

LEGACY

A Journal of Student Scholarship

Volume 11

2011



A Publication of the Sigma Kappa Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta
& the Southern Illinois University Carbondale History Department

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2011

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The Editorial Staff would like to thank all those who supported this issue of *Legacy*, especially the Undergraduate Student Government, Phi Alpha Theta, our History Alumni, the SIUC History Department, the students who submitted papers and their Faculty mentors, Drs. Jo Ann Argersinger, Jonathan Bean, Germaine Etienne, Holly Hurlburt, Gray Whaley, Jonathan Wiesen, and Hale Yilmaz.

This issue of *Legacy* is dedicated to the memory of Judy G. Summers, Editorial Staffmember, 2010.

A Publication of the Sigma Kappa Chapter of Phi Alpha
Theta & the History Department
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Krysta Wise

Islamic Revolution of 1979: The Downfall of American-Iranian Relations

In the broad scope of history, one year is merely a vapor. Many single years are filled with “insignificant” people and events that do not have great effects on global or domestic relations. However, in some instances one year can mark a phenomenal transformation from the past to the present. Such is the case with Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979. Prior to this event, the United States had excessive power over the Iranian government. This western influence led to anti-American sentiment in Iran.¹ Because of unwanted American influence during the 1950s through the 1970s, the Islamic revolutionaries of 1979 not only resented western customs, but also American foreign diplomacy. Thus, they halted Iran’s peaceable relations with the United States of America.

US-Iran Relations, 1953-1979

Before the Iranian Revolution, the U.S. had gained extensive control over Iran by propelling Mohammad Reza Shah to a hegemonic power over Mohammad Mossadegh, a charismatic Iranian Premier.² Mossadegh nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951, a company that Britain received billions of dollars from per year.³ Nationalization enraged Britain’s leaders who then placed an embargo on Iran, impairing its economy. The U.S. was afraid Iran would fall to communism, which was considered a threat because of the ongoing cold war between America and the Soviet Union. British pressure and the fear of a communist takeover resulted in U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower authorizing a coup to remove Mossadegh. In 1953, British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) staged a successful coup, known as Operation Ajax, removing Mossadegh from power. Once he was gone, they strengthened the power of the Shah and replaced Mossadegh with a U.S. supported Iranian general, Fazlollah Zahedi. Thus, Britain and America established an Iranian government that they could control.⁴

In the post-coup era, American-Iranian relations flourished. These good terms were not created by the Iranian masses' contentment with the U.S., but from the Shah's relationship with America. Once the Shah's power had been restored by Britain and the U.S., these countries felt they had the right to direct his actions, which in turn controlled Iran. The U.S. propelled the Shah, who was also known as the "American puppet," into a domineering leader over the Iranian government and masses.⁵ As a result, Iranian government officials and the public grew weary and developed hatred toward not only the Shah, but also toward the U.S.⁶

Mohammad Reza Shah led an extremely repressive regime, which was maintained by the Iranian National Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK). This organization, which was created and endorsed by the U.S., and employed 30,000 Iranians, 5,000 of which tortured, arrested, and killed thousands of the Shah's opponents.⁷ Because of the Shah's dictatorial status, the political policies and mass opinion were not aligned. For example, most Iranians held anti-Israeli sentiments, but Iran was an ally to Israel because the U.S. maintained peaceful ties with Israel.⁸ In the 1960s, inflation paralyzed Iran's economy. The majority of wealth was held by families that were somehow linked to the oil industry or the Shah. These families were few in number, whereas the mass population was poor.⁹ The Shah reaped the benefits of oil wealth because of his deals with Britain and America. Therefore, he did not sympathize with his hurting nation.

Another aspect of the Shah's political agenda that did not coincide with the will of the people was the modernization of Iran through secularization. This agenda was primarily carried out with the unsuccessful American-inspired "White Revolution," which consisted of six parts: land reform, sale of government-owned factories to finance land reform, a new election law including women's suffrage, the nationalization of forests, a national literacy campaign, and a plan to give workers a share of industrial profits. Because of America's "paranoia" toward Islam, U.S. leaders have often approved of secular reforms such as this one in countries like Iran. U.S. leaders wanted this plan to succeed because it would help the Shah present images of liberalism and progressivism, which would in turn possibly make him more popular.¹⁰

Not only did the U.S. empower the Shah to reform and maintain his country by force, but it also helped him build and sustain his army. A series of American presidents passed bills and endorsed diplomatic measures that ensured peaceful relations with the

Shah. In turn, Mohammad Reza complied with American wishes and forced legislation through parliament that would appease Washington. In 1964, the *Majles*, which contained the Shah's chosen parliament members, approved a plan for a \$200 million loan from the U.S. to purchase military supplies and equipment. Shah oppositionists across the globe saw this agreement as a symbol of bondage to the U.S.¹¹ The Shah, with U.S. aid, continued the advancement of his military. In 1971, American President Richard Nixon and his cabinet approved a plan for Mohammad Reza to purchase unlimited amounts of the best military equipment of the time with the exception of nuclear weapons. President Gerald Ford continued to shower Iran with military aid from 1974-1977. Consequently, by 1978, Iran had the most highly advanced, best-trained military in the Persian Gulf area. It had the fourth-largest air force and fifth-largest military on the globe. Iran's military spending went from \$293 million in 1963 to \$7.3 billion in 1977.¹² Their forces were a reflection of the American military. The Iranian Air Force spoke fluent English; military pay was often based on how well soldiers spoke English.¹³

During Jimmy Carter's first year as the American president, he hosted the Shah in the U.S. for the entire world to see his commitment to Mohammad Reza. According to the *New York Times*, Carter praised the Shah for upholding a "strong, stable, and progressive Iran."¹⁴ However, during the Shah's reign, American foreign policy contradicted itself. U.S. leaders prided themselves on their abilities to intervene in global situations in the name of democracy and human rights. Yet at the same time, the U.S. endorsed, aided, and praised the Iranian government, which did not even remotely resemble democracy or a ground for human rights.¹⁵

Opposition to the Shah in the 1960s: Ayatollah Khomeini

Because the United States aided, endorsed, and praised the Shah's repressive regime, he remained in control for thirty-eight year. During this time, government opposition groups developed frequently. Most of these movements were crushed by the Shah; however, one fierce revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini, rose above the restraints placed by the American-approved Shah.¹⁶

Khomeini, an Islamic fundamentalist, was educated in Qom, which is the primary center for Shi'a scholarship in the world.¹⁷ He opposed the Shah's regime for two major reasons: American influence and the secularization of Iranian society.¹⁸ Khomeini

believed Israel was a center for western imperialism—primarily maintained by the U.S., and that Israel persecuted Muslims. Therefore, he believed that Israelis and Americans were in a war against Islam.¹⁹ In 1962, under pressure from the Kennedy administration, the Shah issued a new election bill that allowed non-Muslims to be political candidates.²⁰ Khomeini capitalized on this legislation as his excuse to “save” Iran from the government threat to the Islamic world. Another 1962 action that enraged Khomeini was the fact that Shah had given Americans in Iran protection from prosecution in Iranian courts. According to Khomeini, this legislation was a prime example of American influence that was corrupting Iran²¹:

If any of them commits a crime in Iran, they are immune. If an American servant or cook terrorizes your source of religious authority in the middle of the bazaar, the Iranian police does not have the right to stop him. The Iranian courts cannot put him on trial or interrogate him. He should go to America where the masters would decide what to do. . . . We do not consider this government a government. These are traitors. They are traitors to the country.²²

Because of his criticism of the Shah, Khomeini was jailed for two months in 1962. But Khomeini’s imprisonment did not stop him from attacking “America’s puppet.” Thus, in 1964, the Shah exiled Khomeini.²³ From Iraq, Khomeini eventually sparked an Islamic revolution in Iran that would alter this country forever.

Economic decline and revolutionary turmoil in the 1970s

Even though the peak of the revolution was in 1979, key preliminary events occurred throughout the mid 1970s. During this era, Iran experienced a harsh economic downturn, urban overcrowding, monetary inflation, corrupt electoral processes and leaders, and a large gap in the distribution of wealth.²⁴ Because of the growing discontentment in Iran, three main revolutionary factions spoke out in opposition to the Shah: women, students, and religious reformers. The main goal of Iranian women was to overthrow the Shah’s repressive regime. Revolutionary women engaged in protests and guerrilla activities to undermine Mohammad Reza’s authority.²⁵

Along with women’s groups, university students, domestic and abroad, participated in revolutionary activities as well. The largest student organization was the Confederation of Iranian Students.

These students held diverse political ideologies, but the majority of students belonged to two factions, the religious left or Marxism. They had many grievances against Mohammad Reza: low college acceptance rates, poor university education, insufficient housing and conditions, and political dissatisfaction. Consequently, there were many student-led protests and uprisings in university cities such as Tehran.²⁶ Many Iranians were killed while the Shah's military tried to suppress the crowds. Since Iranian cities were in such turmoil, the Shah banned public gatherings in a desperate attempt to stop the crisis. This act resulted in hundreds of thousands of rebels protesting in Tehran and surrounding cities because of the widespread disapproval of the ban.²⁷

Revolutionaries from women and student organizations merged with the revolutionary religious opposition, which was led by Khomeini. Once this oppositional group became the leaders in the revolution, it housed many groups of Iranians: middle-class, former elderly of the National Front, workers, and guerillas. The revolutionaries wished to remove Mohammad Reza from power and establish a government that would benefit the Iranian public and Islam, not a shah.²⁸ Thus, Khomeini promised that he and the religious reformers would not rule Iran directly.²⁹ According to Khomeini, the government had four key jobs: enforce Muslim Law, destroy corruption and establish rights for the oppressed, eradicate laws that had been created by false governments, and prevent foreign nations from intervening in Islamic societies.³⁰

The extensive pressure of Khomeini's movement placed Iran into a state of chaos. Since Iran was in extreme turmoil, the Shah declared martial law in Tehran and eleven other cities. During this period, the Shah's military continued to kill Iranians. On November 3, 1978, Khomeini stated, "The Shah must go."³¹ Because of continual protests and strikes, Iran was paralyzed. Most businesses were closed: stores, media sources, banks, and many oil industries.³² Iran's oil production decreased to the lowest rate seen in twenty-seven years. On December 29, 1978, Mohammad Reza consented to temporarily leave the country.³³

The U.S. response: January 1979

Throughout the 1978 commotion in Iran, America continued to support the Shah with military aid and equipment to keep him in power. The U.S. opposed Khomeini for many different reasons. First of all, if Khomeini came to power, he would limit or eradicate western influence in Iranian policies and relations because this

promise was one of his primary platforms.³⁴ This Iranian-U.S. relationship would be drastically different from the American relationship with the Shah. The U.S. was also concerned with a change in economic relations, mainly in regards to oil, if Iran fell to the revolutionaries. American leaders feared price increases and a lack of oil availability. Another reason the U.S. opposed a Khomeinian government was because the Communist party (Tudeh) in Iran supported the revolutionary movement. Tudeh had been banned by Mohammad Reza, but members were willing to work with Khomeini if he established a new Iranian government.³⁵ The U.S. saw this communist party as a potential threat that might spread the Soviet sphere of influence. Therefore, American leaders considered it their "duty" to contain Soviet influence and maintain control over Iran.³⁶

During 1978 and early 1979, the U.S. State Department continually sent messages of support to Mohammad Reza. On January 4, 1979, the U.S. sent General Robert E. Huyser, Commander in Chief of the U.S.-European Command, to Iran. This joint military force was directed by the United States. The purpose of Huyser's four-week mission was to stabilize the Iranian military and encourage the Iranian military to support the Shah's government. The U.S. carefully chose Huyser for this mission because the Shah was in desperate need of reestablishing control over his country. Huyser was chosen for many reasons: he was a friend of the Shah, he had previously worked to strengthen the Iranian military, and he had been the overseer of the U.S. weaponry sales to Iran.³⁷

After arriving in Iran, Huyser set up daily direct communication with the Secretary of State's office and occasionally the White House.³⁸ Huyser spent every day but one in meetings with the Shah, Iranian senior military advisors, and Ambassador Zahedi. Huyser declared American support for Iranian military action that would hopefully stabilize the government.³⁹ In the event the government crumbled and chaos ensued during his mission, he was required to aid the military in reinstating order. During his visit, the U.S. supplied the Iranian military with clothing and equipment. The revolutionaries continued to spread chaos among Iranian cities. Toward the end of Huyser's mission, he realized that Mohammad Reza Shah's government would fail and Khomeini's forces would take over Iran. As a result, Huyser, who feared for his safety, returned to Washington and advised U.S. leaders to positively communicate with Khomeini.⁴⁰ Along with Huyser, Henry Precht, Department of State desk officer in

Iran, urged Carter and his cabinet to establish peaceful relations with Khomeini's forces. Precht felt that eventually Khomeini's radicalism would subside and his forces would enact moderate institutions and policies. Ambassador William Sullivan also sided with Huyser and Precht; however, Carter and his advisers continued to oppose Khomeini.⁴¹

On January 16, 1979, the Shah and his family left Iran; 4.5 million Iranian citizens flooded the city streets in celebration. On January 27, several million anti-government demonstrators marched throughout Iran in support for Khomeini and denounced the Shah. When Khomeini announced his return to Iran, a senior diplomat from America was beaten by a mob of revolutionaries. As a result, U.S. leaders urged American citizens in Iran to leave the country or remain in safety zones. On January 31, Khomeini returned to Iran after almost fifteen years of exile; on February 12, he officially took power.⁴²

Deterioration of US-Iran Relations

The Islamic Revolution led to ideological changes in Iran. Not only did Khomeini remain in power, but he and his Shiite clerics also ruled directly, which was not his original promise. They based their rule on divine right and ran Iran by their interpretation of Muslim law. The main principles of the clerical rule were military intervention for political problems, Iranian unity, the acknowledgment of selfish motives of foreign nations, and a goal of Iranian progress.⁴³ Khomeini and Iranian leaders identified the U.S. as a nation with selfish motives. Thus, after the conclusion of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, American-Iranian relations went downhill. Khomeini knew that the U.S. had opposed his revolution. Therefore, he ardently opposed most positive relations with America. Khomeini accused the U.S. of exploiting Iran's resources and money. He claimed that because of U.S. exploitation, Iranians were forced to engage in a revolution where Iranian blood was shed. He was willing to take economic risks in order to destroy western influence in Iran. Because of Khomeini's radical views, many U.S. leaders assumed that the passion of revolution would decrease and moderate reformers would rise to power. However, this scenario never occurred.⁴⁴

When Khomeini was first establishing his government, U.S. officials concluded that they should attempt positive diplomatic measures toward him in order to prevent the Soviet Union from influencing or taking over Iran. Khomeini, however, wanted Iran

to engage in isolationism and did not wish to strengthen ties with America. In fact, he gave fiery anti-American speeches to allies and the Iranian media. In May of 1979, the U.S. Congress passed decrees that criticized the Iranian government for its current actions. As a result, masses of Anti-American protesters and media showed their discontent with the United States. The U.S. proposed a nominee for an ambassador to be sent to Iran, but Iran declined the nominee.⁴⁵

According to Khomeini, "All the problems of the East stem from those foreigners from the west, and from America at the moment. All our problems come from America."⁴⁶ Since Khomeini believed that the U.S. was to blame for the Iranian problems and revolution, the remaining part of 1979 was a pivotal shift in American-Iranian relations. Attitudes and actions between these two nations continually got worse.⁴⁷ This declining relationship was best proven through six major events in 1979: the removal of U.S. "containment," the alteration of oil policies, a change in U.S.-Iranian arms sale agreement, U.S. disapproval for Iran's "lack" of human rights, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the U.S. embargo on Iran.⁴⁸

