estimate the resolve of the British and Commonwealth troops, as well as the Greek troops and local Cretan civilians. The Germans had determined that the 10,200 Greek troops would not fight after losing the mainland and that the 15,000 British, 7,750 New Zealander and 6,500 Australian troops were demoralized to some degree from the previous defeats.[162] These assumptions proved to be completely inaccurate and would have deadly consequences. Although lacking reinforcements, ammunition, and heavy guns, the Allied forces remained steadfast and were determined to hold their ground. Most of the troops defending Crete were first-class fighting units from across the British Empire and Commonwealth.[163] The vast majority of them had taken part in the fighting on the Greek mainland which had not disheartened but rather battle-hardened them. Moreover, the Greek troops also fought furiously, defending the last part of the country not under the yoke of Axis control. The fierce resistance put up by the Allied soldiers

[158] Ibid., 151.
[159] Kurowski, *Infantry Aces*, 197.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., 199.
[162] Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete," 33.
[163] Ibid.

surprised the Germans, who underestimated their enemy and expected just minimal opposition, resulting in major casualties.

The Allied troops were not the only combatants that the *Fallschirmjäger* had to contend with. The Cretan civilian resistance began as soon as the first German boots landed on the ground and fought the invaders by any means.[164] Many German veterans of the battle recounted the bitterness of the fighting and atrocities committed against their wounded by the Cretan civilians.[165] By all accounts, Cretan men, women and even children were exceptionally courageous and challenged the Germans at every corner.[166] The Germans had assumed that the local population would welcome and greet them as liberators from British influence. This was a faded reality, and the locals would be another adversary that the Germans had to fight against to gain control of the island.

The Allied forces were slowly pushed back throughout the thirteen-day battle due to a series of tactical blunders, counter-attack delays, and a lack of supplies. A young Greek medical officer wrote: "I knew that I was taking part in a retreat; in fact, I wondered if it should not be called more correctly a rout as, on all sides, men were hurrying along in disorder. Most of them had thrown away their rifles, and a number had even discarded their tunics as it was a hot day…"[167] After the Germans had successfully captured the Maleme airfield, it facilitated the landing of transport aircraft carrying more reinforcements and equipment.[168] The Allied Commander on Crete sent a telegram to Churchill on May 27th, stating: "Fear we must recognize that Crete is no longer tenable and that troops must be withdrawn as far as possible. It has been impossible to withstand weight of enemy air attack which has been on unprecedented scale…"[169] This would mark the beginning of the end of the Allied defence who were pushed back to the sea and faced surrender or escape to Egypt. The Allied High Command realized a stubborn fight to the death would garner no real achievement, and set off to salvage their remaining forces to fight another day. Around 17,000 Allied soldiers were evacuated by the Royal Navy; however, around 10,000 would not be so fortunate and faced German captivity.[170] The successfully evacuated troops would later play an integral part in halting the formidable German *Afrika Korps* (Africa Corps) in the North African campaign.

By June 2nd, 1941, the island had been deemed secure by the Germans and their paratroopers had claimed victory, but at a deadly cost. Nevertheless, the victory achieved by the *Fallschirmjäger* despite these handicaps demonstrated their quality as

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[164] Moorey, "The Battle of Crete and Occupation," 255.
[165] John Cirafici, "Fallschirmjäger!: A Collection of Firsthand Accounts and Diaries by German Paratrooper Veterans From The Second World War," *Air Power History* 68, no. 1 (2021): 62.
[166] Moorey, "The Battle of Crete and Occupation," 225.
[167] Ibid., 260.
[168] Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete," 34-35.
[169] Mcgrady, "The Defence and Loss of Crete, 1940-1941, Part II", *The National Archives*, 6th August, 2020.
[170] Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete," 34-35.

elite soldiers.[171] The use of paratroopers on a broad scale impressed Allied commanders so much that they immediately began developing their own airborne troops that would later be integral in operations in Sicily, Normandy, and the Netherlands.[172] However, this was not the impression left on the Germans, with the majority of remaining *Fallschirmjäger* units being stood down as airborne troops and sent to the newly started Russian campaign as elite infantry.[173] The severe losses prevented the Germans from pursuing the fleeing Allies further and attacking Egypt and the Suez Canal, a vital life line for the British Empire. Moreover, roughly 50,000 German soldiers had to be garrisoned on the island for the remainder of the war to provide defence and suppress the Cretan resistance.[174] *Generaloberst* Kurt Student, the main catalyst of the airborne approach declared that Crete was: "the graveyard of the German paratroopers".[175]

The Germans had suffered nearly 50% casualties of the original 22,000-man-strong invasion.[176] This magnitude of losses can be attributed to a lack of proper battle preparations, improper coordination, and dissemination of equipment, along with a miscalculation about the enemy's resolve. The bloodstained victory reverberated throughout the German military and political spheres, leaving a lasting impact of both praise and chagrin. Adolf Hitler himself remarked about the operation, saying: "Crete has proved the days of the parachute troops are over! The parachute arm is a weapon of surprise; the surprise factor has by now been exhausted."[177] The bloodshed on Crete was closely remembered by the Germans, being the last large-scale paratrooper operation conducted by them during the Second World War. If the operation had been less costly, airborne operations could have been implemented on both the Eastern and later Western fronts, possibly changing numerous battle outcomes. Nevertheless, it set a new precedent on future airborne operations and their potential in modern warfare.

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[171] Richter, "Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete," 153.
[172] Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete," 32.
[173] Richter, "Operation Mercury, The Invasion of Crete," 153.
[174] James C. Bliss, "The Fall of Crete 1941: Was Freyberg Culpable?" (MA Thesis, U.S. army comman and General Staff College, 2006), 4.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Clark, "The German Invasion of Crete," 32.
[177] Kurowski, *Infantry Aces,* 207.

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Chinese Canadian Masculinity During the Exclusion Era

Heather Macnab

Abstract

This paper examines how Chinese Canadian men reconstructed ideas and expressions of masculinity in response to the unique pressures of the Chinese exclusion era, defined by the Chinese Headtax and Chinese Exclusion Act. The consequences of anti-Chinese legislation, discourse, and beliefs created a unique environment for Chinese communities in Canada, with few women, limited access to jobs, and oppressive stereotypes. During this time, dominant Canadian culture attempted to isolate Chinese Canadian men from the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. However, these men transformed cultural and social practices to create a distinct Chinese Canadian masculinity and assert manhood within their communities and the larger nation. These assertions included the embodiment of both Western and Chinese ideals of masculine appearance, which allowed men of Chinese heritage to project manhood within society. They also reorganized gendered roles, finding economic success and social respectability through domestic and traditionally feminine labour as exemplified by the prominence of Chinese owned laundries and restaurants during this time. Furthermore, these communities reassigned meaning to interpersonal relationships by placing new significance on homosocial bonds and redefining heterosexual relationship dynamics. The evidence presented argues that Chinese Canadian men resisted Canada's attempts to emasculate them by reimagining community structures and creating new gender ideals that suited Chinese Canadian life.

During the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, Chinese Canadian life was largely shaped by the national policies of exclusion. Chinese men living in Canada during the exclusion era faced racism, stereotypes, and discriminatory legislation which aimed to alienate them from the roles and ideals of hegemonic masculinity. This culture sought to place and maintain white men in positions of economic, social, and political dominance within Canadian society. Chinese Canadian men thus adopted a variety of social and economic practices to express and assert manhood both within their communities and dominant Canadian society. These expressions of masculinity were shaped by Chinese and Western ideas of masculinity and varied across the country. Physically, this manifested in many Chinese Canadian men either adopting Western styles, or leaning into more traditional archetypes associated with Chinese masculinity. Additionally, Chinese Canadian communities reorganized the established gender roles present in cultural and labour practices, transforming traditionally feminine labour like cooking and cleaning into sites of manhood, creating new masculine roles and ideals in the process. Lastly, interpersonal relationships became central to Chinese Canadian masculinity, with these men able to express both Chinese and Western ideals of manhood through their homosocial and heterosexual relationships. These cultural reorganizations allowed Chinese Canadian men to embody the ideals of masculinity in a unique and culturally distinct way. During the exclusion era, the attempts of dominant Canadian society to exclude Chinese Canadian men from hegemonic masculinity led these communities to transform and reimagine gendered ideals, roles, and relationship dynamics, creating a uniquely Chinese Canadian masculinity.[178]

Chinese settlement in Canada dates to the earliest British settlement in British Columbia, with the first major wave of Chinese immigration beginning in 1858 with the Fraser Valley Gold Rush. Additionally, between 1880 and 1885, Chinese labourers helped to build a majority of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in British Columbia. About 17,000 Chinese immigrants arrived during this time,[179] providing cheap essential labour for the construction of the nation-building project. However, after the completion of the CPR Chinese labour was seen as a threat to the jobs of British and other white workers, resulting in federal legislation restricting new immigration into Canada within a year. With few exceptions, the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 introduced a head tax of $50 for those who wanted to immigrate from China to Canada. In 1901 the fee was increased to $100, and $500 in 1903, at a time when the average

[178] The terms 'masculine' and 'masculinity' were not used broadly in North America until the 1920s, replacing the terms 'manly' and 'manhood'. All four terms will be used in this paper as the period discusses spans before and after this change.
[179] Paul Yee, *Chinatown: An Illustrated History of the Chinese Communities of Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal* (Toronto: James Lorimer & company Ltd., Publishers, 2005), 13.

Chinese labourer made about $300 a year.[180] As a result, Chinese immigrants were overwhelmingly men looking to support themselves and their families from overseas. In 1923 the Chinese Immigration Act was replaced with the Chinese Exclusion Act which banned the majority of Chinese immigration altogether with rare exceptions for merchants, students, and diplomats. Supporters of these bills saw the immigration of Chinese people into Canada as a threat to the colonial order. As MP Alan Webster Neill argued, Chinese Canadians would begin to 'overrun' the country, eventually destroying Canadian civilization.[181] The period between the introduction of anti-Chinese immigration laws and the repeal of these laws in 1947 constitutes the Exclusion Era, which resulted in Chinese-Canadian communities becoming known as bachelor societies due to the lack of Chinese women.

Racist ideas and stereotypes about Chinese society and the dangers of male Chinese Communities shaped how Chinese Canadian men navigated life in Canada. Anti-Chinese rhetoric, as expressed by intellectuals and institutions such as the Canadian Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, was defined by the belief that China as a nation had been civilized for too long and had evolutionarily and morally degenerated. The dominant culture understood Chinese men as having lost their manhood due to this over-civilization, regained only through opium-induced sexual desire.[182] Chinese Canadian men also faced less intellectualized stereotypes, with white Canadians seeing them as unclean, backward, alien and strange, and capable of having hypnotic powers.[183] To combat these stereotypes and regain their manliness in the public sphere, Chinese men living in Canada altered and transformed their culture, practices, and gendered roles, creating new, uniquely Chinese Canadian, masculine ideals.

In addition to the racist policies and beliefs of those outside the Chinese Canadian community, figures and organizations within the Chinese community also influenced how these men shaped their masculinity. Chinese political groups competed and cooperated for influence across Canada, projecting ideals for China and Chinese diaspora. The Kuomintang or Chinese Nationalist League was a Chinese political party founded in 1894 with Canadian headquarters in Vancouver and Winnipeg.[184] The party gained significant power and influence beginning in 1926 before becoming the sole

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[180] Arlene Chan, *Chinese Immigration Act* (The Canadian Encyclopedia, March 7, 2017) www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-immigration-act.
[181] Dominion of Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 11 July 1924 (Mr. Neill): 4352-4354, parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC1403_05.
[182] Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925: With A New Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 110-111.
[183] El Chenier, "Sex, Intimacy, and Desire Among Men of Chinese Heritage and Women of Non-Asian Heritage in Toronto, 1910-1950," *Urban History Review/Revue d'Histoire Urbaine* 42, no. 2 (2014): 33, doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/43562434.
[184] Alison R. Marshall, "Early Chinese Migrant Religious Identities in Pre-1947 Canada," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (2023): 240, www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/early-chinese-migrant-religious-identities-pre/docview/2886078360/se-2.

ruling party of China from 1928 to 1949. Party leaders were primarily Christian and emphasized a Westernized vision for modern China. The Kuomintang often worked closely with other Chinese organizations such as the Chee Kung Tong or Chinese Freemasons, a Chinese secret society established in 1880 or the Zhonghua Huiguan (Chinese Benevolent Association).[185] The Zhonghua Huiguan worked in cities like Victoria to unite factions of the Chinese Canadian community, acting as a community leader and community voice toward local and federal government.[186]

Chinese Canadian men transformed their masculine presentation most directly by adopting Western masculine styles of appearance. Many men, for example, chose to cut their hair rather than wear the traditional *queue* hairstyle, with the top of the head shaved and the hair on the back of the head grown long and typically braided. Wearing the *queue* was expected of Chinese men to show loyalty to the emperor during the Qing Dynasty, while wearing short hair instead signified a desire to assimilate into Western masculinity and embrace modernity. This was particularly common in areas with a significant presence of the Kuomintang which encouraged Chinese Canadians to adopt Western styles to show support for the party's vision for a modern China.[187] These Western hairstyles were often accompanied by Western dress for men who looked to integrate into the larger Canadian culture through association with the norms and ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Chinese Canadian masculinity was also influenced by Chinese ideals, particularly by political leaders who modeled Chinese understandings of manliness. For example, Kuomintang leader Sun Yet-sen influenced a rise in the masculine archetype of the *haohan*, characterized as physically strong, emotionally restrained, and valuing male relationships.[188] When Sun Yet-sen died in 1925, members of the collective leadership who took on responsibility of the Party inspired a rise of rougher traditionally masculine ideals which valued bravery and courage.[189]

The lack of women of Chinese heritage in Chinese Communities across Canada resulted in the reorganization of traditionally gendered roles, especially within cultural practices and everyday life. One of the most important duties of women was to provide the food necessary for large traditional celebrations, a job which had to be redistributed within the Canadian context of the exclusion era. In many Chinese Canadian communities, it became the responsibility of elders or respected Chinese organizations like the Kuomintang or Zhigontang to provide these celebratory foods that brought the

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[185] The Victoria association was the first established in Canada and was known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. Groups with variations of this name can be found in cities across Canada.

[186] Influence and rivalry of these political groups further discussed by David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership Case Study of Victoria in Canada* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010).

[187] Alison R. Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor: Early Chinese Settlement in Manitoba* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 72.

[188] Pamela Hunt, "The Road Home: Rebellion, The Market and Masculinity in the Han Han Phenomenon," *China Perspectives* no. 3 (January 2020): 32, https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.10372.

