



Oshkosh Scholar

Volume XIII, 2018  
University of  
Wisconsin Oshkosh



University of Wisconsin Oshkosh  
*Oshkosh Scholar*

Volume XIII, 2018

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## Preface

“Research,” wrote the famous African-American author Zora Neal Hurston, “is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” At the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh we believe it is a core principle of our mission to foster experiences that enable students to engage their curiosity with “purpose,” and to “poke” and “pry” in their fields of study. It is in that spirit, that I am proud to welcome you to the thirteenth volume of our undergraduate research journal, *Oshkosh Scholar*. In this volume, student authors working across disciplines that include history, music, psychology, philosophy, literature, and kinesiology present their original research and engagement with important scholarly debates. Produced through the hard work of students and faculty, *Oshkosh Scholar* aims to follow the process of academic journals as much as possible. All articles are evaluated through a double-blind review before student authors and their faculty mentors revise and resubmit their papers. An interdisciplinary selection committee of faculty then chooses the final set of articles for publication. A student artist designs the cover, and student editors do essential work in the editing and production process. Presenting some of the university’s best undergraduate student research and writing, this volume of *Oshkosh Scholar* continues our deep commitment to celebrating our students’ intellectual curiosity.

The six articles selected for publication in this volume demonstrate the vitality of undergraduate research on our campus. Jennifer Depew, a double major in history and political science, is our first “two-time” student author. Her study of the anti-immigration Know-Nothing Party in Wisconsin during the 1850s demonstrates exemplary skill in archival research and suggests interesting parallels between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century in the politics of immigration. A recent kinesiology graduate, Maddisen Long-Pero, presents the results of several recent studies on the relationship between chemotherapy treatment and physical activity. She argues that a growing body of research suggests that exercise can effectively mitigate many of the adverse side effects of chemotherapy. Monica Meldrum combines her two fields of study, history and music, in an interesting article on the careers of East and West German musicians during the Cold War. She examines various ways that these artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain used their music to critique and challenge the socialist systems of the Eastern Bloc. Jacob Covey, a history and English major, raises interesting questions about history and memory through his study of Holocaust sites in Eastern Europe. He argues that the passage of time, and the efforts of the Nazis, the Soviets, and others to deny or change the history of the Holocaust have created challenges for memorializing the tragic events of the Final Solution today. An anthropology and geology double major, Samantha Moore demonstrates her interdisciplinary skills with an article on Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* that engages scholarship in literature and philosophy. She uses existential nihilist philosophy as a tool to unlock important insights into the actions of the novel’s heroine, Oedipa Maas. Finally, history major Anna Dinkel’s article looks at the historical impact of the introduction of a new entrance exam for the selection of agents to the colonial civil service in mid-nineteenth century British India. She argues that the introduction of a standardized process of selection for joining the Indian Civil Service had long-term consequences that contributed to the eventual democratization of India.

Special thanks are due to all of the student authors, faculty mentors, faculty reviewers, and members of the Selection Committee who contributed their time and talents to *Oshkosh Scholar*. Additional thanks go to the managing editor, Susan Surendonk, as well as the student editors, Sydney Nelson and Natalie Dillon. Their hours of service and dedication to the journal were essential to the completion of this volume. I also wish to thank the Provost's Office for its continued financial support of the journal, and undergraduate student research. I invite you all to enjoy this excellent collection of undergraduate exploration and discovery.

**Dr. Michael Rutz**

Professor, Department of History  
Faculty Editor, *Oshkosh Scholar*

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“As I was thinking about the buildings and places on campus, I thought about the students who spend their time here. Students conduct scholarly research in these buildings, and a rewarding research process may culminate with publication of the research. I wanted to highlight the distinguishing features of campus with a gold look to show the value of UW Oshkosh.”

