

# LEGACY

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## Erin Anderson

### **The Great Social Evil: Geographic and Social Segregation in Metropolitan Victorian Prostitution Reform**

What is a prostitute?...She is a woman with half the woman gone, and that half containing all that elevates her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity; degraded and fallen she extracts from the sin of others the means of living, corrupt and dependent on corruption, and therefore interested directly in the increase of immorality – a social pest, carrying contamination and foulness to every quarter to which she has access....<sup>1</sup>

-William Acton, 1870

The nineteenth century was an era of social dichotomization. The expansion of the middle classes precipitated new distinctions between the rich and the poor, men and women, and the “haves” and the “have nots.” People increasingly defined themselves not only by what they were, but also by what they were not.<sup>2</sup> This disparity fostered a sense of social and moral superiority among the upper and middle classes that quickly became an integral part of so-called “Victorian values.”

These values emphasized, among other traits, religious piety, sexual purity, self-help, frugality, and charity.<sup>3</sup> The latter generated an era of top-down volunteerism in Victorian England in which the upper classes sympathized with the unsanitary living conditions of the underprivileged.<sup>4</sup> The idea was to “rescue” the poor from their filth and sin in order “to re-establish a sense of their own direction and to make a contribution to the common good.”<sup>5</sup> However well-intentioned the reformers may have been, the fact remained that a gulf of misunderstanding divided them from the recipients of their aid.

Such was the case with Victorian England’s prostitution reform efforts. An unnamed contributor to the *British Medical Journal* in 1870 put it this way: “We are exhorted to charity towards ‘fallen sisters’; and deficiency of Christian love is imputed because we are not willing to recognize and befriend the class referred to.”<sup>6</sup> In this essay I will argue that attempts to reform or eradicate the sex trade in urban Victorian England resulted in the geographic and social segregation of prostitutes from “civilized” (i.e. upper and middle class) society. Anthropologist Mary Douglas described taboos as “the by-product of a systematic ordering and

classification of matter in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.<sup>7</sup> Prostitutes were the ultimate Victorian sexual taboo. The life and practices of a prostitute were incompatible with idealized Victorian values, and thus the “working girl” found herself spatially and morally marginalized to prevent her from “inflict[ing] the greatest scandal and damage upon society.”<sup>8</sup> Reformers accomplished this by restricting the geography of prostitution and by shaping contemporary rhetoric to depict prostitutes as societal outsiders in the public opinion.

Estimates of the number of prostitutes in Victorian England vary widely. Nineteenth century researcher William Acton cited numerous sources claiming that the population of prostitutes in London ranged anywhere from 8,600 to 80,000 in his comprehensive study on the subject.<sup>9</sup> Of course, these estimates included only the demographics of densely populated London, not of any other large towns or cities, let alone the rural countryside, and can hardly be considered more than guesses. Furthermore, as Fraser Harrison noted, “many of the women walking the streets...were irregulars who did not live by prostitution, but who turned to it, whenever necessity dictated, in order to supplement incomes derived from other sources.”<sup>10</sup> Though exact statistics are difficult to ascertain with any real certainty, we may reasonably conclude from historical accounts and modern studies that prostitutes were numerous enough that “everyone who sought a prostitute could be confident of finding one appropriate to his pocket and requirements.”<sup>11</sup>

Prostitutes generally operated through three main institutions: introducing houses, dress houses, and accommodation houses. Introducing houses provided a location run by a third party, usually a procuress, where prostitutes could meet up with their nightly companions.<sup>12</sup> Acton described these rendezvous points saying, “They concern us...little from a sanitary...point of view, but are not without an influence upon the morals of the highest society.”<sup>13</sup> However, introducing houses made up only a small portion of England’s sex trade. Many more prostitutes worked in dress houses. Owners of dress houses provided food, clothing, and lodging for prostitutes. Drawn ever deeper into debt to their hosts, the women plying their trades on the streets were effectively trapped in a state of slavery.<sup>14</sup> Most Victorian prostitutes preferred to work independently on the streets and to take advantage of accommodation houses. These houses gave them a place to take their sexual partners temporarily for a modest fee, usually paid by the client.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to arrive at an accurate number of accommodation houses since, as Acton describes, “these houses are so quietly kept, that police supervision is...impossible.”<sup>16</sup> Often they took the form of a few extra rooms above a tavern or an extra bedroom let secretly by an individual to supplement his or her income.<sup>17</sup>

The inability to detect prostitutes’ lodgings was just one reason police found it so hard to regulate and control prostitution. Another was the transient nature

of the sex trade. Prostitutes could practice their trade in any town or city, and “if a prostitute is prosecuted for plying her trade in one parish, she will only move into another.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, not every prostitute was a “professional.” In times of want or need some prostitutes sought additional income. One woman interviewed reported that she only prostituted herself when she wanted to afford “some little luxury in the way of food or clothes” that her salary as a typesetter could not cover.<sup>19</sup> Even when police successfully detained prostitutes, the women often returned to the streets immediately upon their release from jail. Roughly ten percent of prostitutes arrested near Cambridge University between 1823 and 1894 were arrested at least ten times.<sup>20</sup> The fluidity of the sex worker demographic made it difficult for police to control the English sex trade.

However, this did not stop observers from blaming the continued existence of the sex trade on the failure of the police.<sup>21</sup> They believed that “everything that concerns the relations of the sexes concerns the purity of our homes, the interests of morality...and the honor of our race.”<sup>22</sup> The upper and middle classes wanted an effective solution for the stain that “diffus[ed] itself through the social fabric.”<sup>23</sup> But it would have been a hopeless undertaking to try to eradicate prostitution completely. Acton began chapter two of his book by saying, “Prostitution [is] an inevitable attendant upon civilized, and especially closely-packed, populations. When all is said and done, it is, and I believe ever will be, ineradicable.”<sup>24</sup> For this reason, Victorian legislation placed more emphasis on limiting, controlling, and corralling prostitutes than it did attempting to exterminate the sex trade.

In 1864, Parliament passed the first of three Contagious Diseases Acts. Together these acts worked to control and limit prostitution in coastal towns in an attempt to lower the prevalence of syphilis contracted after sexual liaisons with prostitutes among army and navy personnel. The second and third acts (passed in 1866 and 1869 respectively) extended the geographic reach of the original act. Under this trio of legislation, women merely *suspected* of prostitution or of suffering from a sexually transmitted disease could be forced to undergo an involuntary medical examination. They could be detained for up to nine months in lock hospitals, which specialized in treating venereal diseases.<sup>25</sup> Responses to these acts divided the nation.

Opponents of the acts varied in their reasons for disapproval. A group of 124 women published a “Protest against the Acts” saying that “the Acts put women at the mercy of the police, that they unjustly punished the sex who were its main cause, and that they cruelly degraded their female victims.”<sup>26</sup> An unknown author of *The British Medical Journal* took a very different approach. He argued that “syphilis and gonorrhoea do stand for many men as efficient scarecrows in the fields of forbidden pleasure” and that by attempting to remove the threat of venereal disease, the government was removing the only deterrent preventing men from using prostitutes even more frequently.<sup>27</sup>

Others, like William Acton, were wholly in favor of this legislation. In a response to the aforementioned anonymous article, Acton declared that he had “long been dissatisfied with the *know-nothing, do-nothing* effete system of the passing century” and regretted that the unnamed author would dare to place “more value on the morals [of the acts] than on the health of the Englishman.”<sup>28</sup> Acton and his fellow supporters of the Contagious Diseases Acts believed the “magistrates should exercise the law—should clear the streets of every one of these infamous women, and make them at least decent, if they cannot make them moral and virtuous.”<sup>29</sup> Acton’s argument clearly displays a common Victorian attitude: that prostitutes—like their fellow lower class compatriots—are inherently morally corrupt, and that no amount of legislation or charity could effectively change that. Thus, his argument follows, laws must be passed to effectively contain this immorality and its physical consequences (i.e. venereal disease). The Association for Promoting the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Act published its argument that “No woman need be a prostitute unless she chooses, but that if she deliberately adopts such a mode of gaining her living, the imminent risk which she incurs of contracting a serious disease renders her so dangerous in the community as to justify state interference to prevent her doing much mischief to others.”<sup>30</sup> Supporters of the act clearly believed that the power of the law was the only hope of controlling a naturally sinful society.

Lock hospitals and lock asylums were the main institutions through which the English government attempted to reform prostitutes and eradicate prostitution (or at least reduce the prevalence of venereal disease).<sup>31</sup> In Britain, the most prominent of these institutions were the London Lock Hospital and London Lock Asylum, respectively. Lock hospitals were responsible for treating both men and women suffering from sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>32</sup> Until the Contagious Diseases Acts implemented their policies of involuntary quarantine for infected prostitutes, these institutions were simply a specialized sub-set of medical care facilities.<sup>33</sup> Their emphasis was on curing their patients of *physical* ailments only. Lock asylums, on the other hand, were reserved for women exclusively, and emphasized a *moral* reform of prostitutes admitted to lock hospitals. Only women were considered suitable for the sexuality alteration programs of a lock asylum because “men had a natural sexual impulse which they could not control because it was innate in them,” therefore making reformation impossible, “but women were held to be responsible for the purity of the nation, therefore they had to be chaste.”<sup>34</sup> Inmates of lock asylums underwent a stringent curriculum emphasizing the “Victorian values,” in short, upper and middle class morality and respectability.

The use of medical detention was one of the key dividing factors in the debates about the Contagious Diseases Acts. The *British Medical Journal* played host to many of these arguments in print. One contributor against the use of lock hospitals made the point that, “. . . it is said, every woman guilty of syphilitic



disease must be held in durance until she is cured. But why not also every man? Do men never spread the disease?"<sup>35</sup> Women, far more often than men, were targeted for incarceration in lock hospitals and were far more likely to receive the moral education of lock asylums.<sup>36</sup> For many opposed to the acts, the singling out of women (and prostitutes specifically) as targets was the greatest issue. However, equally as many supporters were quick to turn the tables and argue that the *act* of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or infection was the justifiable cause for incarceration, not the woman's gender or profession. Another writer for *The British Medical Journal* stated rather simply that "a prostitute still continues to be in law a disorderly character, [and is therefore] liable to be treated as such."<sup>37</sup>

Each side of the Contagious Diseases Acts debate based its arguments on both sanitary and moral grounds, though at times the two became one and the same. Such was the case more broadly for prostitution reform throughout Victorian England. The health and legal elements of reforms were tied inextricably to the morals and values of the upper and middle class reformers. They could neither tolerate nor eradicate the blemish of prostitution from society completely, so instead, they separated themselves from it socially and geographically.

Of particular importance when understanding the segregation of prostitutes from Victorian society were mid-nineteenth century expressions of sexuality. Victorian-era morality was based largely on idealized standards of societal perfection. Members of the upper and middle classes created these mores and—with their perceived class superiority—took upon themselves the responsibility to hold the lower classes accountable for the latter's failure to meet these criteria. This further rifted the upper and middle classes from the working class, creating insurmountable moral divisions between the two groups.

Puritanical notions of sexual purity were strictly dichotomized between the "wicked" and the "angelic"; there was no middle-ground, and "the natural place for women was with the angels."<sup>38</sup> Double standards of the Victorian era required that women remain paragons of virtue, while society expected men to have natural, but largely uncontrollable, sexual urges they must somehow relieve.<sup>39</sup> Prostitutes provided a solution to this social dilemma. The exact Victorian understanding of a prostitute was relatively imprecise.<sup>40</sup> Given this age of dichotomization—and keeping in mind Mary Douglas's definition of taboo subjects as "matter out of place"—it is appropriate to turn to Lynda Nead's description of prostitutes in the Victorian era:

The category of 'prostitute' was not fixed or internally coherent; it was accommodating and flexible and could define any woman who transgressed the bourgeois code of morality. The prostitute was understood in terms of her difference from the norm of respectable femininity: if the feminine ideal stood for normal, acceptable sexuality, then the prostitute represented deviant, dangerous and illicit sex.<sup>41</sup>

Society considered prostitutes especially sexually immoral because of their perceived ability to separate sex from its moral consequences.<sup>42</sup> Victorian culture vilified prostitutes not only for violating “civilized” social constructs of sexual purity, but also for supposedly tempting otherwise virtuous (i.e. upper class) men to give in to their primal sexual urges.

Historian W. H. Lecky wrote, “...the sensual side of [human] nature is the lower side and some degree of shame may appropriately be attached to it.”<sup>43</sup> In many cases this “lower side” of human nature was directly equated with the working class lifestyle. One observer described it thus: “To put it bluntly, sexual promiscuity, and even sexual perversion, are almost unavoidable among men and women of average character and intelligence crowded into the one-room tenements of slum areas.”<sup>44</sup> The direct relationship between sexual immorality and the lower classes originated with the upper and middle classes’ sense of moral superiority that was designed to keep the former in a state of perpetual subjugation.

Fraser Harrison argued in his book *The Dark Angel* that the upper and middle classes *intentionally* created and preserved morally-based social divisions between the higher and lower strata of society. He writes,

In order to perpetuate the all-important distinctions between one class and another, and in order to expiate any pangs of guilt arising from the knowledge that prostitution was a form of exploitation by one class of another, it was essential that the class from whom prostitutes were recruited was credited by the class that kept them in business with a fundamentally sinful nature. By the same token, it was essential that the exploiting class bestowed upon its own women a fundamental innocence....<sup>45</sup>

In short, by separating itself morally from the lower class, the upper and middle classes of society placed themselves in a superior, and therefore more powerful, social and political position from which to dictate the laws and mores governing the lower class.

Prostitutes in particular were considered especially heinous to society because they were not self-containing within the slums of metropolitan England. Victorian-era rhetoric portrayed prostitutes as both a medical and moral threat to the “civilized” social code designed by the upper class. Prostitutes’ sexual availability purportedly acted like the Sirens’ call to “civilized” men who were tempted into sin by these “harlots.” Physically, prostitutes also appeared to pose an imminent threat to England. Victorian society believed that the “constant recirculation of potentially diseased women into the population” posed an “invisible but omnipresent national threat that [could not] be curtailed without panoptic surveillance and enforced regulation.”<sup>46</sup> The transient and largely untraceable nature of the sex trade in England purportedly necessitated the

creation of such strict regulations in order to curtail the endangerment of the broader community.

Prostitution reforms like the Contagious Diseases Acts were nominally designed to reduce or eliminate the *physical* effects of prostitution, namely venereal disease. However, in practice, these regulations and reform efforts were created to remedy prostitution's *moral* affront to society. William Acton blamed many of England's problems with prostitution on the prevalence of sex workers themselves. He wrote, "...thousands would remain uncontaminated if temptation did not seek them out."<sup>47</sup> Even the doctors examining prostitutes (as called for by the Contagious Diseases Acts) were considered by their contemporaries to be performing a great sacrifice in merely associating their name with common street-walkers.<sup>48</sup> More generally, the upper strata of society aggressively attacked prostitution because it "undermined their family structures, humiliated the women, brutalized the men, and exercised a malign influence over the children."<sup>49</sup> It is important to note however, that this moral alienation was a purely upper and middle class construct. As Harrison argued, "Working-class women who took to the streets were not excommunicated by their families, friends, and neighbors; they were pitied, abused, exploited, or even admired by their immediate community, but they were not rejected."<sup>50</sup> The social divisions were constructed from the top down by the upper classes, not by other members of the lower classes. However, in order for these moral distinctions to effectively curb the spread of the "loathsome poison" of prostitutes' immorality through the upper strata of society, geographical restrictions had to be created as well.<sup>51</sup>

Victorian prostitution regulations were aimed less at ending prostitution or reforming the sex workers themselves than they were designed to remove the sex trade from the purview of "civilized" society. The goal of such regulations was "to remove [these] women as far as possible from the public streets and to enclose them in specified spaces of sexual exchange."<sup>52</sup> Most often authorities accomplished this by either restricting (either *de jure* or *de facto*) the territory in which prostitutes may ply their trade or by incarcerating sex workers in the aforementioned lock hospitals or lock asylums.