[189] Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 173-175.

community together. Traditional festivals and meals became important not only culturally, but also to create and strengthen ties outside of the Chinese Community. For example, in Manitoba, members of the Kuomintang took on the traditionally feminine roles of organizing, hosting, and providing food for traditional festivals, ranging from formal dinners to annual public picnics.[190] These events preserved cultural practices while simultaneously providing environments to strengthen inter- and intra-community relationships. Many such events brought Chinese Communities together with local white Churches and/or dignitaries. In Manitoba especially, these intercommunity relationships contributed to the Chinese Canadian community facing less racism compared to other Canadian Chinatowns.[191] Cooking and hosting large meals like these became uniquely important in many Chinese Canadian contexts, transforming from a role served by women to one fulfilled by the most important and respected men of Chinese Canadian communities.

Taking on the traditional domestic roles of women in China empowered Chinese Canadian men to thrive economically as well as socially. Commercializing the domestic labour of cleaning and cooking, through laundries and restaurants, brought Chinese Canadian men across the country the most economic success.[192] After the completion of the railway, Chinese labourers came to be seen as direct threats to the white working and middle classes. Racist views and discriminatory practices kept Chinese men out of a large portion of jobs and industries in Canada, and by locking Chinese men out of the labour force, these men were also essentially locked out of the norms and ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Chinese Canadian-owned laundries were male spaces where between one and eight men would live and work. Without the families of these workers present, many had no outside obligations, allowing them to work up to thirteen-hour shifts which in turn kept prices lower than any white-owned laundry could compete with.[193] The lack of specialized training, need for advanced business knowledge, or investment money made opening laundries appealing for many Chinese men, who would often take on business partners to fund the establishment of their laundries.[194] As higher demand was placed on laundries, business owners sponsored the immigration of male relatives and friends from China to keep up with the workload. Often, after being trained, these men would go on to establish their own laundry, further cementing the laundry business and a Chinese Canadian niche.[195] Thus, the loss of manly respectability due to the feminine

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[190] Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 37.
[191] Alison Marshall explains how Chinese Canadians faced less racism the closer they were to Winnipeg. For further reading as to why this phenomenon occurred see: Alison R. Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor: Early Chinese Settlement in Manitoba* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 9.
[192] Yee, *Chinatown*, 13.
[193] Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 64.
[194] Ban Seng Hoe, *Enduring Hardship The Chinese Laundry in Canada* (Gatineau: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003), 12.
[195] Ibid., 13.

nature of such work was negated by gaining masculine status as economically successful breadwinners and business owners.

The major alternative to laundries for Chinese men looking to find economic success and a place within hegemonic masculinity was the restaurant business. Like laundry, food preparation was traditionally considered women's work in both China and Canada, particularly in rural Canada where woman-run inns were the only place to buy a meal in most small towns.[196] Chinese Canadians who established Chinese restaurants found more economic success, as well as higher social and masculine status than the laundry business could provide. Despite the feminine nature of the work, Chinese restaurant owners often became wealthy and respected community leaders, which enhanced their manliness and respectability.

Chinese-owned restaurants became incredibly popular within the Chinese and non-Chinese Communities around the country, serving meals from both the Chinese and British traditions. These restaurants often provided community gathering spaces, particularly in rural areas where they were the only restaurant in town. Before 1923, restaurant owners were often successful enough to fund the immigration of their families, paying the exorbitant head tax for male family members who could come work in the restaurant, before sponsoring their wives and children.[197] The result of economic success, as well as having family present brought many restaurant-owning men further into the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and manly respectability among both the Chinese and non-Chinese Communities. Restaurant ownership also allowed Chinese Canadian men to fulfill masculine ideals on a more physical level. Restaurant labour was less draining on the body and more financially rewarding than laundry work, granting men more access to nutritious food and allowing them to fit into the masculine ideals of physical strength and male vitality.[198] With this, Chinese Canadian communities created a unique masculine ideal which balanced traditionally feminine labour with masculine respectability.

Chinese-owned restaurants were often the only spaces where white Canadians regularly interacted with Chinese Canadians. This meant that Chinese restaurants became spaces of inter-community mixing, which in some areas, particularly in Manitoba, helped to lessen racist and anti-Chinese sentiment compared to other parts of Canada, as white communities formed relationships with Chinese communities.[199] However, in many other areas, Chinese restaurants became a point of anxiety for those who feared interracial mixing.

Interracial and intra-racial relationships were a major aspect through which Chinese Canadian men navigated traditional and Western ideals of masculinity. Within Chinese Canadian communities, transforming traditional relationship structures and

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196 Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 84.
197 Ibid., 92.
198 Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 203.
199 Ibid., 9.

the value placed on these relationships was one of the primary shifts made to renegotiate masculinity. Chinese Confucian tradition dictated that there were five types of relationships, each with their own position on the hierarchy of importance; 1. Ruler to subject, 2. Father to son, 3. Husband to wife, 4. Brother to brother, 5. Friend to friend. This hierarchy of importance was transformed by many Chinese Communities across Canada as male friendships became the most important relationships for navigating Canadian life, particularly in rural areas where even fewer Chinese women were present than in larger urban Chinatowns. In Canada, male friendships often became hierarchical rather than equal, typically in terms of local political influence and social status.[200] These homosocial friendships largely replaced the Chinese heterosexual relationship dynamics that were central to traditional Chinese understandings of manliness which framed manhood in relation to the subordination of women, instead, reframing manliness in relation to status over male friends.[201] These friendships were essential for economic success and social status, as many men relied on male friends to run their businesses while they made trips to visit friends and family around Canada, return to China to marry and have children, or visit wives and children they were unable to bring to Canada.[202] With this help, Chinese Canadian men could bolster their masculine status through continued economic success as well as new or continued heterosexual relationships with Chinese women.

Chinese men did still engage in heterosexual and social relationships in Canada despite the lack of Chinese women. The assumption that Chinese women would be the only available partners for Chinese men created stereotypes and expectations of Chinese men as a largely celibate group. While many of these men may have been effectively celibate during their time in Canada, relationships between white women and Chinese men were not uncommon.[203] The idea of inter-racial relationships between Chinese men and white women was a point of anxiety across the country, at a time when the slogan "White Canada Forever" informed the dominant mindset,[204] causing fears of race mixing, interracial marriage, and mixed-race children.[205] Chinese men were framed as dangerous to white women due to their corrupting influence, hypnotic powers, and perceived asexuality which could lure white women to become victims of a dangerous opium-induced Chinese sexuality or be manipulated into smoking opium,

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[200] Ibid., 2.
[201] Hunt, "The Road Home: Rebellion, The Market, and Masculinity," 34.
[202] Marshall, *The Way of the Bachelor*, 107.
[203] Chinese Canadian men may have also expressed sexuality with other men, however, this expression would not have been seen as masculinizing within the Chinese Canadian context and is thus out of the scope of this paper. For further reading on traditional Chinese understandings of same-sex attraction and gender see Song Geng, "Jasper-like Face and Rosy Lips: Same-Sex Desire and the Male Body." In *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture*, (Hong Kong University Press, 200) 125–56.
[204] Discussion of racial categorization and segregation in Canada's state formation further explored by Timothy J. Stanley, "John A. Macdonald, 'the Chinese' and Racist State Formation in Canada," *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry* 3, no. 1 (2016): 6-34, https://doi.org/10.24908/jcri.v3i1.5974.
[205] Chenier, "Sex, Intimacy, and Desire," 32.

and dissolving the racial sexual boundaries. The result of such fears was legislation introduced barring white women from working in or frequenting Chinese-owned businesses, framed as protection of white women from sexual slavery.[206] The White Women's Labour Law, enacted in Saskatewan in 1912 before influencing copycat laws in provinces across the country, aimed to distance Chinese Canadian men from hegemonic masculinity in two ways. The first was by sabotaging the economic success of Chinese business owners, particularly restaurant owners, who largely hired white female waitresses for their cheap labour. The second method was by attempting to isolate Chinese men from the largest demographic of maritally available women, thus affecting heterosexual and social relationships and hegemonic masculinity.

In reality, urban cities like Toronto saw about a third of Chinese men in marriages or common-law relationships with white women, while others participated in long-term companionate marriages or commercial sexual relationships.[207] These relationships were also often sites of traditional gender role transformation due to external pressures against such relationships. Many Chinese Canadian men surrendered the level of authority over women that they would have had over Chinese women, or that white men had over their partners in traditional relationship dynamics. They often took on a significant load of domestic labour, such as cooking and cleaning for their partners. The advantages Chinese men brought to relationships with white women were typically meant to compensate for the reduction in social status and connections that white women faced due to their taboo relationships, especially if the couple was not legally married.[208] Not only were white women in relationships with Chinese men assumed to be prostitutes, but they were frequent targets of the morality police, who could harass and arrest white women who frequented Chinatown or Chinese-owned businesses. Women who married their Chinese partners also often struggled to find work with a Chinese surname, lost their status as British subjects, and could be disowned by their white families and shunned from white communities.[209] Thus, many women were motivated to stay in these relationships despite hardships thanks to the experience of increased autonomy and decreased household labour. Even relationships between Chinese Canadian men and white sex workers saw these kinds of non-traditional gender dynamics. While many of these men paid sex workers in cash, many also accompanied these payments with a wide range of other benefits including cooking fresh meals, cleaning or other domestic labour, or gifting clothing, jewellery, and household goods.[210] The result of these inter-racial relationship dynamics was

[206] Constance Backhouse, "Mesalliances' and the 'Menace to White Women's Virtue': Yee Clun's Opposition to the White Women's Labour Law, Saskatchewan, 1924," in *Colour-Coded a Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999), 132-172, 140-143.
[207] Chenier, "Sex, Intimacy, and Desire," 31.
[208] Ibid., 33.
[209] Ibid., 35.
[210] Ibid., 33.

decreased masculine roles within the home in exchange for increased masculine respectability outside of the home.

Ultimately, during the Exclusion Era, legislation and anti-Chinese sentiment attempted to block Chinese Canadian men from reaching the norms, ideals, and roles of hegemonic masculinity. In response, these men expressed and lived out their manliness in a variety of ways, within both their local Chinese Communities and dominant society. While the legal and social contexts varied across Canada, patterns in the techniques used by Chinese Canadian men to regain manhood did emerge. Physically, some men leaned into Western masculinity in their appearance while others embraced traditional Chinese masculine archetypes. The reorganization of gendered roles within cultural practices was essential in preserving these traditions and redefining masculine roles in the process. Many Chinese Canadian men were only able to establish themselves within economic masculine ideals by working in traditionally feminine labour roles like cleaning and cooking, establishing successful laundries and restaurants. Recharacterizing relationship dynamics was also essential to navigating masculine ideals, placing new importance on homosocial relationships and redefining heterosexual relationships. Chinese Canadian men navigated Canada's attempt to emasculate them, responding with expressions of agency by envisioning a uniquely Chinese Canadian version of masculinity.

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Hypatia the Highest: Analyzing the Life, Legacy, and Liberties of Hypatia of Alexandria

Emma Newton

In loving memory of my own father, Jon Newton. Thank you for teaching me to follow my passions and convictions, and believing I could do anything.

Abstract

This paper outlines the structures which allowed Hypatia of Alexandria to succeed as a female scholar in the highly paternalistic world of Greco-Roman academia. Despite the excessive focus surrounding her death, the circumstances of Hypatia's life are equally fascinating and merit more discussion than they are often given. To begin, Hypatia's unusually close relationship with her father allowed her to pursue academic interests which were typically inaccessible to Greco-Roman girls during the fifth century. In wider society, although accounts of Hypatia's adult life are mostly posthumous, we can infer that she was generally well-regarded despite taking up space in a typically male environment. Finally, by contextualizing Hypatia's murder within the greater socio-political context of fifth-century Alexandria, we can lessen much of the sensationalism surrounding her death. In conclusion, Hypatia stands out as an example of how the complex dynamics of Alexandrian social and legal frameworks could—in some cases—allow for greater freedoms than were typically thought to exist for Hellenistic women.

Author's Note:

There is a huge amount of complex scholarship relating to Hypatia. However, due to the constraints of an undergraduate paper, there are several details that I have omitted for the sake of including what I believe to be the most salient points relating to Hypatia's life. I would like to acknowledge the sparseness of my discussion in some areas, particularly regarding religion, politics, and the relationships between Hypatia and her circle.

Introduction

Hypatia of Alexandria was a strikingly complex figure: she has been described varyingly as both a martyr and a sinner, a wife and a virgin, a respected intellectual, and a corrupt temptress.[211] While some sources—such as Damascius[212] and Socrates Scholasticus—describe Hypatia's life and works with considerable respect, extolling both her intelligence and her virtue[213], others such as John of Nikiu were openly hostile towards her.[214] Indeed, the manner of her death in the year 415 AD, and its aftereffects, also point to the fact that Hypatia's public image was difficult for her fifth-century audience to come to terms with. Regardless of public perception, be it positive or negative, Hypatia was afforded a relatively privileged position within the fiercely patriarchal sphere of Hellenistic intellectual life. This is evidenced by the fact that she is one of very few female philosophers whose name is still known to us. In order to reconcile the hugely disparate accounts of Hypatia's life and form a better understanding of her legacy, it is crucial to take a step back from the woman herself and examine the factors that contributed to her relative freedoms. By discerning how she was able to occupy such a respected space in Alexandrian scholarship, it is easier to understand Hypatia as an individual. In addition, an analysis of the more persistent anecdotes that surround Hypatia can help to not only provide further insight into many of the values and societal practices that existed during her lifetime, but also how her contemporaries attempted to understand her image. By collating contemporary information alongside the advantage of modern hindsight, this paper will provide a holistic understanding of the social, political, and individual factors that allowed Hypatia to hold such a high position in Alexandrian intellectual circles despite the typical limitations on women in the Hellenistic world.

Early Life and Background

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[211] Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History,* VII.15 J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series graeca) in Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation,* ed. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016) 415.

[212] Damascius Fr. 163-4 in C. Zintzen, ed., Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 415.

[213] Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History,* VII.15 J.P. Migne, 415.

[214] John of Nikiu, "The Life of Hypatia" in *Chronicle* 84, https://web.archive.org/web/20160303171858/http://cosmopolis.com/alexandria/hypatia-Bio-john.html, 87-103.