— Jacob Vang

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# **“The Glorious American Banner Floating High above the Ramparts”: The Rise and Fall of Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin**

**Jennifer Depew**, author

Dr. Thomas Rowland, History, faculty mentor

Jennifer Depew graduated in December 2018 with history and political science majors. Her research interests are American history, political development and women in politics. Jennifer has previously published “A New Slavery of Caste: An Evaluation of President Woodrow Wilson with Regard to Race” in the 2016 *Oshkosh Scholar*, and she worked as a research assistant on the UW System Lands We Share Initiative, an oral history project focusing on the story of farming in Wisconsin. She plans to attend graduate school and earn a Ph.D. in history.

Dr. Thomas J. Rowland graduated from Marquette University in 1974 with a B.A. in history. He received an M.A. in theology from the Washington Theological Union in 1978 and a Ph.D. in history from the George Washington University in 1992. Over a 20-year span, he has taught a variety of courses, including American History, Wisconsin History, U.S. Military and Foreign Affairs, the American Revolutionary War Era, and the U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction. He is the author of *In the Shadows of Grant and Sherman: George B. McClellan and Civil War History*. He has also published interpretive biographies of Presidents Fillmore, Pierce, and Grant.

## ***Abstract***

Know-Nothingism was an anti-immigrant movement that gained prominence in the United States following a surge in Irish and German Catholic immigration during the 1840s and 1850s. Wisconsin, a new state with a diverse and fast-growing population, was uniquely poised to be a battleground for political fights between the native- and foreign-born. This paper recounts the efforts of Wisconsin Know-Nothings to vie with the Democratic and Republican parties for electoral supremacy from 1855 to 1857. Although not strong enough to run their own challengers in the 1855 gubernatorial election, the Know-Nothings contributed to an aura of frenzied paranoia about political purity that would result in one of the most notorious elections in the state’s history. In the 1856 presidential election, the Know-Nothings mounted a campaign that helped reveal cracks in the foundation of the Union and paved the way for the coming Civil War. The movement would ultimately divide over the issue of slavery, but during its brief ascendancy, it ignited a furious, statewide debate over American values that impacted the formation of both major political parties.

## ***Introduction***

About a mile outside of West Bend, Wisconsin, on the night of August 1, 1855, George DeBar, a nineteen-year-old American-born farmhand, knocked on the door of his employer, a Bavarian immigrant named John Muehr. When Muehr answered, he found his discontented, young employee in a more anxious state than usual, appearing

“sweaty” and “fatigued” beneath the brim of his distinctive white Know-Nothing hat, a signifier of his allegiance to the country’s fast-growing anti-immigrant political organization. DeBar, with an air of nervousness, expressed his wish to leave Muehr’s employ and requested to be paid the remainder of his wages. Muehr complied, and, after receiving his payment, DeBar asked for a glass of water. Muehr offered him beer instead, and he descended through a trap door into the cellar to retrieve it. DeBar would later tell the police that he “turned two or three times to go away,” but instead he stayed, striking Muehr in the head with a rock. Muehr’s young wife, Mary, who had been watching the situation unfold, escaped out of the back of the house with DeBar in hot pursuit. From a jail cell, he would claim that his only intention was to kill John Muehr. Mary’s flight, along with the frantic cries of “Murder!” from the Muehrs’ fourteen-year-old hired servant, forced DeBar’s hand. According to a sensationalized newspaper account, he chopped Mary’s head “half off” and he slit the boy’s throat.