Nineteenth century researcher William Acton understood that because the sex trade was naturally fluid, attempting to eradicate prostitution in any one region would simply lead to its expansion elsewhere. He therefore recommended that since prostitution was "a thing to be kept within certain bounds, and subjected to certain restraints and surveillance," that it "must so far as possible be kept a thing apart and by itself."<sup>53</sup> Spatial segregation seemed to be the only way to effectively decrease the influence of working girls on men. Some urban areas established "sex districts" or "vice zones." These tolerance zones promoted connectivity between the prostitutes and criminals but also facilitated more accurate and consistent registration and tracking of working girls.<sup>54</sup> For example, Cambridge University's population of young, single men

supported the flourishing *de facto* sex zone of Barnwell, a working-class town east of the university itself. As Philip Howell describes, "If Barnwell was never a licensed prostitional space, the proctorial system ensured that it functioned for authority in more or less the same manner."<sup>55</sup> In this way, prostitution was tolerated in Victorian society, but only in specific geographic regions where its moral influence on upper and middle class society was negated, or at least lessened, by physical distance. In locations where the creation of a new space for containing prostitution was an impractical solution (especially in urban centers), authorities focused on moving prostitution off public streets to indoors. Laws were "designed more at protecting the neighbors than curbing anything that might be going on inside."<sup>56</sup>

Broad geographic legislation begs a return to the discussion of Victorian-era sexuality as well as historical discussions of public versus private spheres. James Walvin perhaps described it most concisely when he wrote, "The Victorian hesitation to speak or write about sexual matters was part of a long tradition of delicacy about behavior which was, and is, highly personal."<sup>57</sup> Sexuality was a *private* affair and wasn't meant to be flaunted by whores on street corners where the respectable public must be subjected to their indecency. The purpose of geographical legislation was to diminish the effects of prostitution on the senses of upper and middle class society by removing prostitution from the public sphere (or at least the *respectable* public sphere) to the private, isolated neighborhoods of the working class.

However, when policing the haunts of prostitutes failed to have the desired effects, authorities changed their tactics and began restricting the movements of the street walkers themselves. Under the Contagious Diseases Acts, women who contracted venereal diseases could be involuntarily quarantined in lock hospitals for up to nine months.<sup>58</sup> By legally detaining women, and prostitutes in particular, Victorian society took the ultimate step in the segregation of the working class girls: incarceration. Previous regulations had dealt with prostitution on an institutional level; with the implementation of lock hospitals in tandem with the Contagious Diseases Acts, English society controlled and regulated the movements of prostitutes on an individualized level.

Of course, although prostitution reform had no qualms about taking serious and domineering steps to alleviate the moral and physical impact of the English sex trade on "civilized" society, the legislation always maintained a rhetoric of protection and improvement consistent with Victorian-era volunteerism. "In lock asylums women were taught appropriate behavior through religious instruction, and a decent working class profession, so that a process of inclusion in respectable society would be fulfilled after a process of exclusion had taken place in an institution that was run according to middle class values."<sup>59</sup> Lock asylums placed an emphasis on the moral reformation of their inmates with the ultimate goal of returning former prostitutes to society in the role of domestic servants well versed in the values of upper and middle class society.<sup>60</sup> Even the goal of lock asylums

—preparing women to work in upper and middle class households—reinforced the social segregation already established between the two groups; high society remained the master and commander of the lower classes.

In many ways, the consortium of lock hospitals and lock asylums was the epitome of geographic and social segregation in Victorian England's prostitution reform efforts. Prostitutes were specifically targeted for incarceration in these institutions because they failed to conform to traditional Victorian values of propriety and private sexuality. The legislation that legalized prostitutes' involuntary detention—most notably the Contagious Diseases Acts—was created by members of the upper and middle classes who, being in a self-proclaimed superior social and moral position, believed it was their duty to "civilize" the working classes. Rather than truly working to re-introduce prostitutes to society, existing legislation focused on removing the immoral "blemish" of the sex trade from the purview of high society thus restricting its existence to very specific geographic locations, namely tolerance zones and lock hospitals and asylums. The upper and middle classes designed English prostitution reform laws to physically segregate prostitutes from society with the justification of removing the group's corrupting influence to prevent further damage on civilized and moral society.

Participants in the Victorian sex trade simply could not live up to the values established by the upper echelons of English society. The working class had not created these mores, but they were bound by them all the same. Working from their "civilized" position, the privileged classes of Victorian England took it upon themselves to raise up their "fallen" working class "sisters" in prostitution. While nominally a noble gesture, in reality the new legislation and reforms passed during the second half of the nineteenth century benefitted the upper and middle classes far more than it actually helped reduce the population of prostitutes in urban England, ameliorate the plight of venereal disease, or reintegrate street walkers into "civilized" society.

What these new reforms did accomplish was to widen the social gap between the privileged classes of society and the working class. The combination of Victorian era morals and the rhetoric of reform efforts painted the image of the English prostitute as an immoral disease that if left unchecked would corrupt society from the bottom up. Additionally, the new legislation created during this time geographically removed prostitutes and their profession to specific isolated locations where they could not inflict harm on the upper and middle class society. Toleration zones created a sanctioned space where prostitution could continue unmolested by the authorities as long as it did not offend the delicate sensibilities of the upper and middle classes. Likewise, lock hospitals and lock asylums ostensibly acted as a refuge for prostitutes to heal their physical and moral diseases but in reality served as penitentiaries under the Contagious Diseases Acts. The social and geographic segregation of working class prostitutes created by Victorian reforms was not designed to help

prostitutes at all; rather, segregation was used to remove the taint of prostitution from the purview of upper and middle class society.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (London: Frank Cass, 1972, originally published 1870), 166.
- <sup>2</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "The Middle Classes in Europe," in *The European Way: European Societies during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Harmut Kaelble (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 17.
- <sup>3</sup> Asa Briggs, "Victorian Values," in *In Search of Victorian Values*, ed. Eric M. Sigsworth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 15.
- <sup>4</sup> Bill Forsythe and Bill Jordan, "The Victorian Ethical Foundations of Social Work in England: Continuity and Contradiction," *British Journal of Social Work* 32 (2002): 849.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> "The Control of Prostitution," *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 494 (1870): 631.
- <sup>7</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1996), 36.
- <sup>8</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 30.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3-4.
- <sup>10</sup> Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality* (New York: Universe Books, 1978), 218.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Michael Pearson, *The Age of Consent: Victorian Prostitution and Its Enemies* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David and Charles, 1972), 26.
- <sup>13</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 14.
- <sup>14</sup> Pearson, *The Age of Consent*, 27.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 16.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 15-16.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>19</sup> Harrison, *The Dark Angel*, 235.
- <sup>20</sup> Philip Howell, "A Private Contagious Diseases Act: Prostitution and Public Space in Victorian Cambridge," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26, no. 3 (2000): 390.
- <sup>21</sup> "Pseudo-Cures for the Social Evil," *The British Medical Journal* 2, 146 (1863): 425.
- <sup>22</sup> "The Control of Prostitution," 630.

- <sup>23</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 48.
- <sup>24</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 28.
- <sup>26</sup> Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 56.
- <sup>27</sup> "The Control of Prostitution," 631.
- <sup>28</sup> William Acton, "Shall We Find that by the Control of Prostitution We have Irretrievably Lost in Morality and Gained Not at All in Health?," *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 498 (1870): 76, 77.
- <sup>29</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 221.
- <sup>30</sup> Association for Promoting the Extension of the Contagious Diseases Act, *3rd Report*, 29 quoted in Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 55-56.
- <sup>31</sup> The word 'lock' implied a social evil which respectable society perceived as a peril. Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz, "Fallen Women and the London Lock Hospital Laws and By-Laws of 1840 (Revised 1848)," *Journal of English Studies* 8 (2010): 147.
- <sup>32</sup> Both men and women received treatment for venereal diseases in lock hospitals, however only women were legally obligated to remain there under the Contagious Diseases Acts. "Pseudo-Cures for the Social Evil," *The British Medical Journal* 2, 146 (1863): 426; Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz, "Fallen Women and the London Lock Hospital Laws and By-Laws of 1840 (Revised 1848)," *Journal of English Studies* 8 (2010): 143.
- <sup>33</sup> Ruiz, "Fallen Women," 143, 146.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.
- <sup>35</sup> "Pseudo-Cures for the Social Evil," *The British Medical Journal* 2, 146 (1863): 426; Ruiz, "Fallen Women," 143.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.
- <sup>37</sup> P.H.H., "The Contagious Diseases Act," *The British Medical Journal* 2, 500 (1870): 130.
- <sup>38</sup> Michael Pearson, *The Age of Consent*, 17.
- <sup>39</sup> This is not to suggest that Victorian women (of any class) lacked sexual desires. I argue only that the accepted outlets of feminine sexuality were severely restricted relative to those of men. James Walvin describes it like this: "Female sexuality was assumed to take place within the confines of the family; but this had also been true for centuries. It was equally applicable to menfolk, though they, unlike their wives, had opportunities of sexual encounters outside marriage; the degree to which they took up these opportunities is unclear, and presumably varied enormously. But it would be bizarre to imagine that, in general, men were forced into the arms of mistresses and prostitutes because of the frigidity of the bourgeois married woman. Some doubtless were; many

were not." James Walvin, *Victorian Values* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 125.

- <sup>40</sup> The basic *definition* of a prostitute is obvious, but here I am referring to the *understanding* of a prostitute, meaning the perception of prostitutes juxtaposed against broader upper and middle class definitions of civilized society.
- <sup>41</sup> Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (London: Blackwell, 1988), 94-95 quoted in Ruiz, "Fallen Women," 143.
- <sup>42</sup> Shalyn Claggett, "Victorian Pros and Poetry: Science as Literature in William Acton's *Prostitution*," *Prose Studies* 33, no. 1 (2011), 28.
- <sup>43</sup> Quoted in Asa Briggs, "Victorian Values," in *In Search of Victorian Values*, ed. Eric M. Sigsworth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 23.
- <sup>44</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 129.
- <sup>45</sup> Harrison, *The Dark Angel*, 229.
- <sup>46</sup> Claggett, "Victorian Pros and Poetry," 30.
- <sup>47</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 166.
- <sup>48</sup> "Pseudo-Cures for the Social Evil," *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 146 (1863): 426-427.
- <sup>49</sup> Harrison, *The Dark Angel*, 234.
- <sup>50</sup> Harrison, *The Dark Angel*, 234.
- <sup>51</sup> Acton, *Prostitution*, 74.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.
- <sup>53</sup> William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (London: Frank Cass, 1972, originally published 1870), 206, 230 quoted in Shalyn Claggett, "Victorian Pros and Poetry: Science as Literature in William Acton's *Prostitution*," *Prose Studies* 33, no. 1 (2011), 31.
- <sup>54</sup> Howell, "A private Contagious Diseases Act," 380.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.
- <sup>56</sup> Pearson, *The Age of Consent*, 25.
- <sup>57</sup> Walvin, *Victorian Values*, 122.
- <sup>58</sup> Under the original act, women could only be detained for three months, but the second act extended it to six months and the third act further extended it to its ultimate length of nine months. Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, 28.
- <sup>59</sup> Ruiz, "Fallen Women," 143.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.



## Mike A. Mroz

### Black Cowboys of the Cattle Frontier

“Did you know that one of the most successful mustangers (one who captured wild mustangs) in the American Wild West was Bob Lemmon, a Negro cowboy who captured mustangs by making the mustangs think [he] was one of them?”<sup>1</sup>

Black cowboys, including Bob Lemmon, were among the many cowboys that roamed the open ranges and drove cattle across Texas and the rest of the cattle frontier during the nineteenth century. It was the work of the cowboys that gave Texas its nickname of “The Beef Empire of the United States.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars estimate that over five million cattle were driven north from Texas and sold to eastern markets between 1866 and 1885.<sup>3</sup> During this time, ranch owners hired strong men with a skill set characteristic to the line of work of a cowboy. This selective preference was partially because few people in the Western Frontier actually possessed the skills required of cowboys. At the heart of this careful selection, ranch owners needed someone who was capable of making money for them; the cattle industry was a business. For ranch owners, the skills and competency that the positions required outweighed the color of a man’s skin. Black cowboys played an integral role in the development of the cattle frontier, which has often been overshadowed by that of their white counterparts. This paper will highlight the role black cowboys played in the emergence of the cattle frontier through a detailed analysis of responsibilities of cowboys, issues cowboys encountered along the drive, contributions of black cowboys to the cattle frontier, and personal accounts of black cowboys.

The historiography of the cattle frontier underscores the strong work ethic among cowboys. In his book *The Negro Cowboys* Philip Durham argues that a strong work ethic superseded any pre-existing racial tension or barriers between black and white cowboys. Durham writes that, “The demands of their job made them transcend much of their prejudice. On a drive, a cowboy’s ability to do his work, to handle his share and a little extra, was far more important than his color.”<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, a cowboy’s ability to perform his tasks not only warranted a level of respect among the members of his crew, but it also was essential for the successful completion of the cattle drive. In all, the cattle industry was a lucrative business for wealthy ranch owners. They needed resolute and reliable cowboys capable of driving thousands of wild cattle at once, where northern ranchers awaited, eager to buy breeding and feeder stock.<sup>5</sup>

Similar to Durham's analysis, Gina De Angelis claims in her book *The Black Cowboys* that ranch owners needed harmonious cattle crews with limited conflict. In order to sustain levels of harmony and to prevent conflict from uprising, cowboys often forbade any member of the crew from drinking, gambling, or even swearing throughout the duration of the drive. De Angelis also points out, "as with ranch cowboys, the demands of their jobs often forced trail drivers to abandon or transcend any prejudices they might harbor against black comrades."<sup>6</sup> With no room for racial barriers or internal conflict to exist, the fate of the drive fell in the hard-working and diligent hands of the crewmembers.

Contrary to Gina De Angelis's contention, other scholars such as William Katz argue that although the skin color of a cowboy was irrelevant in the eyes of a fellow crewmember, it certainly played a factor in the treatment of black cowboys after the completion of the drive. According to Katz, blacks faced more discrimination and segregation in larger, more stable western communities than in smaller, less developed communities.<sup>7</sup> Once the crew reached its final destination, specifically in one of the heavily white-populated cattle towns, black cowboys often experienced racial discrimination and harassment. Katz also mentions that many "cattle drive towns enforced only an informal segregation in saloons, but the cowhand camaraderie often times repeatedly challenged this racial barrier."<sup>8</sup> This statement made by Katz not only bears witness to the existence of racial barriers found in cattle towns, but it also compliments Philip Durham's argument that a strong work ethic superseded any pre-existing racial tension or barriers between a cowboy of color and a white cowboy throughout the cattle drive.