"Containment"

Prior to the Islamic revolution, Iran was an ally against communism, which was the key "evil" of America's cold war enemy, the Soviet Union. After the Islamic revolution, Khomeini removed Iran from the American sphere of influence. Unlike Mohammad Reza, Khomeini initially allowed the Tudeh party to exist. Not only did he allow this pro-Moscow party to re-emerge in Iran, but he also took measures that benefitted the Soviet Union. Iran was a strategic place for the U.S. to gather intelligence on the Soviets. A result of the Islamic revolution was the decline of American intelligence seeking in Iran. After Khomeini took over the government, he closed two American operated intelligence collection centers. One adjoined the border of the Soviet Union near Bandar Shah. The other was in an isolated location in Kabkam. Because Khomeini shut down these facilities, U.S. leaders were not able to spy on the Soviet nuclear and missile testing site in Soviet Central Asia. During this shift in Iran's foreign political policies, Soviet leaders gained important information on U.S. military advancements that they might not have otherwise learned about. For example, Soviet leaders obtained booklets and visuals of the F-14 Tomcat fighter aircraft, and samples of the A1M-54A Phoenix air-to-air missile and the Hawk anti-aircraft missile. At this point in history, America's primary concern was with the Soviet Union. Thus, Khomeini's actions to prohibit the

U.S. from gathering information on the Soviets and allowing key information to get into Soviet hands were huge blows to American officials and intelligence officers. These moves caused anxiety and anger among U.S. leaders.⁴⁹

Oil policy

In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, America not only feared the spread of communist sympathizers, but also what would come of the oil industry in Iran. Khomeini declined any western influence. Thus, no western countries would be able to control or even manipulate the running of this industry. These concerns proved to be correct because the Iranian revolution resulted in the curbing of one-fifth of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) production capability. This Iranian oil cutoff strained the oil market immediately.⁵⁰ American media automatically began speculating on how high oil prices would rise because of Iran's policies.⁵¹ The U.S. bought approximately 200 million fewer barrels of oil during 1979.⁵² By December, world oil prices were approximately fifty percent higher than when Iran first cut back the oil supply. U.S. oil refining companies paid nearly thirty dollars per barrel for OPEC's crude oil. This price was double what it had been one year prior and approximately ten times the price that was paid in 1970. These new oil policies marked an economic shift for both Iran and the U.S. Iran began reaping more profits from its oil industry; America was required to pay more for foreign oil. As a result, American leaders attempted to decrease reliance on foreign oil and conserve energy more efficiently.⁵³

Arms sales

Along with curtailing the oil capacity, Khomeini also tried to hurt the U.S. economy by cancelling the U.S. sale of arms to Iran. This transfer of arms from the U.S. to Iran had taken place for many decades while the Shah was in power. It resulted in billions of dollars that boosted the U.S. economy. However, Khomeini wanted to sever Iranian reliance on America. In 1979, he officially cancelled seven billion dollars worth of U.S. arms purchases. Khomeini's actions mark an extreme change in economic policies between the two countries.⁵⁴ U.S. arms sales to Iran peaked in 1978 during Mohammad Reza's reign at \$4,500,000,000. The following year, it dropped to zero and the exchange remained very low throughout the 1980s.⁵⁵ The U.S. had to find new buyers for the arms to prevent the U.S. economy from weakening.⁵⁶

Human Rights

Throughout 1979, U.S.-Iranian relations continued to spiral downward. Previously, U.S. leaders had supported the Shah's repressive actions because they kept him in power. However, after the Islamic revolution, the U.S. repealed its support for such activities. Not only did American leaders remove their support, but they actually criticized Khomeini and his government officials for acts that Americans deemed inhumane. For example, when Khomeini's men started executions for oppositionists, the U.S. Senate unanimously supported a resolution of condemnation for these actions. American leaders also expressed discontent toward Khomeini and the Islamic clerical rulers for sentencing Mohammad Reza to death. These U.S. reactions further prove that America had endorsed the Shah far more than it would ever support the new Islamic government.⁵⁷

The Hostage Crisis

These souring relations between Iran and the U.S. culminated at the end of 1979. On November 4, Iranians seized the American embassy in Tehran and took nearly seventy U.S. citizens captive.⁵⁸ This act was a response to American President Jimmy Carter admitting Reza Shah into the U.S. for cancer treatment. This hostage crisis lasted 444 days and tainted Carter's presidency. Khomeini's support was the main reason this crisis lasted so long. He endorsed the act against the U.S. for four reasons. First of all, he and his clerics believed that America was trying to bring down his regime through the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Khomeini backed the hostage situation because he felt it would hinder amends being made between the United States and Iran.⁵⁹ According to one contemporary observer, "since American opposition to the Islamic revolution was deemed to be an immutable fact, any easing of relations by Iranian leaders would show them to be traitors to the cause."⁶⁰ Khomeini and his men also believed the moderate reformers were attempting to liberalize the government. By storming the embassy, the clerics could eliminate the moderate political forces and create an impasse between the U.S. and Iran. Although Jimmy Carter made efforts to make peace with Iran in 1979, Khomeini continued to allow the militants to hold the Americans because it showed Iran's "independence and opposition to American power."⁶¹ Khomeini's first proposal of peace required the U.S. to apologize for past exploitation, hand over the Shah, and return his money. However, American leaders declined this offer.⁶²

In 1980, Carter made two attempts at reconciliation and a rescue mission, but all failed. As the crisis continued, Khomeini made a second offer for reconciliation: the U.S. had to give back Iran's frozen assets and the royal family's wealth, declare that America would not intervene in Iranian affairs, and drop law suits filed against Iran. The U.S. declined this offer. In September of 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. Khomeini blamed the United States for this invasion even though the U.S. claimed to be neutral in the conflict.⁶³ On a radio broadcast, Mohammad Musavi Kho'ini, a member of the *Majles* hostage committee said, "How can one meet a criminal who for long years exploited our Muslim nation and imposed the Pahlavi dictatorship on it? As for now, the United States is actually in a state of war with us."⁶⁴

Khomeini continued his hardnosed policies toward the U.S. In December of 1980, he made a third proposal to end the crisis. Its conditions were steep: America would have to give Iran \$24 billion dollars in place of its frozen assets and royal family's money. The U.S. refused and this crisis hurt Carter's campaign for reelection. On January 20, 1981, Carter left office and an agreement was reached; the hostages were freed. The terms of this agreement were that the U.S. returned \$11 billion of Iran's frozen assets, American leaders declared they would not intervene in Iran's affairs, the royal family's money would be frozen, and Iran would be permitted to attempt to regain this wealth through the U.S. court system. Most of the money Iran received from this crisis was used to pay off debt owed to the U.S. This crisis deepened the rift between the two countries. Americans were upset at how the hostages were mistreated and Khomeini's followers reinforced their anti-American sentiment.⁶⁵

U.S. Embargo

During the hostage crisis in 1980, the United States severed political relations with Iran. Carter passed Executive Order No. 12170, which stated

I hereby order blocked all property and interests in property of the Government of Iran, its instrumentalities and controlled entities and the Central Bank of Iran which are or become subject to the jurisdiction of the United States or which are in or come within the possession of control of persons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.⁶⁶

The Islamic revolution's immediate effects on U.S.-Iranian relations foreshadowed diplomacy between the two nations for the next few decades. Every American president since Carter has continued this trade embargo on Iran.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Along with the trade embargo, bad American-Iranian relations have continued since the revolution and its aftermath. Many instances illustrate this downturn. In 1983, Khomeini supported Shi'a Muslims who bombed western embassies in Kuwait. Throughout the late 1980s, Iranians expressed their anti-American sentiment through rioting and propaganda. In 1996, Iranian leaders helped train supply men for the bombardment of the U.S. military housing facility in Saudi Arabia. This attack resulted in nineteen dead and over 500 wounded, 240 of whom were American military staff. In the new millennium, the U.S. and other leading United Nations (U.N.) actors have been trying to explore Iran's nuclear program because Iran will not provide the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) a statement or design on their program.⁶⁸

Today, the U.S. and Iran exchange ambassadors, but diplomacy between the two is not as smooth as it was during Mohammad Reza's era. American presidents and legislation still forbid almost all trade with Iran. President Barack Obama not only continued the embargo against Iran, but also enacted individual sanctions on certain Iranians.⁶⁹ According to U.S. officials, these trade restrictions are meant to harm not the Iranian public, but the Iranian leaders because of their failure to comply with certain standards: Iran will not withdraw its sponsorship of terrorism, recognize Israel's independence, raise human rights standards, or reveal substantial information on its nuclear program.⁷⁰

In the historical realm of U.S.-Iranian relations, many years are important. However, 1979 marks the greatest change in diplomatic and economic exchanges between these two nations. Khomeini's rise to power halted good relations. Not only did he remove American influence from Iran, but he also supported, endorsed, and praised any anti-American sentiment, protests, or terrorist acts. This standpoint is very contrary to Iran's previous leader, Mohammad Reza. Khomeini's anti-Americanism was proven many times throughout his term; he removed Iran from the American sphere of "containment," he reduced the amount of oil sold to the U.S., cancelled the U.S. arms purchase agreement, and approved the Iranian hostage crisis. His legacy has remained evident in

the leaders that followed him. In response to Iran's policies and actions, the U.S. has participated in a continuing embargo against Iran. These sanctions have affected Iranian politics and economic system.⁷¹ Only time will tell just how long the 1979 Islamic revolution's impact will be seen in U.S.-Iranian relations.

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Gavin Robert Betzelberger

Off the Beaten Track, On the Overground Railroad: Central American Refugees and the Organizations that Helped Them

In 1983, Nelson Sosa and his brother were forcefully recruited by El Salvador's Civil Defense Militia before they were old enough to go to high school. A year earlier their father, Elicio, had fled the country because his colleagues and friends had been assassinated. Elicio reached the United States and found help in a newly formed network of churches called the Overground Railroad dedicated to helping refugees from Central America. With their help he gained temporary residence in the United States, found work at a real estate agency in Wilmette, Illinois, and worked to rescue his wife, two sons, and their other three children.¹

Because the U.S. government was reluctant to grant asylum to Central Americans, the Overground Railroad helped refugees secure asylum in Canada through primarily legal avenues via an extensive network of churches and volunteer communities. Other "tracks" of the Railroad focused on delaying the deportation process as long as legally possible. Though not openly defiant like some refugee advocacy organizations in this period, the Overground Railroad successfully delivered thousands of war-torn refugees to safety.

The Overground Railroad helped Elicio get asylum papers and mail them to his wife. She then tracked down which boot camp Nelson and his brother had been placed in and went there with the asylum papers in hand. She confidently asserted that those papers, written in English, guaranteed the release of her sons. The guards, who were intimidated by the official looking seals and fine print, released her boys. Knowing that the Civil Defense Militia² would soon discover their mistake, she got all her kids on a bus and was out of the country before nightfall.³

On June 5, 1985, the Sosa family arrived in Mexico City where Ruth Anne and Richard Friesen, Overground Railroad volunteers, met them and arranged for the next stage of their journey to the U.S. The Friesens literally held the Sosas' lives in their hands for the next several weeks. It was a harrowing journey for the family.

They crossed the Rio Grande on the trusses of a sunken bridge, were captured by the INS and later released. After almost a month of traveling, the Sosa family flew into Chicago. There, Elicio was waiting for them with Julius Belser, the founder of the network that had delivered them to safety.⁴

The Overground Railroad believed that the Sosa family had a strong case for asylum in the U.S. even though none had yet been granted to Salvadoran refugees in their federal district. In 1986 the case, prepared for months by volunteers and pro-bono attorneys, went to court. A year after the Sosa family told their story in the federal courts, residence cards granting asylum arrived in the mail.⁵

Happy though it is, Nelson Sosa's story belongs within a larger, darker chapter. In order to understand the plight of central American refugees and the actions and convictions of the organizations that aided them it is best to start with the causes. In this case political turmoil and social violence in El Salvador and Guatemala dislocated hundreds of thousands of people who migrated north. Mexican and United States immigration policies forced this dislocated population to reside illegally in those countries or to seek asylum in Canada. Finally individuals, churches, and communities across the U.S. became aware of both the presence of a large population of illegal and unrecognized refugees, and their own government's implication in the violence (or at least the complacency that allowed it to continue). This awareness and compunction caused them to actively search for ways to aid Central American refugees on both personal and political levels.

Central American Context

The Sosa family were only one among hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the violence and instability in Central America during the 1980s. In El Salvador, for example, a civil war raged between the guerrilla group known as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Salvadoran government.⁶ In this war, the clandestine guerrillas were out of reach of the government and government-sanctioned paramilitaries, so the government resorted to tyrannizing vocal moderates. The Roman Catholic Church was one of the most outspoken advocates for social justice and therefore became a target for the right-wing death squads.⁷ These squads circulated a flyer reading, "Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest" and terrorized many rural churches suspected of sympathizing with the guerrillas. This did not stop the church or quell dissidence; quite the contrary, the attacks on the church fueled the revolutionary forces.⁸

In 1979, General Carlos Humberto Romero's dictatorship had been toppled without bloodshed by a junta of young idealist military officers. The new leaders promised to restore justice, address class inequalities, and hoped to reunite the increasingly polarized parties. The Carter Administration gave plentiful aid in hopes that this coalition government would lead to a more stable democratic one.⁹ Unfortunately, the new junta proved too weak to hold the country together. The assassinations of Mario Zamora, a prominent politician, and of Archbishop Oscar Romero effectively ended the unity movement.¹⁰ In the wake of their deaths the country erupted in protest and Major Roberto D'Aubuisson Arrieta, already convicted for murder, took control of the government. The other military leaders fell into line behind the new dictator, who was President of the Constituent Assembly and founder of the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance, ARENA).¹¹ D'Aubuisson and ARENA's hard line against the communist left appealed to the new Reagan Administration in the United States. Attributing guerrilla warfare and political dissidence in Central America to the meddling of the USSR and Cuba, Reagan liberally supported the "democratic" anti-communist government.¹²

Reagan used El Salvador as a test case for his administration's tough new anticommunist stance in Central America. This new campaign was set off with the CIA's release of the "White Paper," which presented the guerrillas in El Salvador as the tip of an intricately planned communist expansion financed by the Soviets and orchestrated by Cuba. According to the "White Paper," the Marxist Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua was merely the first phase, soon to be followed by communist takeovers in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Congress released twenty five million dollars in aid, more than El Salvador had received in the previous forty years combined.¹³

In the few months leading up to Reagan's inauguration in January 1981, Cuba had actually shipped arms to the FMLN in El Salvador using Nicaragua as a conduit; however, the Sandinistas were reluctant participants. They did not believe that the Salvadoran FMLN was organized or powerful enough to support as serious allies, even though they shared some ideological similarities to the Nicaraguan FSLM.¹⁴ The USSR was also reluctant if not indifferent to the affairs in Central America. Even Cuba retracted its support after the failed FMLN January offensive of 1981.¹⁵ Thus, under scrutiny the White Paper's factual basis broke down, revealing it to be merely a carefully timed political stunt. Nevertheless, under

the banner of communist containment, its release successfully expanded U.S. military aid to Central American countries with dubious human rights records.¹⁶

Guatemala, El Salvador's neighbor and the "White Paper's" supposed "second phase" of communist expansion, had been ruled by a military junta almost continuously since 1954, often with the support of the United States. However, it had lost its U.S. military aid in 1977 under Carter's increased humanitarian scrutiny.¹⁷ Then, following the fraudulent election of General Angel Anibal Guevara, a group of about twenty midlevel officers seized control. They reappointed General Efraim Rios-Montt, justifying their actions by pointing out the obvious corruption and human rights offenses of the previous regime.¹⁸ Rios-Montt announced a fourteen-point plan to reestablish a democracy although he did not set dates for the accomplishment of that goal. He also proclaimed that the government would "achieve individual security and tranquility based on absolute respect for human rights."¹⁹ Because of Guatemala's promised human rights improvements, its staunch support of the U.S. containment policy in Nicaragua, the recent fall of Somoza's regime in Nicaragua, and threat of a similar coup by the FLMN in Guatemala, the Reagan administration reinstated the funding Carter had withheld.