To begin, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction regarding some of the principles of Neoplatonism, the school of philosophy that Hypatia devoted herself to. Given the complexity and breadth of Neoplatonic thought, as well as its numerous highly nuanced subsections, this discussion will primarily focus on the basic structure of Neoplatonic principle, especially as it pertains to gender and intellect. This overview provides us with a framework to understand the environment that Hypatia was educated within. Neoplatonism was concerned with the study of the One, an immaterial entity that is responsible for ultimate enlightenment and the governance of world order; in tandem with the One is Intellect, which is tasked with the organization of the material world; finally, the Soul operates as the lowest level of the three, directly interacting with the material world on behalf of the One and Intellect.[215] From the Soul, human souls have fragmented and found their way into human bodies, but can rejoin the One through the acquisition and development of Intellect.[216] Most crucially, Neoplatonist doctrine considered the human soul to be genderless, meaning that Neoplatonists similarly believed sex did not preclude intelligence or dictate what subjects children should learn in order to achieve Intellect.[217] Because of this, Hypatia's father Theon, a Neoplatonist himself, was likely far more supportive than the average Hellenistic patriarch.

Although this paper is working under the most common assumption, that Theon was Hypatia's biological father, it should be noted that recent scholarship has called into question whether Theon's references to Hypatia as his daughter should be taken literally. As Dr. Cara Minardi points out:

> [. . .] clear identification of Hypatia's teacher is [complicated by] the Neoplatonist practice of using familial terms to describe teacher student relationships. Most assume that daughters of philosophers tended to be educated in philosophy most often, but [. . .] Neoplatonists often referred to their teachers by using family terms and confusing biological relationships; these terms should not be taken literally. Whether Theon was Hypatia's biological, adopted, or ideological [father], he probably educated Hypatia, at least in part.[218]

However, assuming that Hypatia was born to Theon and his wife, it certainly seems that they were hoping to raise Hypatia as an intellectual—after all, her very name translates as "the highest."[219] Although credit should be given to Hypatia for her own

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[215] Edward Jay Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher,* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 41.
[216] Ibid., 41-42.
[217] Cara Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women: Hypatia of Alexandria and her Communities," PhD dissertation, (Georgia State University, 2011),89-94.
[218] Ibid., 86-87.
[219] Ibid., 83.

wisdom, her reported closeness with her father was, without a doubt, one of the most impactful factors that allowed her to indulge in academic pursuits. By all accounts, Theon held great respect for his daughter, teaching and nurturing her study of mathematics and astronomy to such an extent that contemporaries commented on how she reportedly surpassed him in both areas, before turning to philosophy to fulfill her need for continued educational enrichment.[220] During their frequent collaborations, Theon is noted to have drawn specific attention to their familial relationship—affectionately referring to her not as associate or student, but as daughter.[221]

Along with the support he provided to her, Theon's own position in society was also a boon to Hypatia; he was a well-respected scholar in his own right, who held the title of director at the Museum at Alexandria.[222] Based on this, it stands to reason that Hypatia likely had access to the information he acquired at the museum, or perhaps the museum itself, which was at the center of Alexandrian intellectual life. While it should be noted that Hypatia's upper-class background provided her with some degree of education regardless of her paternal relationship, this would have been relatively provisionary so as to both prepare her to raise capable children, and to mark her status as a member of elite society.[223] Instead, Hypatia's individual intelligence, as well as her father's willingness to nurture this intelligence, were both crucial to her upwards trajectory in the Alexandrian academic world.[224] Moreover, this path was enabled not only by Hypatia's brilliance, but also the very place where she grew up.

Along with her economic position in society, Hypatia's situation within Alexandria—as opposed to Rome or Athens, two other major seats of Hellenistic power—is significant, as is her ethnic and cultural identity, and the time period she was born into. By the late-Roman period—roughly 250-450 AD, with Hypatia generally cited as being born sometime between 355 or 370[225]—Alexandria was a bustling, multiethnic seat of culture, boasting the second largest population in the Mediterranean.[226] This cultural melting pot espoused a mix of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian laws and morals that were comparatively far more lenient than those within Greece or Rome proper.[227] By contrast, had Hypatia been born in fifth-century Classical (or, to some extent, post-Classical) Athens, she would have been legally

[220] Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, trans. F. Lyra, (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 70-72.
[221] Ibid., 70.
[222] Kathleen Wider, "Women Philosophers in the Ancient Greek World: Donning the Mantle." *Hypatia* 1, no. 1 (1986), https://www.jstor.org/stable/3810062, 52.
[223] Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend,* 21-22.
[224] Ibid., 29.
[225] Ibid., 15-21.
[226] Wider, "Women Philosophers," 52.
[227] Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women," 82.

disenfranchised, socially inferior and, most importantly, prevented from achieving education beyond the most fundamental levels expected of female children.[228]

Regarding Hypatia's ethnicity, although her mother is sadly absent from historical record, it can be deduced that Hypatia inherited Theon's Egyptian/Greco-Roman ethnic background.[229] Owing to her heritage, as well as her social and geographical position within Alexandria, Hypatia was afforded considerably more freedoms than her Roman or Athenian counterparts. Given that Alexandrian legal practices were an amalgam that assimilated laws and virtues from across the Mediterranean world, as a biracial woman, Hypatia was uniquely empowered to follow whichever laws or practices best fit her needs in accordance with both her own multiethnic background and the multiethnic nature of the city she lived in.[230]

Clearly, Hypatia's unique set of circumstances—her economic position, geographic location and time period, and ethnicity—positioned her to enjoy liberties beyond those experienced by many women in the Hellenistic world. However, this is not to say that Hypatia did not face hardship. Despite the privileges she had access to, her life and legacy were still greatly complicated by matters of social morality and sensationalism.

Contemporary Opinion and Legacy

Having established some of the primary factors that contributed to Hypatia's place in Hellenistic academia, this paper will discuss three anecdotes and events that were particularly important in the construction of Hypatia's image: her purported virginity, the infamous menstrual rag incident, and her eventual murder. Before going further into this topic, it is important to note that not only are the best-known documents about Hypatia not written by the woman herself, but also, the three most influential primary accounts concerning Hypatia were all written posthumously by male authors.[231] Along with issues of historical reliability, such as bias and a lack of understanding towards the female experience, another problem that arises from the degree of separation between Hypatia and her biographers is the general lack of consensus shared amongst them. Consequently, this has resulted in a lack of consensus among modern scholars when interpreting opinions towards Hypatia.

Hypatia's chastity and modesty are especially fertile ground for discussion. Along with praising her intelligence, Socrates Scholasticus goes on to comment on how she "had no hesitation about being in the company of men, since they all respected her more because of her extraordinary chastity."[232] While this further speaks to the relative freedoms that Hypatia enjoyed, as it seemingly indicates that she was in the presence of men while unescorted, it also implies that her virtue was so widely discussed that her

[228] Wider, "Women Philosophers," 24-26.
[229] Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women," 82.
[230] Ibid., 82-83.
[231] Ibid., 70.
[232] Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 415.

"extraordinary chastity" was common knowledge. Socrates also stipulated that, although she was not afraid to speak directly to ruling men, she did so "with due modesty."[233] Likewise, Damascius' *Life of Isidore*—reproduced in the *Suda*—repeatedly extoled Hypatia's "distinguished nature" and celebrated her choice to remain a virgin.[234] However, despite Damascius' confident statements in regards to Hypatia's virginity, he would later discuss the supposed marriage between Hypatia and the titular individual in his writings, Isidore (e.g. Isidorus).[235]

Conflicting narratives, such as Damascius', are further proof of the problems that result from historical writings undertaken by someone other than the subject, particularly once that person has passed away. Despite Damascius' claims,[236] the purported marriage between Isidorus and Hypatia has since been debunked due to records of Isidorus' existing marriage to a woman named Danna, as well as the fact that a marriage between Hypatia and Isidorus would have been logistically impossible since the former was dead long before the latter was even born.[237] Furthermore, it is unlikely that she would have been able to continue her intellectual pursuits had she ever been married, for two reasons. First, the typical marital age for girls aligned with the age that rhetoric was normally taught, therefore precluding them from ever completing this portion of their education; second, the families of elite women were typically unwilling to finance this higher level of education anyway, since it provided limited potential in comparison to the comfort offered by a secure marriage.[238]

Despite Hypatia's apparent rejection of married life, this was not for lack of options. Damascius provided a particularly vivid description of an incident that resulted from Hypatia's admonishment of a potential suitor, saying:

> [Hypatia] was so beautiful to look at that one of her pupils fell in love with her. When he was no longer able to control his passion, he let her know how he felt about her. The uneducated stories have it that Hypatia told him to cure his disease through the study of the arts. But the truth is that he had long since given up on culture; instead, she brought in one of those women's rags and threw it at him, revealing her unclean nature, and said to him, 'This is what you are in love with, young man, and not with the Beautiful' [. . .][239]

Although there are few contemporary responses to this event, aside from the *Suda*, modern scholars have had much to say about how this event should be interpreted. Some have asserted that Hypatia's display of her menstrual napkin was a means of

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[233] Ibid., 415.
[234] Damascius, *Damascii vitae*, 415.
[235] Ibid., 415.
[236] Ibid., 415.
[237] Wider, "Women Philosophers," 52.
[238] Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend,* 25-26.
[239] Damascius, *Damascii vitae,* 415.

demonstrating her disgust towards the human body, or specifically the female body;[240] others have interpreted it as an example of sexual impropriety and moral debasement;[241] one has even suggested that incidents like the bloody rag drew attention to her gender, and incited significant anger which could have contributed to her eventual murder.[242] It is difficult to ascertain which, if any, of these arguments is closest to the truth. However, they all point to the fact that Hypatia's death is a popular subject of discussion, with some scholars even claiming that "Hypatia's fame rests more on the manner of her death than on her stature as a philosopher."[243]

Hypatia's murder is perhaps the most thoroughly documented moment in her life, with scholars both ancient and modern repeatedly analyzing the possible motives, drawing conclusions ranging from jealousy towards her intelligence and authority, fear of her influence, or a wish to use her as an example to other female scholars.[244] Furthermore, the set of political circumstances surrounding the murder is extremely complicated, involving conflict between pagans (such as Hypatia herself) and Christians,[245] a power struggle between two of her former students—Orestes and Cyril—and general civil unrest caused by political and religious turbulence throughout the Mediterranean.[246] Rather than focusing on Hypatia's murder as an isolated incident, it is helpful to contextualize it alongside similar events in order to highlight what the details can tell us about its intent.

By all accounts, the killing was not the act of one individual, but rather a large Christian crowd spurred on by political and/or religious discontent. In addition, the method by which the murder was carried out is especially notable. Damascius provides the most succinct summary of the murder, stating that "a group of bestial men attacked her, true ruffians, who had no respect for god and no concern for men's indignation; they killed [Hypatia] and brought the greatest pollution and disgrace on their fatherland."[247] The accounts from both John of Nikiu and Socrates elaborated on this, detailing how the crowd was not content with merely killing Hypatia, but that they also burned her body afterwards. Moreover, although John of Nikiu asserts that Hypatia died as the mob dragged her through the street,[248] most historians accept Socrates' statement that she was killed and dismembered using pottery shards—a further desecration of her body.[249] Crucially, Hypatia's murder fits into a history of high-profile Alexandrian killings where the victims' bodies were brutally disfigured before

[240] Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, 50-51.
[241] Wider, "Women Philosophers," 54-55.
[242] Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women," 104.
[243] Wider, "Women Philosophers," 57.
[244] Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women," 103-106.
[245] Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria,* 88-91.
[246] Wider, "Women Philosophers," 57.
[247] Damascius, *Damascii vitae,* 415.
[248] John of Nikiu, "The Life of Hypatia," 87-103.
[249] Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 415.

eventually being burned, as both a further insult and a means of preventing the person's soul from finding rest in the afterlife.[250]

Although this last point would suggest an atmosphere of vehement hatred towards Hypatia, this was not the case. Rather, her death seems to have come as a genuine shock to the Alexandrian people[251] who, for the most part, held her in genuine high regard.[252] This is evidenced by the fact that of the three best-known accounts of Hypatia which have been discussed, only John of Nikiu is openly critical of her.[253] Considering this, I propose that by collating the most widely known stories of Hypatia's life along with notable details concerning the environment she lived in, it is possible to gain a robust understanding of Hypatia as an individual within the wider sphere of Hellenistic Alexandria.

Conclusions

Hypatia is an excellent example of the fact that, as Cara Minardi so eloquently stated, "Conditions for [Alexandrian] women were diverse, changing, and dependent on their ethnicity, their position in the social hierarchy, and the ideology of the family into which they were born."[254] Hypatia's contemporaries struggled to understand her image, so it stands to reason that modern scholars, who are even farther removed, would as well. By situating the accounts provided within the larger society that Hypatia belonged to, three salient facts help to remind us of the reality in which she lived. First, she was fortunate to be born into a family and belief system that allowed her considerable freedoms, in comparison to many other Hellenistic women. Secondly, her rejection of marriage, while it was the topic of heavy speculation and fetishization, nonetheless provided her with even greater liberty. Finally, she was generally well-regarded even after her death, suggesting a level of respect and acceptance towards women in her position.

Hypatia's legacy is that of a woman who fully utilized the societal advantages available to her. Her intelligence is notable not only through her work, but also due to her obvious understanding of how best to navigate the social position she was in, and the liberties that she was fortunate enough to enjoy. Furthermore, I would hesitate to use Hypatia's murder as an overall example of how women—or, more specifically, female scholars—were viewed in antiquity, especially considering the posthumous reactions that generally mourned her murder. While it is true that there were some problematic facets to her overall contemporary reception, general consensus was unlikely to have been as negative as the manner of her death would suggest. Thereby, I would construct her legacy as follows: a woman who was able to reach the highest peaks of her intelligence, both due to social happenstance and individual shrewdness.

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[250] Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women," 102.
[251] Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend,* 3.
[252] Minardi, "Re-Membering Ancient Women," 105.
[253] John of Nikiu, "The Life of Hypatia," 87-103.
[254] Ibid., 64.

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Thomas Sankara's Legacy: Forging the Burkinabe Cultural Identity

Melanie Warwick

Abstract

This paper explores the legacy of Thomas Sankara, the first president of Burkina Faso, whose brief yet impactful time in power from 1983 to 1987 continues to influence Burkinabè identity and Pan-African political thought. Sankara's policies were grounded in an ideology that focused on decolonization, Pan-African unity, anti-corruption, women's emancipation. He fostered a national identity rooted in indigenous African values through his dedicated promotion of local and traditional culture, language, and independence. This paper examines the influence of Sankara's ideology, both during his life and after his death, as Blaise Compaoré attempted to use his regime to erase Sankara's place in Burkinabè history. It also investigates the resurgence of Sankarist ideals in political parties, social movements, and youth activism in contemporary Burkina Faso. While acknowledging the limitations and contradictions of Sankara's leadership, this paper argues that his revolutionary vision played a central role in constructing a resilient Burkinabè identity that persists beyond his assassination and continues to inspire collective action and national pride today.