Contrary to the racial segregation that William Katz and Philip Durham claimed blacks often experienced, Nat Love, one of the most revered black cowboys in history, never mentioned any innuendo of racial segregation towards him during his short stays in the cattle towns.<sup>9</sup> In his autobiography *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love*, he describes his time spent in Dodge City, Kansas, as fun, eventful, and entertaining. According to Love, the crew's main mission was to have as much fun as they could possibly afford. Love and his crew spent an overwhelmingly large portion of their money on whiskey, dancing, and whoring.<sup>10</sup> At no point in Love's accounts did he ever provide any inclination to the existence of racial barriers that may have impeded him from partaking in the entertainment that was common to cattle towns.

Critics of Love argue that he omitted some truths from his accounts, including the existence of racial tensions between whites and blacks. It is important to note, however, that racial barriers existed not among the cowboys themselves, but rather with the white people that black cowboys came into contact with in cattle towns. Those racial tensions often tormented and restricted the liberties and freedoms of black cowboys during their stay. For example, some bartenders prevented black cowboys from sitting on a certain side of the

bar reserved for whites only. Moreover, some saloons prevented blacks from patronizing white prostitutes.<sup>11</sup>

Although racial barriers portrayed a common theme throughout the era of the cattle frontier, they served only as a small fraction of a much larger theme, which was the newly developing Western Frontier of the late nineteenth century. Scholars such as Colonel Bailey C. Hanes hold this claim because they believe that the Western Frontier signified the era of the cowboy and the illustrious cattle industry. The Western Frontier is considered a large component that makes up much of the historiography of the cattle frontier. According to Hanes, it was the thriving cattle industry, highly skilled cowboys, entertaining rodeos, and large profits incurred that became the forefront for the development of the Western Frontier. Specifically, Hanes mentions, "it was the exciting performances of famous cowboys like Bill Pickett in the 101 Ranch Wild West Show that drew up to 20,000 people at a time to the newly developed territories of the West."<sup>12</sup>

Similar to Hanes's account of a Western Frontier characterized by a powerful cattle industry, Matthew Ponsford argues that the Western Frontier evolved from the efforts of hard-working cowboys. Moreover, Ponsford credits much of the cowboys' success to a code of honor that existed between black and white cowboys. This *Cowboy Code* united the members of a cattle team, brought about steady profits, and ultimately contributed to the expansion of the newly acquired territory of the Western Frontier.<sup>13</sup> Scholars such as Ponsford and Hanes believe that the cattle industry and the Western Frontier are interrelated, and therefore one cannot be discussed without the other.

The birth of the cattle industry occurred in Texas in the second half of the nineteenth century, during a period of rapid change in American history. This period of transformation resulted from significant events in the country's history, including the Mexican-American War in 1848, the abolition of slavery in 1865, and the American Industrial Revolution. These three historical events transformed and expanded the Western Frontier into an area for resettlement, which allowed for the establishment of booming ranches that supported the emerging cattle industry. Consequently, ranch owners were in need of a sufficiently large labor force. Upon the abolition of slavery in 1865, ranch owners often supplied their labor force with black cowboys after many newly freed slaves migrated westward.<sup>14</sup>

As ranch owners fulfilled labor demands, they incurred large profits from the lucrative business. Much of their success resulted from the spread of industrialization into the Western Frontier. Between railroad expansion into the Southwest Territory and the increasing demand from eastern meat markets, Texas ranch owners acquired a new and efficient method of selling and transporting thousands of cattle for steep profits.<sup>15</sup> This marked a major turning point in the development of the cattle industry and the United States.

Over time, historians wrote extensively about those methods, developments, and accounts, which greatly influenced the growth and development of the cattle industry. However, many scholars excluded from their scholarship one of the most influential factors that led to the overall success of the cattle industry: the significant role black cowboys played throughout the cattle frontier. Although scholars of the cattle frontier wrote various studies on the black cowboys, the scholars simply acknowledged the cowboys' presence rather than systematically studying the significant role they played. Moreover, no one has ever challenged the status quo by claiming that the cowboys' influence on the thriving cattle industry of the nineteenth century belonged not only to white cowboys, but to black cowboys as well.<sup>16</sup>

Much of the historiography of the cattle frontier was written during the pre-civil rights era, thus many scholars' writings suggest that blacks played only a marginal role in its development. However, extensive inquiry into the cattle frontier allows us to understand just how significant of a role black cowboys played in its development. While additional recorded personal accounts of black cowboys can adequately support their tremendous role, these narratives are almost non-existent. Primary sources of this subject are scarce because very few blacks were literate during the era of the cattle frontier. However, the available sources provide insight into the lives of black cowboys and the role they played as integral participants in the development of the cattle frontier.

Nineteenth century cowboys were the backbone of the cattle frontier due to their hard working efforts. Cowboys performed many laborious tasks, while earning approximately five dollars a week and roughly twenty-five to forty dollars in monthly wages.<sup>17</sup> Ranch owners also provided room and board and three meals a day as an additional compensation. Although cowboys experienced much greater economic opportunities and benefits than perhaps industrial jobs in the late 1800s, life for cowboys was extremely rough and demanding. Contrary to Hollywood's portrayal of the great hero of the Wild West, the cowboy was actually one of the least glorified figures in the Western Frontier.<sup>18</sup>

The position of a cowhand required a specific type of individual capable of withstanding the rigorous labor demands in the cowhand's line of work. A cowhand was typically a young male, roughly around the age of fourteen or fifteen, who possessed a unique set of innate characteristics.<sup>19</sup> Those characteristics included a strong sense of determination, perseverance, mental fortitude, and a tremendous work ethic. Many of those young, able-minded, and physically capable individuals were black. Scholars estimate that out of the 35,000 cowboys that traveled up and down the Texas cattle trails between 1868 and 1895, about one-third were black.<sup>20</sup> Other historians suggest that black cowboys constituted roughly one-quarter of a normal sized cattle crew.<sup>21</sup>

During the two to three-month period that a typical cattle drive endured, black and white cowboys performed and shared many of the same duties and

responsibilities. Some of the most common responsibilities included steering the direction of the herd, roping any steer that strayed from the herd, and standing watch at night throughout the drive. In order to ensure the drive went smoothly and efficiently, all members of the crew worked in unison. They helped one another drive thousands of cattle at a time to numerous selling points and shipping yards located in northern cattle towns such as Dodge City, Abilene, and Ogallala.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes, cowboys rode as far as eighty miles a day up and down the cattle trails of Texas.<sup>23</sup>

During the long mileage, the cattle team experienced exhaustion throughout each drive. "It was a twenty four-hour responsibility for every member of the crew, whether they were black or white."<sup>24</sup> A cowboy's capacity to do his job well was more significant than his skin color. All of these responsibilities represented a strong sense of dependability on one another's performance. Together, black and white cowboys developed a "Code of the West," which was a sense of mutual dependency, forged by their communal work.<sup>25</sup> That mutual dependency was one of many examples throughout the drive that portrayed each crewmember's role as equally important to the overall completion of the drive and further development of the cattle frontier.

Beyond the many roles and responsibilities required of each cowboy, there were some unforeseen issues the crew often encountered throughout each drive. Cowboys commonly experienced minor problems such as encounters with rattlesnakes and wolves or a runaway horse. When a fellow crewmember suffered a rattlesnake bite and was unfit for duty, the rest of the crew took on his burden and responsibilities. Since the cowboys worked together as a team, any additional work that the crew acquired along the way was shared.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the more difficult challenges the crew faced along the drive were the crossing of American Indian sovereign lands, stampedes, and river crossings. In his autobiography, Nat Love indicates conflict with Indians was a common threat to his cattle crew. As Love and thousands of other cowboys rode up and down the Texas cattle trails, passing through various Indian territories, cattle teams usually incurred some form of toll from the native people. This toll was often transferred over in the form of a steer or money payment.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note, however, that not every Indian encounter ended peacefully.

Oftentimes, the cattle team fended for their lives against violent Indian retaliations.<sup>28</sup> Most Indian attacks occurred during the day. However, in some instances, the posse encountered a surprise ambush in the middle of the night. This called for the implementation of an active night watch as cattle teams stopped for rest in sovereign Indian territories. The night watch was crucial, not just for preventing cattle from wandering astray but because it ensured the overall safety of the entire cattle team. No member of the cattle team was exempt from the night watch. Without the nightly watch, the cattle team ran

the risk of failure for completion of their cattle drive; they entrusted their lives to one another.

Bill Pickett's rodeo technique of bulldogging was one of the most notable contributions made to the cattle frontier by a black cowboy. Bulldogging was a difficult and dangerous rodeo technique that involved jumping onto the back of a wild steer, then proceeding to take it to the ground by forcefully biting the steer's upper lip with one's teeth. The significance of Pickett's new and exciting technique was that it led to the creation of an entirely new rodeo event known as steer wrestling.<sup>29</sup> Over time, Pickett's spectacular rodeo performances generated large amounts of revenue for both the 101 Ranch Wild West Show and the state of Texas. Ultimately, Bill Pickett's impact on the Texas cattle industry and the rest of the cattle frontier earned him the prestige of becoming the first African American inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1971.<sup>30</sup> Bill Pickett's mark in history was just one of many contributions that black cowboys made to the overall development of the cattle frontier.

Another black cowboy that left a lasting impression in the history of the cattle frontier was Nat Love, who was known throughout the cattle frontier as "Deadwood Dick."<sup>31</sup> According to *The Chicago Defender*, Nat Love was "the most famous Negro cowboy who played a major part in the development of the Old West."<sup>32</sup> He was a brave, courageous, hard-working, and highly skilled cowboy. In 1907, Love published his autobiography *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country as Deadwood Dick* where he narrated many of his personal accounts and listed his grandiose accomplishments.<sup>33</sup> Love's account is extremely significant because it was the only full-length autobiography ever written by a black cowboy in an era when most blacks were illiterate.<sup>34</sup>

Although Love's autobiography mentioned little about the existence of racial barriers that he might have encountered as a black cowboy, it revealed much detail that was unknown at the time about the roles black cowboys played in the development of the cattle frontier. Love's accounts suggested that black cowboys played more than a marginal role throughout the cattle frontier because black cowboys shared the same responsibilities as their white counterparts. Above all else, Love confirmed that equal participation existed between black and white cowboys during the long and enduring cattle drives, by which much of the cattle frontier was forged during the nineteenth century.

While it seems that there was no racial discrimination among the crew during the cattle drives, it sometimes occurred back home on the cattle ranches. "Being a black cowboy was hard work," said Cleveland Walters, a black cowboy from Liberty, Texas. "When it was branding time, they'd put twenty cows in the pen and I was the one who had to catch them and hold them down. The brander was white—so in other words all the hard, dirty work was done by the black cowboys."<sup>35</sup> According to Walters, pawning off the hard and dirty work

onto black cowboys was one of the most common forms of racial antagonism he experienced on the ranch.

Although it appeared that white cowboys at times delegated the harder work to black cowboys, the cowboys' line of work encouraged the notion of teamwork. This form of teamwork implied that cowboys, both black and white, worked together for the overall completion of their tasks and responsibilities. Regardless of how easy or difficult one cowboy's task was compared to another cowboy's responsibilities, both proved just as instrumental to the outcome of their work. Moreover, both the individual and team efforts made by black and white cowboys exemplified an equally important role that brought success upon their ranch owner, which in effect, furthered the development of the cattle frontier. Against Cleveland Walter's claim that the brander was typically a white cowboy, Will Crittendon, another black cowboy from Texas, argues that the responsibility of the "brand man" was his.<sup>36</sup>

In an interview conducted by the Federal Writers Project in the 1930s, Will Crittendon attested to the many duties and responsibilities entrusted to him throughout his career as a cowboy. Crittendon recounted many of his tasks, which included branding the steers during the spring and fall round-ups, passing through dangerous river crossings along certain cattle drives, and breaking-in hundreds of horses for numerous ranch owners. Busting and breaking-in horses was such a common and easy task that "I'd contract to bust forty at a time,"<sup>37</sup> said the black cowboy from Cedar Grove, Texas. Although Crittendon claims the task was easy, breaking-in horses was another hard and challenging task that sometimes had dangerous or fatal outcomes.

It is important to note the significance of Crittendon's horse-breaking accounts and how they greatly affected the delivery of thousands of cattle to wealthy buyers north of Texas. The "breaking of stock (taming horses) and getting horses ready to ride each morning was often the work of the black cowboy," explains Michael Searless.<sup>38</sup> It was also "some of the roughest work," and black cowboys were oftentimes subjected to it "more than their white counterparts."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the duty of horse breaking was a tremendous responsibility because a horse was a cowboy's most important tool and resource for his job. Without a tamed horse, a cowboy or cattle team was unable to herd and drive cattle across the frontier. In effect, it was proficient horse breakers and black cowboys like Will Crittendon that provided an opportunity for the successful delivery of millions of Texas cattle to meat markets across the country throughout the nineteenth century.

After closer examination of the relevant scholarship and the available primary sources, it is clear that black cowboys played a large part in the development of the cattle frontier. Their significant role was evident in a number of ways, one of which was through the many roles and responsibilities that were required of cowboys. Over time, black cowboys proved themselves both capable

and worthy of those roles and responsibilities as they worked alongside their white counterparts during long and exhausting cattle drives.

Black cowboys also proved themselves just as competent as their white counterparts in resolving the many issues that the team encountered along the way. The way in which a cattle team negotiated those challenges throughout the cattle drives was through a reliance and dependence on every member of the team. Skin color held no bearing on each crewmember's trust, dependence, and performance during the cattle drives; yet skin color sometimes influenced the types of jobs assigned to both blacks and whites back on the cattle ranches.

As black cowboys demonstrated their competency and dependability along the cattle drives, they also solidified their place in history through many of their contributions. Famous black cowboys like Bill Pickett and Nat Love proved that black cowboys were capable of achieving great success. Moreover, Pickett and Love showed the rest of the country that black cowboys were not inferior to white cowboys. Their efforts and contributions to the cattle industry and cattle frontier were significant and long-lasting.

Many black cowboys' efforts and contributions to the cattle frontier were evident through the personal accounts of former black cowboys. As Cleveland Walters and Will Crittendon recalled some of the hardest work they dealt with as cowboys, it was clear that black cowboys sometimes acquired the least desirable tasks found within the job, while white cowboys received some of the most desirable tasks. Regardless of the caliber of work that a particular cowboy experienced, there was not a single task that was more significant than another. All of the work involved contributed to the overall success of the cattle industry, and ultimately the continued growth of the cattle frontier. After closer examination into the roles and responsibilities of black cowboys, it is clear that they played an integral role in the development of the cattle frontier; they should no longer remain in the shadow of their white counterparts.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Rosemarie Tyler Brooks, "At Last! 'The Negro Cowboy,'" *Washington Round-Up* (Chicago, IL), July 10, 1965.
- <sup>2</sup> Peter Argersinger, "The Cattle Frontier" (Lecture, History 466B: Trans-Mississippi West, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, March 22, 2014).
- <sup>3</sup> Gina De Angelis, *The Black Cowboys* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998), 40.
- <sup>4</sup> Philip Durham and Everett Jones, *The Negro Cowboys* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965), 44.
- <sup>5</sup> Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys*, 32. The term "feeder stock" refers to the cattle sold immediately to meat markets and buyers across the country upon their delivery to the cattle towns. The term "breeding stock" refers to the cattle that were purchased with the intention of breeding more cattle that would later be sold as feeder stock. Cattle typically lost much of their weight after a long



drive. Wealthy buyers purchased these cattle and fattened them up in order to reach their maximum potential market value and sold them later.