To Congress' credit, funding to Guatemala was heavily scrutinized and contingent upon human rights improvements. Nevertheless, starting in 1982, Rios Montt launched a massive counter offense dubbed by those who witnessed it as the "Scorched Death Policy." It sought to destroy the Guatemalan guerrilla support by destroying crops and targeting politically moderate civilians in contested regions.²⁰ In the wake of this campaign thousands of Guatemalans joined the refugees from El Salvador in fleeing across the border to Mexico.

Refugee Policies in Mexico and the United States

Many of the Guatemalan refugees first crossed the Mexican border to the state of Chiapas, where they had familial relations and protection and could more easily return home when the violence had passed. This region had once been a part of Guatemala and still retained many cultural and economic ties to Guatemala. Chiapas was poor; two-thirds of the population was without sewage, one-fifth without potable water, two-thirds without electricity, and less than half had obtained a third grade education. There was only one hospital bed for every five thousand inhabitants. Initially the

refugees were mistaken for the seasonal migration of Guatemalan workers, but by 1983 over 35,000 refugees resided just across the border of Mexico in the Chiapas region with an estimated 70,000 living further inside Mexico.²¹ As Mexico received more and more refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, it struggled to create a feasible policy for dealing with them.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) helped prospective refugees apply for visas in Mexico, but from 1980 to 1986 only one hundred were granted, and none between 1986 and 1990, despite the hundreds of thousands of refugees who flooded into the country during that time.²² This was partly due to the fact that Mexico's undeveloped immigration system simply offered no provisions for refugees. Mexico's response to the influx of refugees was to make a refugee zone, a 150 kilometer-wide berth along the "armed curtain" of the Guatemalan border. Guatemalans traveling outside the refugee zone would be deported.²³ Those refugees in the zone stayed in a number of newly constructed refugee camps. But conditions in the camps remained poor because of the region's poverty, the inaccessibility of the camps, and the Mexican government's resistance to outside aid. The vast majority of the refugees lived illegally in other areas of Mexico or continued to work their way north toward the United States.

For the numerous refugees who made it north, the U.S. had different, yet no more hospitable policies. The United States had been clearly biased in favor of immigrants fleeing communist states and against refugees coming from U.S. allies. The Refugee Act of 1980 was aimed at fixing the bias. This was done by broadening the language used to define a refugee to include anyone who was unable to avail themselves of the protection of their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution. However, Congress could not agree on the finer points of the new policy so they left details to be worked out by the newly formed Board of Immigration Appeals and the INS. In practice these organizations followed the State Department's suggestions rather than acting as an independent bodies.²⁴ Because El Salvador and Guatemala were democracies supported by the U.S., the Reagan Administration was reluctant to admit the human rights offenses caused by these governments and in turn pressured immigration authorities to discredit refugees from these countries.²⁵

So, despite the Refugee Act's "well-founded fear of persecution," Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees were deported *de facto*. In 1988 a training video was released to the public, in which the INS

mocked Salvadoran refugees and stated that 99 percent of their cases should be denied.²⁶ Not surprisingly, 97 percent of Salvadorans and 99 percent of Guatemalans were declined asylum.²⁷ From 1980 to mid-1985, only 626 out of 10,000 Salvadoran applicants were granted political asylum.²⁸ In 1985 a census estimated that only 80,000 of the 280,000 Salvadorans in the U.S. were legal immigrants while only 70,000 of the 205,000 Guatemalans were legal.²⁹ Illegal refugees who were caught by the INS were sent to processing and holding centers, which came to be called *los corralenes*—the stock pens or corrals—by the illegal refugees. Despite state sanctions, INS officers consistently tricked refugees into signing “voluntary” departure agreements before letting them meet with lawyers. Within a week or two the refugees would be flown out of the U.S. and returned to their country of origin.

U. S. Refugee Aid Movements

The majority of illegal refugees crossed the Rio Grande or entered in Florida. By 1983 churches in these regions had begun to notice the new trends in illegal refugees. Because many of the refugees had religious ties, and the United States was clearly involved in the unrest in their countries of origin, these churches also felt obligated to do something. Many churches were frustrated by the evasive tactics of the INS and the continued deportation of refugees to the dangerous situation from which they had fled. Numerous independent organizations sprang up to try to assist the refugees. Among these, many came to self identify with the well-known Sanctuary Movement.

The Sanctuary Movement was started in 1980 by James “Jim” Corbett, a Quaker in Arizona. He sent out five hundred letters of appeal to the Unprogrammed Friends Meetings across the U.S. From these letters the Sanctuary Movement was born. Gambling that the U.S. government would not want to square off against churches or draw attention to Central America, the Sanctuary Movement housed illegal refugees inside their church buildings and tried to draw as much attention to their actions as possible.³⁰

The Overground Railroad and Jubilee Partners, a partner organization, took a different approach. Knowing that Canada was accepting many of the refugees that the U.S. refused to acknowledge, these two organizations went into refugee centers and sought out refugees who were interested in securing asylum in Canada.³¹ Canada had two tracks for awarding asylum through the 1976 Canadian Immigration Act. Any refugee who made it

to the Canadian border gained asylum simply through border presentation. However, refugees who applied for visas and asylum via Canadian Consulates were eligible for one year of financial sponsorship by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission, CEIC. The pledge of support by Canada included language and culture training, money for travel, housing, and career counseling for the first year.³² Of 13,000 total refugee sponsorships per year, 2,500 were designated for Salvadorans in the late 1980's.³³ The Canadian Council for Refugees explained their generosity: "If we are regarded as among the best in the world it is not because we are perfect, but because the standards internationally are so low."³⁴

In many ways, Canada could afford to have a generous acceptance policy because Mexico or the United States received the lion's share of Central American refugees. Canada may have also seen immigrants as potential settlers for its still developing frontier. But its open door policy also stemmed from a keen awareness of its own cultural history. In the previous decade Canada had received Indo-Chinese Refugees. And Canada received a great number of Mennonite and Brethren refugees in the eighteenth century, groups who had strong representation in the Canadian Parliament.

Origins of the Overground Railroad

The Overground Railroad originated from a Mennonite intentional community called Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston, Illinois. Reba Place started from a small but radical religious reform known as the Concerns Movement, named after a series of pamphlets published by a Mennonite press and circulated among the Mennonite and Brethren churches. These pamphlets criticized the complacency of the church in Europe for not acting decisively leading up to World War II and for not speaking out against the obvious injustice during the war.³⁵ These pamphlets emphasized social justice and responsibility and stressed the danger of alignment with government. Some of the most influential theologians in Mennonite history struggled during this period over the relationship between the church and state. Out of this context, a small group of students from Goshen College, Indiana, started a communal house they called Fellowship House. Here, under the guidance of John Miller, a seminary professor, they experimented with a community model based on the church in the biblical Book of Acts.³⁶ John Miller was soon put on "active leave" because of his radical theology, but, ironically, he used this free time to establish a Voluntary Service unit in Chicago from which Fellowship House expanded and became Reba Place.³⁷

In Comer, Georgia, there was a similar, though rural-based, intentional community named Koinonia. Koinonia was founded in 1942 with the help of the radical Christian author Clarence Johnson.³⁸ Because Reba Place Fellowship and Koinonia shared an emphasis on social justice, pacifism, and close-knit common-purse communities, they formed a close bond. By 1980 Koinonia had already begun to work with refugee issues by forming a nonprofit organization they called Jubilee Partners, which primarily helped Cuban refugees.³⁹ Subsequently, they created a refugee training program and worked the Canadian consulate in Atlanta to gain visas for the Central American refugees. Jubilee Partners had already helped forty-four refugees gain Canadian visas when in 1983 Julius Belser sent out a letter similar to Jim Corbett's.⁴⁰

Julius Belser, who had met the Sosas when they arrived in Chicago, was aware of what Jubilee Partners was doing, but he also believed there was a great potential for a dispersed network of churches and volunteers working with refugees. The name Overground Railroad was specifically chosen for this network to emphasize its moral connections and physical similarities with the Underground Railroad. Additionally, the name suggested that this network looked first for legal ways to address the needs of refugees. Belser believed that people would act out of a common acknowledgement of a Christian responsibility to care for these disempowered people: "You too must love the alien, for you once lived as aliens in Egypt."⁴¹ He wrote a letter of intent and mailed it to the Mennonite and Brethren churches in the U.S., asking for support. Next, Belser approached Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen, a newly wed couple, about doing reconnaissance in Texas to assess how and where Reba Place could help.⁴² The Mennonite Central Committee, MCC, sponsored this three-month exploration. Before the end of the three months the Overground Railroad had already taken its first two families to asylum in Canada. They also published the first three issues of the Overground Railroad's newsletter, the *Telegraph News*. The newsletter contained a definite tone of urgency. Belser and the Friesens realized almost immediately that there was an immense need for a network like the Overground Railroad.⁴³

The Friesens returned to Reba Place and discerned what specifically was needed. There was a great need for transportation, housing, legal defense, and other amenities for the refugees. The Overground Railroad would essentially supplement the separate Sanctuary Movement by pursuing legal routes and means. While at

Reba, funds were raised to provide all the operating expenses for a yearlong residence for the Friesens in southwestern Texas.⁴⁴

The strategy of the Overground Railroad was to secure for refugees who had already been captured a voluntary departure with permission to travel, or to get them into the asylum process, which ensured them legal residence for a few months. Voluntary departure contracts guaranteed that refugees would leave the country of their own will within an allotted period of time, typically a few months, but allowed them to stay legally in the United States until they left. These few pivotal months were gained by showing that the refugee had resources to apply for a Canadian visa and the means to feed and house themselves in the mean time. After a while the organizations themselves gained enough repute that a simple letter vouching for the refugee was enough.⁴⁵

Refugees were recruited for the Overground Railroad from South Texas refugee shelters and INS detention centers. Refugees in the detention centers would typically be deported within twenty-five days and because deported refugees had frequently been assassinated when they arrived in their countries of origin, they were a very high priority for the Railroad.⁴⁶ Since the majority of the refugees were bailed out of detention centers, one of the primary needs was for bail funds. Because bail was returned when the refugee was admitted to Canada, this fund could be used cyclically. The revolving bail fund was created almost exclusively from personal donations. Donors could expect to eventually receive their money back and could withdraw their funds if they needed. Personal loans were also taken out in a pinch.⁴⁷ Once temporary legal residence had been gained, the refugees would leave the Rio Grande Valley in volunteers' cars or on the "Year of Jubilee," an old bus that the Overground Railroad and Jubilee Partners used.⁴⁸

Refugees would be taken to Jubilee Partners or to other communities dispersed throughout the Midwest. Jubilee Partners housed forty or so refugees at their communal farm in Georgia, using the same strategy to gain temporary legal residence for their refugees. In addition, while at the farm refugees were enrolled in a three-month orientation and language course, the purpose of which was to improve refugees' chances of asylum (the ability to speak English was looked upon favorably) and to prepare them for adapting to life in Canada. The Canadian consulate would meet the refugees either in Atlanta or at the Koinonia farm for an interview. Virtually all refugees who applied through this program were granted asylum in Canada.⁴⁹

The most significant difference in Reba Place's complimentary program was the use of a dispersed network of churches and communities. This entire network, rather than exclusively Reba Place Fellowship, bore the cost of supporting refugees during the sometimes lengthy asylum process. Basic requirements for a church or support group included a Spanish speaker who could translate and a place for the refugee to stay with basic provisions for six to twelve weeks. The group would line up a medical examination (required for a Canadian visa), something to do during the day if possible, and a friend for emotional support who could also help them get ready for their interview.⁵⁰

The biggest limiting variable in the network was the sponsorship of refugees once they made it to Canada. Assuming that most refugees apply from their country of origin or neighboring countries, the CEIC granted only 450 of the 2,500 sponsorships to refugees applying from consulates within the U.S.⁵¹ There was a far greater need for support of refugees sojourning through the U.S., so the Overground Railroad turned to the Canadian Mennonite-Brethren church networks for support. The 1976 Canadian immigrant legislation had also permitted the private sponsorship of additional refugees in the CEIC refugee program. In fact, the Canadian churches, service clubs, and NGO's had already utilized this apparatus to provide relief to 25,000 Indo-Chinese refugees in the late 1970's and early 1980's.⁵² Still, private sponsorship cost a church about \$250 per person each month, a daunting sum to small Mennonite and Brethren churches in Canada. To try to ease their burden and encourage more churches in Canada to sponsor refugees, the Overground Railroad lined up partner churches in the U.S. to share half the expenses.⁵³ The Mennonite Central Committee in the U.S. and Canada was helpful in lining up host congregations, providing logistical support, and extending its services to the refugees. For instance, Mennonite Mutual Aid health insurance policies were offered to refugees.⁵⁴

The MCC had a long history of activism. MCC international aid and service efforts began in 1928 when Canadian Mennonites heard rumors of plundering, repression and imprisonment of Mennonites in Russia. They borrowed \$2.5 million from the railroad for travel expenses and transported tens of thousands of Mennonites fleeing Russia by the Canadian Pacific Railroad to new homes across Canada. Canadian Mennonites had since been involved in the aid of Chinese Christians escaping to the Philippines and eventually to Canada.⁵⁵ When the Mennonite Central Committee met in 1984 they

discussed the importance of refugee work in the U.S. and Canada with an emphasis on the work of the Overground Railroad. There was some reluctance on the Canadian Mennonites' part because this was a burden passed on by the U.S. churches, but the tradition of compassion for the alien was much stronger. For many Canadian Mennonites, their own history convicted them to act.⁵⁶

Articles from Canadian churches appeared frequently in the *Telegraph News*. They typically noted the rapid progress of the refugees and tended to express lasting relationships between the host communities and the refugees, though more troubled letters sometimes arrived at the MCC and Overground Railroad administrations. While most resettled refugees adapted quickly to their new environment and were eager to help the Railroad by sending money and offering their homes as stops, others struggled. Many refugees suffered from post-traumatic stress and found the culture, climate, and language trying.