Thomas Sankara was the first president of Burkina Faso, creating the position after organizing a coup d'état in 1983. His presidency ended with his assassination in 1987, ordered by the same man who helped him create and carry out the revolution in 1983: Blaise Compaoré. Sankara achieved much during his time in power, but he is most strongly remembered for his ideology and the impacts it had on the collective cultural identity of Burkina Faso. Sankara's ideology was based in Pan-Africanism, a desire for the political union of Indigenous Africans, independent from non-African supervision and influence. His strongest principles were his stances on anti-corruption, women's emancipation, and decolonization. He used symbolic acts to reinforce the policies and laws he enacted, bolstered by his determination to lead by example. Sankara's public image was characterized by selflessness and transparency, which added to his authority and his popularity, both domestically and internationally. Sankara facilitated a thriving Burkinabè culture based in the Indigenous cultures of the region, promoted through various policies enacted by his government. After his assassination, Sankara has been immortalised through the cultural memory held by the Burkinabè people, which was reinforced as scholars began to study his ideology in depth. Many movements have drawn inspiration from Sankarist ideology, with some being entirely based upon his ideas and goals. Sankara's approach to the leadership of Burkina Faso was not without flaws, and draws much criticism even now. His strategies did not have much time to create long-term changes, and his time in power was very short. Despite these shortcomings, Thomas Sankara's image and ideology were instrumental in constructing a Burkinabè identity that persists in Burkina Faso until today.

France invaded the area now known as Burkina Faso as part of the Scramble for Africa in the 1890s, officially making it a French protectorate in 1896. It became a self-governing colony named the Republic of Upper Volta in 1958 and gained full independence from France in 1960. Upper Volta sustained four coup d'états before the one led by Thomas Sankara in 1983.[255] After Sankara's coup d'état, the country was renamed from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, to both shed French colonization and embrace Indigenous African cultures within the country.

Considerable research has been conducted concerning the life and ideology of Thomas Sankara, as he was an unprecedented figure in contemporary African politics. Many scholars have attempted to define his legacy and what made it so impactful, as well as attempted to analyze the various factors that have contributed to the persistence

[255] Ernest Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara: a Revolutionary Experience in Retrospect," *Review of African political economy* 40, no. 137 (2013): 360.

of said legacy.[256] Some research looks at Sankara's impact within Burkina Faso;[257] other research investigates his impact in the broader context of the African continent.[258] Various people have contributed to accounts of Sankara's life, from his brother Paul Sankara, to his widow Mariam Sankara, and other advisors and staff who worked with him during his time as president.[259] Ernest Harsch is a research scholar at Columbia University's Institute of African Studies, and has written multiple books and journal articles about Thomas Sankara and topics surrounding him. Harsch spoke with Thomas Sankara himself multiple times during Harsch's time as a journalist covering economic developments in Burkina Faso.[260] His closeness with Sankara provides a sympathetic perspective of the man, aiding in the study of his image and impact. However, this also introduces significant bias towards him, which Harsch acknowledges in his works. Also consulted for this essay were several papers investigating the political movements that have drawn concepts or originated from Sankara's ideology.[261] Research conducted more recently, specifically after Burkina Faso's 2014 revolutionary activity and 2015 coup d'état, usually touches on Sankara's influence on the events, even though twenty-seven years had passed between his assassination and the 2014 revolution.[262] Discussion about Sankara as an inspiration, martyr, and critical motivational figure for both Burkinabès and other Africans is significant; however, the discussion of his impact on Burkinabè identity is much less common.

Thomas Sankara was born in Yako, Upper Volta, in 1949. His father was a police officer, and as he was employed by the colonial state, his family lived a relatively privileged life.[263] After primary school, Sankara pursued sixth grade in the secular education system, and was studious throughout his education.[264] When he was seventeen, he received a scholarship to Prytanée Military de Kadiogo, a military academy in Ouagadougou, where he was exposed "to a revolutionary perspective on

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[256] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 358–374.; Shaka Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Isidore Noel Sankara's Servant Leadership Style of Government in Burkina-Faso." *Eureka, Social and Humanities* (Online), no. 2 (2022): 93–102.; Zakaria Soré, "Balai Citoyen: A New Praxis of Citizen Fight with Sankarist Inspirations." *In A Certain Amount of Madness*, ed. Amber Murrey (Pluto Press, 2018), 225–240.

[257] Leo Zeilig, "Burkina Faso: From Thomas Sankara to Popular Resistance," *Review of African political economy* 44, no. 151 (2017): 155–164.

[258] Felix Kumah-Abiwu, and Odeyemi, Olusoji Alani, "Sankara's Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity: A Perspective for Africa's Development?" in *A Certain Amount of Madness*, ed. Amber Murrey (Pluto Press, 2018), 194–208.; Soré, "Balai Citoyen," 225-240.

[259] Ernest Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: an African Revolutionary* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014), 1-160.

[260] Ibid., 3.

[261] Soré, "Balai Citoyen," 225-240.; Kumah-Abiwu and Odeyemi, "Sankara's Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity," 194-208.; Fiona Dragstra, "We Are the Children of Sankara: Memories as Weapons During the Burkinabè Uprisings of 2014 and 2015," in *A Certain Amount of Madness*, ed. Amber Murrey (Pluto Press, 2018), 335–348.

[262] Zeilig, "Burkina Faso: From Thomas Sankara to Popular Resistance," 155-164.

[263] Harsh, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary,* 12.

[264] Ibid., 13.

Upper Volta and the world."[265] After Sankara graduated, he was selected for advanced officer training in Antisrabé, Madagascar. Here, he learned more about agricultural methodology, a variety of political theories, and other non-military subjects. Sankara also witnessed revolutionary change within Madagascar during his time there, as a military takeover of the island's conservative, pro-French regime.[266] Thomas Sankara returned to Upper Volta at twenty-four years old, trained in both military strategy and revolutionary ideas.

Sankara's first command post in Upper Volta was at Bobo-Dioulasso, training new army recruits. Here, he implemented the strategies and civic education he had learned in Madagascar.[267] He was transferred to Ouagadougou in 1974, where he oversaw the army's engineering corps. While in this position, Sankara became aware of how many people were "diverting funds, materials, or food or giving their own relatives lucrative jobs."[268] He openly criticized these corrupt practices, which alienated him from his peers and superiors. Sankara continued to rise through military ranks for many years, purposely avoiding political positions until 1981, when he was briefly instated as the Minister of Information.[269] He spent his time in this position encouraging journalists to reject state intimidation, and left the position with a dramatic speech broadcasted on live radio, criticizing the current party in power for serving only their own interests.[270] In 1983, Sankara was appointed Prime Minister, the right hand man to current President of Upper Volta, Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo.[271] His rousing speeches upstaged President Ouédraogo, and his revolutionary messaging alarmed French authorities and conservative officers. His outspokenness resulted in his arrest in 1983, which sparked large demonstrations throughout the capital of the country, primarily composed "high school students, youths from poor neighbourhoods, and some trade unionists."[272] A political stalemate continued for two months, until Sankara led a successful coup d'état in August of 1983,[273] marking the beginning of Sankara's iconic time as the first President of Burkina Faso.

Sankara was clear in his goals and ideas for the new revolutionary process that had just begun. In October of 1983, he gave his *Political Orientation Speech*, outlining his plan for the creation of a new Upper Volta. In this speech, Sankara stated his priorities as, in order of importance: the reform of the army, advancement of women's

[265] Ibid., 17.
[266] Ibid., 18.
[267] Ibid., 19.
[268] Ibid., 20.
[269] Ibid., 28.
[270] Ibid., 30.
[271] Ibid., 32.
[272] Ibid., 36.
[273] Ibid., 38.

political status, and economic reconstruction.[274] The new missions to be undertaken by the national army were as follows: to be "able to fight any enemy inside and out, and participate in military training",[275] to participate in agriculture and economic production in order to "live and suffer among the people it belongs to,"[276] and finally to arm their soldiers not only with military training, but also with ideological and political training, in order to promote the creation of conscious revolutionaries.[277] Advancement of women's political status would be achieved through the creation of a new mentality amongst Burkinabè women, letting them "assume the fate of the country alongside the man."[278] Finally, Sankara's goals concerning economic reconstruction revolved around the reformation of land, administration, and education.[279] Sankara constructed these political priorities intentionally, to forge a self-sufficient, independent, and proud decolonized African state. Thomas Sankara's ideology was a unique mixture for the time, which made him a striking political figure to both the people of Burkina Faso and Africa.

Thomas Sankara's desire for a strong Burkinabè identity situated in a pan-African community is evident throughout the entirety of his time in power and is ever present in his strongest ideas and policies. One of the best examples of his pan-African principles is the name 'Burkina Faso,' accompanied by the term 'Burkinabè'. Sankara wanted to "kill off Upper Volta in order to allow Burkina Faso to be reborn,"[280] and the careful consideration in the crafting of the name 'Burkina Faso' is a direct reflection of that. 'Burkina Faso' roughly translates to 'Land of Upright People', and is a composite of several languages Indigenous to the region; 'Burkina' comes from the language of Mooré, meaning "worthy people" or "men of dignity"; 'Faso' comes from the language of Jula, meaning "house" or "republic"; finally, the 'bè' suffix in 'Burkinabè' was taken from the language of Fulfuldé.[281] Efforts to promote the many different Indigenous cultures of the region were undertaken even before the name change, with state media beginning to actively promoting various languages and cultures when Sankara took power in 1983. This was done by having television newscasts stop delivering exclusively in French, adding radio broadcasts in eleven of Burkina Faso's Indigenous languages.[282] Once in power, Sankara supported a variety of cultural festivals, and the country saw an "unprecedented blossoming of African

[274] Thomas Sankara, "The Political Orientation Speech," transcript of speech delivered over radio in Burkina Faso, October 2, 1983.
www.thomassankara.net/the-political-orientation-speech-thomas-sankara/?lang=en.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Harsh, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary,* 366.
[280] Thomas Sankara, "Asserting our identity, asserting our culture," 1983 in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution,* ed., Michel Prairie, (United States of America: Pathfinder Press, 2007), 143.
[281] Harsh, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary,* 67.
[282] Ibid.

cultural and ethnic representations"[283] during his era. These efforts to promote Indigenous cultures, languages, and appreciation forged a strong Burkinabè identity based in pride for their African heritage and thriving cultural scene.[284]

Sankara's desire for the Burkinabè identity to be based on cultures Indigenous to the region was partially driven by his anti-Western, anti-colonialist stance. He believed that Western interference had stifled the development of culture in most, if not all African countries.[285] In order to amend this suffocation of culture, Sankara worked to cut the West out of Burkina Faso's economy, culture, and identity, to allow the country to develop a self-sufficient economy that the Burkinabè people could be proud of. Sankara's facilitation of the Burkinabè identity began through his revolutionary efforts, and was strengthened by his dedication to meaningful cultural events and practices. His hope was that these cultural attitudes would trickle down into the general public successfully, allowing Burkina Faso to develop a concrete identity with a thriving culture.

Sankara's ideology was based on his strong pan-African ideals, with many beliefs surrounding African solidarity, collective identity, and economic independence.[286] His stance on decolonization was deeply informed by this pan-Africanist base. Sankara advocated for all African countries to refuse to pay their colonial debts, stating that "[t]he debt is another form of neocolonialism, one in which the colonialists have transformed themselves into technical assistants. Actually, it would be more accurate to say technical assassins."[287] Sankara made great strides within Burkina Faso to reduce reliance on foreign aid and resources, but did not achieve his goal of spreading this practice to the greater continent. Sankara was also staunchly anti-corruption. He had openly criticized the corruption of army officers and government officials he had encountered during his time overseeing the Upper Volta Military Engineering Corps, and openly supported activists who exposed high-level corruption during his time as Minister of Information. Sankara believed that corruption was "nurtured by imperialism and neocolonialism,"[288] and was determined to shed all colonial influences. Once he became President, Sankara had many officials of both previous regimes and current officeholders tried for corruption.[289] Another major pillar of Sankara's ideology was the emancipation of women, made clear in his *Political Orientation Speech*, where he stated that "[the] Revolution and liberation of women go together."[290] Sankara was sincere in his commitment, and made many reforms concerning women's rights, including the establishment of a minimum marriageable age, the widow's right to

[283] Ibid., 68.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Sankara, "Asserting our identity, asserting our culture," 146.
[286] Kumah-Abiwu and Odeyemi, "Sankara's Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity," 203.
[287] Thomas Sankara, "A united front against the debt," 1983, in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution*, ed., Michel Prairie (United States of America: Pathfinder Press, 2007), 375.
[288] Kumah-Abiwu and Odeyemi, "Sankara's Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity," 204.
[289] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 369.
[290] Sankara, "Political Orientation Speech."

inherit, and multiple public campaigns against issues such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage.[291]

Sankara's success as a leader and as an inspiration was greatly reinforced by his use of symbolic gestures in his policies, fortified by his determination to lead by example. He purposefully enacted policies that had genuine impact on the economy and the community in a way that was visible and meaningful. To help embrace Indigenous culture and promote the domestic cotton market, civil servants were required to wear traditionally designed and locally created outfits made from Faso dan Fani fabric on a regular basis. The practice of weaving Faso dan Fani fabric had been all but eradicated as people bought more imported fabrics, and the cotton produced in the region became almost entirely exported. For International Women's Day, Sankara encouraged men to take on the duties of their female counterparts to understand women's role in the community. He often employed the use of mass public assemblies, in which central government budgets were designed, while the makers of said budgets were subjected to questioning from the public.[292] This helped demystify how the state functioned and allowed the public to voice their concerns in an effective and direct manner.

In addition to the symbolism he used to reinforce his policies, Sankara always led by example. He was one of the least paid Presidents in Africa during this period, with a salary of US $450 per month.[293] Civil servants had similarly reduced salaries as a reinforcement that they worked for the good of the community, not for monetary gain. Sankara's projected image was one of sincerity, openness, and humility. He rode a bicycle everywhere, played soccer on the public field with his advisors and staff every week, and discouraged people from chanting his name.[294] He publicly denounced any form of personality cultism pertaining to himself, refusing to have his picture on display in public buildings, and discouraged all other forms of personality worship.[295] Sankara's image was forged with the intention of placing emphasis on the Burkinabè people's connection with their leader as equals, and to remind the people that his leadership was focused on the people, instead of on himself. This image has lasted to the present day, where Sankara is hailed as a hero both within Burkina Faso and across the continent.[296]

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[291] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 369.
[292] Ibid., 371.
[293] Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 98; As of April 2025, $50 USD would be the equivalent of $800 CAD.
[294] Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary,* 29.
[295] David Smith, "Burkina Faso's Revolutionary Hero Thomas Sankara to Be Exhumed," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, March 6, 2015. www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/06/burkina-fasos-revolutionary-hero-thomas-sankara-to-be-exhumed.; Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 97.
[296] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.; Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 83.