DeBar would later claim that the motivation for murder was politics and honor. During the previous spring election, DeBar, an outspoken American outsider with anti-immigrant leanings in the predominately German community of West Bend, was struck in the head with a club. Although he was unsure who had done it, he believed Muehr to be the culprit. Ultimately, DeBar was a poor murderer—both of the Muehrs survived the attack, while DeBar was lynched for the attempt as well as the death of the boy—but the episode itself was representative of growing tensions between native- and foreign-born Americans.<sup>6</sup> The middle of the nineteenth century saw unprecedented immigration to the United States from non-English speaking and Roman Catholic areas of Europe.<sup>7</sup> These immigrants, spurred by famine and political unrest in their home countries, arrived in a United States that, although expanding territorially, was relatively culturally homogeneous.<sup>8</sup> Their foreign tongues, religions, and customs were perceived as a threat to the existing social order by a significant number of native-born Americans, inciting a furious, and frequently violent, nationwide debate about American identity and democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Wisconsin, although in its infancy, was not spared from becoming embroiled in the debate. On the contrary, the state was poised to become actively involved in the political maneuverings and social strife wrought by the Nativist movement. Wisconsin, a new state with bountiful, cheap land, was a beacon for enterprising Americans and foreigners alike. The beauty, fertility, and low prices of the state’s farmland were advertised widely, from New York to Norway, in the form of pamphlets and informational brochures.<sup>10</sup> From 1847 to 1860, Wisconsin’s population rose from 210,546 people to roughly 776,000. Of these individuals, one-third were native Wisconsinites and the rest were either Americans from other states or foreign born, making Wisconsin the state with the second highest proportion of immigrant inhabitants in the country.<sup>11</sup> This rapidly growing, highly diverse population proved to be an ideal breeding ground for a strong Nativist movement.

Nativists, referred to as Know-Nothings for their coy manner of denying outright involvement in an anti-immigrant organization, were actors in a movement that was, at its heart, political.<sup>12</sup> Initially organized into secret orders, the Know-Nothings gained prominence in the mid-1850s following the slow demise of the Whig Party, which left a vacuum of power to be filled in national partisan politics. By 1855, two ascendant parties vied for dominance as the principal opposition to the Democrats: the Republican Party and the American Party, the official political organization of the Know-Nothing movement.<sup>13</sup> At the same moment that they became active on the

national stage, the Know-Nothings made a determined effort to dominate politics in Wisconsin, challenging both Democrats and Republicans for power.

Despite the intensity of the political battles that would follow, little has been written about the rise of Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin. The most prominent and authoritative works on both Know-Nothingism and state history wrongfully ignore the movement. It receives no mention in Tyler Anbinder's *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s*, the premier work on Know-Nothingism in the North, and it is treated as an inconsequential oddity in the most comprehensive history of mid-nineteenth century Wisconsin, Richard N. Current's *The History of Wisconsin: The Civil War Era, 1848–1873*. This perspective is shared by other works of nineteenth-century Wisconsin history, including Michael J. McManus's *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840–1861*, as well as Joseph Schafer's seminal article on immigration, "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin." Of the few published works that take Know-Nothingism in the state seriously, Jack H. Anderson's *Dark Lanterns: An American Lynching* is limited by its explicit focus on the DeBar Lynching, and Joseph Schafer's "Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin," the last and only published piece on the topic, written in 1924.<sup>14</sup> In the decades since, the acquisition of new materials relating to Know-Nothingism by the Wisconsin Historical Society, as well as the digitization of newspapers, have helped to bring the full scope of Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin to greater clarity. In this paper, I share for the first time the intense partisan battles fought by the Know-Nothings over the course of 1855, 1856, and 1857. The movement, represented by statewide councils and the American Party, ultimately acted as a powerful political force that incited a heated, statewide discussion about political purity and American values that would change the nature of state and national politics irrevocably.

### ***Informal and Formal Avenues to Power: The Rise of Know-Nothingism***

By the time Nativism came to Wisconsin, it had been entrenched on the East Coast for decades. During the early republic, immigration had been perceived as a boon to the growing, young nation.<sup>15</sup> This began to change in the 1830s following the publication of a series of rabid anti-Catholic works that coincided with a dramatic surge in Irish and German Catholic immigration to the United States. Nativists, like inventor Samuel F. B. Morse, alerted Americans to what they saw as a vast papal conspiracy in which Catholic immigrants comprised a "powerful religious-politico sect, whose final success depends on the subversion of these democratic institutions, and who have therefore a vital interest in promoting mob violence."<sup>16</sup> To offset this perceived threat to the republic, Americans on the East Coast organized themselves into anti-immigrant fraternal organizations such as the Native American Democratic Association and the Order of United Americans. By the mid-1840s, Nativists were actively involved in politics up and down the Eastern Seaboard, fighting against efforts by state governments to make religious instruction in public schools more amenable to non-Protestants, opposing foreign-born political candidates, and promoting temperance laws.<sup>17</sup> When the Whig Party, at that time the primary opposition to the Democrats, collapsed in 1854 over the issue of slavery, the Nativists were poised to coalesce around disillusioned native-born former Whigs in search of a new political home.