Despite a few hiccups, by mid-1985 the Overground Railroad was on solid ground. The hosting and public sharing model they had created was so successful that by July the waiting list for host churches was more than eight months long. The administrative staff—altogether six compensated staff split between Evanston, IL. and Brownsville, Texas—was even able to relax a bit about finances.⁵⁷ Then the Canadian Consulate in Dallas directly contacted the Overground Railroad and asked it to help them fill a bonus 150-person sponsorship quota for that year. The Canadian Refugee Board recognized the probable need for more sponsorship of refugee applicants in the U.S. and redistributed 150 sponsorship slots to its consulate in Dallas for Salvadoran refugees.⁵⁸ Because the government sponsorships relieved the burden from the Canadian churches and the organizational burden from MCC, they were highly sought after. Instantly, the Overground Railroad switched into high gear; this would be the first real test of the Overground network. A veteran MCC mission worker volunteered several months to help with translating. People across the Midwest sent in money to post bail for applicants and cover the additional \$6,000 to \$10,000 cost for processing. In the end it was a success; the Overground Railroad alone was able to fill almost half of the new spots.⁵⁹

Provisional Legal Refuge

In May of that same year, Jim Corbett of the Sanctuary Movement asked if the Overground Railroad could help enroll into the asylum process refugees who were about to be deported from the U.S.⁶⁰ The

Refugee Act of 1980 had created some avenues for illegal refugees to secure safe temporary residence. Until then, the Overground Railroad had been getting temporary legal residence for refugees through the use of volunteer departure agreements. While the INS was willing to grant temporary stays to refugees who agreed to leave via the Overground Railroad, voluntary departure only worked for refugees they knew they could place in Canada. However, under section 208 (a) of the Refugee Act of 1980, aliens in the U.S. could apply for asylum while undergoing the deportation process, prior to detention, or to a judge by submitting an application during a deportation or exclusion hearing.⁶¹ Once the asylum process had started the refugees could not be deported until the legal process was concluded. If refugees were in the asylum process or involved in continual appeals, they would be provisionally legal until conclusion. Neither Jim Corbett nor the Overground Railroad had much hope of achieving actual asylum in the U.S. because success rates were less than three percent for Salvadorans and equally low for Guatemalans. Nevertheless, if they continued to appeal and string out the legal process they might be able to protect the refugees and keep them in the U.S. for a few years. So, starting in July of 1985, the Overground Railroad started legally bailing out refugees from the detention centers and enrolling them in the U.S. asylum process. This new bonded refuge was called Provisional Legal Refuge or PLR for short.⁶²

PLR did not have relocation to Canada as its primary goal but instead sought as great an elongation of temporary residency as legally possible. The appeals process alone could last up to three years for an asylum case, during which time a lot could happen to help refugees. For instance, with the help of his or her host a refugee could go on to a declared Sanctuary church. Alternatively, a refugee could present him- or herself at the Canadian border for asylum without sponsorship, or gain legal U.S. residency through a labor certification (meaning they had become indispensable to their employer and the U.S. economy), or get in line for visas to foreign countries. Another possible reprieve might come from the DeConini-Moakley Bill calling for a temporary freeze on deportation, which the Overground Railroad and MCC supported.⁶³ At the very least PLR would keep refugees out of danger for a little longer.

Working With the INS

The INS, for its part, passively impeded the various organizations helping the refugees. Many of the churches and organizations

affiliated with the Sanctuary movement complained of the constant evasive movement of detainees from one facility to another and the frequent and unannounced changes in legal protocol.⁶⁴ These frequent changes not only encumbered the legal proceedings for asylum cases but also seriously endangered organizations like the Overground Railroad. In 1983 the INS in Southern Texas denied the voluntary depart forms they had consistently awarded refugees headed to Canada. Suddenly finding its legal foundation suspect, the Overground Railroad planned to defend itself, asserting that it had gone as far as possible under the legal system.⁶⁵ Although the Overground Railroad was never accused of wrongdoing, several closely affiliated groups were prosecuted for missteps. On January 29, 1987 Stacey Merkt, who worked for Casa Romero and Proyecto Libertad (two organizations with which the Overground Railroad had close ties), began a 179-day sentence for helping to transport illegal refugees.⁶⁶ Casa Romero was also raided by the INS under false pretenses, and later forced to relocate. In surprising contrast, however, the INS publically stated that it had no objections to the work of the Overground Railroad. As Mary Jude Postal explained it, "We violate the spirit of the law, but we don't violate the letter of the law... It's kind of a delicate relationship publically. In the Rio Grande Valley, we really can't use the word sanctuary or our contacts in the INS and our ability to work with them would close off."⁶⁷

In December of 1988, the U.S. sent agents to Mexico and Guatemala to coordinate INS efforts with the Servicios Migratorios.⁶⁸ The next year the number of detainees jumped from 15,000 to 80,000 and the numbers have grown higher every year since. In March 1989, the INS started a new policy of massive detention and deportation. In May they announced the early success of this new program. To match the increasing refugee processing in Texas, the Overground Railroad set the goal of doubling their volunteers in that state by creating a small community of volunteers in Harlingen by the fall of 1989.⁶⁹

Correspondingly, the *Telegraph News*, the Railroad's bi-monthly newsletter, also shifted from recounting the daily exploits of Railroad workers and volunteers to more politically relevant information. The newsletter continuously relayed the personal stories of its passengers and regularly asked for support, but it also began to feature articles written by the various other refugee programs around the country. They published special editions focusing on the new INS policy, and were featured in

several major publications such as the *Christian Science Monitor*. The newsletter included articles by the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Latin American press. It also began to announce protests, fasts, reform campaigns, and projects led by numerous other organizations as well as encouraging its readers to join organizations like the Christian Urgent Action Network for El Salvador.⁷⁰ A "resources" section was created on the last page of the newsletter listing recent studies, books, and presentations available to their affiliated churches and organizations. The Overground Railroad also made video and multimedia presentations that affiliated groups could borrow to compliment their own publicity programs.

Jubilee Partners and the Overground Railroad were not just waiting and working for change in the U.S; they looked abroad. As early as 1984, Jubilee Partners sent Don Mosley to France to explore the possibility of sending refugees to Europe and Australia.⁷¹ They sent delegations to Nicaragua and Honduras to better understand the political volatility of that region. They visited the refugee camps in Mexico to see if there were ways of directly helping in the camps and reported back to the network in long, heart wrenching, and heavily political letters reprinted in the *Telegraph News*. The Overground Railroad had also started organizing tours of the network itself by the mid-1980s. Participants from the affiliated churches visited the Jubilee Partners, the Overground Railroad's office in Texas, refugee shelters like the Casa Romero, and the INS detention centers.⁷²

The intimate involvement of every group along the Railroad proved to be essential to the movement because it created powerful ties between refugees and otherwise unaffected churches and communities. PLR and regular sponsors had a direct interest in the larger political climate in the U.S. The smallest change in policy could seriously affect their new neighbors. The Reagan Administration was portraying Salvadoran refugees as Communists, but the refugees themselves often contradicted this stereotype. Many were union members, farmers, church leaders, and professionals, which resonated with the rural Midwestern communities. Their stories brought the war, struggle, injustice, and pain of Central America home and were too compelling for most communities to remain on the sidelines.

By 1990 the network crisscrossed with dozens of similar smaller refugee organizations, many of which sprang up to receive refugees and later grew autonomous. The Lancaster Inter-religious Network

for Central American Refugee Action, LINCARA, was one such organization supported by seven different denominations.⁷³ The Overground Railway itself displayed a full gamut of different host congregation denominations; Presbyterian, Brethren, Catholic, and even a school in Kansas that took on the responsibility of helping to raise funds. The Overground Railroad also received help from numerous legal firms. The most notable organization was probably the nonprofit Proyecto Libertad based in Texas.⁷⁴ As the churches and refugee organizations helped by raising money, providing housing, educating, and transporting the refugees, the legal firms worked the asylum cases and provided legal guidance.

When the civil war in El Salvador ended in 1992, the Overground Railroad ended with it. The United States had clearly perpetuated the conflict in El Salvador and Salvadorans had in turn been the largest constituency of the Railroad. Many of the Railroad's former passengers returned to try to find families and help the reconstruction of their nation. The Overground Railroad and various member churches sent individuals to Central America to continue what had become a central ministry of reconciliation and social justice. In this way many of the communities continued to be actively aware and involved in politics and humanitarian action, while the Overground Railroad's transnational track was quietly dismantled.

It has now been twenty-five years since Nelson Sosa won asylum in the United States. He stayed in Evanston, IL working for Reba Place because they "trust [him], and treat [him] like a family member."⁷⁵ Today the Overground Railroad stands out as a reminder that there are ways to pursue social justice within legal frameworks. More importantly it stands out as a successful model for the mobilization of an unaffected populous. As Sosa puts it, "The Overground Railroad was a miraculous scheduling feat."⁷⁶ The Railroad may never have been big enough to bring all the thousands of refugees to safety, but it did bring Central American refugees and their struggle to hundreds of thousands of Americans and Canadians.

Notes

- 1 Nelson Sosa, interview with author, March 26, 2010.
- 2 Sosa, interview. The Civil Defense Militia was created by the Salvadoran army by forcefully recruiting locals. After the initial recruitment and training the majority of the enlisted soldiers would leave. The remaining paramilitary force was led by a dozen or so army men, and sustained through continued forced recruitment.

- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The FMLN was a coalition of Guerilla groups, including Fuerzas Populares de Liberación, Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, the Salvadoran Communist party, and other smaller groups. Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace, Second Edition*. 2nd ed. (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1994,) 101.
- 7 Oscar Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985,) 6.
- 8 William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States In Central America, 1977-1992*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000,) 38.
- 9 Ibid., 44.
- 10 Edward T. Brett, "Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas and the Struggle for Social Justice in El Salvador." *Catholic Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (October 2008), 728.
- 11 Ibid. ARENA is the right wing party of El Salvador which controlled the presidency for twenty years, and during the Salvadoran civil war was the largest and most lethal of right wing paramilitary death squads.
- 12 LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 63.
- 13 Ibid., 80-82.
- 14 *Frente Sandista de Liberation National*, the prominent Nicaraguan Guerilla organization that overthrew the Samoza Government in 1979. Ibid., 27.
- 15 Montgomery, *Revolution*, 117.
- 16 LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 89.
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- 19 "Military Regime Promises Respect for Human Rights," *Gadsden Times*, April 6, 1982, sec. International News.
- 20 Cathy Woodruff, "'Escaped Guatemalans Tell of Severe Repression,'" *Schenectady Gazette*, March 23, 1984.
- 21 María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). 136.
- 22 Ibid., 128.
- 23 Ibid., 136.
- 24 Barbara M. Yarnold, "Administrative Policy Making: Adjudication by the Board of Immigration Appeals in Asylum-Related Appeals 1980-1987," *Policy Studies Review* 9, no. 4 (1990): 681-701.
- 25 Donald G. Janelle, *Geographical Snapshots of North America* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1992), 58.
- 26 Jeffrey S. Chase, "For Salvadoran Refugees, an Empty Promise?" *The New York Times*, January 14, 1991, sec. Opinion.

- 27 "For Refugees, the Door Swings Open," *The New York Times*, December 24, 1990, sec. Opinion.
- 28 Yarnold, "Administrative Policy Making," 681-701.
- 29 Ibid., 58.
- 30 Jim Corbett, *Goatwalking* (New York: Viking, 1991).
- 31 David Janzen, interview with the author, March 25, 2010.
- 32 Gerald E. Dirks, *Controversy and Complexity: Canadian Immigration Policy During the 1980s*. (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 1995), 64.
- 33 Julius Belser, "In the Last Month," *Telegraph News*, February 8, 1984.
- 34 Garcia, *Seeking Refuge*, 64.
- 35 Dave Jackson and Neta Jackson, *Glimpses of Glory: Thirty Years of Community. The Story of Reba Place Fellowship* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Pr, 1987), 27-30.
- 36 Ibid., 34.
- 37 Voluntary Service was a social works program originally created as an alternative to military service during WWII and continued after the war ended. It was primarily funded through the Mennonite Central Committee and tended to be in inner-city poverty stricken areas. Jackson and Jackson, *Glimpses*, 35-39.
- 38 "Koinonia's History," <http://www.koinoniapartners.org/past.html>.
- 39 "Jubilee Partners," <http://www.jubileepartners.org>.
- 40 Janzen interview.
- 41 Deuteronomy, 20:19
- 42 Julius Belser, interview with author, March 25, 2010.
- 43 Richard Friesen and Ruth Anne Friesen. "The First Three Months Exploratory Phase of This Ministry," *Telegraph News*, September 30, 1983.
- 44 Julius Belser, "Year Review," *Telegraph News*, December 26, 1983, 1-2.
- 45 Richard Friesen, letter, "Re: Juan Orlando Aquilar Ayala," October 10, 1990, MCC National Archive.
- 46 David Janzen, "New Track on the Overground Railroad: Provisional Legal Refuge," *Telegraph News*, May 1, 1985.
- 47 Belser, interview.
- 48 Janzen, interview.
- 49 Jubilee Partners, "Orientation to Jubilee; for Refugee going to Comer, GA," June 26, 1991, MCC National Archive, 1.
- 50 Julius Belser, "The Time Has Come," *Telegraph News*, August 25, 1983.
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- 52 Dirks, *Controversy*, 62, 66.
- 53 David Janzen, "Yes We Have a Long Waiting List for Church Sponsors, But!!!," *Telegraph News*, February 17, 1985, 6.
- 54 David Janzen, "Healthcare Insurance for O.R.R. Refugees," *Telegraph News*, August 13, 1984.

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- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 David Janzen, "New Track on the Overground Railroad: Provisional Legal Refuge," *Telegraph News*, May 1, 1985.
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- 62 David Janzen, "A Few Questions about Provisional Legal Refuge (PLR)," *Telegraph News*, July 5, 1985.
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- 65 Belser, "Time Has Come."
- 66 Postal, Mary Jude "Stacey Merkt Begins Prison Sentence," *Telegraph News*, March 6, 1987.
- 67 Epstein, Nadine, 'Refugees find Sanctuary in Canada,' *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 30, 1986, section National.
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- 70 CUANES was essentially an alert system activated when a church activist in El Salvador was disappeared. The church in Salvador alerted the network in North America. The people in the U.S. sent telegraphs to the appropriate official to influence a release. Steve Durham, "CUANES: Christian Urgent Action Network for El Salvador," *Telegraph News*, October 4, 1984.
- 71 Julius Belser, "100 New Openings for Central American Refugees Through Atlanta," *Telegraph News*, August 13, 1984.
- 72 David Janzen, "A Tour of the Valley and Jubilee Partners," *Telegraph News*, December 10, 1987.
- 73 Richard Friesen, "Juan Orlande Aquilar Ayala A70 431 201," Custody Request, October 10, 1990, MCC National Archive.
- 74 David Janzen, "Six Volunteers Needed for the Valley," *Telegraph News*, May 12, 1989.
- 75 Sosa, interview.
- 76 Ibid.

Alena R. Pirok

Mrs. Satan's Penance: The New History of Victoria Woodhull

The first woman to run for president in the United States was a social outcast who believed she could communicate with the dead. While her actions were very unique, they were initially accepted relatively well by her peers. Sadly for Victoria Woodhull, her popularity did not last. Less than a year after she ran for president she became a walking scandal among her contemporaries. After having been called a "modern Joan of Arc," and a "social martyr," she became better known for the name famed cartoonist Thomas Nast gave her, "Mrs. Satan."¹ The details about her family life, open sexuality, and an exposé she published on an affair in the famous Beecher family, helped to earn her that, and became some of her most well known characteristics. Today, she is remembered as a woman who openly rejected the Victorian ideal, but what is often neglected in historical accounts of her life is the period after she left the United States and settled in England. In England, Victoria Woodhull successfully altered her image from a disreputable figure of scandal into a respectable philanthropist. This dramatic change adds an interesting twist to her rejection of social norms in the U.S.

Woodhull's life in England was not fully cleansed of the soils of her past; the issues from her life in New York haunted her wherever she went. Still, once she became wealthy in England she attempted to erase the blots on her reputation by dedicating her life to social reform, and by adhering to social norms. Woodhull was able to fund her image change by marrying a rich banker, publishing a monthly paper that focused on philanthropy, and giving a series of charitable donations to the town of Brendon's Norton. While her earlier life was wrought with scandal and public ridicule, Victoria Woodhull successfully altered her image and can now be remembered as having two histories, one on each side of the Atlantic: an outrageous pariah in America and an "ideal" woman in the U.K.