Thomas Sankara was killed in a coup d'état in 1987, led by his former ally Blaise Compaoré. Compaoré was Sankara's deputy during his presidency, and served as both Minister of State at the Presidency and as Minister of State for Justice. Compaoré went on to claim the presidency for himself, and was in power until another coup d'état ousted him in 2014. During his regime, Compaoré did his best to suppress Sankara and the effects he had on Burkina Faso's population. Compaoré wanted to build Burkina Faso around the image of himself, rather than Sankara.[297] He had Sankara buried in a mass grave with the other men killed in the 1987 coup d'état, with no grave markers and no ceremony.[298] Sankara was actively slandered on television and on the radio, being called a "traitor", "fascist", "messianic", and a "paranoiac misogynist."[299] Open mention of Sankara was taboo, and it was even more risky for any Burkinabè to express admiration or appreciation of Sankara, an attitude that lasted for many years after his assassination.[300] Unfortunately for Compaoré, by prohibiting talk of Sankara and his ideology, Compaoré motivated those against his own regime to rally around Sankara, effectively making a political martyr of the former president. Sankara's place in the cultural memory of Burkina Faso was only further cemented with Compaoré's efforts to erase him from the minds of the people. As his regime progressed, Compaoré realised that Sankara's position in the greater Burkinabè cultural memory was firmly entrenched. He eventually allowed Sankara to be openly celebrated again, and designated Sankara as a national hero in 2000.[301]

One of the factors that Compaoré underestimated in attempting to sully Sankara's legacy was his significance in the pan-African consciousness. The former president was not a hero solely to the Burkinabè, but an inspiration across Africa. Sankara's popularity was rooted in what he represented to the whole of Africa, which had been struggling with corrupt leaders ignoring their basic needs since the colonization of the continent.[302] Additionally, Sankara represented a true split from the West, economically and culturally, which only added to his popularity amongst Africans. His legacy is one of inspiration and revolution, both to those fighting Compaoré and to those outside of Burkina Faso, living and fighting elsewhere in Africa.[303] Sankara's sudden assassination immortalised him, and Compaoré's attempts to diminish the effects of the Sankara era on Burkina Faso and the rest of Africa further cemented Sankara's place in both the Burkinabè and the African cultural memory.

Thomas Sankara was a source of hope for many Burkinabè during his presidency, and his legacy continues to provide that same hope for Burkinbè today. His ideas are often given as alternative solutions to crises in Burkina Faso both by those

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[297] Dragstra, "We Are the Children of Sankara," 345.
[298] Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary,* 90.
[299] Ibid., 69-70.
[300] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.; Dragstra, "We are the Children of Sankara," 344.
[301] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.
[302] Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 101.
[303] Zeilig, "Burkina Faso: From Thomas Sankara to Popular Resistance," 161.

who identify as Sankarist and those outside his ideological affiliation. The term 'Sankarist' in reference to a political alignment was not used while Sankara himself was alive, but emerged with the study of his revolution and rule by scholars after his death.[304] It was further popularized in 2000 when it was first used as an identifier by a political party, which called itself the 'Union for Rebirth / Sankarist Party'.[305] Since then, more political parties built on Sankarist ideals have developed, and have elected a few deputies to the National Assembly since 2002.[306] However, factionalism and fragmentation between them have caused votes for Sankarist parties to be split, and no majority has been achieved by any one party.

In addition to political parties, Sankarism has been an inspiring basis for many social movements. The Balai Citoyen, which translates to 'Citizen Broom', is one of the more remarkable social movements based on Sankarism. The name indicates their goal, which is to "rid the country of 'dirt', including the greed of political corruption."[307] It officially launched in 2013, and its origins dates back to 2011. Balai Citoyen is primarily composed of journalists, students, and human rights activists.[308] They are committed not only to the movement's primary goal of anti-corruption, but also to preserving the legacy of Sankara, through celebration of his actions and preservation of his memory.[309]

Separate from organized movements, it is remarkable that the contemporary youth still draw on Sankara and his ideology for revolutionary inspiration, despite being born after his death. During Compaoré's time in power, youth protestors would refer to themselves as 'les enfants de Sankara', or 'the children of Sankara'.[310] This clear expression of contempt for Compaoré and his regime is made more impactful by the knowledge of Compaoré's attempts to wipe Sankara from the cultural memory of the Burkinabè people. The youth of Burkina Faso use Sankara, his image, and his words as "contemporary weapons for social and political movements."[311] Sankara and his ideologies are a powerful rallying point, bringing together intergenerational Burkinabè, and creating a strong sense of national unity and pride. People who lived during Sankara's regime draw pride from seeing his policies in action, and the youth claim him as a part of their national heritage and an icon from which they draw motivation and hope.

While Sankara is hailed as a hero to the Burkinabè people, his ideology had flaws that were not dealt with during his time in power. His visions were vast and ambitious. They often lacked a clear implementation plan, with no other successful examples to

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[304] Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 98.
[305] Ibid., 99.
[306] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.
[307] Soré, "Balai Citoyen," 225.
[308] Ibid., 226.
[309] Ibid., 237.
[310] Dragstra, "We are the Children of Sankara," 345.
[311] Ibid., 342.

prove if his methods would work. Sankara was also impatient with anyone who insisted that his sights were set too high for the current economic or political position of Burkina Faso. In some situations, he was right to ignore these complaints. UNICEF did not believe that his vaccination drive would succeed, but agreed to support him despite their reservations.[312] Sankara managed to achieve the vaccination target despite the misgivings others expressed about the plan. However, his plans often had unintended consequences. For example, the CDRs, or Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, were Sankara's main vehicle for the participation of Burkinabè citizens in the governance of Burkina Faso. They were intended to allow local governance to be directly involved in the development of smaller communities, in addition to compensating for the shortcomings of the military.[313] Unfortunately, their history is tarnished by the abuses committed by the young and inexperienced activists that comprised most of these units.[314] Sankara had big dreams, and while many of them worked in his favour, there were some serious flaws to his system of governance.

The modern Burkinabè identity gained much of its cultural shape under the direct influence of Thomas Sankara. While he was alive, Sankara strove to create a thriving culture within Burkina Faso, shaped by his anti-colonialism and anti-Western ideals. This manifested in the promotion of Indigenous languages, festivals, and traditions, while shunning Western influences like fashion. His pan-African approach allowed for multiple Indigenous cultures in the region to weave together to create the Burkinabè identity, while still retaining their distinct cultures. This culture was further reinforced by the creation of new holidays, traditions, and customs, introduced through government policy and strengthened by Sankara's practice of leading by example. Even after his death, Thomas Sankara's ideology continues to influence the political thoughts and developments of the Burkinabè people. His assassination gave him the status of a martyr, and the study of his ideology has inspired many people, especially Burkinabè youth, to pursue Sankarism as a political alignment. Sankara may only have served four years as Burkina Faso's first President, but his impact continues to reverberate throughout the country. He will continue to motivate and inspire the Burkinabè people as an upstanding political figure and virtuous national hero, for as long as he remains in the cultural memory.

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[312] Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 371.
[313] Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 35.
[314] Ibid., 34.

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From Saint-Domingue to Haiti: How the Impetus of the Haitian Revolution Changed Throughout the Revolutionary Process

Henry Watt-Walter

Abstract

In recent decades scholars have established the Haitian Revolution as a momentous historical event alongside the other canonical Atlantic revolutions. The Haitian Revolution was distinctive, however, because it was the only slave revolt in the Americas to overcome European colonial governance and found an autonomous state. This extraordinary event erupted out of the extreme societal conditions in the French colony of Saint-Domingue. Supported by France, the plantocracy dominated the colony through mass enslavement and political exclusion of the colony's free population of colour. These two structural conflicts determined the revolutionary process. Initially, the political and economic conflict between intransigent white Dominguans and aspirational free Dominguans of colour resulted in a civil war and as this conflict destabilized the fragile structure of colonial oppression the enslaved population seized control of the revolutionary process.

In the 18th century, Saint-Domingue developed into one of the world's most dynamic and brutal colonies. Saint-Domingue was France's premier Caribbean colony and the immense wealth it produced for the metropole relied entirely on plantation slavery. Like all societies based on plantation slavery, Saint-Domingue was violent and stratified. Saint-Domingue, however, had an active and influential population of free people of colour which disrupted the white enslaver and black slave dichotomy characteristic of most plantation slavery systems. The resulting tensions between white Dominguans and free Dominguans of colour escalated into a civil war which weakened the societal structure of the colony and catalyzed an immense slave insurrection. This revolt radically transformed Saint-Domingue by destroying colonial society and creating a new political order based on the autonomy of the formerly enslaved. This paper will consider the pre-revolutionary conditions in Saint-Domingue and then trace the shifting causal factors of the revolutionary process which culminated in an autonomous state constituted by the formerly enslaved. As the Haitian Revolution involved several phases and actors it had no single impetus. The initial cause of the Haitian Revolution was the political and then military conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour, but as the slave insurrection overwhelmed all other actors, it dominated Saint-Domingue and drove the Haitian Revolution toward its momentous conclusion.

Any discussion of the Haitian Revolution must consider the extreme nature of Saint-Domingue's society because the colonial environment conditioned the origin and course of the revolutionary process. In Caribbean plantation colonies, a small group of white colonizers controlled the political and economic life of the colony by enslaving a large concentration of black Africans.[315] With the support of its European metropole, this plantocracy developed the system to a distinctly extreme level. In the 1780s, 215,000 enslaved Africans were imported, expanding the slave population of Saint-Domingue to 500,000 by 1791, while the white population was only 30,000.[316] Furthermore, the conditions on Saint-Domingue's 7,000+ plantations were atrocious. A litany of horrors were inflicted on an enslaved population that was perpetually belaboured and malnourished.[317] Consequently, the mortality rate of the enslaved population on Saint-Domingue was between five and six percent.[318] Around one third of Saint-Domingue's enslaved population laboured on the colony's 730 sugar plantations on which conditions were distinctly harsh.[319] During harvest, slaves could work up to

[315] Jeremy Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 2-3.
[316] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 1-19.; Trevor G. Burnard and John D. Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 253.
[317] Carolyn Fick, "Emancipation in Haiti: From Plantation Labour to Peasant Proprietorship," *Slavery and Abolition*, no. 2 (2000): 11, doi.org/10.1080/01440390008575304.
[318] Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge Mass.; London: Belknap, 2004), 40.
[319] David P. Geggus, "Slave Society in the Sugar Plantation Zones of Saint Domingue and the Revolution of 1791-1793," *Slavery and Abolition* 20,mno. 2 (1999): 31, doi.org/10.1080/01440399908575276.

twenty-hour days adjacent to boiling vats of sugar and their limbs were sometimes severed by the sugarcane grinding machines.[320]

The societal consequences of plantation slavery were highly impactful throughout the course of the Haitian Revolution. As historians Carolyn Fick and David Geggus observe, violence is inherent to slave systems because they are based upon violent oppression which generates violent resistance.[321] In such societies escalating violence is inevitable because oppressors must resort to extremes to maintain their control. Therefore, colonies like Saint-Domingue are inherently violent and experience mass violence and structural pressures toward revolt. This pernicious reality informed the perspectives and actions of the revolution's participants in two ways. Firstly, it made the plantocracy highly opposed to any reform that could conceivably reduce their power and apparatuses of oppression. Secondly, it produced a formidable slave revolt and provided a contrast so profound for the formerly enslaved that they would never again accept enslavement.[322]

The motivation to maintain such a volatile society was the enormous wealth it produced for the elites. Alongside coffee, cotton, and indigo, Saint-Domingue was a premier sugar producer. Sugar was one of the most valuable commodities on European markets and in 1790 alone France imported an astounding 75,000,000 *livres* worth of sugar from Saint-Domingue, which was equivalent to approximately 20% of France's total expenditure.[323] The planters and merchants controlled virtually all of the wealth that was not extracted to Europe and in the elite neighborhoods of Cap Français (the colony's primary port), property rents varied between five and ten thousand *livres* annually, which was comparable to similarly prestigious property areas in Paris.[324]

Crucially, this wealth and power was not only held only by white elites. Saint-Domingue was distinctive among Europe's plantation colonies for having a dynamic population of free people of colour. Dominguan society was defined and obsessed by race, and the rigid racial hierarchy was challenged by people born from relations between those of European and African descent. Initially, the white Dominguans had been unperturbed by the free Dominguans of colour, but as the free Dominguans of colour accrued more wealth and power the white Dominguans became ideologically and economically threatened by them.[325] While there were only

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[320] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 45-46.
[321] David P. Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint-Domingue 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 32. 32; Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution From Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 46.
[322] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 140-155.
[323] Robert Stein, "The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century: A Quantitative Study," *Business History* 22, no. 1 (1980): 14, doi.org/10.1080/00076798000000001.; Peter McPhee, *Liberty of Death: The French Revolution* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017), 41.
[324] Burnard and Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine*, 64.
[325] Jeffrey L. Stanley, "Demanding Racial Equality: Free People of Colour and the 1791 Concordats in Saint-Domingue," *Slavery and Abolition* 43, no. 1 (2022): 22-23 doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/0144039X.2021.1978230.; Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 20-22.

approximately 28,000 free Dominguans of colour in Saint-Domingue by the mid-1780s, the elite Dominguans of colour were merchants and planters themselves and owned one third of the colony's property and one quarter of its slaves.[326] They were actively advancing their position as well, participating in 45% of rural property transactions in the 1780s and 35% of urban transactions.[327] Furthermore, wealthy free plantation owners of colour like Vincent Ogé travelled to France to participate in intellectual and political institutions.[328]

In response to the influential free population of colour, white Dominguans zealously endeavoured to economically and politically limit them by instituting a system of political and legal racialization. Manumission laws were tightened, all free Dominguans of colour were obligated to provide documentation of their freedom even if it had been achieved generations previously,[329] and Saint-Domingue's legal system defined an astounding 13 different legal categories of race.[330] Free Dominguans of colour were reclassified from 'white' to 'nonwhite', and, accordingly, courts in Cap Français declared it necessary to determine whether a witness was "stained with mixed blood."[331] As a result, Dominguan society was radically restructured as race replaced class as the primary social division.

The white Dominguans' dogmatic initiatives to subordinate the free Dominguans of colour had profound consequences for Saint-Domingue and the conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour. Class identity and conflict were subordinated to conflicts of racial identity,[332] and the free Dominguans of colour were outraged at the injustices inflicted onto them by white Dominguans.[333] In a letter between two prominent free Dominguans of colour, Louis Félix Mathurin Broisrond-Tonnere wrote to Julien Raimond voicing his dismay, declaring that "it is no longer possible to bear the imperious humiliations of the whites who have illegally assumed the right to govern us… Never before have we suffered so many arbitrary humiliations."[334] The outraged, prosperous, and powerful free Dominguans of colour then organized and politicized themselves to impose their will on the intransigent white Dominguans.