The brand of Nativism known as "Know-Nothingism" was a relative latecomer to the movement but benefited by virtue of having good timing—it swelled in popularity

at the exact moment it could make a name for itself on the national stage. The Know-Nothings organized as a secret society in 1850 and quickly attracted members because, unlike other organizations of its kind, Know-Nothing councils charged no dues.<sup>18</sup> By 1853, Know-Nothings were running candidate tickets in New York; by 1855, Know-Nothingism had followed the flow of Yankee settlers west to Wisconsin.<sup>19</sup> The secretive nature of the organization makes it difficult to trace the exact details of its founding within the state, but by July 1855, as evidenced by the founding of notoriously pro-Know-Nothing newspapers like the *Herald* (Fond du Lac) and the *American* (Milwaukee) as well as incidents like the DeBar Lynching, Know-Nothingism had arrived. It had either arisen organically from disgruntled native-born Wisconsinites and settlers with ties to the East, or it had been brought by an influential Nativist named John Lockwood. A New Yorker who would later become the leader of the state council, Lockwood immigrated to Milwaukee in 1852 from Ohio. He or other Yankee immigrants could have easily carried Nativist connections and know-how to the state.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of its early origins, by August 1852 the organization was making overt political overtures and forcing Wisconsinites, both native- and foreign-born, to take notice. Know-Nothings had already swept the state of Massachusetts and won mayoral elections in cities like Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Chicago.<sup>21</sup> Several months earlier they had developed a public partisan arm, the American Party, in an effort to attract support on a national scale.<sup>22</sup> Foreign born Wisconsinites and non-Nativist politicians alike watched Know-Nothing success and formal mobilization with anxiety. In the 1855 election, the governor's seat was up—and a Know-Nothing victory was possible. The Democratic Party, seizing the opportunity to defend its prospects by consolidating existing constituencies, made frenzied appeals to immigrants, lambasting its opponents as dangerous and un-American.<sup>23</sup> The Republican Party, a group of disaffected former Whigs and radicals with antislavery leanings, was not as lucky—many Know-Nothings were Republicans and vice versa, staining the party and compromising the ability of anti-Nativist Republicans to achieve their goals.<sup>24</sup> The result was a climate of paranoia as Know-Nothings, Democrats, and Republicans in 1855 vied for dominance in what would come to be known as “the most corrupt election in Wisconsin’s history.”<sup>25</sup>

### ***“Spreading Their Plots and Machinations”: The Election of 1855***

“It is clearly impossible that a man can remain in and promote that organization,” the Ohio newspaper editor J. R. Gibbings argued, referring to the Know-Nothings, “and be a Republican.”<sup>26</sup> The potential taint of Know-Nothingism was looming heavily over Republicans as they prepared for the 1855 gubernatorial election. The Republican Party, like the American Party, was young—it had been formed in Wisconsin a little over a year before the Know-Nothing organ—and attracted men largely cut from the same cloth: native-born former Whigs.<sup>27</sup> The Republican Party had coalesced in opposition to slavery, but many Republicans shared similar views with Know-Nothings. In the South, the Know-Nothings were popular amongst slave owners who were disillusioned with the Democrats, but in the North, the Know-Nothings were of the same old New England abolitionist, pro-temperance tradition as the Republicans.<sup>28</sup> The Republican Party, which courted foreign-born constituencies in order to obtain the votes necessary to win elections and promote an antislavery agenda, was struggling to

distance itself from its resemblance to the Know-Nothings.<sup>29</sup> The parties' similarities were made worse by the reality of the dual affiliations many prominent Republicans shared with the secret organization.