The story of Woodhull's life reads like a Hollywood movie plot. A young girl born into poverty was taken on the road by her

religious fanatic parents, where she was marketed as clairvoyant. Woodhull and her sister supported their growing family as fortune-tellers, healers and prostitutes. After marrying twice, Woodhull had a chance encounter with an extremely wealthy and well known business tycoon, Commodore Vanderbilt, which allowed Woodhull and her sister Tennessee Claflin to start their own stock brokerage, the first of its kind. Woodhull also ran for president, became a newspaper writer, spent many nights in jail, was blacklisted by the feminist movement, and in the end died alone in an English manor. She lived an extraordinary life and had a hand in the suffrage and equal rights movements in the United States, but she is often left out of common histories of her time. This paper will examine Victoria Woodhull's story beginning with a brief introduction to her life as a young woman, followed by an explanation of her most notable years in the U.S. The bulk of the paper will focus on her life in England, and the end will explore Woodhull's lasting memory.

Early Life

Victoria Woodhull was born on September 23, 1838 to Roxy and Buck Claflin, in Homer, Ohio. One biographer quoted her as saying she was a "child without a childhood."² Her mother was widely known as a fake clairvoyant and her father sold patent medicine. Interestingly, her experience as a child clairvoyant was not unique; during the same period the famous Fox children were being used as connections to the "other side" and went as far as the Lincoln White House.³ This movement, known as the Spiritualist movement, was at its beginnings when the Claflin girls were being peddled by their parents. The movement, along with their own clairvoyant powers, allowed the girls not only to support their family as children but was the core of all of their future success.

Woodhull's childhood is a dense story of winning and losing, hardship and occasional prostitution. Eventually, Woodhull's sexuality would become the central factor in her fall from social grace. At age fifteen she happily left her family and married Doctor Canning Woodhull, who was thirteen years her senior. Dr. Woodhull was known as an alcoholic, which was the cause of the abuse Woodhull faced at his hands. She gave birth to two children while married to the Doctor. Her first child Byron appears to have had a form of mental retardation, which some accounts attribute to a kick in the stomach from her husband during her

pregnancy. Her second child, Zulu Maude, to whom she stayed very close until her death, was her favorite. Due to her husband's abuse and other such events, Woodhull eventually divorced him.⁴⁵

Following her separation from the Doctor in the mid 1860's, Woodhull began seeing Colonel James Blood, a married Civil War veteran from Missouri whom she met during a spiritualist conference.⁶ After Blood obtained a divorce from his wife, he and Woodhull were married and subsequently divorced, but this did not end their relationship.⁷ This confusing relationship with Blood, coupled with her loyalty to Dr. Woodhull (which spoke of her humanitarian nature, not her sexual perniciousness), caused a great deal of gossip. Her intentions were not seen clearly or understood by her peers. She wrote to the *New York Times* on this topic in 1871:

One of the charges made against me is that I lived in the same house with my former husband, Dr. Woodhull, and my present husband, Colonel Blood. The fact is a fact. Dr. Woodhull being sick, ailing and incapable of self-support, I felt it my duty to myself and to human nature that he should be cared for, although this incapacity was in no wise attributed to me. My present husband, Colonel Blood, not only approves of this charity, but co-operates in it.⁸

Woodhull also had a great loyalty to her family despite the fact that they had repeatedly tarnished any good reputation she had made for herself and lived off her earnings for the bulk of her life. After her sister Tennessee had been accused of murder in Ottawa, Illinois due to a botched attempt to cure a woman's cancer using her fathers' medicine, Woodhull took her sister away.⁹ When she gained more money and fame her family came to her home to once again live off of her earnings. As in their childhood, mother, father, sisters, brothers, and children once again lived under a roof built on the work of Victoria and Tennessee. Adding to their parasitic tendencies, the family fought often and sued one another many times, which caused a great deal of notoriety and further blackened Woodhull's image.¹⁰

Notoriety in New York

After moving to New York in 1868 and setting up shop as fortune tellers, Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin soon found

themselves in the good graces of business mogul Commodore Vanderbilt, who wanted to use the women's powers in his business endeavors.¹¹ Luck had been good to the sisters for once and Vanderbilt took a special liking to Claflin. Although their relationship was controversial, the sisters claimed it was strictly business.¹² An allotment of money from the famous mogul allowed the sisters to open a stock firm, where they encouraged women to take part in the stock market by providing them with a comfortable atmosphere and preferential treatment.¹³ It was not long before Woodhull and Claflin began to publish a paper, *The Woodhull and Claflin Weekly*. Their paper dealt with suffrage, spiritualism, and women's interests, the hot topics of the day.

In an 1872 issue of the paper, Woodhull famously announced her run for the presidency on the Equal Rights ticket. She had been chosen by the Equal Rights Party to be their candidate in the upcoming presidential election and gladly took the opportunity to challenge the social standards of the time. While women did not have the right to vote, there was no law specifically stating that a woman could not run for president, allowing Woodhull to run legally. Woodhull also felt that there was no legal documentation stopping women from voting, a position she expressed in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1896:

Section 1 of Article XIV, declares that 'all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States....' The only question which can arise here is as to the meaning of the word 'persons,' but by no legal or verbal sophistry can it be twisted to exclude women.¹⁴

Though her run for president did not earn her many votes, she did successfully become the first female to officially run for president, no matter how unpopular her campaign was.

It did not take long before her failed attempt at the presidency helped to sour her public image. A speech she gave at Steinway Hall was interrupted by her belligerent older sister's heckling, forcing Woodhull to publicly admit to her views on free love.¹⁵ Free love, at the time, was defined as the ability to love whomever one chose, for however long one chose, repeating that cycle for as many times as one wanted. This idea completely defied the Victorian ideal, which prescribed that the sanctity and purity of

marriage should supersede emotions. Woodhull was already seen as an odd person, but after her statement confirming her open support of free love it was inevitable that she was dropped out of favor in society.

Compounding her fall from grace, the reverend Henry Ward Beecher, brother of famed author Harriet Beecher-Stowe, took it upon himself to defend mainstream Christianity against Woodhull's spiritualism by condemning her free love life style.¹⁶ Woodhull struck back with an exposé, printed in her paper, which highlighted the affair the reverend was having with a friend and fellow public figure's wife, Lib Tilton. Paradoxically, her exposé turned more people away from her and left her and her family on the street. The good times in Victoria Woodhull's life had come to a screeching halt. As he had once before, Commodore Vanderbilt came to the aid of Woodhull and her family. This time he gave his help postmortem. After his death, a major legal dispute arose about the odd divisions of wealth left to his children. While the mogul's family and friends were being questioned and taken to court, Vanderbilt's son contacted Woodhull and her sister and, in an apparent attempt to suppress the details of the sisters' relationship with the Commodore, sent them to England with a generous amount of money.¹⁷ The son's attempt to save his father's name provided the turning point that Woodhull and Claflin needed in order to reinvent themselves.

A new life and new opinions in England

In England, Woodhull took off on the same foot she left the United States on, lecture touring.¹⁸ *The New York Times* reported that in 1881 Victoria Woodhull's reception in England "especially among the higher classes, was very flattering, and wherever she lectured there were crowded houses to hear her."¹⁹ The popularity of her lecture series solidified the idea that her name was nowhere near as poisonous in England as it was in the United States and her public character overhaul could be accomplished. The articles written about her lecturing in Europe do not suggest that her views aroused opposition; this could be attributed to the fact that many of the speeches, letters and articles she wrote while in England took on a new approach to the opinions she had espoused while in New York. For instance, while in England Woodhull wrote in a letter, "Free love is not what I ask for nor what I pleaded for. What I asked for was educated love, that our daughters be taught to love rightly. . ." ²⁰ She also wrote in 1881

that she had never been an advocate of free love, and that what appeared to be support was only a creation of Colonel Blood, who she claimed had published falsities.²¹ Her new ideas were starkly different from what she had claimed to believe in New York, where she had asserted, "I advocate free-love in the highest purest sense, as the only cure for the immorality, the deep damnation by which men corrupt and disfigure God's most holy institution of sexual relations."²² In the first quote she stresses educated love, while in the second quote she stresses sexual relations, showing that her opinions had changed from a more physical interpretation of love to a more mental interpretation. Clearly, Woodhull either had a change of heart after her boat ride to England or she understood the change in image that was necessary to stay in the good graces of the English public.

Marriage, money, and a new reputation

In London at a lecture in the old St. James's Hall she was introduced to John B. Martin, whose recently deceased sister had shared many of Woodhull's views.²³ Martin was a wealthy London banker and heir to a large estate. It is debatable whether or not Woodhull made Martin her third and final husband for financial gain or for love, but it is known that in the Victorian era women were encouraged to marry for financial comfort. In the fall of 1883, Woodhull and John B. Martin were married. After fourteen years of undisputed monogamy, Martin died,²⁴ leaving to Woodhull his personal assets and the family land in Brendon's Norton, a small town outside of London.²⁵

Before his untimely death, Martin and Woodhull took great pains to mend her reputation. One of the first obstructions that came in the couple's way was disapproval of their secret marriage on the part of Martin's friends and family.²⁶ To counteract this, Martin and Woodhull attempted to show evidence of "good blood" in Woodhull's veins. As many status-seekers have done, Woodhull and Martin attempted to claim blood relations with United States founding fathers. In a document titled "The Washington Pedigree," Martin defended his family's own relation to the first American President, George Washington, and Woodhull defended her relation to Washington's close friend and fellow founding father, Alexander Hamilton. The evidence provided for Martin's side is plainly more concise and seems to be more valid than the spotty lineage presented by Woodhull, which was accompanied by a change in her daughter's name.²⁷ This large

scale attempt at laundering the family name also included her sister, whose first name was changed from Tennessee to Tennie C. Attempting to clean up Woodhull's family background was an important aspect of creating a character worthy of association with the Martin family and their friends.

Tennessee Claflin also married into a substantial amount of prestige and money in England. In the fall of 1885, not long after Woodhull was married, Claflin married Francis Cook, and became the first Cook Baronet—a proper English Lady and one of the wealthiest people in England,²⁸ a surprising twist from being a little girl who was peddled by her family as a fortune teller, healer and prostitute. Her 1923 obituary in the *New York Times* portrayed her first as the lady she had become, mentioning her previous life in veiled language that made it less of a scandal and more of an interesting fact.²⁹ Clearly, marriage became Claflin's social saving grace. Woodhull, however, had to work much harder to regain a good name for herself.

Philanthropy in Brendon's Norton

Following the death of her third husband, Victoria Woodhull-Martin moved her life out to the town of Brendon's Norton and the estate she had inherited. Her time in Brendon's Norton encompasses the stage in Woodhull's life where she truly succeeded in becoming a figure well known not for her radical life style but for her acts of good will and financial donation.³⁰ One of the first things Victoria Woodhull did for the town was give a local reverend a house, rose garden, green house, and cow, along with £55 to the church for renovation.³¹ A local chaplain commented on her good deeds to the church saying, "No one next to our Lord has been more cruelly misjudged and spoken ill of than Mrs. Biddulph Martin."³² This was only the beginning of her attempt to use her money to gain favor with the people of Brendon's Norton.

One year later in 1903, Victoria Woodhull gave the town street lights, postal service, and telephone availability. One could argue that she simply furnished the town with her own comforts of home—an interpretation perhaps shared by a group of rioters who, disapproving of her donations, proceeded to destroy the newly planted gas lamps.³³ Also in 1903, she became known for being the first woman seen driving a motorcar in Hyde Park. She was known as a car enthusiast and in 1904 she started a Lady's Motor Club, to encourage the women of her town to take up

leisurely drives in the country.³⁴ Surely there must have been those in her quiet town who did not approve of her noisy pastime, but there seems to have been no public objections to her love of automobiles.

As a woman who lived in the United States and Great Britain, Woodhull developed a special liking for both of her residential nations. She was an active member in the Sulgrave Movement, a philanthropic effort to create friendly links between the United States and England—a perfect movement for the *new* Victoria Woodhull. The movement highlighted the link between American founding father George Washington and his ancestors who had lived in Sulgrave Manor.³⁵ Woodhull is said to have been a great contributor to the purchase of Sulgrave Manor as well as having donated another English manor to the movement.³⁶ In these acts, Woodhull created an image of herself as both a good American woman and a good English woman. Her good works as a wealthy donor had made an impact on her history in England in spite of her radical and notorious past.

Censoring the past

Many modern day celebrities have encountered great social misfortune, much like Victoria Woodhull did, whether because of a sexual scandal or simply absent-minded words. One key to self-reinvention after such scandals is to measure to what degree the people around believe in the transformation, and how willing they are to accept a new identity and to forgive past transgressions. Woodhull spent the latter part of her life living down her past through self-reinvention. A first step was reinventing her family. In a patrilineal society or in any society where grand fortunes are passed on through inheritance it is important to be connected to someone who is held in high esteem. Such connections not only give the aura of wealth but they also foster trust and fraternity on the part of others in the same social class. In the United States, Woodhull's family had not been of noble or famous birth, but in England she was associated with the American founding father Alexander Hamilton.³⁷ Moreover, though she had arrived with her own money from Commodore Vanderbilt's son, that wealth would not have gotten her far in society. In Victorian England, it was better to be associated with "old money," as opposed to "new money." Inherited wealth helped to build an image of class, sophistication, and birthright, while sudden recipients of money had were stained as lower-class

individuals who were unwelcome to the wealthy elite. Woodhull was wise in choosing the more honorable and respectable avenue to acceptance by marrying into "old" wealth and claiming Alexander Hamilton as her ancestor.

In order to ensure her respectability Victoria Woodhull also took steps to clear her name, or make sure her past was not leaked out to the people of England. In early 1894, Woodhull and Martin filed libel charges against the British Museum for allowing pamphlets discussing the Beecher-Tilton scandal to be open to public view.³⁸ In their libel case, Woodhull and Martin claimed that these pamphlets were incriminating to Woodhull's character and that the information in them was "falsely" written. Though they did not win the case they proved to the rest of the upper class society that they rejected using her name in a way that would harm her reputation. The lawsuit also allowed Woodhull to publically claim that other negative things that would eventually come out about her were mere fabrications, like the pamphlets in the British Museum. On many occasions she denied that she had held the controversial views she had been pinned with. Rather, she asserted, she had been misunderstood or taken advantage of, a claim that fit in well with contemporary images of women as helpless and impressionable beings. This seemed to be good enough proof for the upper class of England to take her seriously as one of their own.

Winning acceptance in Brendon's Norton

Woodhull had more difficulty winning over the people of Brendon's Norton, some of who took to the streets smashing the gaslights she had donated to the town.³⁹ In another attempt to win the townspeople over, she also tried to bring a Botanical Women's College to the area that would have access to the large gardens on her property for educational purposes. Woodhull also had dormitories built for the women who would come and learn about the plants. This plan did not succeed, however, and both Woodhull and her daughter Zulu gained a great deal of negative press for their failure.⁴⁰ Woodhull did not stop there, however. She also had inherited two school buildings when Martin had died. She gave a great deal of financial aid to the schools, but failed to be voted to the school board after a valiant attempt.⁴¹

After a widely publicized car wreck, however, Victoria Woodhull began to slow down her overhaul of the town of Brendon's Norton. This incident was apparently the turning point

for her popularity in the town. Not long after, Woodhull and her daughter began to give away more and more of their land, asking nothing in return. They began by turning a large part of their land into a country club where they sponsored many plays. They also were supporters of the youth movement, and gave generously to both the elderly and children.⁴² Once it seemed she was able to give to the town of Brendon's Norton without any implication of selfishness, she was then able to create for herself an identity that would leave the town with a positive lasting impression.

Reactions in the U.S.