- <sup>6</sup> De Angelis, *The Black Cowboys*, 48.
- <sup>7</sup> William Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York: Harlem Moon/Broadway Books, 2005), 145.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> That Nat Love did not write about color prejudices should not suggest that they did not exist, but rather that extraordinary black cowboys faced fewer racial obstacles.
- <sup>10</sup> Nat Love, *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love, Better Known in the Cattle Country as Deadwood Dick* (Los Angeles: Privately published, 1907), 54.
- <sup>11</sup> Peter Argersinger, "The Cattle Frontier." (Lecture, History 466B: Trans-Mississippi West, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, March 24, 2014).
- <sup>12</sup> Bailey Hanes, *Bill Pickett: Bulldogger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 42.
- <sup>13</sup> "Folklore and Folklorists," *Western Folklore* 22, no. 3 (1963): 209-11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1498733>, accessed October 10, 2016. See page 9 for a more elaborate explanation of the Cowboy Code, which was also commonly referred to as "The Code of the West."
- <sup>14</sup> Like many whites during the late nineteenth century, blacks migrated westward in search of greater economic opportunities. In addition, many blacks migrated west with the hope of becoming cowhands. The position of a cowhand provided significantly less chance for racial antagonism to arise between blacks and whites than most other jobs in the country at the time.
- <sup>15</sup> De Angelis, *The Black Cowboys*, 38.
- <sup>16</sup> The status quo during the era of the cattle industry was that blacks were unworthy of the title of cowhand. Many believed that the title of cowhand was a prestigious title reserved only for white men. Hence, the term cowboy was coined because whites refused to acknowledge black males as men. Instead, they referred to adult black males as boys. Thus, a more degrading and less prestigious title of cowboy was given to blacks. Moreover, a common notion that existed during the nineteenth century was that blacks were incapable and unworthy of performing a task that many considered a white man's vocation.
- <sup>17</sup> Woody Phipps, "Trials of the Trail: African-American Cowboy Will Crittendon," <http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4934>, accessed October 10, 2016. At the time, no other job in America afforded workers respectable wages and working conditions as those found in the cattle industry.
- <sup>18</sup> Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys*, 12.
- <sup>19</sup> Argersinger, "The Cattle Frontier," Lecture, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, March 26, 2014.
- <sup>20</sup> John Marvin Hunter, ed., *The Trail Drivers of Texas*, 2nd revised ed. (Nashville, Tennessee, 1925), 453. Cited in Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys*.

- <sup>21</sup> De Angelis, *The Black Cowboys*, 48. A typical cattle crew consisted of usually eleven or twelve men, depending on the size of the herd.
- <sup>22</sup> Charles Poore, "Books of The Times: The Negro Cowboy in the History of His Country," *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1965. Dodge City, Abilene, and Ogallala were three of the largest, most notable cattle towns and shipping points throughout the cattle frontier.
- <sup>23</sup> Love, *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love*, 43. The most commonly used cattle trails consisted of the Chisholm Trail, the Shawnee Trail, and the Loving-Goodnight Trail.
- <sup>24</sup> Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys*, 44.
- <sup>25</sup> De Angelis, *The Black Cowboys*, 49. The Code of the West is a synonymous term for the Cowboy Code.
- <sup>26</sup> Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys*, 37.
- <sup>27</sup> Love, *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love*, 59.
- <sup>28</sup> It is important to note that as westward expansion continued, white Anglo-Americans violated the sovereignty of native people. Due to much distrust, deceit, and many negative encounters with the white outsiders, the confrontations often turned violent.
- <sup>29</sup> Hanes, *Bill Pickett: Bulldogger*, 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Teresa Palomo Acosta, "Black Cowboys," *Handbook of Texas Online*, (2010), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/arb01>, accessed April 2, 2015.
- <sup>31</sup> De Angelis, *The Black Cowboys*, 76.
- <sup>32</sup> "Negro Cowboys Helped Old West," *The Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1954.
- <sup>33</sup> During a short pit stop through the town of Deadwood, South Dakota, Love participated in a roping and shooting contest on a Fourth of July weekend. Love annihilated all of the competition in all three events, earning himself the nickname of "Deadwood Dick." The people of Deadwood proclaimed Love the champion roper of the western cattle country and a hero of Deadwood.
- <sup>34</sup> Katz, *The Black West*, 150.
- <sup>35</sup> Sarfraz Manzoor, "America's Forgotten Black Cowboys," *BBC News Magazine*, March 22, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21768669>.
- <sup>36</sup> Woody Phipps, "Trials of the Trail: African-American Cowboy Will Crittendon," *Texas A&M University Press*, 1984, <http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4934>. The brand man was the cowboy who marked the cattle with a permanent mark, representing the cattle ranch they belonged.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Matthew Ponsford, "America's black cowboys fight for their place in history," *CNN*, November 28, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/15/world/black-cowboys>.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## Emily Muszynski

### **The Sexualized Nature of Female Superheroes from 1940 to 1980: A Journey through Time, Comic Books, and the Women's Liberation Movement**

Comic books, in their modern form, have reflected and shaped American culture since their "cut-and-paste" birth in 1938. A year later, Superman became the nation's first titled superhero, creating a formula that the makers of heroes have been following ever since: a hyper-masculine costumed man is instilled with some sort of power and driven to save humanity and after capturing a villain, returns home at the end of the day disguised as an ordinary human.<sup>1</sup> Many of these men had female assistants, but one woman, Sheena Queen of the Jungle, was the first self-titled, scantily-clad superheroine of these early books.<sup>2</sup> In 1941, Wonder Woman took the stage in *All-Star Comics* #8. Oversexualized and strong, she represented a new, feminist driven superheroine whose audience included both men and women.<sup>3</sup> She would later be reinvented every decade to better reflect society's expectations of women. Regardless of feminist intentions, Wonder Woman and subsequent superheroines created in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s were ultimately created for the avid comic book readers: young men. The women's liberation movement of the 1970s heavily influenced these superheroines, pushing for the creation of women characters that went against expectations for women to show their capacity to change society. However, even Wonder Woman and the original superheroines of the X-Men, whose feminist movement driven creators were targeting a male and female audience, were unable to break away from the oversexualized, weak image that plagued women and women superheroes from the 1940s to the 1980s.

The audience, publishing team, and character choices of the early comic book publications of the 1930s and 1940s were almost exclusively male. Debuting in a society where men were the breadwinners and women were domestics, these books featured overly masculine god-like heroes eager to save the universe from its own destruction by defeating villains. Victoria Ingalls, an evolutionary psychologist who has studied the drive behind the creation of these characters writes, "...cross culturally, the desire to exert dominance through physical aggression expresses itself in men more than women, that physically aggressive behavior is especially prevalent in male children."<sup>4</sup> Taking this into account, it is clear that the popular hero of the time was almost forced to be a punch-throwing male superhero due to the single gendered nature of the industry and

its audience. The more soldiers who were involved with World War II, the more resonant this heroic image became; comic books were targeted at young men who were looking up to or wishing to be soldiers fighting for freedom. In many of these early books, the heroes were accompanied by female sidekicks who, instead of capturing a female audience, always managed to get into trouble and needed to be saved. Historian Mike Madrid claims that these partners were an integral part of the comics of this time. Their subordinate, naïve, and “girlish” characterization reinforced the gender roles of society where men dominate women and did not attract female readers.<sup>5</sup> In this way, early comic books found their specifications; with a target audience of young males, heroes needed to fight dirty, speak dirty, and be dirty.

Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, was the first woman superhero to have her own book under this formula. Though her character was conceptualized before Superman, the self-titled comic book was released in 1942. Like comic book characters throughout history, Sheena is a product of her time. She was created in this male-dominated industry, where aggressive behavior and annihilation of villains were paramount. Sheena embodied this idea wholeheartedly as she swung through the trees and killed hunters or jungle warriors in a savage-like manner.<sup>6</sup> Nothing was left to the imagination when reading her comic. She was pictured with a short leopard print dress, long, blonde hair blowing in the wind, showing off her voluptuous breasts [see link to image 1]. She was no doubt a woman and one made for a male audience; it was ultimately the male-dominated production team and paying audience that demanded her sexiness. Ingalls explains that “for the male mind, a hero must be ultrapowerful, females should display signs of fertility, and females...should act in ways that suggest the possibility of a sexual encounter.”<sup>7</sup> Sheena is the poster-woman for all of these aspects of the male definition of a superheroine. Consequently, the lack of a strong female viewership barred her from representing any other style. Though her overtly sexual style was contested by the more conservative lifestyle of the time, she paved the way for other woman-dominated comic books such as Wonder Woman, whose characters were sexy like Sheena but strong in message.

Wonder Woman was both a product of her time and a product of this early superheroine; her creator highlighted the sexual aspects while creating a character that embodied feminist ideas of the early 1900s. Wonder Woman, alias Diana Prince, was created by William Moulton Marston, a Harvard graduate and the inventor of the lie detector. Marston, born in 1893, grew up surrounded by a mother and aunts who were well versed in the philosophy of the feminist movement of the 1910s.<sup>8</sup> These family members taught Marston to hold women with the utmost respect, treat them as equals, and above all, love them as superior beings when compared to men. William Marston kept these truths in mind throughout his childhood and into adulthood, eventually settling down in

a household with his wife, children, and his assistant.<sup>9</sup> Their arrangement was simple yet reflective of Marston's views of women. Sadie Holloway (his legal wife, and a women's movement supporter) was able to keep her high status job and be a mother because Olive Byrne (his assistant) could be home to take care of the children.<sup>10</sup> While Holloway was able to live the feminist dream, Byrne was encouraged to be the stay-at-home mother as was expected throughout the 1930s and beyond. An apt supporter of suffrage and subsequent women's movements, Marston outwardly respected his wife and assistant and supported their wishes to go through higher education and gain a foothold in the workforce, but there was also a sense of traditionalism in their household. Thus, Marston's home life supported women's equality so long as it was convenient, and the same went for Wonder Woman's story, characterization, and image.

In 1941, under the pseudonym Charles Moulton, Marston created Wonder Woman as a superheroine that contested the ideas of the male-led industry by highlighting contradictions in the same way his own private life embraced them. What resulted was the idea that Wonder Woman was not a character strictly for boys but also gave a voice to girls in pop culture, especially those who supported the feminist agenda. Again, like comic book characters before her, Wonder Woman was a product of her time. She was created during the U.S. involvement in World War II, a pivotal time for men and women alike. As the boys were seeking strong, masculine heroes who followed the formula established three years prior, girls were also looking for an icon to symbolize strength and peace. The culture during wartime focused on the perfect peace of the past and looked for American heroes (fictional and real) to help recreate this prewar society.<sup>11</sup> Wonder Woman, an Amazon princess and descendant of Greek and Roman Goddesses, was a heroine who appealed to the larger culture while also being gendered.

Wonder Woman's origin story saw a character that was both strong and gentle, a hero and a normal citizen, as well as a fantasy object and a female liberator. She hailed from an all-woman island in the Amazon, with its own rocky past. The Amazonian women defeated Hercules but were then put in shackles and forced to be slaves to him and his men.<sup>12</sup> In the same way that supporters of the women's suffrage movement chained themselves to government gates, preaching of a time when they are no longer shackled into submission by men, Marston's comic book world established a similar society. This ancient island was an allegory for the suffrage movement and opened the readers' eyes, especially the new target audience, to the oppressiveness of men, something Marston believed characterized American society. He took this a step further by having the Amazonian society establish an all-women, self-governed civilization on Paradise Island, where women were "not only stronger and wiser than men," but also had better weapons.<sup>13</sup> This society embraced its contradictions by developing a strong, modernized community that was gentle

and caring to all of its citizens, much like Marston's own home life. Wonder Woman's character further emphasized this strong vs. gentle contradiction through the very reason she became an American hero: she fell in love with an American pilot, Steven Trevor. "And so, Diana, the Wonder Woman, giving up her heritage and her right to eternal life, leaves Paradise Island to take the man she loves back to America—the land she learns to love and protect, and adopts as her own!"<sup>14</sup>

While in America, Diana (Wonder Woman) made the conscious decision to don a secret identity in order to save her relationship with Steven and protect her royal identity. While this was successful in the comic world, in the readers' world, it furthered the contradictory nature of the book. Though Wonder Woman, as a comic book, was revolutionary because it exposed the readership to feminist ideas and attracted a diverse audience, the inclusion of a secret identity gave a mixed message to the audience. On the one hand, her secret identity was following the same hero formula that brought Batman and Superman into popular culture and doing this made her destined to be popular to the primarily male audience. On the other hand, having two identities mirrored the lives of many women during this time. They were expected to reside in the domestic sphere. They raised good-natured children while also being expected to join the workforce to replace men in the jobs they left in order to join the war effort. The women in these early issues of the comic book were often drawn in a sexy, yet masculine style to appeal to an audience of different genders. This was also a popular drawing style of the era, and through dialogue and style these characters, "epitomized this new role and the culture's new appreciation and exploitation of women."<sup>15</sup> Some women embraced this secret identity by comparing the Diana Prince vs. Wonder Woman internal identity crisis to their own confusion about what American culture wanted for them. Other women drew away from the comic, confused at how a woman with two identities could be a fighter for the good of mankind. The sexual nature behind these early Wonder Woman stories made some women uncomfortable.

Under the guise of the suffrage movement, Marston made chains and shackles a regular part of Wonder Woman's adventures. Regardless of the fight or the enemy, Wonder Woman and her team were almost always being bound and shackled by men, with no hope to escape.<sup>16</sup> Historians have speculated over the reason for the excessive bondage within these early adventures. Kelli E. Stanley highlights a popular belief on the subject: "Wonder Woman's creator was consciously inserting these themes because he believed in the message: women must sexually dominate men."<sup>17</sup> Marston's own beliefs in the superiority of women over men fueled Wonder Woman's own image and adventures. Once again, this was contradictory in application. If Marston was really wishing to push a feminist social agenda, why promote a character in skimpy clothing who relives sexual fantasies repeatedly? There is only one answer to this question: sex sells.

Statistics from 1940s and 1950s reflect this statement in different respects. Though Wonder Woman's appeal to female audiences during her first decade is questionable, 1944 survey results from the Market Research Company paint a different picture. According to the survey, ninety percent of boys and ninety one percent of girls aged six to eleven were regular readers of comic books, while eighty seven percent of adolescent boys and eighty one percent of adolescent girls were regular readers.<sup>18</sup> What is most surprising is the percentage of female audience. Within ten years, the primarily male-dominated comic book industry opened its doors to female Wonder Woman readers. Did Marston's motives successfully give voice to America's women? Yes and no. In terms of audience, the large percentage of female readers may be attributed to Wonder Woman's popularity and underlying social agenda. However, in terms of image, her skimpy outfit and curvy body still targeted boys. Her sexiness kept her on the shelves, while her power kept women reading.