By the summer of 1855, the Republican Party in Wisconsin was fighting a battle against Know-Nothingism on two fronts. Not only were Republican leaders trying to publicly disavow Nativism, they were attempting to entice their own Nativist branch to remain with the party. Newspaper editors, abolitionists, and partisans generally sought to do both in one breath by invoking the only issue more controversial than Nativism: slavery. Sherman M. Booth, the Milwaukee-based radical abolitionist, furiously published columns that lambasted the American Party's xenophobia while also mocking its division on slavery, arguing that the opposing party "presents a padlock to our lips and exclaims 'Hush! Not a Word! Don't agitate! You'll only make the slaveholders angry; keep quiet!'" Anyone truly devoted to abolition, he implied, would never support such a party, regardless of their views on immigration.<sup>30</sup> Other editors attacked the Nativists on terms of ideology. The Republican newspaper, the *Freeman* (Fond du Lac), argued "the phrase so common, 'America for Americans,' is rife with treason for the human race, as would be the saying 'Heaven for the white folks.'" Not only were antislavery Know-Nothings hypocrites, a charge designed to both attract hesitant immigrants to the Republican Party as well as challenge the logic of Nativist abolitionists, they were fundamentally opposed to human rights.<sup>31</sup> The American Party of Wisconsin, attempting to deflect, argued that it stood "as fair and square before the Slavery question as any well-organized national party can stand." The American Party was sympathetic toward abolitionism, it argued, but not in such a way that would threaten the stability of the union.<sup>32</sup> The two young parties, both attempting to attract the same constituency, competed for moral and electoral dominance.

The Democratic Party, confident in both its position within the party system and the influence it wielded over its foreign-born constituents, took great joy stoking the flames of inter-party strife. A divided opposition made electoral success all the more assured. Its security, however, was shaken with the late August publication of an alleged Know-Nothing circular that suggested the existence of a Nativist conspiracy poised to infiltrate the upcoming Democratic and Republican state nominating conventions and promote candidates amenable to Know-Nothing goals.<sup>33</sup> The American Party, although perceived to be a real electoral threat, was too weak to run its own candidates for the gubernatorial election, and suspicions that it would hijack a more established party's apparatus, likely the Republican's, to further its own agenda were widespread.<sup>34</sup> This pamphlet, which was argued to be evidence that the Nativist organizations were "training their enginery [*sic*] and spreading their plots and machinations" throughout the state, called the sanctity of both parties into question.<sup>35</sup> An aura of intense paranoia enveloped Wisconsin over the next few months as both the Democrats and the Republicans worked to simultaneously distance themselves from Know-Nothingism and argue for its influence on the other party.

The circular, despite the storm of controversy it incited, was almost certainly a fraud. A Republican newspaper, the *Independent* (Portage), first published it, and it was then featured in the *State Journal* (Madison), another Republican paper with a larger reach. In the same breath that the *State Journal* addressed the existence of the publication it charged that the "K.N. movement in this State is one of the principal strings" which the Democratic incumbent, William A. Barstow, "relies upon

to pull, with effect, securing his re-election.”<sup>36</sup> Some members of the Republican Party published the circular in a deliberate attempt to undermine the Democratic Party. Ironically, the accusation that Know-Nothings were attempting to influence the Republican nominating convention was true. This effort, however, was born less out of the machinations of an unknowable shadowy cabal and more out of the natural confluence of Republicans and Know-Nothings.<sup>37</sup> It was also ineffective. The Republican Party unanimously adopted an anti-Know-Nothing resolution, and chose a nominee, Coles Bashford, who was not amenable to the Nativist interest.<sup>38</sup> In light of this, the American Party, interested in taking advantage of its growing popularity and strength, floated the possibility of running its own candidates instead.<sup>39</sup> The state leadership, however, was divided between running Simeon Mills, a candidate with Democratic ties who could draw votes away from both of the other parties, and Benjamin Pixley, a former Whig with Republican ties.<sup>40</sup> They ultimately decided to forgo their own candidate and back the Republican nominee, who they believed would see great success on Election Day.<sup>41</sup>