Just as the brutality of plantation slavery affected the Haitian Revolution by conditioning the behaviour of participants, so too did the immense wealth concentrated

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[326] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 19.; Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 22-24.
[327] John D. Garrigus, "Colour, Class and Identity on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Saint-Domingue's Free Coloured Elite as Colons Américains," *Slavery and Abolition* 17, no. 1 (1996): 25, doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/01440399608575174.
[328] David P. Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 5 (1989): 1298, www.jstor.org/stable/1906352.; John D. Garrigus, "Blue and Brown: Contraband Indigo and the Rise of a Free Colored Planter Class in French Saint-Domingue," *The Americas* 50, no. 2 (1993): 249-250, www.jstor.org/stable/1007140.
[329] John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 108.
[330] Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 19.
[331] John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, 142-144.
[332] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 17.
[333] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 24-29.
[334] Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 244-245.

among Saint-Domingue's divisive elites. With regard to the elite white Dominguans, their wealth contributed to a profound hubris that impelled them to advocate for their autonomy in relation to France,[335] while also obdurately resisting any and all measures that would advance the political position of the free Dominguans of colour.[336] These free Dominguans of colour demanded systemic recognition and equal political rights.[337] Without their wealth and position of power within the society, however, their demands would have been much weaker in scope and conviction.[338] Therefore, without a dynamic elite of free Dominguans of colour, the conflict between the white and free Dominguans of colour would have been less destructive to the colonial structure.

The conflicting objectives and perspectives of the white and free Dominguans of colour converged with the outbreak of the French Revolution to initiate the process that became the Haitian Revolution. The advanced development of Atlantic networks and the prominence of absentee planters in France ensured that Saint-Domingue was informed and affected by revolutionary ideals.[339] The prevalence of revolutionary ideals and the Dominguans' use of them is evidenced by the fact that in 1789 Saint-Domingue had one newspaper and in 1793 there were over a dozen.[340] White Dominguans leveraged the ideals of popular sovereignty and utility to advocate for increased autonomy and the abolition of the *exclusif* with France.[341] Free Dominguans of colour invoked the ideals of equality and popular sovereignty to assert the legitimacy of their claim to political rights. The facile audacity of the white Dominguans' invocation of grand revolutionary ideals while simultaneously resisting the political rights of the free Dominguans of colour accentuated the hypocrisy of their position, thereby intensifying the free Dominguans of colour's aims.[342] The clashing objectives of the white and free Dominguans of colour fundamentally destabilized the colony and propelled it toward revolution.

The first significant violent manifestation of the conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour occurred when Vincent Ogé, a wealthy free planter of colour returned from France where he was advocating for the rights of free Dominguans of colour. Ogé was immensely frustrated by the dogmatic white Dominguans and the Parisian assembly's hesitation to rectify the injustices faced by free Dominguans of colour.[343] Upon his return, Ogé led a futile revolt against the white plantocracy which

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[335] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 76-81.; Jeremy D. Popkin, "A Colonial Media Revolution: The Press in Saint-Domingue, 1789-1793." *The Americas* 75, no. 1 (2018): 4. doi.org/10.1017/tam.2017.95.
[336] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 24-29.; Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 228-245.
[337] Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 228-245.; Stanley, "Demanding Racial Equality," 21-27.
[338] Ibid., 172.
[339] Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 8 & 33.
[340] Popkin, "A Colonial Media Revolution," 3.
[341] A mercantilist term meaning that Saint-Domingue could only trade with France.; Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 35.
[342] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 28.
[343] Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 236-237.

was crushed by the colonial forces. Ogé was tortured by being broken on the wheel after which his head was paraded around Cap Français on a spike.[344] While Ogé had every intention of upholding slavery, in their prejudicial convictions the white Dominguans conflated Ogé's revolt with the threat of a slave rebellion.[345] Writing to his father about the event, enfranchised white Dominguan Blaise Garnier wrote that "all the whites of the island have gathered to choose the leaders of the Patriotic Troops that we need…against our sworn enemies."[346] While militarily ineffectual,[347] the revolt Ogé participated in intensified the conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour by exacerbating the white Dominguans' dogmatic obduracy and provoking outrage among free Dominguans of colour. Additionally, it galvanized both groups and further entrenched the rigid and vitriolic racial divisions in Saint-Domingue.[348]

The draconian punishment of Vincent Ogé was one of many events that displayed the white Dominguans' fierce obduracy. Many white Dominguans' subsequent actions were determined by a combination of revolutionary fervour and intense notions of superiority and exceptionalism. In Autumn 1789, a particularly extreme group of white Dominguans expelled the colony's French representative, François Barbé-Marbois, and convened an assembly in the city of Saint Marc the following spring.[349] The Saint Marc assembly immediately declared its right to govern colonial affairs without French approval and rejected any and all participation by free Dominguans of colour.[350] Yet the assembly was promptly dispersed by Governor Antoine de Peynier and a group of loyal white Dominguans.[351] The white Dominguans' loyalty to the French must not be overemphasized, however, as upon the arrival of the new governor, Philibert François Rouxel de Blanchelande, the white Dominguans forced his compliance to ensure the subordination of free Dominguans of colour.[352]

In 1791, the white Dominguans' racialized zeal preventing free Dominguans of colour from obtaining political rights generated a civil war in Saint-Domingue. In June 1791, Saint-Domingue received news of the May 15 Decree enacted by the French government in Paris which established the political rights of people of colour with free parents.[353] Despite the fact that this excluded most free Dominguans of colour,

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[344] David P. Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 64-65.
[345] Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 237-242.
[346] *Blaise Garnier*, quoted in: Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*, 63.
[347] John D. Garrigus, "Vincent Ogé Jeune (1757-91): Social Class and Free Colored Mobilization on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution," *The Americas* 68, no. 1 (2011): 58-60, doi.org/10.1353/tam.2011.0078.
[348] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 32.
[349] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 29.
[350] Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 244.
[351] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 82.
[352] Jeremy D. Popkin, "The French Revolution's Royal Governor: General Blanchelande and Saint Domingue, 1790-92," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2014): 209-219, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.71.2.0203.
[353] Stanley, "Demanding Racial Equality," 25-26.; Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly," 1303.

Governor Blanchelande, perpetually pressured by the white Dominguans, refused to enact the law.[354] Free Dominguans of colour responded by forming militias to enforce their demands and by electing Pierre Pinchinat to represent, who was a prominent politician and ardent advocate of the rights of the free Dominguans of colour.[355] Beginning on September 7 1791 with an agreement between himself and the influential white planter Hanus de Jumécourt, Pinchinat embarked on an arduous autumnal campaign of signing agreements exchanging recognition of political rights for allegiance with the separate white factions on Saint-Domingue.[356] Pinchinat secured many concordats, but when France rescinded the May 15 Decree in September 1791 most white Dominguans blatantly reneged on the concordats.[357] Free Dominguans of colour were dismayed and a fight broke out in the colony's capital, Port-au-Prince, between the white and free Dominguan of colour's respective militias which ignited a civil war.[358]

During the civil war between white and free Dominguans of colour, the societal structure of Saint-Domingue was destroyed and the Haitian Revolution progressed radically in this anarchic environment. Throughout the conflict, white Dominguans were perpetually incapable of uniting, because they fundamentally disagreed about Saint-Domingue's relationship with France and the place of free Dominguans of colour in the colonial structure.[359] In contrast, the free Dominguans of colour formed a relatively cohesive political and military unit,[360] all the while maintaining a convoluted and fluid web of alliances with the fragmented white factions.[361] In the autumn of 1791, Governor Blanchelande's bleak report encapsulated the state of affairs in Saint-Domingue at the outbreak of civil war:

> For nearly three months, left to my own resources, surrounded on all sides by enemies redoubtable because of their number and their ferocity, continually harassed on my own side by enemies almost as dangerous, who never stop blackening my conduct and that of my collaborators by putting the most malignant and odious interpretation on it, tormented by the difficulty and, often, the impossibility of sending sufficient forces everywhere they are needed. . . , obliged to consult public opinion and often to reconcile a thousand different interests before doing anything . . . I struggle constantly against the multiplied efforts of monsters determined to destroy the colony.[362]

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[354] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 85 & 119.
[355] Ibid., 119-121.
[356] Stanley, "Demanding Racial Equality," 26.
[357] Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession During the Constituent Assembly,"1294-1303.; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 125.
[358] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 126.
[359] Ibid., 119-122.; Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 18 & 34.; Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, 244.
[360] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 119.
[361] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 51.
[362] *Governor Blanchelande*, quoted in Popkin, "The French Revolution's Royal Governor," 215.

The insoluble anarchy Governor Blanchelande described continued when the French Civil Commission led by Léger Félicité Sonthonax and Etienne Polverel arrived in Autumn 1792 with six thousand French soldiers and a mandate to stabilize the colony and enforce the political rights of free Dominguans of colour.[363] Upon their arrival, the commissioners were bitterly resisted by the obdurate and fragmented white Dominguans.[364] With the military support of armies comprised of free Dominguans of colour, Sonthonax established his authority and granted political rights to free Dominguans of colour.[365] During this struggle, Sonthonax dissolved the exclusively white colonial assembly and deported the most active white subversives.[366] Several months after the commission arrived, the British and Spanish invaded Saint-Domingue.[367] The introduction of foreign actors escalated the conflict by further complicating the strategic picture and existentially threatening Saint-Domingue.[368]

As the civil war escalated and foreign actors entered the conflict, the nature of the Haitian Revolution fundamentally transformed. Whereas before this transition the conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour drove the change in Saint-Domingue, the massive slave insurrection which had erupted across Saint-Domingue's northern plain in August 1791 eventually came to dominate the colony.[369] While the slave revolt was immediately impactful, it did not become the primary impetus of the revolution until 1793. There were several reasons for why the slave revolt did not immediately become the dominant force in the colony. Firstly, the slave revolt was initially confined to the northern plain and its spread was facilitated by the chaos of the civil war.[370] These slave revolts had no coherent strategy or objective beyond freeing themselves and enacting retribution and only in the northern province did unified leadership emerge under Georges Biassou and Jean-Francois who were formerly enslaved black Dominguans.[371] Therefore, the insurrection was initially too weak to overwhelm the colonial structure. Secondly, the febrility generated by the convergence of the conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour and revolutionary ideals catalyzed the slave insurrection. David Geggus emphasizes the

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[363] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 52-54.; Stanley, "Demanding Racial Equality," 33-34.
[364] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution,* 52-54.; Robert R. Stein, *Léger Félicité Sonthonax: The Lost Sentinel of the Republic* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), 70.
[365] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 52-54.
[366] Ibid., 52-53.
[367] Ibid., 54.
[368] Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 388-390.
[369] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 34-38.
[370] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 91-117 & 137-139.
[371] 'Jean-François' is his full name as it appears in the sources.; Jeremy D. Popkin, "A Haitian Revolutionary Manifesto? New Perspectives on the 'Letter of Jean-François, Biassou, and Belair," *Slavery and Abolition* 43, no. 1 (2022): 3.; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 91-117.

impact of revolutionary instability on the insurrection, stating that "for two years, the slaves of Saint Domingue had watched their masters white and colored, violently assail established authority."[372] Thirdly, the power of the initial revolt was limited and its later revolutionary dominance must not be projected back onto its nascency. When Sonthonax and Polverel arrived in September 1792, their primary concern was white Dominguan intransigence, insubordination, and the civil war it had generated.[373] David Geggus argues that if a large and unified army could have been mustered during the initial stages of the revolt it probably would have been defeated.[374] Consider, as well, the fact that Britain was able to suppress a similar, albeit less potent slave revolt in Jamaica during the Seven Years' War because the colonists were connected to the metropole and marshalled significant forces.[375]

The fourth and foremost reason for why the conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour was the initial impetus for the Haitian Revolution is the fact that it is highly improbable that any rebelling slave force would have been accepted, legitimized, and integrated into formal governance apparatuses without the existential threat to established actors introduced by war. As the civil war escalated, white and free Dominguans of colour increasingly perceived it as a struggle for the future of Saint-Domingue. Accordingly, free Dominguans of colour allied themselves with atomized slave forces in the southern and western provinces.[376] Similarly, many white Dominguans resorted to the extraordinary expedient of arming their own slaves to fight for them.[377] The most transformational instance of this phenomenon occurred in June 1793 when Governor General François-Thomas Galbaud rallied the remaining zealous and vitriolic white Dominguans in Cap-Français and attacked Sonthonax and Polverel, forcing the Civil Commission to flee.[378] In response, Sonthonax enacted a monumental decision. In an effort to obtain the support of the numerous armies of the formerly enslaved surrounding Cap-Français,[379] Sonthonax issued an official proclamation which declared "freedom to all the Negro warriors who will fight for the republic," and that they will "will be equal to all free men" thereby receiving "all the rights belonging to french citizens."[380] This strategy was successful as armies led by formerly enslaved men Jean-Louis Pierrot and Jean-Louis Villatte helped the commissioners recapture Cap-Français and deport the colony's remaining white Dominguans.[381]

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[372] Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 39.
[373] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 53.
[374] Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 121-122.
[375] Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: THe Belknap PRess of Harvard University Press, 2020), 44-63, 86, 179-185, & 219-224.
[376] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 131.
[377] Ibid., 133.; Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution,* 39-40.
[378] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution,* 57-58.
[379] Stein, *Léger Félicité Sonthonax*, 63.
[380] Etienne Polverel & Léger Félicité Sonthonax's Proclamation, quoted in Stein, *Léger Félicité Sonthonax*, 75.
[381] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 159.; Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 57-61.

The leveraging of armies of the formerly enslaved by white and free Dominguans of colour as well as by the French representatives was the critical point in the Haitian Revolution. This is because it transformed the enslaved from being property waiting to be restored or destroyed to being the most powerful actors in Saint-Domingue. The acceptance, legitimization, and integration of slaves by both the French representatives and the white and free Dominguans of colour granted the rebelling slaves a permanence and power they had never experienced or that anyone had initially intended or expected.[382] Once they had achieved this position, the actions and objectives of the numerically dominant and extremely motivated formerly enslaved propelled the Haitian Revolution forward.