During the 1940s, sexual references were rampant throughout the comic book industry. Wonder Woman was no exception. A particularly racy title page from 1944 shows the superheroine wearing her iconic red boots and skimpy red-white-and-blue outfit, bent over the knees of Etta Candy [see link for image 2]. A strong feminist movement and activist culture was missing during the first half of this decade because of the Second World War; women were involved in keeping the home front as efficient and peaceful as possible, and the focus was on winning the war. It was not until the 1950s, when former soldiers settled in at home and the G.I. bill provided educational and economic opportunities, that society became censored for sexual content. The Comics Code Authority was created in 1954 by the Comics Magazine Association of America as a set of guidelines to regulate the comic book industry, warding off subject areas that contested the "wholesome" family life of the 1950s.<sup>19</sup> While it outlines many guidelines for the popular dime crime comics, the statutes on costume, marriage, and sex significantly influenced the superheroines. Specifically, "females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities," and "sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden," were two standards that slammed the brakes on the style and image of Wonder Woman and her sidekicks.<sup>20</sup>

The 1960s was a turbulent decade in America's history, as public opinion against the Vietnam War leaked into society. The X-Men were created in 1963 by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby as a superhero team with human, more "realistic" characters.<sup>21</sup> The X-men, a team of mutant outcasts, mirrored this new social culture because they, "fight to protect a world that both hates and fears them."<sup>22</sup> The superhero "formula" from two decades prior was also challenged by Marvel Comics' characters. Gone were the days of hyper-masculine heroes with powers that were deemed "super" by regular citizens. The male mutants of the X-Men were more human in emotion and physical fitness than their earlier counterparts but were still clearly heroes whose sole responsibility was to defeat their enemies

and fight social constructs. The one female member, Jean Grey, did not have such a clear role in the storyline. Like the superheroines before her, Jean Grey, alias Marvel Girl, was a product of her time. Though her characterization changed throughout her lifetime, her original image established her as a feminine housewife figure, not unlike one commented on by *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>23</sup>

For rising numbers of female comic book readers, the characterization of Jean Grey gave a name and image to the housewife culture outlined in *The Feminine Mystique*. Betty Friedan writes, "But still, the housewife complains, I'm nearly fifty and I've never done what I hoped to do in my youth—music—I've wasted my college education."<sup>24</sup> Due to the traditional culture of the 1950s, a smaller percentage of women went to college and those who did were destined to live life as a housewife, as Friedan contends. Jean Grey, established in the same year as Friedan's book, was no different. Her role in the X-Men was not one of heroics like Wonder Woman but more of a love-interest and mother. She was the only character in the original X-Men comics that was shown going to college but was also the universal love-interest for the whole team.<sup>25</sup> The similarities do not stop there; her role on the team was almost exclusively weak and domestic. She was seen as a cook, seamstress, and nurse as well as the team member in need of saving when battling a villain.<sup>26</sup> Though smart enough to attend college, its effects were never referenced thus reinforcing her domestic role.

Jean Grey's character opposes Wonder Woman's for many reasons. First, her time of conception was marked by more social unrest than Wonder Woman's. Second, her intended audience was male-dominated. Though more women were reading comics in the 1960s, the readership was still dominated by boys and men. Third, the intentions behind her character were of a matronly nature, not one of domination. These reasons are most commonly demonstrated in Grey's relationship with her own powers and secret identity as Marvel Girl. Grey's mutant power is telekinesis, a power that she finds useful for battling both dirt and grime, while cleaning, as well as crime [see link to image 3].<sup>27</sup> In this sense, her power was doubly downplayed; not only did she use it for domestic duties, but it also was the reason she got extremely weak and needed to be saved while in battle.<sup>28</sup> Where Wonder Woman was created as a strong female who saved her weak love interest, Jean Grey, as herself and as Marvel Girl, was both the love interest and weak link. Both of these women were products of their time and culture. Wonder Woman was created at a time when women were going to work in men's jobs, while Marvel Girl was created at a time when women were expected to work only in the home.

Their situations simply mirror their cultural positions because Wonder Woman was created by a strong, all-women society, while Marvel Girl was pushed into an all-male team. The use of "secret identities" furthers this idea. From the reader's point of view, Wonder Woman created a subdued secret identity to better follow the social culture of America, whereas Jean Grey could



not escape expectations regardless of whether she herself or Marvel Girl. Though her emotional and physical strength matured in the late 1960s, Marvel Girl's actions and image continued to relay a woman in a male-dominated world trying to gain a voice in social culture. This opposed Wonder Woman, who took a more muted style in order to better relate to the average woman. These obvious differences are a by-product of their changing intended audience demographic. Marvel Girl's more active role in the team's strength indicates a stretch into a more female-centered readership.

Regardless of intention, both Wonder Woman and Marvel Girl played into the revolving superheroine formula. Though they were given strong title roles, their dialogue and cover pages were riddled with more words about their appearance than their superpowers.<sup>29</sup> Despite the rules outlined by the Comics Code Authority, late 1960s depictions of Wonder Woman and Marvel Girl are surprising and (unsurprisingly) sexual. Due to the high amount of male readers, comic book illustrators were determined to capture the sexy themes seen before in Sheena's comics in a more appropriate manner. Wonder Woman is pictured in a form fitting, latex-like outfit that covers her skin, but leaves no curve to the imagination [see link to image 4]. Joseph Darowski writes, "Her curves are realistic, her breasts are not exaggerated in size or shape..."<sup>30</sup> Though both of the superheroines' bodies have lost the exaggeration seen in Sheena's early books, their skin-tight, short-skirted costumes with knee-high boots allude to the same idea of sexiness [see link to image 5]. Still under sanction of the Comics Code Authority, these costume changes kept male readership, while pleasing the vast majority of conservative consumers.

Still, the characterization of superheroines is influenced most by their position in culture, and the 1970s brought a new beginning for superheroines and the American woman. In 1971, Jane O'Reilly stated, "But that was three or four years ago. Too many moments have clicked in the minds of too many women since then. This year the women in the room have not moved to their husband's sides; they have...solidified."<sup>31</sup> According to Amy Erdman Farrell, O'Reilly's article, "The Housewife's Moment of Truth," highlights the shift in women's rights culture in America from the "resurgence period" of the 1960s to the Women's Liberation period starting in the 1970s.<sup>32</sup> With its establishment in 1972, *Ms. Magazine* was one of the driving forces in the Women's Liberation Movement and the resurgence in the leadership potential of superheroines. From its beginning, the title of the magazine emulated an independent name for a woman ('Miz' instead of 'Miss or Mrs.'), regardless of her marital status.<sup>33</sup> This was a big change for women of this time, especially women comic book readers, who were accustomed to reading about superheroines whose roles were only qualified because of their relationship with men. In conjunction with O'Reilly's reflection on housewife culture, *Ms. Magazine* quickly became a meeting place for feminists, new and experienced. These experienced feminists grew up

during Wonder Woman's zenith, and they remembered her fondly because of her feminist undertones.<sup>34</sup>

They chose her as their unofficial mascot of feminism during 1972. Focusing on the fight for justice that was rampant in her original books, she was even pictured on the cover, under the banner, "Wonder Woman for President," larger than life in her original patriotic costume, saving the small business with her lasso of truth while running away from war and destruction towards peace and justice [see link to image 6]. This throwback image of the superheroine is much more patriotic and cause-driven than her 1968 counterpart. Echoing the comic book industry, an increase in readership and funds was ultimately at the root of decisions at *Ms. Magazine*. Yes, the women believed Wonder Woman should be revered for her feminist agenda, but like the early comics, there was the need to make money. As Amy Erdman Farrell writes, "Warner Communications, the primary financial investor in *Ms.*, owned National Periodical Publications, which published and was then planning to begin republication of Wonder Woman comics."<sup>35</sup> While this relaunch into the realm of "classic" Wonder Woman attracted many of *Ms.*' readership, it also pushed the limits of the Comics Code Authority—bringing back a sexy, dominating Wonder Woman, who in turn, influenced other superheroines at this time.

This first regular issue of *Ms. Magazine* in 1972 was not only influential in the image of superheroines during the time, but also the sexual themes and language used when referring to them. The magazine commented on the sexist language often used in American culture, specifically the use of words describing a group of people such as "brotherhood" and "men."<sup>36</sup> The X-Men had been using these terms to describe mixed gendered mutant teams for nine years and did not opt to change their language. However, they did choose to support one aspect of the Women's Liberation Movement the magazine often wrote on—the sexual revolution. The dialogue on the subject of sexual behaviors that started in *Ms. Magazine* jumpstarted a sexual liberation movement and culture that was translated in many forms throughout the 1970s.<sup>37</sup>

In the X-Men comics, the transformation of Jean Grey into Phoenix and the introduction of Ororo Munroe, alias Storm, mirrored the sexual awakening many women felt at this time. Starting in the 1970s, Jean Grey became increasingly more powerful, completing her transformation that started in the late 1960s. As Darowski points out in *X-Men and the Mutant Metaphor: Race and Gender in the Comic Books*, Jean Grey's transformation into Phoenix in the 1970s is almost simultaneous with her first sexual encounter with Cyclops and her "fetishistic outfit" changed with her admission in to the Hellfire Club.<sup>38</sup> On one hand, Grey's newfound independence and drive put the women's sexual liberation in a positive light, claiming that women who were more sexually free could be more successful as an individual. On the other hand, liberation came at a price. She was only liberated because of her relationship with Cyclops, thus reflecting the idea that a woman was unlikely to be anything without the help of

a man. Also, her change in outfit was overtly sexual, making her more appealing to the men in this newly sexualized American culture. Storm also debuted as a character in an incredibly skimpy outfit but portrayed a more dominating role, much like Wonder Woman of the 1940s.<sup>39</sup> Storm, in turn, represented the strong, independent feminist who stood her ground against the men of the group but was ultimately a visual enhancement, made to increase sales.

Once again, these heroines were a product of their time and like Wonder Woman were a force for the feminist agenda. Like all of the heroines before them, Storm and Jean Grey could not break away from the sexual fantasies of the male readership or the feminine expectations that were consistent in American culture throughout history. Phoenix's demise came from a choice to save herself or save the entire team from her powers, and in the end, it was her love for Scott that made her decision. Her last words were "tell him that I loved him!" [see link for image 7]. A half-naked Storm is left to take Grey's place in the X-Men; she soon became a motherly leader who cared for the men while looking sexy in battle.<sup>40</sup> Through rebirth after rebirth, Wonder Woman, Jean Grey, and Storm offer outlets for rising Women's Liberation movements but are always put back into their place, thus finalizing their role as sexualized fantasies whose strength and usefulness are seen through the lens of the male-dominated world in which they were created. Though every feminist theme and reader increased the popularity of feminine superheroes between 1940 and 1980, it was ultimately the large male audience who purchased copies of the works, thus furthering the overtly sexualized, love-interest image that superheroines continue to fill today.

## Images

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# Blake Nanney

## Illinois' "Egypt" and its History of Slavery

The state of Illinois today, for many, can be understood as a microcosm of the greater United States. With its vast metropolis of Chicago, scattered industrial cities, and productive agricultural belt, the state seems to fit that mold nicely. The history of the state, too, supports the metaphor. A complex and rich history similar to that of the United States at large makes Illinois, historically, a place of multiple and often contradictory opinions. Exemplary of this turbulent state and national history is the great political divide over the role of slavery in American society that led to the U.S. Civil War. During this polarizing moment in American history the country was tearing itself apart along the boundaries of northern free-labor industry and southern slave driven agriculture. Illinois was not the exception. Inhabitants in Northern and Central Illinois generally supported the abolitionist ideals of the emancipation of the slave class. However, those in the southern geographical tip of Illinois, often referred to as "Egypt,"<sup>1</sup> did not support those ideals of the Northern Illinoisans. As a result, the region of Southern Illinois began to be called "Egypt." This paper will explore the origins of the term Egypt and its political use in Southern Illinois to highlight the links to its pro-slavery past which set the region apart from the rest of the state.

Scholars contributing to the historiography of the state of Illinois provide various narratives explaining the genesis of the term "Egypt" as a place-name and its relationship to Southern Illinois. For example, in his book *When Lincoln Came to Egypt*, George W. Smith suggests that the term Egypt and its references to Southern Illinois date back to as early as the late 1780s.<sup>2</sup> Darcey O'Brien in her book, *Murder in Little Egypt*, argues that Egypt's use as a synonym for Southern Illinois emerged as a result of the northern hardships experienced by the harsh winters of 1834 and 1831.<sup>3</sup> According to O'Brien, Northern Illinois experienced the misfortune of extraordinarily long, cold, and harsh winters during the years of 1824 and 1831. Accordingly, in order to sustain their livelihood, Northern Illinoisan farmers had to travel to Southern Illinois to buy the necessary provisions to sustain themselves to the next year.<sup>4</sup>

As Northern Illinoisans traveled south, they linked biblical references to the motives of their journey.<sup>5</sup> O'Brien suggests that the northern farmers gradually connected their experiences to those of the biblical Jacob, in Genesis 42, to draw this religious imagery.<sup>6</sup> In the biblical story, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt in search of grain and other basic necessities to sustain the lives of his family.<sup>7</sup> As

the result of their voyage “down to Egypt,” Jacob and his sons enjoyed bountiful commodities for living, just as the northern farmers of the 1820s and 1830s had done. The link between the Egypt-bound biblical travels of Jacob’s sons and that of the crop-deprived farmers of Northern Illinois was solidified, thus coining Egypt as Southern Illinois’ new title.

Scholars from the region of Egypt, such as John W. Allen in his book, *Legends and Lore of Southern Illinois*, draw geographical similarities between Ancient Egypt and Southern Illinois to explain the region’s moniker.<sup>8</sup> For example, the aptly named city of Cairo, located in Southern Illinois’ river-dominated geographical tip, draws references to the similarities of Ancient Egypt’s great Nile Delta. The name of this southernmost Illinoisan city alone reveals its resemblance to that of ancient Egypt, given that Cairo is the capital of the ancient Egyptian empire as well as the modern day nation-state. City proprietors of Cairo took note to mention the opportune location of the city for trade and commerce like that of its primordial sister-city nestled along the banks of the Nile River in North Africa.<sup>9</sup> It is of no coincidence that only a few short years after Cairo’s official founding, Egypt emerged as an ever-popular metaphor for its encompassing areas.

Scholars note Egypt’s distinct political culture was unlike that of the rest of Illinois. Mabel Rauch in her work, *The First Memorial Day*, sheds light upon the origins of the term Egypt and its distinctive political culture. Rauch explains that some of the initial waves of settlers that came into Southern Illinois originated from slave-holding states such as Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee.<sup>10</sup> As the settlers coming from these regions were accustomed to slavery practices, they were prone to bring the same habits with them.