In the United States the change that took place in Victoria Woodhull was more difficult for people to accept. Though she changed her own history, many American writers did not let her escape her past. In an 1890 article from the *Milwaukee Spiritual*, a journalist interviewed Miss Lockwood, a 1884 Presidential Candidate.⁴³ The topic was Woodhull's recent threat of a libel case against American papers for their writings about her and the Beecher-Tilton Scandal. Having met with Woodhull and Claflin, Lockwood concluded,

I think they are absurd, a piece of foolishness. They were too well known here, and all the bulldozing in the world that they attempt upon the press of the country will fall and fall flat. They are not dealing with English editors who are banished for telling the truth... Oh, no, their characters are too well known.

She also adds,

While I was in Woodhull's house in London she was then pasting up and editing a lot of the old newspaper scraps from American papers, preparatory to their publication in a book form showing in what great esteem she was held here, but I observed that she ran her pen through everything that was unfavorable.⁴⁴

Another article from the *New York Times*, which dealt with an 1895 case brought on by Woodhull against her niece, described her as a rascal bent on destroying the family. The article quotes one of her sisters' complaints:

Why does not Victoria devote her remaining years

to [charity] work, instead of running from Europe to America and back again, and spending her husband's money to achieve notoriety? See what she did in England? She sued the British Museum for having on its shelves a "Life of Victoria Woodhull," declaring that it was libelous publication. She was awarded £1 damages. At the same time she herself wrote the book, or rather, dictated every word of it. That is a fair sample of what she had been doing in years past.⁴⁵

It is certainly fair to say that at least two people in the United States had harsh words for Woodhull and her activities in England. Both women commented on her failed attempt to change her image or alter her past. While England seemed to have taken Victoria's protest as a sign of either innocence or redemption, America was not ready to let go of "Mrs. Satan," just yet.

Modern interpretations and historical significance

Victoria Woodhull managed to straddle the fence in between being a noteworthy trailblazer and an insignificant tabloid star many times. What was it, then, that makes her historically significant? What can be said of this woman who was truly a character of the times? Woodhull has played many roles in subsequent histories: she is currently a symbol of the women's rights movements and the sexual rights movements; she is also the patron of a small English town, the first woman to run for president, the first woman to own a stock firm, and a public woman who rubbed elbows with the rich and famous of Victorian New York. Victoria Woodhull was many things and there are many things she is noted for doing, leaving a lot room for different interpretations of her life.

One modern interpretation of Woodhull sees her as the woman who made significant advances for women in politics and finance. A web page dedicated to her called "Victoria Woodhull, The Spirit to Run the White House," provides a link to her campaign song, a store for Woodhull goods, and news about her remembrance as a trailblazer.⁴⁶ While this page does acknowledge her social wrongs, most of the information is full of errors. To the creators of this web page and its followers, Victoria Woodhull is the first woman to run for president, an innocent woman of good character. Though this web page advertises many books written

on her life, it would appear that the information of the web page itself does not reflect the research done in the books.

Another website that highlights Woodhull's achievements as a women's rights fighter is published by "The Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership." Their page reads, "she spoke frankly of the need for women to take control of their reproductive life and health—so frankly that she was not received in the most respectable drawing rooms, even those belonging to the feminists of her day."⁴⁷ This group highlights Woodhull as a brazen woman who did not steer away from speaking her mind, and as a great leader whom women in the organization hope to embody. While they do acknowledge the fact that she was in some ways ostracized by her peers, they fail to recognize that it was not so much her words on women's rights but her thoughts on free love that brought her a large amount of ill fame.

A foundation dedicated to sexual freedom and women's equality also takes its name from Woodhull. The Woodhull Freedom Foundation does not highlight her run for president but instead highlights her as being a woman who was not afraid to be a free lover.⁴⁸ The foundation aims to protect and promote federal freedoms of sexuality and privacy in the United States. This foundation sees Woodhull as the woman she was in New York, when she believed strongly in free love and was not about to deny her stance on woman's rights or her sexuality. This image of Woodhull did not cross the sea with her though.

Even before her death she began to be seen as what Henry Frany would call one of the "First Social Martyrs in the C[ause] of Woma[n]." ⁴⁹ The early 1900's were favorable years for Woodhull. She was involved with donating documents to the Statistical Society Library, for which she was generously thanked in a personal letter.⁵⁰ She was also asked to donate a copy of her signature to the Los Angeles Public Library, which wrote that Woodhull was qualified as someone who "has enriched thought interests [across] all classes, from children to philosophers."⁵¹ In her later years Woodhull was the gracious recipient of many favorable letters that thanked and honored her for her achievements. John M. Kullerman wrote to her that the United States was now catching up with her, as some people were now accepting the teaching of eugenics, sexual hygiene, and votes for women.⁵² Another Woodhull supporter wrote "I should think you would take great pleasure in contemplating the way th[e] world is coming round to the thing[s] you fought so lonely for when you

were in the United States.”⁵³ Despite having left the United States in almost total social ruin, Woodhull was able to maintain many followers.

A 2001 article from *The Times* highlights Brendon’s Norton, the town that Woodhull moved to after her last husband’s death.⁵⁴ The article focuses on the fear that the people of Brendon’s Norton had that their favorite benefactor might be shown in an unfavorable light in an upcoming movie based on her life. The article claims that Woodhull seduced Vanderbilt, that she herself claimed to have slept with Henry Beecher, and that she fled to England due to her cartoon portrayal as “Mrs. Satan.” While most of the “facts” presented in the article are not facts at all, they do show that the people of Brendon’s Norton and England have an extremely skewed view of her history, and that they have forgiven her for her past deeds, and have accepted her as their beloved benefactor. The people of Brendon’s Norton, while acknowledging that she had an ill-favored past, choose to remember her as their own hero rather than the woman who ran for president of the United States or otherwise. There are so many different aspects of Victoria Woodhull to choose from it would seem that any group could take her up as their champion.

Many theatrical performances have used Woodhull as a muse. “Onward Victoria,” “Victorious Victoria,” and “Spirit and Flesh,” are examples of the many plays and musicals written about her life.⁵⁵ Some concentrate on her presidential campaign, others, including “Spirit and Flesh,” center on her life as a spiritualist and clairvoyant. While this play in particular is cited as being a comedy, this does not discredit its honesty.⁵⁶ In fact, the play may be in many ways a more honest portrayal of her life, as it does not steer away from showing her in a light that might be less flattering.

Victoria Woodhull is not only a pop culture icon; she has been the subject of much historical research. Many histories focus on her life as an interesting and somewhat odd Victorian woman who made great strides in women’s advancement, ignoring her life after New York. This may be caused by the fact that Woodhull was a woman of many hats. For instance, in *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and Scandalous Victoria Woodhull*, Barbara Goldsmith tells Woodhull’s life through the lens of spiritualism’s impact on her life and on Victorian America. Amanda Friston, on the other hand, examines Woodhull as a “public woman” in an article in the *Journal of Women’s History*. The phrase “public

woman" refers to a woman/women's emergence from out of the home sphere and into the public. Friston highlights Woodhull's presence in the public eye, and suggests that the reason she was left out of many histories of the Suffragist movement was because her poor public image embarrassed other suffragists.⁵⁷

Most histories focus on the part of her life that had the greatest effect on the United States. They fail to give her full life story, which leads to a kind of "heroification."⁵⁸ This type of selective history allows historical figures to be remembered more as deity-like figures, free from moral or ethical judgments of society. While claiming that someone recanted all their previous statements that gave them their fame might be in bad taste in an obituary, the same statement in a historical context gives a more honest and significant idea of the person in the time they lived. Without examining the full life of Victoria Woodhull, we cannot understand how much social disdain she earned and how it affected her personally. The loss of her later life's history leads to a misinterpretation of her as a person, creating an image stuck in time with no evidence of change, which is, after all, the key to any history.

Victoria Woodhull successfully created a double life for herself, making her own history open to interpretation. History has been very kind to her. Many writers have portrayed her as a "woman beyond her time," allowing her Victorian-era sins to be washed away in hindsight, and leaving her with a past that looks more like martyrdom than a series of character flaws. She has been left out of history, given new histories, and has become a significant character in history and in the study and discipline of writing history.

Notes

- 1 Letter to VW from Henry Frany & "A Few facts not generally known regarding this 'modern Joan of Arc.'"
- 2 Theodore Tilton, *Biography of Victoria Woodhull*, (New York: Golden Age, 1871).
- 3 Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Life of Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1998), 28-29.
- 4 *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography* (hereafter *ONDB*), "Woodhull, Victoria Claflin" (January 2010), <http://www.oxforddnd.com/view/printable.98231> (accessed March 2010); Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 52.
- 5 *ONDB*; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 64. Goldsmith calls Byron a "Sixteen year old with the mind of an infant."

- 6 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 107.
- 7 ONDB, Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 107.
- 8 Victoria Woodhull, "Letter to the New York Times," *New York Times*, May 20, 1871.
- 9 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 82.
- 10 "Again Victoria Woodhull," *New York Times*, June 16, 1895.
- 11 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 156.
- 12 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 158; Julia Flynn Slier, "The Tides of Fortune," 19 December 2007, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1198011762564337829.html> (accessed March 2010).
- 13 ONDB; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 191.
- 14 Victoria Woodhull, "Women Suffrage In America," *New York Times*, May 28, 1896.
- 15 Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 303.
- 16 Woodhull, "Letter," 1871.
- 17 ONDB
- 18 "Mrs. Woodhull In New York," *New York Times*, November 27, 1881, N.P.; "Woodhull, Suffragist Dies." *New York Times*, June 11, 1927.
- 19 "Mrs. Woodhull," *New York Times*, 1881.
- 20 Victoria Woodhull, "Free Love Is Not What I Ask For." Victoria Woodhull Papers. Special Collection Research Center, Morris Library. Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Il. Hereafter VWP.
- 21 Owen Stinchcombe, *American Lady of the Manor; Brendon's Norton; The Late Life of Victoria Woodhull Martin* (Cheltenham: Adprint, 2000), 19; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 441.
- 22 Woodhull, "Letter," 1871.
- 23 Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 19.
- 24 "John Biddulph Martin Dies," *New York Times*, March 22, 1897.
- 25 Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 19; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 445.
- 26 ONDB; Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 19; Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 442.
- 27 "Washington Pedigree," *Men and Women of the Time 1891*, VWP. Zulu Woodhull is known as Zula in all English accounts. Her name was probably changed due to the long-standing conflict between the British Empire and the African Zulu. She began going by the name Lula around 1911, according to Henry Frany, "Letter to Victoria Woodhull and Lula Woodhull," June 11, 1911, VWP.
- 28 "Lady Cook Dies," *New York Times*, January 20, 1923.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Adam Sherwin, "Villagers' Heroine is 'Mrs. Satan,'" *New York Times*, January 29, 2001.
- 31 Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 30.
- 32 Ibid., 32.

- 33 Ibid., 30.
- 34 Ibid., 29. "Printers Copy of National Annual Blue Book of American Biography," VWP.
- 35 "Victoria Woodhull, Suffragist, Dies," *New York Times*, June 11, 1927; "Case For Support, Sulgrave Manor," http://www.sulgravemanor.org.uk/helpsulgrave/case_for_support.htm (accessed March, 2010); ONDB.
- 36 "Victoria Woodhull, Suffragist, Dies."
- 37 "Washington Pedigree."
- 38 ONDB. Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 21-22.
- 39 Stinchcombe, *American Lady*, 35.
- 40 Ibid., 24.
- 41 Ibid., 46.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 "She told Belva," *Milwaukee Spiritual*, January 27, 1890.
- 44 Woodhull's papers show that she did indeed strike through unfavorable comments in her newspaper clippings, even the one containing these quotes.
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- 47 Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, "Who was Victoria Woodhull," <http://woodhull.org/pageView.php?id=20> (accessed March 2010).
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- 50 J.A. Magee, "Letter from Royal Statistical Society," November 18, 1907, VWP.
- 51 J.G.Retchen, "Letter to Victoria Woodhull," November 6, 1929, VWP.
- 52 John M. Kullerman, "Letter to Victoria Woodhull," February 26, 1913, VWP.
- 53 Hearid C. Howe, "Letter from People's Institute," March 13, 1913. VWP.
- 54 Sherwin, "Village Heroine."
- 55 Shearer, Mary L. "Woodhull Movies, Plays and Etc." October 27, 1996. <http://www.victoria-woodhull.com/movie.htm> (accessed March 2010).
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- 57 Amanda Friston, "Sex and Politics: Victoria Woodhull as an American Public Woman," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 89-110.
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Matt Loughlin

**Is the Gestapo Everywhere?
The Origins of the Modern Perception of the Secret
Police of the Third Reich**

The attempted genocide of European Jews committed by the National Socialist-controlled Germany in the 1930s and 40s has left scholars with more questions than could ever be answered definitively. A persisting question in the mind of anyone studying the Holocaust has to be “How could this happen?” How could the mechanized killing of millions of people happen in a modernized country in the twentieth century? Surely, whoever is to blame for these atrocities, this black spot on the human race is unlike you and me. Blame must be placed on something grand and evil. This type of thinking makes it possible to blame an overpowering government. The Secret Police of Germany during this time, also known as the Gestapo, was one of the groups that was put on trial and allocated blame for the Holocaust after World War II. A common perception of the Gestapo up to the present day is that it was a wide-reaching group, with an officer on every street corner and a tap on every phone; that a conversation was scarcely held without the Gestapo knowing about it. This image of the Gestapo, however, is a myth. Uncovering the origins of this myth is important because without understanding how these concepts were and are promoted we fail to learn one of the many lessons of the Holocaust. Inadequately placing blame for the horrors of the Third Reich leads down a dangerous path.

One would have to have more than a casual knowledge of the Gestapo to know anything different from the common portrayal. A variety of factors have led to this perception being built up in people’s minds. For instance, pre-war descriptions of the Gestapo aggrandized its abilities. Postwar historical writings focused on other aspects of the Gestapo that promoted its presence as being large and frightening. Furthermore, postwar images of overpowering governments became even more culturally relevant with the release of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Scholars have written about the Gestapo since the end of the Third Reich. There are a number of important histories that have been written that help us understand how the Gestapo has been perceived. According to Eric A. Johnson, the historiography of the "Nazi Terror" has progressed through three stages.¹ Works written during the first stage displayed the Gestapo as an elite organization, highly influential in an all-powerful and all-knowing police state. For instance, Edward Crankshaw's 1956 work, *Gestapo: Instrument of Tyranny* puts the Gestapo on the grand scale of all Nazi war crimes, saying in its final chapter that it is impossible to separate the crimes of the Gestapo from other Nazi agencies such as the S.S. and S.D.² The next stage of scholarship portrayed the German people as the victims in a very resistant Germany. It is only in the past twenty years that historians have begun to see the Gestapo as a smaller, but still quite guilty, body. Contemporary historians focus on how heavily the Gestapo relied upon tips from German citizens rather than their own intelligence-gathering agents to implicate criminals and opponents to the government.

The violence of the Nazi state from the time it took control of Germany in 1933 until its demise at the end of World War II is extremely well documented and indisputable. The brutality of many groups within the Third Reich is beyond debate. Millions of Jews and other political opponents were imprisoned and murdered in a variety of ways. Through the use of gassing, mobile killing squads, neglect, and deliberate starvation, Nazi Germany cemented itself as the most brutal regime in modern history. The Gestapo played an important role in this process of genocide. From the beginning they arrested opponents of Hitler and legally persecuted Jews. The Gestapo would oversee the transport of Jews to the ghettos, all the while treating them in an inhumane manner.³ Most of these deported Jews were eventually murdered.⁴ This is certainly not a group without guilt.