The reality of the situation did not stop the development of an intense political newspaper war within the state. Democratic and Republican papers alike argued that the Know-Nothings were successful in their plots to influence the state conventions. The nominees, Republican Coles Bashford and Democrat William Barstow, were both accused of harboring Nativist tendencies and participating in Know-Nothing councils.<sup>42</sup> These accusations were most damning for Bashford and the Republicans, who chafed against the public support of the American Party.<sup>43</sup> The *American*, the official newspaper of the American Party in Wisconsin, announced an official endorsement of the Republican ticket, an action that made allegations of Know-Nothingism harder to deny.<sup>44</sup> Democratic newspapers fed off of each other, printing and reprinting allegations that Bashford was well known as a Nativist in his hometown of Oshkosh, or that he had a large apparatus of Know-Nothings across the state working for his election through various, sometimes unseemly, means.<sup>45</sup> Republican papers, not to be deterred by the American Party’s endorsement, reported on alleged meetings between Barstow and John Lockwood, president of the State Know-Nothing Council, as well as the existence of former Democrats in high-ranking positions within the organization.<sup>46</sup> It was the Democratic Party, they argued, that had a problem with Nativism. The American Party’s support of the Republican ticket was a clever trick designed to “defeat the Republican ticket, and to damn it” while actually working on behalf of the Democrats.<sup>47</sup> In essence, Wisconsin state politics in 1855 became an elaborate and aggressive game of finger-pointing.

These charges were simultaneously valuable and troublesome for all parties involved. The Democrats, having escaped an official Know-Nothing endorsement, were able to better promote their platform as the last defense against Nativist ascendancy. “Against this conspiracy,” Democratic editors wrote of the Know-Nothings, “there is no organized opposition but the democratic party [*sic*].”<sup>48</sup> Despite these assertions, the Democrats were forced to spend time and political energy fending off unprecedented attacks on their own purity. The environment of uncertainty gave Republicans the opportunity to sow doubt on the part of Democratic constituents, painting some of the stain of Know-Nothingism onto the opposition party and appealing to a constituency otherwise lost to them. At the same time, the charge of Know-Nothingism against the Republicans was more accurate. Although this helped attract the vote of those with



Nativist sympathies, Know-Nothingism's central and controversial role in the election did more harm to Republican efforts to distinguish themselves from the American Party than good. The American Party, despite not running any candidates of its own, received a great deal of publicity and was taken seriously as a force in state politics—it even used this environment to expand, establishing a council in the state capitol and no doubt gaining similarly minded adherents across the state.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the opposition from both Democrats and Republicans led to a great deal of powerful, negative rhetoric being deployed against the American Party in the press. This would ultimately serve to harden resistance to its platform in ways that would have a long-lasting effect on partisan sympathies in the state.

The Know-Nothing debate contributed to an environment that resulted in an election so close that both parties could make a claim to the governorship. The Democrat Barstow was declared the winner following the official vote count, but by March he was forced to relinquish his seat after an investigation revealed the existence of blatant election fraud: Barstow's narrow lead over Bashford was the result of manufactured votes cast in the fictional towns of Bridge Creek and Spring Creek. Bashford ultimately captured the office following a nail-biting Wisconsin Supreme Court struggle. It would not take long before he revealed himself to be as equally corrupt as his gubernatorial opponent, accepting a total of \$50,000 in bribes—an enormous \$1.5 million in 2018 dollars—from the La Crosse & Milwaukee Railroad Company in exchange for approval of a land grant. Shortly thereafter, Bashford moved west to Arizona.<sup>50</sup> Charges of Know-Nothingism against both candidates continued following the election, but they were drowned out by more egregious and pressing scandals.<sup>51</sup>