The important process in which slaves achieved permanence and then power is illustrated by the settlement at Platons in the mountainous central region of the colony, which was established by the formerly enslaved as they escaped and overthrew the plantation structure. As the slave insurrection expanded and spread throughout Saint-Domingue, the formerly enslaved established small fortified communities where they developed rudimentary agricultural and political systems.[383] Platons was a particularly prominent settlement and its population expanded above ten thousand.[384] In settlements like Platons, the formerly enslaved experienced freedom, independence, and power in ways they never would have while enslaved on plantations. Historian Carolyn Fick describes this phenomenon as an "irreversible transformation" in the lives of these people.[385] The contrast between even a dismal freedom and plantation slavery was so intense that once the formerly enslaved won their freedom, defended it, and experienced it they were never again willing to accept enslavement and would sacrifice their lives to preserve their freedom.[386] This determination transformed Saint-Domingue because it established the socio-political base for what would become a new society without slavery. Initially, the slaves at Platons only demanded improved conditions of enslavement, but after they maintained their freedom by repelling an attack and developing their rudimentary settlement, they demanded total abolition.[387] The former slave and man whose leadership these enslaved people would eventually coalesce under, Toussaint Louverture, wrote a letter in 1797 to the French describing the importance of the phenomenon illustrated by Platons. Louverture said that his people had only "accepted their chains" because "they had not experienced a state happier than slavery" and that they would now rather "be buried in the ruins of their country than suffer the return to slavery."[388]

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[382] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 159.; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 100-117 & 138-148.
[383] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 137-142.; Fick, "Emancipation in Haiti," 17-23.
[384] Ibid., 145-155.
[385] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 137-142., 150.
[386] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 141.; Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 64 & 104.
[387] Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 143-144.
[388] *Toussaint Louverture*, quoted in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 209.

Slave settlements like Platons were established and developed throughout Saint-Domingue after the initial insurrection.[389] By progressively growing in size and strength, these settlements formed the base for the expanding organization and power of slave armies.[390] By the end of 1793, armies of the formerly enslaved were one of the most powerful forces in the colony and the French predominantly relied on armies by the formerly enslaved and the free Dominguans of colour to fight the British, Spanish, and their allied slave armies. In the six year struggle for Saint-Domingue from 1793 to 1798, the colony's already precarious societal structure was annihilated, white Dominguan power was destroyed,[391] and the French became entirely reliant on black armies to repel the foreign invasions.[392]

Out of this existential and anarchic maelstrom emerged the slave army commanded by Toussaint Louverture.[393] During the ascension of Louverture and his slave army their objectives propelled the Haitian Revolution onward. Louverture's vision of a militarized and centralized Saint-Domingue with an economic base of free black agrarian labourers determined the course of the revolution by demanding the elimination of his opponents.[394] After he was proclaimed governor by Sonthonax in 1797, Louverture promptly expelled him to increase his authority.[395] Louverture then did the same to General d'Hédouville, who had been sent by France specifically to reassert French authority.[396] Louverture was equally severe with non-white actors. In 1796, Jean-Louis Villatte had overthrown Étienne Maynaud de Laveaux's authority in Cap-Français and Louverture used this to justify his seizure of Cap-Français, after which he immediately imposed his authority on Laveaux.[397] In 1799, after the foreign threats were vanquished primarily by Louverture and André Rigaud, Louverture attacked Rigaud and captured the southern province, gaining complete control of the colony.[398]

Once Louverture established his supremacy and amassed an army of 30,000 formerly enslaved Dominguans his vision for Saint-Domingue directed the revolutionary process.[399] His vision was represented by the constitution he implemented in 1801. In addition to abolishing slavery, it established an authoritarian regime led by "citizen Toussaint Louverture, general in chief of the army of Saint

[389] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 85.
[390] Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution*, 118-130 & 189.
[391] Ibid, 102.
[392] Ibid., 118-130 & 189.
[393] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution,* 62-89.
[394] Ibid., 103.; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 239.
[395] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 223.
[396] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 92-94.
[397] Fick, *The Making of Haiti,* 190-192.; Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 78.
[398] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 231-239.
[399] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution,* 120.; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World,* 231-251.; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 183-203.

Domingue."[400] Interestingly, the constitution describes its polity as "the French colony of Saint Domingue" and that it "forms part of the French empire [sic], but which is subject to special laws."[401] Yet Louverture did not involve France in drafting the constitution, and promulgated it without their consent.[402] While technically not a declaration of independence, this was certainly a brazen assertion of autonomy that was unacceptable to France and core to Louverture's vision for Saint-Domingue.[403]

The French were outraged by Louverture's independent constitution, as well as by the fact that he had been conducting independent diplomacy with the United States.[404] These blatant affronts contributed to Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to send an army commanded by General Leclerc to reconquer Saint-Domingue.[405] While Louverture was captured in the invasion, the French were ultimately defeated by his cause.[406] His former lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines replaced Louverture and cleverly inserted himself into the French administration as their agent commanding the black armies.[407] Yet again, the French relied on these black armies and Dessalines was thus able to impose his authority onto the French representatives.[408] Dessalines continued Louverture's military dictatorship and contributed his own vision for Saint-Domingue, which was to unify Dominguans against the French by reconciling with the free Dominguans of colour and eradicating the remaining white Dominguans.[409] Ultimately, the former slaves were too determined and powerful to not be victorious and therefore free. Under Dessalines, the impetus remained with these armies and their leaders who declared independence in 1804,[410] and adopted the new name 'Haïti,' a word derived from the language of the Indigenous Taíno people who were eradicated by the Columbian exchange.[411]

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[400] Article 28 of Toussaint Louverture's 1801 Constitution, quoted in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*, 160-164.
[401] Philip Kaisary, "Hercules, the Hydra, and the 1801 Constitution of Toussaint Louverture," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 4 (2015): 399-401, doi-org/10.1080/14788810.2015.1072678. Articles 1 & 2 of Toussaint Louverture's 1801 Constitution, quoted in Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 160-164.
[402] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 107-111.
[403] Lorelle D. Semley, "To Live and Die, Free and French: Toussaint Louverture's 1801 Constitution and the Original Challenge of Black Citizenship," *Radical History Review* 115 (2013): 65. doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1215/01636545-1724724.
[404] Phillipe R. Girard, "Liberté, Égalité, Esclavage: French Revolutionary Ideals and the Failure of the Leclerc Expedition to Saint-Domingue," *French Colonial History* 6, no. 1 (2005): 58-59, doi.org/10.1353/fch.2005.0007.; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 251.; Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 94.
[405] Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 114-118.
[406] Ibid., 126-34.
[407] Ibid., 127-131.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid., 131.; Julia Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context and Legacy,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 115-116.
[410] Ibid., 115-116, 25.
[411] David P. Geggus, "The Naming of Haiti," *New West Indian Guide* 71, no. ½ (1997): 46-55, www.jstor.org/stable/41849817.

In conclusion, the Haitian Revolution was a complex and prolonged process that resulted in the former slaves of Saint-Domingue establishing an independent state. The initial impetus, however, was not these slaves, but the dispute between white and free Dominguans of colour over their respective positions within the society of Saint-Domingue. When the slave insurrection erupted in August 1791, it did so within the context of an anarchic and ruinous civil war that demolished Saint-Domingue's oppressive colonial structure. Without these circumstances, the slave insurrection would have been less effective and certainly would not have been leveraged and integrated by formal governments. It was primarily due to this context that slave armies established and developed themselves into the most powerful force in Saint-Domingue by 1793. Once the enslaved achieved their freedom and acquired confidence, they were determined to maintain their profoundly transformational position. Under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the formerly enslaved secured supremacy over Saint-Domingue and implemented their revolutionary vision of an independent state constituted by the formerly enslaved. Thus, conflict between white and free Dominguans of colour initiated a revolutionary process during which the formerly enslaved came to dominate the colony. After seizing control, the revolutionaries destroyed the colonial structure and radically enacted their independence.

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In The Beginning There Was Violence: Epic Emplotment and the Sorelian Myth

Sarah Wilkinson

Abstract

In his infamous publication, Reflections on Violence, French syndicalist Georges Sorel explores the social ails of his contemporary France at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the rise of enlightened pacifism and diffusion of class tensions, the socialist revolution promised by Marx appeared to drift ever further from Sorel's reach. In Reflections, Sorel argues that these challenges may be overcome through the use of the myth to spur the working class into violent action. Despite its centrality to Sorel's work, the myth itself remains nebulous in its construction and provides a challenge to later scholars' attempts to understand Sorel. For this reason, the nature of the myth and its capacity to spur the working class into action is examined in this paper against Hayden White's "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact". In reading Sorel through the lens of White's literary emplotment of historical events, this paper offers a new understanding of the Sorelian myth's method of action as the creation of a future history using culturally-bound literary structures.

"At the dawn of every history aimed at ensuring security and making peace with death, it shall be written: 'In the beginning, there was the word.' At the dawn of every new temporal order, however, it shall be written: 'In the beginning, there was violence.'"[412]

In the years leading up to the publication of *Reflections on Violence* in 1908, Georges Sorel saw his native France in the midst of a crisis.[413] By the turn of the twentieth century, the world of the Marxist-turned-syndicalist must have appeared farcical compared to the expectations laid down by Marx himself half a century earlier.[414] Socialist politicians had become key players in France's political sphere, the "bleating herd" of the bourgeoisie had become softened by decadence, and the working class had been placated to the point of pacification.[415] Rather than seeing capitalist France frothing with class warfare and careening towards a proletarian revolution, Sorel watched tensions between the bourgeoisie and proletariat become diffuse, while both were subjected to the self-serving degeneracy of French democracy. Sorel's historical assessment led him to the conclusion that intuitive use of violence and myth could function as the catalyst to provoke a new world order.

However, in his examination of Georges Sorel and his disciples, author and Sorel translator Jack Roth explains that "the quality of Sorel's written work is not uniform and much of it scattered among little-known periodicals."[416] As such, many of Sorel's constructs remain vague and disorganised, which has proven to be a significant obstacle for scholars studying Sorel. In particular, Sorel's descriptions of violence and myth straddle the boundaries between elusory and inchoate, their relative formlessness leaving the reader on unstable ground.[417] Yet, this paper argues that reading Sorel against the backdrop of Hayden White's "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" elucidates the way in which the emplotment of historical events in culturally familiar literary structures aids in the construction of Sorel's general strike myth and enables the mobilization of the proletariat through the creation of a future history.[418]

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[412] Giorgio Agamben, "On The Limits of Violence," *Contemporary Italian Thought* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 109.
[413] Jack J. Roth, "The Roots of Italian Fascism: Sorel and Sorelismo," *The Journal of Modern History* 39, no. 1 (1967): 30-1.
[414] Ibid., 31. Loosely defined, syndicalism is closely related to socialism, yet it views the State as an inherently oppressive mechanism that must be abolished via class warfare. In its place, the syndicalist would have small bodies of elected officials made responsible for determining the needs of their immediate communities. These bodies, or syndicates, would then work collaboratively with other syndicates to engage in broader regional planning and labour exchange.
[415] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E. Hulme and J. Roth (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), 213.
[416] Jack J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and Sorelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), x.
[417] Malcolm Anderson, "Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence," Terrorism and POlitical Violence* 1, no. 1 (1989): 92.
[418] Sorel's understanding of the general strike myth and its relationship to future history will be discussed shortly.

Certainly not the first to view history through the lens of violence and revolution, Sorel fit himself with much contention into a historiography of leftists grappling with the aftermath of Marxism. This tension between the world of Marx and the world as Sorel and many others now saw it underpinned the entirety of Sorel's work and formed the foundation for the questions that his work sought to answer. As such, the impact of Sorel's works is one that is exceptionally unique. In his early writings—an undertaking he would not begin until his retirement from engineering in his forties—Sorel went relatively unnoticed, particularly in his native France.[419] *Reflections on Violence*, on the other hand, became quite popular and was released in several editions and languages. More importantly, however, is the breadth of the audience that responded to this work. Although met with derision by many, *Reflections* found support among fellow syndicalists, but, more perplexingly, also among longstanding adversaries: anarchists and fascists.[420] In fact, the support for Sorel's work ran so deeply for some individuals that later scholars have referred to them as his disciples or Sorelians.[421] The most famous example of these adherents was, without a doubt, Benito Mussolini who would directly credit *Reflections* as aiding the development and rise to power of Italian fascism.[422]

Yet, somewhere between outright rejection and blind adherence to the presumed intentions of Georges Sorel lay the remainder of scholars who took an interest in Sorel's postulations. Among these was critical theorist Walter Benjamin who built from Sorel's ideas extensively in his own evaluation of the intersection between violence, class, and law in German society.[423] Published in 1921, "Toward the Critique of Violence" would prove to be a deeply poignant reflection introduced into Germany's tumultuous Weimar era. In 1958, historian and philosopher Hannah Arendt published *The Human Condition* in which she examined changing perceptions regarding the intersections of labour, work, and action. Through this, Arendt weaves the intersections of violence, whereby violence and force, as with Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, are distinctly separated.[424] The works of Sorel and Benjamin converge in philosopher Giorgio Agamben's essay "On the Limits of Violence"—an analysis of language and violence—which Agamben personally mailed to Arendt in 1970 alongside a letter that credited her works as a driving force in the construction of the essay. Two years later, Arendt would publish her essay "On Violence" as part of the anthology *Crises of the Republic*, which would further refine her understanding of the relationship between violence, power, and government with an emphasis on essence and instrument.[425]

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[419] Roth, "The Roots of Italian Fascism," 30, 32.
[420] Anderson, "Georges Sorel," 71.
[421] Anderson, "Georges Sorel," 76.
[422] For a more in-depth examination of this process, see Roth, "The Roots of Italian Fascism."
[423] Walter Benjamin, "Toward a Critique of Violence," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926,* eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 236-252.
[424] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[425] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

Meanwhile, scholar Jack Roth would dedicate several decades of his life to an exhaustive examination of the key tenets of Sorel's apocalyptic ideology, the followers these ideas enraptured, and the impact these had on Western society. These would finally be published as *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians* in 1980. However, more than a century after its publication, there would still prove to be more to say about the work of Georges Sorel. While scholars such as Malcolm Anderson and Eric Brandom continue previous efforts to pin down Sorel's intentions, others, such as Giorgio Agamben and Thomas Martin, use elements of Sorel's works to guide their own.[426] As such, this paper endeavours to position itself within this continuing legacy.