George Smith demonstrates the magnitude of Egypt’s pro-slavery sympathies in his book *When Lincoln Came to Egypt*. Much of Smith’s claims are supported by the fact that the area was settled primarily by people originating from southern slave-holding territories. For example, Smith illustrates this point through the use of salvaged political correspondence, with one such letter that went as far as to refer to Egypt as a “dark corner of Illinois.”<sup>11</sup> In his book *Illinois in the Civil War*, Victory Hicken supports Rauch’s argument as he further explains the extent and effects of Egypt’s pro-southern and pro-slavery sentiment.<sup>12</sup> Research into the history of Southern Illinois reveals that the term Egypt was used as a reference to the region neither in the historiography nor in primary sources from before the debates over slavery. What the sources and literature indicate is when political discussion about slavery gained importance in Illinois and across the nation, so did the term Egypt.

Southern Illinois had a distinctive identity in comparison to the rest of the state; outsiders took no heed to personify the area’s pro-slavery ideology as something contradictory to its northern counterparts. By referring to Southern Illinois as Egypt, northerners highlighted the differences of region from the rest



of the state. Waves of migrants from slave-holding territories such as Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were instrumental in the settlement of Southern Illinois. As migrants gravitated towards southern Illinois, they “gave Egypt, as this region was soon to be known, the make-up of a southern state.”<sup>13</sup> These settlers brought with them, “Physical courage, the love of home, and a touch of the old plantation life.”<sup>14</sup> Over time this southern-like culture began to transform Egypt’s local culture to resemble the characteristics brought by its pro-slavery southerners. With many migrants flooding into Illinois territory, it was only a matter of time before the territory gained statehood. In 1818, Illinois officially became the twenty-first state in the union.<sup>15</sup> The newly-founded state did not have the luxury of a protracted era of peace in national politics. Only a few decades after Illinois was granted statehood, the question of slavery began to tear the fabric of the United States.

The question of slavery was never fully addressed by the American forefathers, and Illinois paid the price. Under the Land Ordinance of 1787 slavery was to be forbidden throughout the Northwest Territories including Illinois.<sup>16</sup> However, a loophole in the legislation allowed for slaves already in the region, as well as their children, to continue to be used as slaves.<sup>17</sup> This enabled Illinois Southerners to use slaves as they wished, as long as the slaves were already there before 1787.

Along with Illinois, other states began to muster the population numbers needed to receive statehood. As new states entered the union, the balance of slave to free states was certain to tilt in the free-state camp’s favor. To appease the growing tensions between the free North and the Southern slave states, Steven Douglas proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Act gave states the authority to vote on the issue of slavery without federal intervention. The form of popular sovereignty sought to appease both parties. In 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act was officially ratified, appearing to provide a long-term solution to the question of slavery in the United States. Questions regarding the legislation emerged, spurring the issue of slavery even more and eventually culminating in the American Civil War.

Southern Illinois had many residents who supported slavery. A remark from a prominent and influential Egyptian, John P. Mann reveals the pro-slavery sentiment among the local population. During a gathering between John Mann and his local peers, an individual remarked that it was an abolitionist of Hungarian ancestry, who had immigrated to Southern Illinois, who contributed to the economic success of the region. Upon hearing this, however, Mann, “Immediately denied his assertions.”<sup>18</sup> Mann, outraged by the fact that such an influential individual was an abolitionist, deprived the figure of recognition as a means to strengthen southern values. Another example of Southern Illinois’ or Egypt’s unique pro-southern character can be seen in political correspondence written by Joseph Medill to David L. Phillips. Concerning the upcoming 1856

presidential election Medill wrote to Phillips:

We want you to have a complete ticket for every county so far as there are any county offices now in opposition to the Buchaneers, and both kinds. Fremont and Fillmore electors with the anti-Nebraska Act ticket on them. Steps must be taken immediately to have this [done] to all your counties. Some good trusty man must go over to...Carmi, Fairfield and other points where there are printing offices and have tickets printed.<sup>19</sup>

As shown in the letter above, the majority of Southern Illinoisan counties supported the Democratic nominee James Buchanan, indicating Democrats in the 1850s generally supported slavery. Thus, Medill sought to have “some good trusty man”<sup>20</sup> have tickets printed and possibly garner more votes that could be taken from the pro-Southern Buchanan.

Further evidence of Illinois’ troubled internal political relationship began to appear during the slave debates leading up to the Civil War. More specifically, these manifestations appeared after the signing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This act is important in understanding the use of Egypt as an encompassing term to Southern Illinois for a number of reasons. Worthy to note is that the Act was signed only seven years before the Civil War began. In hindsight, the Kansas-Nebraska Act served as a final effort from the U.S. legislature to maintain the integrity of the Union in such a politically volatile time. The Kansas-Nebraska Act was only a short-term solution that failed to fully tackle the greater issue of slavery. Correspondence between Illinois politicians John A. Logan and Steven A. Douglas indicates the growing tensions concerning slavery. Just three years after the Kansas-Nebraska Act was signed, Douglas wrote to Logan:

I regret that I will not be able to carry out my cherished object of paying you a visit this fall. I have yet to have made a thorough tour through Egypt...I regret mournfully that I could not have seen you...I shall necessarily be absent until mid summer...The prospect now is that the [coming] battle is to be fought over again. Come what may the principle of the Nebraska Act...I stared at that principle and will wherever its logical consequences may carry me, and defend the position against whoever may avoid it.<sup>21</sup>

In the letter, Steven Douglas provides an insightful look at Illinois’ political divide in the late 1850’s. For one, Douglas mentions Egypt as a reference to John A. Logan’s political districts within Southern Illinois, thus carving a separate entity from the rest of the state. Douglas also mentioned a debate about to occur in the Illinois legislature over the Kansas-Nebraska Act in the coming spring.

Noteworthy is that this letter was written to Logan in 1857, three years after the Kansas-Nebraska Act was signed and implemented as national policy.<sup>22</sup>

As another debate was to begin, Douglas' letter illustrates that Illinois failed to harmonize a statewide acceptance to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.<sup>23</sup> The letter does not go as far as to explain exactly why the debate was to begin, but given the national context and Illinois' political makeup, one can speculate on the cause of the debate and the actors involved. It is likely that pro-slavery Southern Illinoisans had a large part to play. In addition, Douglas saw it relevant enough to stress the debate and his personal stance on the matter to his Southern counterpart, John A. Logan.

Pre-Civil War Southern Illinois simply had a different political culture than that of the rest of the state. As American southerners had originally settled the region, there was an acute pro-slavery sentiment among its civilian ranks. One inhabitant of Southern Illinois, David L. Phillips from Anna, Illinois, blatantly exclaimed the opinion he had of Egyptians. Phillips reported to the presidential nominee, Abraham Lincoln, that, "Egypt will give a good account of itself yet. This fall we must have your help to revolutionize this dark corner of Illinois."<sup>24</sup> To 1858 Republicans, Egypt personified the backwardness of the pro-slavery inhabitants of Southern Illinois.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, this gave Northern Illinoisans more of an incentive to personify Southern Illinois by referring to the region with a separate name, Egypt.

Despite Egypt's contradictory stance on slavery, Lincoln, a Republican who opposed slavery, took Egypt's pro-slavery stance with a light heart and managed to garner votes from the region. During the famous Lincoln-Douglas Debates for the U.S presidency, Lincoln responded, after his visit to Egypt, "Did the judge talk of trotting me down to Egypt to scare me to death? Why, I know this people better than he does."<sup>26</sup> The judge's comments are understandable because, unlike most southern Illinoisans, Lincoln would have appeared as a political black sheep who supported abolitionist ideals.

Election results for Egyptian counties give credence to the area's slavery-prone nature, thus indicating that the region retained stronger political ties with the Democratic south as opposed to the Republican north. Jefferson County is an excellent example to represent this political trend. Its 1860 presidential election results showed only 18.6 percent of its population voting Republican while a staggering 75.0 percent voted Democratic. Jefferson County is not an exception. Similar regional counties experienced similar lopsided political results. Only in Randolph, Wabash, Richland, and Lawrence counties were the election results less skewed. In these counties the Democratic ticket still beat the Republican nominee by over ten percentage points. Only Edwards and St. Clair remained as outliers attached to the Republican Party.<sup>27</sup>

Egypt's political uniqueness solidified its name as a metaphor to Southern Illinois. With its southern heritage, unique history, and consequently inimitable

political culture, Southern Illinois provided a stark contrast to the rest of the state. During the slavery debates this was more apparent than ever with Stephen Douglas and others perceiving Egypt as a sensitive area for Lincoln during his public debates. Election results from Southern Illinois can be used to prove Lincoln and his abolitionist Republican Party's political weakness in the area. The vast majority of Southern Illinois counties voted lopsidedly against Republican presidential nominees in 1856 and 1860. It is no wonder then that Southern Illinois retained its distinct and unique Egyptian title for many years. Egypt was the name for a unique place and politicians were only too eager to use an area's exclusive qualities to further the aims of their political agendas. Therefore, Egypt's meaning symbolized something more than just its geographical or biblical resemblances to that of its ancient counterpart. Egypt became increasingly known as a political term rather than just a geographical one.

The name Egypt is celebrated today throughout Southern Illinois. Contemporary Egyptians are proud of the unique qualities that their region enjoys. With its protected antebellum architecture, lively vineyards, unique history (including the birth homes of such characters as Popeye and Superman), and small-town etiquette, modern Egyptians immerse themselves in the magnificence of their surrounding countryside. Egyptian-linked words are found in abundance throughout Southern Illinois as a way to celebrate the region's particularities. These include the titles to businesses,<sup>28</sup> team mascots,<sup>29</sup> names of cities and bridges,<sup>30</sup> and of local newspapers and magazines,<sup>31</sup> to mention just a few. However, what contemporary Egyptians often ignore is that these Egyptian titles are seeded by a complex radicalized past, which fostered the tradition of slavery and set the Egyptian region apart from the rest of the state.

Southern Illinoisans today do not often hear about how the name Egypt is complexly rooted in the region's pro-slavery past. Its heightened use during the slave debates served to solidify its connection to the region even more, forever cementing Egypt as a metaphor for Southern Illinois. As troubling as it may be to Southern Illinoisans today, the region's uniqueness is historically tied to its pro-slavery roots. Altogether, Egypt's use as a term representative of Southern Illinois was seeded by the effects of its pro-slavery past. Thus, Egypt became solidified as a representative term for Southern Illinois due to its unique political, social, and cultural makeup that set it apart from the rest of Illinois.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> In this article the words "Egypt" and "Southern Illinois" will be used interchangeably unless otherwise stated when referring to the Egypt located in the Middle East.
- <sup>2</sup> George W. Smith, *When Lincoln Came to Egypt* (Herrin, IL: Crossfire Press, 1993), 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Darcey O'Brien, *Murder in Little Egypt* (Herrin, IL: Crossfire Press, 1993), 3.

- 4 Ibid., 2.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 King James Bible, Gen. 42:1-4.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 John W. Allen, *Legends and Lore of Southern Illinois* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), 40-42.
- 9 City of Cairo, Published by the Proprietors, A.D. 1818. 1818, Box 2, Folder 3, History of the City of Cairo, Illinois manuscript, 1718-1910, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.
- 10 Mabel Rauch, "The First Memorial Day," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 40, no. 2 (1947): 213.
- 11 Smith, *When Lincoln Came to Egypt*, xxxiv.
- 12 Victory Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 2.
- 13 Ibid., 4.
- 14 Ibid., 1.
- 15 Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois: from its Commencement as a state in 1818 to 1847* (Champaign, IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1857), 10.
- 16 Smith, *When Lincoln Came to Egypt*, 3.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 John P. Mann. *Transcript of J.P. Mann Journals, January 1852-May 17, 1836*. Box 1, John P. Mann Family Papers. Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.
- 19 Joseph Medill to David L. Phillips. *David L. Phillips Correspondence, 1856-1858*. ID: 1/9/1950. David L. Phillips Correspondence, 1856-1858. Special Collection Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Steven A. Douglas to John A. Logan, November 29, 1857. *Stephen A. Douglas Correspondence*, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Smith, *When Lincoln Came to Egypt*, xxxiv.
- 25 Republicans at this time were mainly abolitionist and did not agree with the pro-slavery stances of Southern Illinois.
- 26 Smith, *When Lincoln Came to Egypt*, 140.
- 27 Howard W. Allen and Vincent A. Lacey, *Illinois Election, 1818-1900 Candidates and County Returns for President, Governor, Senate, and House of Representatives* (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 144.

- <sup>28</sup> Such as Egyptian Electric, an energy provider within Southern Illinois.
- <sup>29</sup> Southern Illinois University Carbondale's team mascot, the Saluki, which in antiquity was considered the Royal Dog of Egypt.
- <sup>30</sup> Such as the city of Cairo and the close-by Thebes Bridge.
- <sup>31</sup> Such as the Southern Illinois University Carbondale's daily newspaper *The Daily Egyptian* and the popular 1940s magazine *The Egyptian Key*.

# Jacob Mitchell

## Bayard Rustin: The Intersection of Sexuality and Civil Rights

The story of the Civil Rights Movement is of particular interest to many Americans. As such, it has inspired many recent popular films including *Selma*, *The Help*, and *The Butler*. Some of the participants in the Civil Rights Movement, such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr, have become well known to the majority of Americans. Both are often credited with sparking some of the most important events of the movement, and the latter is honored with a national holiday. While King and Parks were key figures in the Civil Rights Movement, the important contributions of others have been largely forgotten by most Americans. Bayard Rustin was one such activist who had significant impact on the Civil Rights Movement.

In his history of the Civil Rights movement, historian Taylor Branch offers the following description of Bayard Rustin:

An internationally respected pacifist, as well as a vagabond minstrel, penniless world traveler, sophisticated collector of African and pre-Columbian art and a bohemian Greenwich philosopher...he lived more or less a hobo's life committed to the ideas of peace and racial brotherhood...he was tall and boney, handsome and conspiratorial, full of ideas that spilled out in a high pitched voice, and a proud but squeaky West Indian accent.<sup>1</sup>

Branch's description makes it difficult to imagine that history could so easily forget a figure like Rustin. Rustin was a fascinating and crucial actor in the Civil Rights Movement. John D'Emilio offers a thorough examination of Rustin's life from his birth in 1912 until his death in 1984. In his biography of Rustin, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, D'Emilio helps to deconstruct the complexities of Rustin's identity. Rustin was born into a Quaker family in Pennsylvania. His Quaker background heavily influenced the powerful political convictions on which most of his life work was based. His Quaker beliefs, combined with his eventual exposure to Gandhian non-violence, solidified his belief in pacifism and the importance of empowering oppressed people. Rustin was also an openly gay man. D'Emilio recounts many instances in which Rustin's homosexuality interacted with his work as an activist.<sup>2</sup>

One may make the assumption that Rustin's sexuality was a constant obstacle to his work as an activist. However, the interactions between Rustin's sexuality and his identity as an activist were complex. In some instances, Rustin's sexuality did negatively impact his work, but despite the various obstacles created by Rustin's sexuality, he remained an active participant and a recurring figure throughout the movement. The interaction between Rustin's sexuality and his identity as an activist manifested in a number of ways. It shaped Rustin's experiences within the Civil Rights Movement, with those in opposition to it, and it even influenced Rustin's legacy as an activist after death. His activism spanned many decades and without his contributions, it is unlikely that many key events of the movement, such as the 1964 March on Washington, would have been as successful.