The goal of this paper, however, is to establish the various origins of modern perceptions of the Gestapo. There were many different areas in which the Gestapo was active. This group was charged with the protection of Hitler's ideological policies within Germany. This meant locating enemies of the Reich and either imprisoning them or eliminating them. The Gestapo targeted Jews, Communists, deviants and any others who were critical of the regime.⁵ They enforced social policies such as those set up by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. These laws prohibited Jews from

marrying non-Jewish citizens as well as banning sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jewish citizens.⁶ The Gestapo was also involved in various instances of violence involving prisoners of war.⁷ This paper will focus on the perception of the Gestapo as an extremely large, forceful group that was very present in the lives of an unwilling German population.

Recent works have focused on the use by the Gestapo of denouncement from ordinary German citizens. It has been established that the Gestapo relied on the German people to give information about their neighbors in order to determine who would be arrested or deported to a concentration camp.⁸ It has been said that eighty percent of Gestapo investigations began because of a denouncement.⁹ A case study of the Krefeld Gestapo yielded similar results. It stated that only twenty percent of the investigations against Jews began due to information gathered by the Gestapo without the aid of a civilian denouncement.¹⁰ *Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent?* by Klaus Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul also provides empirical evidence in its case against the Gestapo's supposed intrusion in German society. It concludes that while major cities such as Berlin had a Gestapo office with capable manpower, offices at the local level were understaffed.¹¹

It is not difficult to imagine that the general public would think of the Gestapo as omnipresent. From the beginning they have been portrayed as being exactly that. *The New York Times* ran an article on February 17, 1936 that portrayed the Gestapo as an omniscient group. This article lays out many of the modern perceptions of the Gestapo. After stating a few conventions of living under a dictatorship, the article elaborates:

The reason for these particular conventions is the Gestapo, the all-pervasive secret State police, which rarely appears in public prints but is ever-present in the mind of almost everybody in Germany, high or low, native or foreign, in office or out of it, and which prides itself on the fact that it is dreaded by all those 'with a bad conscience.'¹²

This portion of the article is almost a glowing review of the Gestapo. It proceeds to use flattering language calling it a "fear-inspiring group."¹³ The term that most speaks to the theme of this paper is "all-pervasive." To be all-pervasive something must be very present in all aspects of German life. Pervasive is an

interesting choice of words as it implies an unwanted presence. Foul odors can be pervasive. Corruption can be pervasive. Joy and good sportsmanship are never described as "pervasive." The article also presents the idea that no one is safe from the long arm of the Gestapo, no matter your class or political standing. A *Chicago Tribune* article from 1938 goes as far as to say that, "the people realize they are powerless, that they can do nothing against the Gestapo."¹⁴ A pre-war review of the book *The Brown Network* in *The New York Times* highlights some frightening Gestapo tactics: "They break into houses, tamper with the mails, violate bank secrecy and pose as foreign police officers."¹⁵ While the book under review deals exclusively with foreign espionage, the reviewer makes broad statements about what Gestapo agents do. Even before the war, all of these seeds were continuously planted in the minds of the public.

It is at least mentioned in every article that the Gestapo is the *secret* state police, as stated in their name. Some articles mention that they are rarely written about in German newspapers,¹⁶ but that was not the case in the United States. During the rise of the Third Reich, Americans saw what Europeans and German society had to be scared of in their daily newspapers. Tales of kidnappings and espionage riddled the newspaper page. For instance, on June 6, 1935, a *New York Times* article told the story of Josef Lampersberger under the title "Terror Silences Émigré Freed by German Police." After being kidnapped and returned, Lampersberger refused to say what happened to him at the hands of the Gestapo out of fear of being returned to his captors.¹⁷ Short articles about alleged Gestapo agents being imprisoned as spies began appearing.¹⁸ The Gestapo was credited with being behind the best "spy system" in the world in a 1938 *New York Times* article. The article presented the testimony of a former President of the Berlin Police. The article describes the great competency of the German foreign espionage services and asserts that America is in danger.¹⁹ So, according to the article, not only were Europeans lives at risk from the Gestapo, now Americans reading at home had a reason to fear Nazi terror.

The legal power that the Gestapo had, if and when they chose to exercise it, also promotes this popular picture. The legal system within the Gestapo was unchecked. It had power that ordinary courts did not have and was not subject to any sort of review process.²⁰ This boundless power can instill in the minds of the public that the organization was larger than it was. Why would a

police force with such a small officer to citizen ratio have such extreme capability? Nazi Germany's government was a large and confusing mix of departments with varying degrees of authority. Each department could be seen as just following orders from another department but at other times seem to answer to no one. Crankshaw's 1956 history claims that the confusion present in Nazi Germany was intentional.²¹ This may have played a role in popular perception, as it was difficult, especially immediately after the war, to separate the crimes of the Gestapo from other organizations such as the S.S.

Someone reading American newspapers after the war might also find it difficult to appropriately place blame. A postwar example of how it might be difficult to separate the blame from one organization to the other concerns the case of Josef Meisinger. A November 16, 1945 article in *The New York Times* proclaims that the 'Butcher of Warsaw' had been transported after arrest to California. The article mentions multiple times that he was a former leader of the Gestapo.²² The crimes he was being held for were in connection with the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto and the deaths of thousands of residents. These connections to such brutality paint a picture of an extremely powerful organization. At the postwar trials at Nuremberg, the Gestapo was put on trial as a "criminal organization" along with the S.S., S.A., S.D., and the Nazi high command. An outcome of this trial was not only the sentencing of individuals involved with certain crimes but banning these organizations from ever existing again.²³

The common view of the Gestapo was also promoted in 1960's scholarly works such as *The Gestapo: A History of Horror* by Jacques Delarue. He titled one of his chapters "The Gestapo is Everywhere."²⁴ In this chapter he lays out exactly the persisting impression of the Gestapo: they secretly installed monitoring equipment in the homes of many Germans and no one was safe from the spying and eavesdropping of Gestapo henchmen.

Postwar scholarly work and newspaper articles coincided with the release of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The popular perception of the Gestapo bears a striking resemblance to the "Thought Police" in George Orwell's 1949 novel. The "Thought Police" are the secret police of the totalitarian government. They are in charge of locating political enemies and controlling the mass population's social actions as well as their thoughts. Their deception is unparalleled.²⁵ Orwell's novel is a sharp political and social commentary at a very relevant time. The world of *Nineteen Eighty-*

Four is controlled and stifled by three large governments. It shows that humanity and culture may disappear if we allow ourselves to fall under the control of massive totalitarian states. Free thought is in danger of being wiped out through legislation. Social regulations and the implementation of a new language that removes words such as "liberty" threaten the advancement of the human race. The term "doublethink," which originated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, can be applied to many practices of the Nazi regime. According to the novel, "doublethink" is to hold contradicting beliefs yet believe both of them, or "to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies."²⁶

The novel has found a way to permeate popular Western culture. It has been adapted into film or television many times as well as referred to in music and other books since its publication. Terms and characters from the book have found their way into common speech. "Big Brother" is a prime example. Its use in the English language is usually in the context of a large central government watching you and keeping tabs on what you say and do. The Third Reich is certainly seen as an "Orwellian" government. Nazi Germany is the closest example that the world has to a modern totalitarian government like the one in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The concept of the Gestapo being extremely pervasive that has grown out of these various sources may have deflected blame from the German public in the years after the war. Making Oceania of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* synonymous with the Third Reich would relieve some of their guilt in the entire situation. As opposed to being compliant, denouncing their community members, and playing along with the Gestapo, the German people can be seen as victims of an overpowering police state. This specifically relates to the second stage of scholarship on "Nazi Terror." If the German people were victims and not denouncers for the second stage as well, that gives the "Gestapo agent on every street corner and in every alleyway" myth more time to develop in the minds of the American public.

The Orwellian view of National Socialism is certainly present in modern American society. This perception has most likely been built up in the minds of the general public because of the immediate writings on the Gestapo after the war. Furthermore, the similarities of the popular image of the Gestapo to the "Thought Police" are too plentiful to ignore. Orwell's book must have affected if not the minds of the general public than the world in

which they lived. Recent academics have proven, however, that there was not enough manpower to have the type of blanketing effects that are popularly thought of with the Gestapo. They also assert that the Gestapo relied heavily on civilians denouncing their neighbors or providing anonymous tips and not on their own intelligence gathering skills. It is only in the last few decades that a clear statement has been made about how Gestapo investigations began. This conjures many more questions to add to the seemingly endless questions that were created by the Holocaust. This is a trade-off in much of Holocaust scholarship: answer one question while raising two in its place. The German population was more compliant than the popular perception would lead one to believe, but what does that say about humanity and the greater theme of victimhood during the Third Reich?

Notes

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- 3 Johnson, *Nazi Terror*, 398.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 405.
- 5 *Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence*, "Gestapo," (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 2005).
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- 8 Laurence Rees, *The Nazis: A Warning From History*, (New York: The New Press, 1997), 64.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Johnson. *Nazi Terror*, 150.
- 11 David F. Crew, *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945* (New York, Rutledge: 1994), 174.
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- 15 Emil Lengyel, "The Nazi Spy System at Work All Over the World," *New York Times*, March 29, 1936.
- 16 Tolischus, "Reich Puts Curbs."
- 17 "Terror Silences Emigre Freed by German Police," *New York Times*, June 6,

1935.

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- 19 "Reich Spy System Seen as the Best," *New York Times*, June 22, 1938.
- 20 *Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence*, "Gestapo."
- 21 Crankshaw, *Instrument*, 228.
- 22 "'The Butcher of Warsaw' Arrives in California," *New York Times*, November 16, 1945.
- 23 *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*, "Nuremberg Trials." (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005).
- 24 Jacques Delarue, *The Gestapo: A History of Horror* (New York: Morrow, 1964), 86.
- 25 George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four. A Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).
- 26 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, part 1, chapter 3.

Felicia Morris

Beautiful Monsters

Providence assigned to woman the cares of a world that is particularly her own, and it is only on this that man's world can be shaped and constructed. That is why these two worlds are never in conflict. They complement each other, they belong together, as man and woman belong together. We feel it is not appropriate when woman forces her way into man's world, into his territory; instead we perceive it as natural when these two worlds remain separate.

-Adolf Hitler¹

Though it was Adolf Hitler who spoke these words aloud, his speech reflected the feelings of many men and women in the Third Reich. According to Nazi ideology, it was the man's place to go out and provide monetary sustenance for the family while woman's existence was solely to serve as the carrier and cultivator of Nazi Germanic perfection. As Hitler later mentioned in the same speech,

What man offers in heroic courage on the battlefield, woman offers in ever-patient devotion, in ever-patient suffering and endurance. Each child that she brings into the world is a battle that she wages for the existence of her people. Both man and woman must therefore value and respect each other, when they see that each accomplishes the task that nature and providence have ordained.²

Clearly, Hitler felt that women, by "nature and providence," were meant to serve Germany as baby machines. The Nazis, however, as with many things concerning their regime, did not always practice what they preached. Though there have been many scholarly works written about the topic of women in the

Third Reich, this paper will focus on the many inconsistencies in Nazi ideology on women by using the Nazi SS-Aufseherin (female guard) Irma Grese, as well as a few other similar female examples, as case studies and examples of how the popular feminine ideal in the Third Reich was never as it appeared. Beginning with their indoctrination in Nazi ideology and concluding with their ultimate fate, this paper will seek to prove that Nazi women were just as capable of evil as men were.

The League of German Girls (BdM)

When Hitler and the Nazis came to power, they devised numerous ways to inundate the children of Germany with their doctrines. The most effective method for female children came in the form of the "League of German Girls," or BdM (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*). Created in 1930, the BdM was a Nazi "educational" program that taught young Aryan girls how to become the perfect Nazi citizens. The program was split into sections: The Young Girls League (*Jungmädel*) for girls from ages 10 to 14, and the League Proper for girls from 14 to 18. Eventually, a third section was added to the BdM for young women ages 17 to 21, called the Belief and Beauty Society (*Werk Glaube und Schönheit*).³ These Nazi youth groups, created for the sole purpose of benefitting the Reich, mimicked the many ranks in the actual Nazi Party structure.⁴ In March 1939, membership in the Hitler Youth for all young people 10 and up became mandatory for all those deemed racially pure. This was a precautionary measure to ensure that the desirable youth in the German population were fully indoctrinated in Nazi ideology to better serve the Third Reich and to teach younger girls and boys how to behave like perfect Nazi citizens.

What drove Nazi ideology was Hitler's urgent desire for a pure Aryan race. Women were not despised in Nazi Germany; in fact, they were revered as important and fertile instruments that would give birth to and raise the perfect German citizens. When asked if she had ever given any thought to fleeing Germany during Hitler's reign, Frau Margarete Fischer replied, "Nein, nein. I was too nationally minded for that. I wanted to will my strength to the children."⁵

The Hitler Youth made absolutely certain that this ideology was driven into the minds of all German adolescents, especially girls and young ladies. As a former official within the BdM, Jutta Rüdiger, explained in 1939:

Today, we all know that men and women, and boys and girls make up the nation, and that each has to carry out his duty to the nation according to his station. Boys will be raised as political soldiers, and girls as brave and strong women, who will be the comrades of these political soldiers – and who will go on to live in their families as women and mothers, and help shape our National Socialist world view – and to raise a new generation which is hard and proud. Therefore, we want to shape girls who are politically conscious. That does not mean women who debate or discuss things in parliament, but girls and women, who know about the necessities of life in the German nation, and act accordingly.⁶

It was perfectly acceptable for a woman to be aware of the political activities that took place around her (provided they coincided with Nazi ideology); however, women were to have no direct influence on important political decisions.