The American Party, stronger in Wisconsin and heartened by continued successes in other states, vowed to never be forced to support the Republican Party again.<sup>52</sup> “Next year,” Lockwood wrote to Madison council Vice President Elisha Keyes, “we shall see the glorious American banner floating high above the ramparts.”<sup>53</sup> On the national level, the party was moving out of the shadows and into political legitimacy—it was disavowing secrecy pledges, making plans for a national convention, and gearing up to run its own candidate in the upcoming 1856 presidential election.<sup>54</sup> Republicans and Democrats, in turn, were preparing to face head-on the threat posed by a fully operational American Party machine. As the state prepared itself for the 1856 election, trouble loomed on the horizon. Sectional strife over slavery was proving difficult to stall, and the alliance between northern and southern Know-Nothings was at risk of being divided by the very same spectre that had split the now-defunct Whig Party.<sup>55</sup>

### ***“Not the Man of Our First Choice”: The Election of 1856***

At the start of 1856, prospects for the American Party in Wisconsin were bright. In early January, a state convention was held in Madison to “construct and adopt a platform of principles to be published, avowed and advocated *openly*.”<sup>56</sup> The result was the official state platform of the Wisconsin American Party. Their program struck a moderate Nativist tone, calling for the “unconditional restoration” of the Missouri Compromise, adherence to state's rights, the disenfranchisement of noncitizens, and restrictive immigration laws.<sup>57</sup> It marked, as the *American* rhapsodized, the moment that “the American Party of Wisconsin launched forth into the Gulfstream of Wisconsin politics.”<sup>58</sup> The platform, along with moderate reforms like the admittance of foreign-

born Protestants into Know-Nothing lodges, were signs that the party was working to institutionalize itself in order to pose a formidable threat in the upcoming presidential election.<sup>59</sup> Political commentators in Wisconsin already perceived the American Party to be a distinct political organ; it served as a voice for a movement now decades old, and it was attractive on a national level—a claim that the Republicans could not make.<sup>60</sup>

The Republican Party, resentful of its negative association with Know-Nothingism and anxious to consolidate its base, instituted mechanisms designed to purge Know-Nothings from its ranks following the American Party state convention. Maintaining private Nativist sympathies but remaining loyal to the party was acceptable; taking an active part in a fully fledged rival political organization was not. On a national level, divisions between Republicans and Know-Nothings remained shifting and unclear, but in Wisconsin the Republicans, spearheaded by hostile anti-Know-Nothing leaders, were aggressive in their efforts to smoke out those with dual allegiances.<sup>61</sup> A resolution by a state Republican caucus led to a mass internal inquisition where Republicans were asked: “Are you a member of the American organization or any other likely to be antagonistic to the Republican party in the approaching presidential campaign?” Any answer other than one in the negative, William A. White of the Republican State Central Committee wrote, “shall be considered offensive.”<sup>62</sup>

In response, a Know-Nothing resistance formed within the Republican Party. “We have decided to request you to answer the Chairman in the following manner,” an anonymous American Party operative wrote to prominent Republican and Know-Nothing Elisha Keyes, “by requesting that he should make this interrogation public, and to each member of the committee and that the answers should be published in the *Madison Journal* or in any other paper he may select.” The purpose of such action was to humiliate the Republicans by further publicizing their association with Know-Nothingism—according to the anonymous letter, six out of the nine Republican State Council members had Nativist affiliations.<sup>63</sup> Keyes made no such moves, but Judge D. E. Wood, a member of the Republican State Committee as well as an active participant in American Party operations, made as much noise as he could following his attempted removal. In the *Herald* (Fond du Lac), Wood published a letter berating the Republicans, implying that the calls for his resignation came from a minority of the party and arguing that the Republican and American platforms were in such accordance that it was unnecessary and foolish to expel those with Know-Nothing ties.<sup>64</sup> The episode revealed the intimate connections between Republican and American partisans while simultaneously straining relations between the two organizations. “The truth is,” a Waukesha newspaper editor wrote as the dust settled, “that although the principles and aims of the Republicans and Know-Nothings are for the most part identical . . . the two will not coalesce and cannot be made to pull together.” It would take the upcoming presidential election, political commentators believed, to see which party would come out on top.<sup>65</sup>