The complex navigation between his sexuality and public identity as an activist was foreshadowed during Rustin's formative years during which he was a student at Wilberforce College. Rustin seemed aware of and accepting of his homosexuality from this point in his life. Not only was Rustin aware of his own sexuality, his grandparents who raised him were aware of it as well. According to a 1987 interview with *Open Hands* magazine, he would frequently bring a lover home with him on university breaks. Rustin states that his grandparents seemed to be aware of the arrangement, but did not particularly mind. Rustin even went as far as to say that "they were aware I was having an affair with my friend from college and they obviously approved it. Not that anybody said 'Oh, I think that's a good thing.' But they would say 'Friends have invited us over for dinner tonight, and we told them your friend is here and it's quite all right if you bring him along.'"<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Rustin's grandparents were not completely opposed to his homosexuality. They allowed him to bring a lover into their home and accompany them to social events. While the level of acceptance is remarkable, it was not without caution. In the same interview, Rustin remembered another conversation he had with his grandmother in which she warned "You know, I want to recommend something to you. In selecting your male friends, you should be careful that you associate with people who have as much to lose as you have... you have a very good reputation, so you should go around with people who have good reputations...."<sup>4</sup> The ambivalence Rustin's grandparents showed toward his sexuality is emblematic of the ambivalent and complex relationship between Rustin and his sexuality throughout his civil rights activism.

The film *Brother Outsider* provides a biographical sketch of Rustin. One prominent feature of the film is the depiction of establishment politicians using Rustin's sexuality as a weapon against Rustin himself and those with whom he associated.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, some of these attacks against Rustin were carried out by fellow civil rights activists allied to other factions of the movement. A most notable example of this was the reaction of United States representative



Adam Clayton Powell to Rustin and Martin Luther King Jr. organizing against both the Democratic and Republican National conventions. According to the *Brother Outsider* film, Powell felt the protests threatened the passage of Civil Rights legislation. Powell quickly deployed Rustin's sexuality as a weapon against the organizing of these marches. According to a 1987 essay by Bayard Rustin, Powell contacted King and threatened to release information about a sexual relationship between Rustin and King. While Rustin asserts the claim was completely fabricated, it was frightening enough to King that it caused Rustin to officially end his association with King.<sup>6</sup>

The Adam Clayton Powell affair effectively illustrates the challenges and complexity Rustin faced as a gay Civil Rights activist. As Rustin claims in his 1987 essay, his sexuality was essentially unimportant to King who simply valued him for his knowledge of nonviolence and his excellent ability to organize.<sup>7</sup> However, that acceptance ultimately became irrelevant. Powell was willing to use Rustin's sexuality as a weapon against Rustin, King, and the political activity he deemed inappropriate. Powell's attacks certainly strained the relationship between Martin Luther King Jr. and Bayard Rustin. That must also have been emotionally damaging to Rustin as he had served the Civil Rights Movement for a significant portion of his adult life. Additionally, he had acted as a consultant and mentor for King in the techniques and ideology of non-violent direct action.<sup>8</sup>

Despite his acceptance of homosexuality on a personal level, King "launched an attack on black queerness in his public life."<sup>9</sup> In his article, "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality," Thaddeus Russel discusses the attitude of mainstream civil rights activists, especially Martin Luther King Jr., towards "queer" behavior during the late 1950s and 1960s. Russel argues that many activists, King especially, attempted to distance African Americans from sexual promiscuity and homosexuality. Russel alleges that activists undertook this strategy in order to strengthen the African American heterosexual family unit. King and many other religious leaders of the movement viewed the heterosexual family unit as key to gaining full citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Russel's article does provide some helpful context for situating the Adam Clayton Powell affair in a broader context of African-American sexual attitudes during the 1950s and 1960s. King likely felt the need to separate himself from Rustin to avoid any kind of controversy. The rumor of a homosexual affair would not only have been damaging to King's reputation, but also would have contradicted the social and religious appeals King was making.

Admittedly, there is some level of hypocrisy within King's crusade to end African American promiscuity and condemn homosexuality. King's life was filled with rumors of extramarital affairs. Many of these rumors were eventually revealed to be true. In a 1987 interview, George Chauncey asked Bayard Rustin the following question, "Did he [King] ever compare your problems to the rumors about his extramarital affair?" Rustin responded, "I wouldn't think there

was any possibility of him comparing them, because I don't think he saw them as having any relationship whatever. Oh, the crap that was going on in those motels as the movement moved forward from place to place was acceptable. The homosexual act was not."<sup>11</sup> Bayard Rustin's homosexuality and Martin Luther King's extramarital affair both represent threats to the African-American heterosexual family unit. Therefore both acts should be considered detrimental to the Civil Rights Movement establishment. However, Rustin's remarks in the interview with George Chauncey make it clear that homosexuality was viewed as a significantly more dangerous transgression than having a heterosexual extramarital affair clear.

Rustin's homosexuality clearly caused a dilemma for those who wished to utilize his excellent strategizing and organizing ability. However, this stigma did not prevent Rustin from holding a key leadership role in perhaps one of the most important and memorable events of the Civil Rights Movement, the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. While Rustin's involvement in the march was hotly debated by other organizers, with much persuasion from Rustin's long-time friend and fellow Civil Rights activist, A. Phillip Randolph, Rustin was ultimately appointed director of the March on Washington.<sup>12</sup>

As director of the 1963 March on Washington, Rustin was charged with the onerous task of bringing 100,000 people from all over the South to Washington D.C. to participate in the protest for civil and labor rights. In his biographical sketch of Rustin, Jervis Anderson describes in great detail the exactness and efficiency with which Rustin exceeded his goal. Rustin and his staff managed to facilitate the transportation of over 250,000 people to Washington D.C. on that day in 1963. Rustin secured transportation, accommodation, and food for this largely poor, African-American group of activists.<sup>13</sup> The 1963 March on Washington is important to the identity of Bayard Rustin as an activist because it illustrates a significant moment in his career in which his brilliance as an organizer and a person who could mobilize others became clear on such a massive scale.

Rustin's involvement with the March did not go unnoticed by Civil Rights Movement opposition. Strom Thurmond, the well-known South Carolina senator quickly took note of his presence. As an ardent defender of Southern segregation, Thurmond dedicated a considerable amount of time attempting to discredit Rustin and end the March. Thurmond accused Rustin of being a socialist, draft dodger, and a sexual pervert. He referenced a 1954 charge of public indecency in which Rustin had been jailed for having sex with another man. While Rustin's sexuality had complicated his civil rights activism in the past, Thurmond's attacks were the most public and most explicitly directed attacks that Rustin had faced.<sup>14</sup> The footage of Thurmond's attacks included in the *Brother Outsider* film are especially incendiary. Thurmond depicts Rustin as an un-American subversive and a sexual pervert.<sup>15</sup>

The technique employed by Thurmond to attack Rustin was nothing new. From 1950 throughout the Cold War era politicians frequently conflated the issues of communism, homosexuality, and political subversion. This practice was first initiated by Joseph McCarthy in the earliest days of Cold War fear mongering.<sup>16</sup> In the political climate of the 1960s, a gay activist was a prime target for those opposed to civil rights legislation and activism. Strom Thurmond further attempted to use Rustin as a way to conflate civil rights activism with political subversion, homosexuality, and un-Americanness. Despite Thurmond's very public personal attacks and the possible harm the attacks could bring the march, Rustin maintained his position as director of the march. His devotion to and value of the movement were not thwarted by Thurmond's rhetoric.

Other activists and leadership members of the march continued to defend Rustin's leadership. This was especially true of A. Phillip Randolph. It seems the instincts of the March on Washington organizers were correct. The March on Washington was successful enough to become an iconic part of American history, and was largely due to the fact that Bayard Rustin was such a capable organizer and director. Additionally, Strom Thurmond's comments were largely brushed off by the African-American civil rights community and have not become a significant part of the story of the Civil Rights Movement. In that moment in history, Rustin's sexuality ceased to be a liability because he was too effective to dispose of.

The Adam Clayton Powell affair and the Strom Thurmond ordeal are examples that model the complex relationship between Bayard Rustin's sexuality and his life as a civil rights activist. Interestingly, the first example illustrates how vulnerable Rustin and those with whom he associated were to unfounded threats due to Rustin's identity as a gay man. These threats and manipulation sometimes even manifested themselves within other factions of the movement itself. Alternatively, the attacks of Strom Thurmond demonstrate the power external force could wield against the movement if one of its leaders was deemed to have "subversive" or undesirable characteristics. Most interesting is the way Rustin himself as well as those around him decided to react to these threats. In the case of the Adam Clayton Powell, the threats that he employed were effective. Rustin resigned his position and terminated his "official" relationship with Martin Luther King Jr. Conversely, when he was attacked by Strom Thurmond, Rustin was able to persevere and maintain his position. He was defended by others in the movement and other Civil Rights leadership when the costs to the credibility of the movement could have been great.

The complex relationship between Rustin's sexuality and his identity as an activist characterizes his legacy after death as well. At the age of 75, Rustin died in New York on August 24, 1987. The following day, his obituary was published in the *New York Times*. The obituary recognized Rustin as an important figure in pacifist activism, civil rights activism, human rights activism and labor

activism. However, the obituary made no reference whatsoever to Rustin's role in gay rights activism. Also, the obituary referred to Rustin's long term romantic partner, Walter Naegle, as his "administrative assistant and adopted son."<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to say why exactly the author of Rustin's obituary chose to make these omissions. While Rustin did not come to gay rights activism until much later in his life, he had given multiple interviews to LGBT newspapers and made public lectures in which he aligned himself formally with gay right activism. Additionally, neither Rustin nor Naegle made any attempt to obscure the nature of their relationship.

Historians also seem to struggle with how they wish to represent Rustin's legacy. In his 1997 biography of Bayard Rustin, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen*, historian Jervis Anderson focuses heavily on Rustin's role in pacifist, labor, civil rights, and human rights activism.<sup>18</sup> Jervis does touch on Rustin's sexuality and his ten-year relationship with Walter Naegle, but these themes do not come across as particularly important in the biography. Jervis steers clear of addressing Rustin's sexuality in any meaningful or in-depth way. He essentially depicts Rustin's homosexuality as a minor part of his personal life and an inconvenience to his activism. Conversely, John D'Emilio's biography of Rustin, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, treats Rustin's sexuality as a major element of his life.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, D'Emilio explores the connections between Rustin's activism and Rustin's identity as a gay man with great depth. Anderson seems more interested in preserving Rustin's legacy as an African American activist who had many causes. D'Emilio is also interested in these aspects of Rustin as well, however he is also very concerned with preserving Rustin as a part of gay history.

Bayard Rustin was politically active for essentially his entire adult life. His background as a Quaker inspired his interest in nonviolence and equality. While Rustin did not speak publically about issues of gay rights or his own sexuality until much later in his life, these issues did effect his identity as a Civil Rights activist. Because of his excellent organizational skills and ability to communicate the importance of non-violence and direct action, Rustin had a nearly continuous presence in the movement. However, his presence in the movement sometimes caused factional disagreements and attacks from outside the movement. Rustin's sexuality provided a point of criticism for his detractors. Though these attacks were sometimes successful, he found incredible support from fellow activists. The complex relationship between Rustin's sexuality and his identity as an activist continued after Rustin's death. His representation in mainstream and historical discourse varies from no representation, to limited representation, to honest and insightful representations that depict Rustin as an important historical figure who bridged many movements.

Some historians may take issue with importance placed on Rustin's sexuality in this analysis of his identity as an activist. For example, Jervis Anderson makes

the central claim in his biography that despite Rustin's incredible successes and talents, he failed to achieve significant power and notoriety in his career because he invested himself in too many causes. Additionally, he claims that Rustin was "unsuited to wielding political power... [because the] details of administration bored him."<sup>20</sup> These issues were given priority in Anderson's account of Rustin's life over issues of sexuality. These claims are not unreasonable and likely hold some degree of validity. However, after engaging with John D'Emilio's biography, *Lost Prophet*, and with interviews, essays, and speeches given by Rustin later in his life, the conclusion reached by Anderson feels somewhat superficial. There were many reasons for the impact Rustin had, but it is clear that the influence of his sexuality played a role in his activism and the legacy that he left.

Rustin was a prolific activist. He dedicated his entire life to advocating for causes in which he believed. This mission may have been complicated in some ways by his sexuality. However, his identity as a gay man and a black man may have provided some of the drive that made him so effective and made his career so prolific. In the 1980's Rustin gave several interviews to gay magazines. Additionally, in his 1986 essay "The New 'Niggers' Are Gays," he makes his sympathy with and allegiance to gay rights activism publically known. He urges new generations of gay activists to unite and challenge the oppressive elements of society.<sup>21</sup> Rustin seemed to always advocate for what he believed was right. He was an antiwar activist, a civil rights activist, and gay rights activist; and eventually he became a human rights activist. Rustin's legacy in American history was temporarily forgotten by most. However, further scholarship combined with changing social attitudes will ultimately secure a more stable position for Rustin in the story of the Civil Rights Movement and American history.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 168.
- <sup>2</sup> John D'Emilio, *The Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003).
- <sup>3</sup> Open Hands Staff and Bayard Rustin, "Black and Gay in the Civil Rights Movement: An Interview with Open Hands," in *Time on Two Crosses*, ed. Devon Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 2003), 283.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> *Brother Outsider*, directed by Nancy Kates and Bennett Singer (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2003), PBS Streaming.
- <sup>6</sup> Bayard Rustin, "Martin Luther King's Views on Gay People," in *Time on Two Crosses*, ed. Devon Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 2003), 292-293.

- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 292.
- <sup>8</sup> *Brother Outsider*.
- <sup>9</sup> Thaddeus Russel, "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2015): 115.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 118.
- <sup>11</sup> George Chauncey and Bayard Rustin, "Time on Two Crosses: An Interview with George Chauncey Jr.," in *Time on Two Crosses*, ed. Devon Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 2003), 302.
- <sup>12</sup> D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 327-340.
- <sup>13</sup> Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 248-259.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 347-349.
- <sup>15</sup> *Brother Outsider*.
- <sup>16</sup> David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- <sup>17</sup> Eric Pace, "Bayard Rustin Is Dead at 75; Pacifist and a Rights Activist," *The New York Times*, August 25, 1987. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/25/obituaries/bayard-rustin-is-dead-at-75-pacifist-and-a-rights-activist.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed October 10, 2016.
- <sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Bayard Rustin*.
- <sup>19</sup> D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 327-340.
- <sup>20</sup> Anderson, *Bayard Rustin*, 4.
- <sup>21</sup> Bayard Rustin, "The New "Niggers" are the Gays," in *Time on Two Crosses*, ed. Devon Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 2003), 275-276.