Touched on in the introduction, Sorel's worldview was rooted in Marx's conception of class conflict whereby the uncontrolled growth of the capitalist society would precipitate an alienated proletariat. Once sufficiently brutalized at the hands of the capitalist society, Marx predicted that the proletariat would become aware of their suffering, overthrow the bourgeoisie, and apprehend the industrialized world to establish a classless society rooted in a socialist mode of production.[427] At the time of Marx's writing, the increasing disparity between classes at the hands of unfettered capitalist expansion certainly lent itself to Marx's historical future theory. Yet, by the turn of the century, the capitalist France of Sorel had undergone a series of cultural shifts to differentiate it significantly from the world of Marx. These shifts, which Sorel attributes to the waylaying of the socialist revolution, can be whittled down to three primary concerns. The first was the use of duty, "founded on sentiments of resignation, goodness, and of sacrifices" toward peace and social cohesion, to encourage pacifism amongst the working class.[428] This emphasis on pacifism directly ties into Sorel's second observation, identified as "middle-class cowardice, which consists in always surrendering before the threat of violence" and, when allowed to solidify, will ensure "that the middle class is condemned to death, and that its disappearance is only a matter of time."[429] The third issue, most vehemently condemned by Sorel, is the introduction of socialists into the French political sphere as parliamentary politicians rather than external antagonists.[430] Having been subsumed into French parliamentary

[426] Anderson's approach includes a broader overview of Sorel's work as well as the impact of these works contextualized by Sorel's own life. Brandom's focus is predominantly through the lens of French liberalism and conducted in the aftermath of the resurgence in interest in Sorel following the 1980s such as the work by Anderson. Agamben builds from the work of Sorel and Benjamin, yet introduces the relationship between violence and death, which goes wholly unmentioned in *Reflections on Violence*. Thomas Martin, spends considerable time examining Sorel's relationship with rationality, yet the latter section of the paper posits suggestions as to where Sorel's ideas may lead future readers. See Agamben, "On the Limits of Violence"; Anderson, "Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*"; Brandom, "Violence and Resistance," 91-2; Thomas Martin, "Violent Myths: The Post-Western Irrationalism of Georges Sorel," *Democracy & Nature* 4, no.2-3 (1998): 50-69.

[427] Granted, this is a very reductionist interpretation of Marxism, but a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

[428] Sorel, *Reflections,* 82-3, 104.

[429] Ibid., 91.

[430] Roth, "The Roots of Violence," 31; Sorel, *Reflections,* 101.

politics, socialist politicians relinquished the potential to overcome the capitalist state and, instead, function within it to further diffuse the class tensions between the middle and working classes.[431]

To understand this shift in dynamics, this author suggests one need only view these three groups—the middle class, the proletariat, and politicians—as the tectonic plates that make up capitalist French society. As with tectonic plates, these groups exist in tension with one another and, in order to avoid a catastrophic earthquake, tension needs to be gradually released. This gradual release is embodied by the three key social changes noted by Sorel. For many, these changes were recognized as positive cultural shifts away from the barbarity and conflict of an unenlightened society.[432] However, for Sorel and other syndicalists who emphasized revolutionary change over parliamentary cooperation, the gradual release of tension through the placation of workers, growing timidity of the middle class, and parliamentary compliance of socialists, prevented the friction necessary to precipitate violent revolution, destabilize the capitalist regime, and usher in the free and classless society proposed by Marx.[433] While it is important to note that Sorel was strictly a non-believer in the use of history as a predictive tool and did not ascribe to the teleological unfolding of history proposed by Marx and Hegel, it was central to his understanding of capitalist society that, should a revolution occur, it would do so through the escalation of tensions between the middle class and the proletariat. Furthermore, for this to occur, both classes would need to revert to the characteristics embodied by these classes in previous decades. Specifically, the middle class would be required to slough off the growing decadence that shackled them to a timid and passive existence and return to a state of tenacious and imperialist inclinations.[434] In response, the proletariat would no longer find the middle class liable to acquiesce to their demands for improved accommodations and, through the degradation of proletariat living conditions, the gap between classes would gradually widen and become reinforced by class tensions. As this gap is reestablished and tension can no longer be gradually released, the tectonic plates would buckle into an eruption of proletarian violence to bring about the socialist revolution.[435]

Critical to this process, in the eyes of Sorel and arguably Marx himself, is the role of violence initiated by the proletariat. Violence is conceptualized by Sorel in two ways: Force and Violence.[436] Force is defined as the planned and organized use of violence, rooted in "savagery" and "superstition" by the state apparatus for the sake of maintaining its own authority.[437] Violence, in contrast, is the collective violence of the

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[431] Sorel, *Reflections,* 96.
[432] Ibid., 70, 81, 103, 139.
[433] Sorel, *Reflections*, 142.
[434] Ibid., 103.
[435] Ibid., 103, 113.
[436] Ibid., 194. Moving forward, these terms will be capitalized to distinguish between Sorel's constructs of Violence and Force and the general use of the word "violence".
[437] Sorel, *Reflections*, 135.

revolutionary proletariat as "the *clear and brutal expression of the class war*" in the form of the general strike.[438] As such, Violence consists of "purely and simply acts of war" and are "carried on without hatred and without the spirit of revenge".[439] Most importantly, however, is the understanding that, although Violence is, in its essence, an act of war, it is distinct from judicial proceedings and the militarism that functions as an extension of the state itself.[440] In Sorel's analysis, Violence is predominantly conceptualized as an instrument wielded by a collective for the purposes of affirming or destabilizing power structures such that isolated acts of violence by individuals do not appear to be encompassed as a part of Violence or Force. Rather, these acts of violence are only alluded to in Sorel's broader discussion of the public perception of violence in his contemporary France and its relationship to criminality and social duty, as discussed earlier. According to Sorel's assessment, the shift in public perception of criminality fell directly in line with the economic development of France as a capitalist nation which was reflected in public response to financial crimes in contrast to violent crimes.[441] As financial crimes such as fraud and theft had become more socially acceptable as part of the daily life of exploitative capitalist society, violent crimes, in contrast, were viewed as increasingly barbaric. This rift is further exacerbated by the increasing prominence of "middle-class philosophers" who espouse the notion that "violence is a relic of barbarism which is bound to disappear under the influence of the progress of enlightenment."[442]

The pacification of French culture is diagnosed by Sorel, in part, as the result of the infection of rationalism into the social sciences. As just mentioned, the dominant cultural relationship to violence was one that viewed violence as the by-product of a barbaric and uneducated society. As such, with proper education and social conditioning, human behaviour can be explained and predicted such that it aligns with reason. Sorel, in contrast, falls into alignment with those who have "abandoned all hopes of discovering a complete science of nature" and maintain that the human condition is one that is rooted in the irrational; human behaviour is better controlled by intuition rather than reason.[443] Thus, to overcome social adherence toward passivity and incite a population toward that which is considered irrational (Violence), one must utilize that which is rooted in the intuitive and irrational. This, Sorel argues, can be accomplished through the use of historical myth.[444]

Sorel's understanding of the myth remains to be one of the most nebulous constructions central to his work. As with Violence and Force, Sorel offers a broad characterization of the myth, particularly as the general strike myth, and the pivotal

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[438] Ibid., 105.
[439] Ibid., 132.
[440] Ibid., 132-133.
[441] Ibid., 214-7.
[442] Sorel, *Reflections*, 93.
[443] Ibid., 169.
[444] Ibid., 170.

role the myth will play alongside Violence and Force in his conception of the proletarian revolution. Nevertheless, in regard to the concrete manifestation of these constructs, Sorel leaves his readers wanting. What Sorel does reveal, however, is that the myth encloses "all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party, or of a class, inclinations which recur to the mind with the insistence of instincts in all the circumstances of life; and which give an aspect of complete reality to the hopes of immediate action by which, more easily than by any other method, men can reform their desires, passions, and mental activity."[445] Furthermore, the myth itself cannot be offered to the designated mass, but must emerge from within it as "a body of images which" compels by intuition rather than analysis.[446] Given this context, it is understandable that Sorel himself cannot provide insight as to the specific details of the myth itself, yet he does offer critical insight as to its essence. While he argues that the specific details and the plausibility of these details are unimportant, it is vital that the myth cultivate a direct association between the general strike and cultural memory of France's recent martial past.[447] In doing so, the myth will "[appeal] to their painful memories of particular conflicts, it colours with an intense life all the details of the composition presented to consciousness" such that the myth will leave a "deep and lasting impression" and ensure that "instead of thinking of battles, they now think of strikes; instead of setting up as their ideal a battle against the armies of Europe, they now set up the general strike in which the capitalist regime will be annihilated."[448] To recap, Sorel asserts that the myth must be one of intense images derived from the proletariat themselves and fashioned from recent military history such that the general strike and the Violence endemic to that strike are visualized by the proletariat as akin to the martial violence out of which, Sorel argues, France's own cultural, political, and national identity has been both fashioned and enforced.[449]

Moving forward with this conception of the myth, two additional facets of Sorel's thinking become critical. The first is the process by which history becomes future history. In Sorel's assertion that the myth will offer the proletariat a vision of the future rooted in their collective cultural memory, he acknowledges that, due to the impossibility of using history as a predictive tool, there reaches a point where it does not matter that the present and future historical events of the myth are fictitious. Rather, as long as they evoke the wider sentiment of the proletariat and the events appear as though they are manifest to unravel in this way, the myth is sufficient for mobilization.[450] The second, which directly responds to the first, is Sorel's praise of the

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[445] Sorel, *Reflections*, 142.
[446] Ibid., 140.
[447] Ibid., 143, 145. In this context, "cultural memory" refers to Jan Assmann's definition of cultural memory whereby significant events are fixed outside of time by cultural formation and institutional communication such as texts, monuments, and observances. Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 129.
[448] Sorel, *Reflections*, 91, 140, 145.
[449] Ibid., 78.
[450] Sorel, *Reflections*, 140, 142, 144.

military epic. According to Sorel, this literary form "gave an epical colour to all the events of internal politics" such that the elements of France's banal political world were elevated to the realm of the fantastical.[451] Riots became illustrious battles, politicians became giants, and most importantly, the process was enveloped "in a dramatic mythology" which rendered all criticism impossible.[452] When read in tandem, these elements suggest that the myth must have the capacity to convincingly bridge past, present, and future through the use of emotionally-charged cultural memory in such a way that its adherents can have no doubt of the way in which the mythologized history is capable of unfolding as is the case in the familiar military epics of contemporary France. It is in this reading of Sorel that a direct parallel can be drawn to the work of Hayden White.

Historical events, White argues, are value-neutral.[453] They hold no inherent value nor inherent meaning on their own. Indeed, for a historical event to be ascribed meaning, it occurs through human intervention in an attempt to somehow make sense of that which has occurred. In particular, White argues that "histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of *mere* chronicles…"[454] Through this process, historical events, chronicles, or facts (however one may choose to refer to segments of the past) are gathered by a historian and then constructed in such a way as to generate a sequence of events that appears to be governed by logic to derive a particular conclusion. White argues that this process is accomplished by "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures" in much the same way as a story, fictional or otherwise, is constructed.[455] White continues on to explain that, the specific meaning ascribed to these events by the historian, guides the way in which the events are emplotted and the literary motif—tragic, comic, romantic, ironic, etc.—relied upon by the historian to guide his reader's interpretation.[456] Furthermore, as these events are value-neutral, they can be constructed using multiple motifs depending on the motivations of the historian.[457] As these literary tropes are culturally derived and integral to one's literary heritage, historians can use these constructions to "familiarize the unfamiliar" and introduce a logic that may not exist otherwise.[458] Thus, the reader of a particular history will not be guided by the events themselves, but rather, how they are emplotted in a familiar literary trope; the reader's expectation of how this trope unfolds helps them to make sense of what has happened and what is yet to come.[459] Thus, a reader following

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[451] Ibid., 116.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 84.
[454] White, "The Historical Text," 83.
[455] Ibid., 83.
[456] Ibid., 84.
[457] Ibid.
[458] Ibid., 85-86.
[459] Ibid., 86.

this structure can understand "*why* a particular story has 'turned out'" and it is in this capacity for meaning-making that the line between history and myth becomes blurred.[460] Indeed, when one sees "the 'point' of a story…we have identified the theme…which makes of it a 'parable or illustrative fable.'"[461]

As with White's conceptions of history, in the strike-generating myth of Sorel's proletariat, the way in which historical events are organized into a familiar story becomes the critical element from which meaning is derived. This becomes abundantly clear with respect to the familiarity of the military epic in French culture contemporary to Sorel. As Sorel touched on in *Reflections*, military epics such as the tales of Napoleonic battles frame military violence as the result of "a people famished for liberty…[who] had maintained against a coalition of all the power of oppression and error", were guaranteed victory against an adversary, and became the foundation for the elements of French culture held in esteem.[462] Thus, when recent historical events are emplotted in a similar fashion against a Marxist backdrop that emphasizes the trials of the proletariat against the ails of a capitalist society, two things occur. The first is that the culturally embedded and widely recognized emplotment-style of the military epic functions to familiarize the unfamiliar, despite the myth extending beyond the past and into the future. The cultural memory of the suffering proletariat, emplotted in the style of the military epic, transforms the uprising and the Violence endemic to it into something recognizable despite being largely fictional (as is the nature of future history). Second, the use of this literary trope endorses the success of the general strike in overthrowing the regime as a guarantee, as were the victories spoken of in the military epics of France's past. Furthermore, the (seemingly) inevitable socialist revolution and resulting cultural shift then bears a resemblance to the way in which French culture and values had previously been established. Once this process has become familiar and inevitable, it has transitioned from irrational to rational; it would no longer be a violation of rational, civil society to pursue the Violence of the general strike.[463] In fact, it would be irrational not to.

Despite Sorel's protestations that the significance of the myth transcended language itself, he would later liken it to poetry in its capacity to evoke powerful images of the future using the images of the past.[464] Giorgio Agamben furthers this idea by suggesting that "poetry introduces a form of persuasion that does not rely on truth, but rather on the peculiar emotional effects of rhythm and music, acting both violently and

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[460] White, "The Historical Text," 83.
[461] Ibid.
[462] Sorel, *Reflections*, 115, 136.
[463] From what is understood of Thomas Martin's claim, the mythical becomes irrational, which is in line with natural human inclination. Thus, the historical future written into the myth becomes attainable. This paper reaches the same conclusion, yet in a different direction. Instead, the familiar logic of the epic form of emplotment presents the historical future of the myth as rational. Thus, humans whose cultural values centre on the ideal of rationality, find themselves aligned with the myth. Martin, "Violent Myths", 54.
[464] Sorel, *Reflections,* 140.

bodily…"[465] Through the comparison to Hayden White's theory of emplotment, this parallel is drawn yet again whereby it is not the language or historical facts themselves that imbue the myth with its power, but rather how the masses choose to structure the myth using culturally derived literary forms. Understandably, "any attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally as future history is devoid of sense. *It is the myth in its entirety which is alone important*: its parts are only of interest in so far as they bring out the main idea."[466] Thus, Sorel's unwillingness to postulate on the specifics of the myth nor aid in its construction as a syndicalist and supporter of the socialist revolution arose not out of ambiguity, but out of necessity. For, if the working class were to rise up and crush the decadence of late-capitalist society, the word so cherished by the peaceful must be exorcised by the rhythm and images of the proletarian myth.

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[465] Agamben, "On The Limits of Violence," 105.
[466] Sorel, *Reflections*, 144.

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