The “Bitch of Buchenwald”

For a great majority of young German women considered to be “racially pure,” the BdM served to alleviate the boredom of youth, and it gave many what they believed to be the chance to become a part of something bigger than themselves, something that brought about a sense of unity. As Melita Maschmann, a teenager during the Nazi takeover in Germany, explained,

Whenever I probe the reasons which drew me to join the Hitler Youth, I always come up against this one: I wanted to escape from my childish, narrow life and I wanted to attach myself to something that was great and fundamental. This longing I shared with countless others of my contemporaries...⁷

Many contemporaries of Maschmann, however, were women who deviated from the Nazi ideology of motherhood, and acquired reputations so notorious that they shocked many in the Western world once their heinous deeds were brought to light. Irma Grese was not the only female Nazi perpetrator within the SS. There were many others who deviated from the common Nazi ideology of motherhood with quite notorious reputations as well. One such woman was the wife of a commander of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Ilse Koch, the “Bitch of Buchenwald,” became

notorious for her extreme cruelty towards camp prisoners and sexual escapades with the other prison guards. Koch's most infamous alleged sin, however, comes from the numerous claims that she had the skin of deceased prisoners made into lampshades.⁸ Her notoriety was widespread by the end of the war, as can be seen by Gene Currivan's observations during his visit to Buchenwald after its liberation by the U.S. Army:

One of the first things that the German civilian visitors saw as they passed through the gates and into the interior of the camp was a display of 'parchment.' This consisted of large pieces of human flesh on which were elaborate tattooed markings. These strips had been collected by a German doctor who was writing a treatise on tattoos, and also by the 28-year-old wife of the *Standartenfuehrer* or commanding officer. This woman, according to prisoners, was an energetic sportswoman who, back in Brandenburg, used to ride to hounds. She had a mania for unusual tattoos, and whenever a prisoner arrived who had a rare marking on his body, she would indicate that that trophy would make a valuable addition to her collection. In addition to the 'parchments' were two large table lamps, with parchment shades also made of human flesh.⁹

Though researchers today still scrutinize these accusations, it is clear that Ilse Koch was known for her cruelty towards the prisoners of Buchenwald and she was believed by many to be capable of such a monstrous crime against humanity.¹⁰ Ultimately, Koch was sentenced to life imprisonment, but she went insane and committed suicide while incarcerated in 1967.¹¹

Aside from Koch there were other perpetrators, such as Dorothea Binz, who would beat, slap, kick, and whip inmates without any sign of mercy.¹² SS Guard Juana Bormann was known as "The Woman with the Dogs." She gained sadistic satisfaction by letting her wolfhounds loose on prisoners so that they could do her dirty work.¹³ Sadly, these women were not alone in their monstrous acts. There were also numerous others, the majority of whom gained their notorious reputations at Auschwitz-Birkenau, such as: Maria Mandel, Luise Danz, and Elisabeth Volkenrath. Though these women did not gain as much notoriety as their other female

comrades, their fates were ultimately similar. In total, over 3,600 women were employed in the concentration camps, but only 60 stood trial. Of these 60 women, only 21 were executed. Those who were not sentenced to death were either imprisoned for life, or given some alternate form of imprisonment and/or punishment.¹⁴

Although the Nazi Party's perception of women was one of purity and maternal strength, there were in fact quite a few women, though not nearly as many of them as men, employed at concentration camps as matrons or guards. According to survivors' accounts, these women, ranging from baronesses to prostitutes, were the most vicious among all of the guards. As Claudia Koonz argues in her book, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, the women who did end up as matrons and/or guards at the concentration camps most likely behaved in such abnormal ways because their occupations within the camps were so far removed from the popular Nazi ideology of the strong Nazi mother.¹⁵

Irma Ilse Ida Grese

Although many of the crimes committed by these women were, without argument, atrocious acts, there is one woman whose heinous deeds surpassed even Koch and her contemporaries. This young woman was christened Irma Ilse Ida Grese. Born in 1923 to Alfred and Berta Grese, Irma's family life and early years would eventually play a major role in her fanaticism with the Hitler Youth. Irma's father was a stern man who joined the Nazi Party in 1937. Irma probably learned much about the Nazi Party through her father, but he was not a fanatic. The actions of her mother Berta most likely caused Irma to immerse herself in the Hitler Youth. Berta, overwhelmed by life events (including her husband's infidelity) drank a bottle of hydrochloric acid with the obvious intent to kill herself. Although she was discovered by her husband and children and rushed to the hospital, they were unable to save her and in January of 1936, Berta Grese died. The young Irma was only twelve years old.¹⁶

Young Irma was not only deemed racially desirable by the Nazis, but she was also viewed as being a desirable member of the Hitler Youth because of her father's occupation as a dairy farmer. The Nazi regime held all youth in high regard; however, they held rural youth in even higher esteem because of their connection with the soil, which the Nazis viewed as a sacred entity. Irma left elementary school, for reasons unknown, at age fourteen. Somehow, from 1939 until the middle of 1941, Irma became an

assistant nurse's aide under the Senior Consultant of the nursing home and SS hospital, Professor Karl Gebhardt at Hohenlychen. However, Grese was apparently not very efficient at providing care to patients there. After two years of working as a nurse's aide, she was referred to Ravensbrück, a concentration camp located in northern Germany, where she would ultimately find her "true" calling as an SS-*Aufseherin*.¹⁷

Irma Grese first arrived at Ravensbrück in March of 1941; however, she was told to return in six months time when she would be eighteen and of the proper age to enlist for training. She waited over a year to return to the facility and when she did so, she volunteered for the auxiliary guard service. This presents an important and startling fact: Irma Grese chose to be an active service member and camp guard. As Daniel Patrick Brown points out in his book, *The Beautiful Beast*, there is clearly a difference between women who were drafted into SS service and those who volunteered for it.¹⁸ As previously explained, Grese came from a modest family with a tragic history that likely still haunted her in her later years when she opted to be employed in the SS. Grese also apparently possessed less-than-average intelligence and, as Brown points out in his study, strongly exhibited "frustration-aggression syndrome," in which an "abused" child grows up to do the same to his/her own children (in Grese's case, her prisoners) because of her highly traumatic childhood. All of these elements likely made Grese highly susceptible to the machinations and the promises of the Third Reich.¹⁹ This is not presented as a justification for Grese's actions, but merely as a means of attempting to explain the inner workings of the woman's mind. The fact is that Grese and other female guards within the camps behaved atrociously and committed heinous crimes against humanity. Grese's crimes began with the "training," or beating, of inmates. Apparently, through this, Grese discovered she received some form of sadistic pleasure when witnessing the pain of others, especially when she was the one inflicting it.

Irma Grese remained at Ravensbrück for seven months where she primarily oversaw work details, or *Arbeitskommandos*. In March of 1943, she was transferred to the infamous concentration camp Auschwitz, initially as a telephone operator. Soon, however, she was promoted to the higher position of camp guard. Through this occupation she earned her notorious reputation, becoming both feared and hated within the Nazi camp. Olga Lengyel, a Hungarian prisoner at Auschwitz-Birkenau describes her: "When she [Grese]

walked through the camp [Birkenau] with a whip in her hand she reeked with the smell of cheap perfume."²⁰ The cellophane "whip" became her trademark, especially for the prisoners who were witness to (or victims of) the whip's stinging lash during "*Sport Machen*" when the camp guards would beat and torture the already weakened inmates. Though Grese disputed ever using the whip on inmates, many prisoners later testified to the contrary. Prisoners such as Ilona Stein provided eyewitness accounts of Irma Grese's brutality with both the whip and her fists:

Earlier Miss Grese had seen a mother and daughter talking through a barbed wire fence separating two parts of the camp. This was forbidden and Miss Grese rode over on a bicycle and beat the daughter until blood ran down her chest. Both had to be taken to a hospital... She often beat people with her riding whip. When people were being loaded on trucks to be taken to the crematorium, Miss Grese would push them about and hit them with a stick. I did not have much to do with Miss Grese, so she beat me only once when someone started talking to me through the wire.²¹

Grese was also rumored to have a voracious and sadistic sexual appetite that she seems to have gained through her intimate association with the notorious "Angel of Death," Dr. Josef Mengele.²² However, according to camp survivors Isabella Leitner and Olga Lengyel, Grese also had homosexual affairs with prisoners (which strongly violated the Race and Resettlement Act) and, once he learned of her "unnatural" proclivities, Mengele called the affair off.²³

While at Aushwitz-Birkenau, Grese continuously proved to be a walking, talking contradiction of the female Nazi ideology that placed Aryan women on a pedestal, especially those who "did their duty to their country" and bore many healthy children. It would appear that Irma Grese's numerous sexual proclivities soon caught up with her. According to the writings of Gisela Perl, a Jewish inmate physician at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Grese approached her and demanded an examination to determine if she might be pregnant. Grese was indeed pregnant, and the next day the two women met again (on Grese's orders, as the Nazi Racial Law prohibited Jews from touching Aryans) and the fetus was aborted.²⁴ Grese, arguably a fine specimen of "Aryan

Womanhood," was employed as an *SS-Aufseherin*, supposedly to help the German cause, yet she secretly thwarted the Nazis through many of her actions, especially this one. For a pure, Aryan woman, even if the child she bore were illegitimate, that child was still considered by the Nazis to be a "valuable" member of German society. An Aryan abortion was explicitly prohibited within Nazi Germany.



Figure 1²⁵

Though transferred to Ravensbrück for a short amount of time in January of 1945, Irma Grese was quickly reassigned to Bergen-Belsen in March of 1945. By the time Grese had arrived at Bergen-Belsen, the camp was most commonly referred to as a "sick camp." Though her stay at Bergen-Belsen lasted less than a month, Grese resumed the "Sport" she and the other guards had so enjoyed inflicting upon the previous inmates at both Ravensbrück and Auschwitz. It was here, at Bergen-Belsen, that Irma Grese would acquire her infamous nickname, "The Blond Bitch of Belsen." Even though the collapse of the Third Reich was close at hand and many of the SS guards were aware of the fact, Grese apparently did not prepare herself for the consequences of her actions in the camps and continued behaving in a cruel and depraved fashion toward the camp prisoners. Perhaps she did not

care about the Third Reich's collapse, or, perhaps she just could not stop herself at this point. Either way, Grese herself acknowledged her awareness of the frequent deaths all around her in the camp and she also maintained that she "never tried to gain favor with inmates, even when she knew Germany would lose the war."²⁶ Bergen-Belsen was liberated on April 15, 1945 and the SS camp guards, had any of them ever doubted Germany's defeat, were quickly brought to the harsh reality of their increasingly ominous situation.

Irma Grese and her SS comrades were tried by English law in what came to be known as "The Belsen Trial," even though the crimes committed had also occurred at Auschwitz and other camps as well. The defense openly confirmed that Irma Grese had committed atrocities in both Aushwitz-Birkenau and Belsen.²⁷ Grese dug an even deeper hole for both herself and her comrades by testifying that all members of the SS were guilty:

But I suppose I have as much guilt as all the others above me. I mean by this that simply by being in the SS and seeing crimes committed on orders from those in authority and doing nothing to protest and stop them... makes anybody in the SS as guilty as anybody else. The crimes I refer to are gassing people at Oswiecem and the killing of thousands at Belsen by starvation and untended disease. I consider the crime to be murder.²⁸

Therefore, by her own confession, Irma Grese implicated herself and her fellow SS colleagues in mass murder.

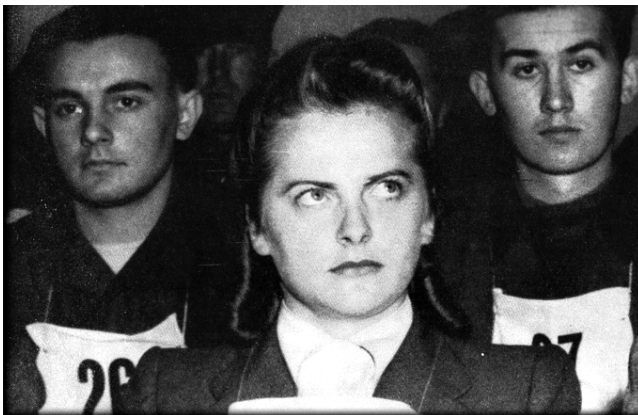


Figure2²⁹

On November 17, 1945, Irma Ilse Ida Grese, along with several others, was sentenced to death for crimes committed at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen, and was executed on December 13, 1945.³⁰ Just like that, one of the great and infamous terrors of the SS was gone forever. Never again would the "Beautiful Beast," as she was referred to by journalists during the Belsen Trial, be able to physically harm another poor soul for the sake of Germany and the "Führer." Irma Grese, like many others in her position in the SS, had started out as a decent human being with so much positive potential, but eventually ended up being severely contorted by the tragedies of life and the devious machinations of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, one must also not forget that Grese was a human being capable of making her own decisions, whether consciously or not. Like many of her German contemporaries who were on a quest to discover who they really were (many of them also finding their place within the Reich), Irma Grese appeared to have found her life's purpose through SS employment and at the expense (and lives) of numerous helpless concentration camp prisoners.

Motivations for Evil

Over 3,600 women were employed as a means to further advance the Nazi cause. Everything about the SS-*Aufseherin* in the Nazi concentration camps was a contradiction. The mere presence of women workers in these camps was a contradiction to the Nazi doctrine that stated that a woman's place was in the home. Nazi social policy clearly stated that women of pure Aryan blood were to bear many children for the sake of the Führer and, subsequently, the State.³¹ However, women such as Irma Grese and Ilse Koch defied the strict edicts proclaimed by the German state that placed woman's status beneath that of man, even as they fanatically embraced much of the Nazi ideology that had placed such a large chasm between the two sexes. What drove these women and their many female contemporaries to join such a contradictory political party? One could argue that it is human nature for each individual to be contradictory in some way, and they may be right to some degree; however, these women were thoroughly convinced that Germany, and their Führer, were in the right for their deplorable actions towards the Jews and others they considered to be enemies of Germany.

The answer can most likely be found in the explanations of the majority of historians of Nazi women such as Claudia Koonz and

Daniel Patrick Brown, and of contemporaries of Nazi Germany such as Melita Maschmann. All argue that it was German women's desire to be a part of something larger and more important than just themselves as individuals. Another major factor was most probably the liberty and freedom of individuality such positions allowed within the concentration camps. This is where much of the cruelty and depravity can likely be accounted for, since, as Koonz says, Nazi women were so far removed from their "normal" pure and nurturing environment that they had no real direction to go save for the brutal one provided for them by the SS. Regardless of their individual motivations, all of these women deviated from the popular Nazi ideology of "Aryan Womanhood," while still playing major roles in the Nazi Regime. Were these women just following the orders given by their superiors? Judging by their cruel and depraved acts, such as Irma Grese's sexual escapades and Ilse Koch's mania for unusual body art, almost certainly they were not. These women were more than just the executors of their superiors' abominable commands. They were individuals capable of making their own immoral decisions, as they have so clearly shown, with or without the permission of their male superiors. These women, these mass-murderesses, were more than comely Nazis obeying orders. They were more than just individuals who discovered a cause they felt was right and decided to join. They were much more than just guards with whips and hateful, yet attractive, visages in a concentration camp. These women of the SS Guard were well and truly monsters.

Notes

- 1 Adolf Hitler, "Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization," September 8, 1934, in *The Nazi State and German Society*, ed. and trans. Robert Moeller (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Publishing, 2010), 80.
- 2 *Ibid.*, "Speech," 81.
- 3 "Bund Deutscher Mädel: The League of German Girls" (1930), <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/BDM.html> (accessed October 29, 2010).
- 4 D. P. Brown, *The Beautiful Beast* (Ventura, CA: Golden West Historical Publications, 1996), 16-17.
- 5 Quoted in Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 9.
- 6 Jutta Rüdiger, "On the League of German Girls," in Moeller, *The Nazi State*, 85.
- 7 Melita Maschmann, "A German Teenager's Response to the Nazi Takeover in January 1933," in Moeller, *The Nazi State*, 49.

- 8 "1937: Quiet Before the Storm" <http://www.holocaustchronicle.org/StaticPages/117.html> (accessed November 7, 2010).
- 9 Gene Currivan, "Report on a Visit to a Nazi Concentration Camp Liberated by the U.S. Army," 18 April 1945, in Moeller, *The Nazi State*, 179.
- 10 "Dachau Trials: The Trial of Ilse Koch," <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/dachauscrapbook/DachauTrials/IlseKoch.html> (accessed November 8, 2010).
- 11 "1937: Quiet Before the Storm."
- 12 Brown, *The Beautiful Beast*, 35.
- 13 "Juana Bormann" <http://www.auschwitz.dk/women/Bormann.htm> (accessed November 8, 2010).
- 14 "Female Nazi War Criminals" <http://www.capitalpunishmentuk.org/nazigirls.html> (accessed November 8, 2010).
- 15 Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 404.
- 16 Brown, *The Beautiful Beast*, 11-14.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 24-26.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 27-28.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 43-44.
- 21 "Belsen Tortures By Woman Listed," *New York Times*, September 27, 1945.
- 22 "Angel of Death: Josef Mengele" <http://www.auschwitz.dk/mengele.htm> (accessed 7 November 2010).
- 23 Brown, *The Beautiful Beast*, 50-51.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 25 Figure 2, "A photograph of Irma Grese in her SS guards uniform," <http://www.scrapbookpages.com/bergenbelsen/BergenBelsen08.html> (accessed November 2, 2010, public domain).
- 26 Brown, *The Beautiful Beast*, 62-66.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 76-79.
- 28 "Belsen Girl Guard Blames All of SS," *New York Times*, October 6, 1945.
- 29 Figure 2, "Two male former SS prison guards and Irma at trial," <http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/staff/staffphotographs.asp?campstaffid=53&photographsid=725&index=25> (accessed 3 November, 2010, public domain).
- 30 Brown, *The Beautiful Beast*, 93.
- 31 Koonz, *Mothers*, 3.

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