## Alex Zander

### The Dust Bowl: An Environmental Disaster on the Great Plains

In the United States, the Dust Bowl of the 1930s represented one of the nation's most devastating environmental catastrophes. Years of over cultivation, drought, and high winds helped produce the blackened skies of the Dust Bowl. Massive storms of blowing dust on the Great Plains were not only economically devastating to the farmers and the country but also dangerous and sometimes deadly to its inhabitants. Photographs and historical accounts of the blinding storms reflect and reinforce the frightening nature of what was known as the "dirty thirties." Children were smothered alive and still others, unable to find their way on their farms, were caught in barbed wire.<sup>1</sup> Many people fled the storms while others struggled to stay on their land.

The Dust Bowl resulted in part from the farming techniques used in the 1930s, along with historical changes in the climate. As M.J. Ingram, G. Farmer, and T.M.L. Wigley have noted in *Climate and History: Studies of Past Climates and Their Impact on Man*, climate played a major role in social and economic developments.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, according to Donald Worster in *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, several technological innovations affected agricultural practices and led to enhanced profitability. These changes included new farming techniques such as dry farming and sod busting, as well as the mechanization of the Great Plains sparked by the industrial revolution. Initially, the cattle business dominated the Great Plains. A "beef bonanza" took place during the 1880s, where the price for cattle soared from three dollars to sixty dollars a head.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after this skyrocketing price, the Great Plains experienced the harshest winter in recorded history, which destroyed much of the buffalo grass and killed eighty-five percent of cattle. The unpredictability of the climate would become a recurring theme of the area.<sup>4</sup>

Following the cattle collapse, settlers poured into the area looking to farm the land. They turned the dirt into their homes and began busting the sod for farming and living purposes.<sup>5</sup> This led to the development of the pasturage farms, a term coined by John Wesley Powell. These farms were much larger and tended by fewer people.<sup>6</sup> Between 1910 and 1940, farmers turned to dry farming, where "the land was to be kept from reverting to useless grass and imperial cattlemen." Dry farming required "deep plowing in fall, packing the subsoil, frequently stirring up a dust mulch, and summer fallowing, leaving part of the ground unplanted each year to restore moisture."<sup>7</sup>

During World War One, wheat prices soared and the Great Plains became a “wheat factory.” Mechanization, especially the use of tractors and combines, allowed for a massive amount of farming to be done in much less time and with less work. As a result, the farmers built a wheat empire out of the American Midwest, breaking the land to make fields of wheat.<sup>8</sup> This great leap towards a wheat empire was only possible due to the tractor and the combine. These machines also made farming possible for outside investors, referred to as suitcase farmers; they existed mostly as speculators trying to make quick cash from a wheat crop.<sup>9</sup> In one example, a suitcase farmer started with 32,000 acres of land but three years later had 50,000 acres of wheat. Under these circumstances, the suitcase farmers could even afford to lose a crop because it was not their primary income. Many times, the crop was left to the mercy of the wind if it looked unprofitable, and the farmer would never return.<sup>10</sup>

In this way, American farmers in the West, fueled by the new industry of wheat, sought to maximize their profits while paying little attention to the impact on the land.<sup>11</sup> Americans were not the first to farm beyond their means, and they echoed the “culture of modern western man” that “he is autonomous in nature” and a “sovereign creature” who controlled the environment.<sup>12</sup> Unwilling to adapt to the land and partner with the environment ensured the devastation of the Dust Bowl.<sup>13</sup> Farmers during the dust bowl faced unpredictable weather patterns. These factors, in combination with outdated farming techniques, resulted in unprecedented dust storms causing forced evacuations, economic hardships, and medical issues. While these factors led to an environmental crisis, they also resulted in the introduction of new farming techniques.

The unpredictable weather patterns of the Great Plains helped create the Dust Bowl. The area suffered from a history of drought, some lasting for twenty year periods. There were five droughts within the three hundred sixty-year period of agricultural settlement; three were considered larger droughts, and two were minor. The Dust Bowl was considered the worst of all previous droughts. Droughts were random and hard to predict.<sup>14</sup> According to the study *Climate and History*, droughts adversely affected wheat yields. During the drought of the 1930s, for example, not only did farmers harvest the smallest amount of wheat but they also planted the most amount of wheat that was not harvested. Reminiscent of the suitcase farmers, this development in the 1930s witnessed farmers planting but not harvesting wheat.<sup>15</sup>

Another major problem for the farmers of the Great Plains were the massive dust storms that formed from the topsoil of their farms. According to Aubert de la Rüe in *Man and the Winds*, these storms were caused by high gusts of wind and the dryness of the climate. In addition, protective vegetation natural to the area was absent.<sup>16</sup> Dust Storms were not a new phenomenon to the area. In 1887 Western Canada experienced a few dust storms as well; early Kansas records show evidence of their existence, though not at the same level as the ones seen



during the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> Usually these dust storms did not cause any serious damage and “after the first crop began to grow and hold the soil, after the first spring rains, the danger was over.”<sup>18</sup> According to the *New York Times*, in one storm the dust mixed with rainfall and created balls of mud that fell from the sky. The winds were so bad that “chickens were denuded of feathers” and “oil rigs and houses were blown down.”<sup>19</sup> Another *New York Times* article describes a massive dust storm that blew into Kansas. It was reported to be twelve miles long and traveled along a two hundred and fifty mile route, damaging wheat crops, blotting out the sun, and sending dust thousands of miles away.<sup>20</sup> A photograph taken by Arthur Rothstein shows a sand dune as tall as a barn, looking starkly similar to dunes found in the Sahara Desert. All vegetation in the area was either removed or dead.<sup>21</sup> The storms and conditions had completely destroyed the area in the photograph. These first-hand accounts show just how powerful these storms were and how devastating they could be for the people living in the Dust Bowl.

Ellen Grey argued in *NASA Study Finds 1934 had Worst Drought of Last Thousand Years* that there were two factors that caused the drought which led to the Dust Bowl. First, there was a high-pressure system that lingered on the west coast of the United States that forced wet weather away from the area.<sup>22</sup> This forced the winter storms that would have normally occurred to get pushed out of the area, leaving hardly any source of rainfall.<sup>23</sup> As the winter ended, the pressure system moved eastward, further preventing any spring or summer rain that would normally fall on the plains.<sup>24</sup> The second factor was land mismanagement by the farmers themselves. Land mismanagement further aggravated the dust storms that suppressed any rainfall due to dust clouds reflecting sunlight and blocking solar energy and also preventing evaporation that would normally cause rain clouds to form.<sup>25</sup> According to the *New York Times*, the drought became so intense that “The entire state of Kansas was designated as official drought territory...push[ing] the national total to 1,021 counties in twenty-two states.”<sup>26</sup>

The Dust Bowl amply demonstrated that the land of the Great Plains simply was not suitable for extensive cultivation. When the farmers stripped the land of virtually all its grasses, this development coincided with the beginning of the drought.<sup>27</sup> According to R. Douglas Hurt, “Prior to 1930, American farmers commonly regarded soil erosion as a ‘spasmodic phenomenon’ largely confined to lands subject to washing. Many farmers believed moderate blowing was beneficial because it mixed the soil and thereby helped to maintain fertility.” Hurt adds that the urban population knew even less about soil conservation.<sup>28</sup> Another problem was ignorance of how climate and droughts functioned. The farmers believed that “rain would follow the plow,” so the more one would plow the more rain was expected to fall.<sup>29</sup> These farmers refused to change their habits given the profitability of Great Plains wheat.<sup>30</sup> As Worster notes, “It was easy

for them to dismiss the grass as unproductive, unprofitable, and unnecessary, and to force the land to grow wheat instead. By the values they had been taught, they were justified in what they did.<sup>31</sup> In as little as seven years, most of the dirt was ploughed and primed for blowing, ready to be transformed into the terrible and deadly black blizzards.<sup>32</sup> Although Dust Bowl farmers did not create the weather, they did engage in harmful practices that made the drought much worse for the lands of the Great Plains. Indeed, according to de la Rüe, the storms caused 321,000,000 acres of damage, leaving nearly a quarter of the land useless for agriculture.<sup>33</sup>

The creation of the Dust Bowl had many consequences for Americans. It caused the destruction of the land and the life of the plains farmers. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt noted in a fireside chat after having visited the Great Plains, the land was so devastated that there was little left in terms of production and profits. He saw field upon field of destroyed crops and recounted a conversation with a cattle farmer, who had to sell all of his livestock save for his breeding cows. Some cattle were only alive due to water brought in from faraway places with tanker trucks. The destruction was so widespread that farmers even lost the water in their wells. They had nothing left.<sup>34</sup>

Due to these grim circumstances, some families chose to leave the area altogether. Even farmers who had worked through the drought for four years were ready to give up and move away. The *New York Times* noted that one hundred families had sought federal aid for moving elsewhere, but aid was not immediately forthcoming.<sup>35</sup> Many families chose to move to California in search of a new existence. These refugees took jobs that once belonged to Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican workers. They were favored for jobs, the *Times* claimed, because they were more familiar with farming than were "foreign immigrants."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, during harvest time, their labor was coveted due to their experience with farming.<sup>37</sup> The Dust Bowl families were in fact met with suspicion and hostility by some residents. One Californian described the refugees as "lazy, no account failures and they'd rather live on the county than work...why I've offered them land and they won't work it!"<sup>38</sup> Still others argued that "They're just the same as the rest of us, but their breaks were tougher."<sup>39</sup> Despite these mixed opinions, many refugees ultimately found better lives in California, especially as a result of government assistance. Seventy thousand refugees fled to California and many of them expected government aid.<sup>40</sup> According to the *New York Times*, "If work becomes too hard to get or pay is below their standard, they firmly believe the government will support them in a pinch."<sup>41</sup>

The Dust Bowl not only devastated the land and forced people to flee, it also took the lives of children and adults. Still others suffered from the sickness that accompanied the dust storms, commonly called "Dust Pneumonia." In Meade Country, Kansas, fifty two percent of the cases reported at hospitals were a result from dust pneumonia.<sup>42</sup> Patients who arrived at the hospital spat up clods

of dirt, had mud washed out of their mouth, their noses swabbed with Vaseline, and their eyes rinsed with boric acid.<sup>43</sup> While the dust held no organic life that could cause sickness, it did have a high concentration of silica, which had a poisoning effect similar to lead, and the fine particles cut into lung tissue and contributed to respiratory infections such as sinusitis, pharyngitis, laryngitis, and bronchitis.<sup>44</sup> Health officials were troubled by the persistence of the dust sickness.<sup>45</sup> The Red Cross, for example, dispensed 17,700 dust masks to residents and sent nurses to 1,631 homes, mostly for dust illnesses.<sup>46</sup> Treatments for these illnesses were limited. Besides wearing the dispensed masks, "health officials recommended attaching translucent glass cloth to the inside frames of windows, although people also used cardboard, canvas, or blankets. Hospitals covered their patients with wet sheets, and housewives flapped the air with wet dish towels to collect dust."<sup>47</sup> Residents would also seal up their windows with tape or rags, sometimes leading to the restriction of air circulation in homes and families had to open the windows just to get air into the house regardless of the dust that also entered their homes.<sup>48</sup>

The Dust Bowl produced many adverse effects, but the people of the Great Plains responded to these distressing times with innovation. The introduction of new farming practices such as water management and terracing helped produce a record harvest in 1942.<sup>49</sup> Suitcase farmers and corporations appeared again to try to make huge profits. Plains farmers grew restless with cautionary practices. Agrarian technicians saw their work once again cause a boom in the 1940s.<sup>50</sup> In the 1950s, a drought occurred that threatened to cause another Dust Bowl. Last minute rainfall averted a recurrence of this natural disaster. One farmer affirmed that "we know how to farm better than we do farm. We simply take chances, winning in good season, and losing when it fails to rain, or if the wind blows out our crops. It's not in our blood to play a safe game."<sup>51</sup> Lessons from the trials of the 1930s were jettisoned for quick profits. Techniques originally developed to ward off another catastrophe encouraged farmers to produce more than before in hopes of making higher profits—no matter the risk.

The trials of the Dust Bowl show what can happen when humans and nature collaborate to create a catastrophe. Although initially some farmers may not have known that they were creating ripe conditions for the Dust Bowl, even when confronted with the reality of their farming practices, they continued their destructive ways. The legacy of the Dust Bowl is ever-present. Environmental historian Donald Worster conducted an interview with a modern day farmer asking, "Can the Dust Bowl come back as it was in the 1930s?" He answered: "No sir, there's no way that could happen. We've got the machinery to stop it, and we know how to farm better."<sup>52</sup> While this sounds eerily similar to what the farmers of the 1920s and 1930s said prior to the formation of the Dust Bowl, perhaps knowledge of this prior disaster can prevent similar destruction in the future.

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 51.
- <sup>2</sup> G. Farmer, M. J. Ingram, and T. M. L. Wigley, *Climate and History: Studies of Past Climates and Their Impact on Man* (New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1981), 4.
- <sup>3</sup> Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 82-83.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-85.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.
- <sup>10</sup> Hurt, *The Dust Bowl*, 28.
- <sup>11</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 90-93.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>14</sup> Farmer, Ingram, and Wigley, *Climate and History*, 494.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.
- <sup>16</sup> E. Aubert de la Rüe, *Man and the Winds*, trans. Madge E. Thompson (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1955), 108.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> "Dust Storm Kills Four in Midwest: Trains Delayed, Trees Felled as Great Clouds Whirl for 36 Hours Over 7 States," *New York Times*, March 17, 1935.
- <sup>20</sup> "Gale-Driven Dust Darkens Skies from Midwest to Pacific: Dust Storms Visit 6 States of West," *New York Times*, March 23, 1936.
- <sup>21</sup> Arthur Rothstein, "The winds of the 'dust bowl' have piled up large drifts of soil against this farmers barn near Liberal, Kansas," Photograph, March 1936, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998018503/PP/>, accessed October 10, 2016.
- <sup>22</sup> Ellen Gray, "NASA Study Finds 1934 Had Worst Drought of Last Thousand Years," NASA, 2014, [http://www.nasa.gov/content/goddard/1934-had-worst-drought-of-last-thousand-years/#VRxLavnF\\_al](http://www.nasa.gov/content/goddard/1934-had-worst-drought-of-last-thousand-years/#VRxLavnF_al), accessed April 14, 2015.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>26</sup> "All Kansas Included in Drought Territory: Last 25 Counties Are Added to List, With Two in Iowa and Two in Kentucky," *New York Times*, August 22, 1936.
- <sup>27</sup> de la Rüe, *Man and the Winds*, 108- 110.
- <sup>28</sup> Hurt, *The Dust Bowl*, 67.
- <sup>29</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 82.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 97.
- <sup>32</sup> Hurt, *The Dust Bowl*, 28.
- <sup>33</sup> de la Rüe, *Man and the Winds*, 113.
- <sup>34</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "On Drought Conditions," Address of the President, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1936, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/090636.html>.
- <sup>35</sup> "Colorado Families Flee Dust Storms: Residents of 2 Counties Begin Exodus As Ranchers Plan to Move 50,000 Cattle," *New York Times*, March 25, 1935.
- <sup>36</sup> Douglas W. Churchill, "Exiles from the Dust: They Create a Grave Problem for California," *New York Times*, March 13, 1938.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> "Dust Bowl Exiles Roam California," *New York Times*, Jul 18, 1937.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 20.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Hurt, *The Dust Bowl*, 51.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 53.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 52.
- <sup>47</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 21.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 225.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 226.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 236-237.



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