Having better consolidated its forces and now in possession of a well-oiled political machine, the American Party of Wisconsin attended the national nominating convention in late February 1856 with a great deal of optimism and unity. The political discourse within the state suggested that the Know-Nothings were just as poised to capture the presidential vote as any other party, and to many national observers, the American Party seemed to be the only choice that would not further incite explosive



sectional strife.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, such conflict could not be avoided. Know-Nothings from the North and South arrived in Philadelphia with a shared investment in anti-Catholicism and the supremacy of the native-born, but they differed totally on matters relating to slavery. After a few tense days, including threats by both the northern and southern delegates to abandon the party, convention-goers decided upon former President Millard Fillmore as their presidential nominee. Fillmore, a man with obscure Know-Nothing credentials and a solid proslavery reputation, appeased the South but left the North alienated.<sup>67</sup>

Initially, the *American* (Milwaukee) fell in line with the national party, declaring, “Mr. Fillmore was not the man of our first choice,” but that they had “no doubt he will command a very large vote.”<sup>68</sup> The first choice of the Wisconsin delegates was New York businessman George Law, a savvy populist who saw broad support amongst Know-Nothing moderates nationwide.<sup>69</sup> In the final returns, Law received the second highest vote count, losing to Fillmore, who was perceived as a safer candidate overall.<sup>70</sup> Despite the American Party of Wisconsin’s disappointment with the outcome of the vote, it was still willing to publicly back Fillmore. Republican newspapers, excited by the news of division within their rival party, largely ignored this. The votes for Law by Wisconsin delegates were widely publicized, and predictions for the ultimate disintegration of the American Party over the issue of slavery were made with gleeful zeal.<sup>71</sup> The situation in other northern states was worse. The Wisconsin party was willing to support the national organization, but others were not. Massachusetts, an American Party stronghold, peeled off from the decisions made by the official nominating convention, reaffirming its own antislavery platform and refusing to support Fillmore.<sup>72</sup> Across the North, the Know-Nothing organizations were joining with Republicans over the matter of slavery.<sup>73</sup> The party unity that had seemed certain only a few weeks prior was now collapsing.

Lockwood, in response to the crisis at hand, called for a state meeting of the Know-Nothing councils in early April 1856. Emboldened by the autonomous, if controversial, actions of the Massachusetts council, the *American* also announced the official rescindment of the Wisconsin party’s support for Fillmore’s candidacy. Fillmore’s nomination was the result of a “packed, one-sided and unfair cabal of Southern and pro-slavery politicians” who sought to force a candidate amenable to their interests, regardless of his actual affiliation with their party.<sup>74</sup> At the state meeting, the Know-Nothings reaffirmed their commitment to a platform opposed to the extension of slavery, and they discussed the possibility of running their own independent candidate for the presidency separate from the national nomination—Nathaniel Banks, a committed Massachusetts Know-Nothing.<sup>75</sup> The American Party used the publicity surrounding this event in Wisconsin to assert its strength—despite the national divisions, Lockwood claimed that membership in the party had grown exponentially in the past year. According to the official proceedings, 61 new councils had been formed, and the Know-Nothings had gained over 15,000 members. They could now claim about a third of eligible voters in the state.<sup>76</sup>

This public show of party unity masked the reality of inner turmoil within the Wisconsin American Party. Bereft of a real candidate and with little connection to what remained of the national party, the Wisconsin Know-Nothings began to make appeals, wanted and unwanted, to the Republicans. Although the *American* maintained that the Know-Nothings were still a party distinct from the Republicans, it admitted its willingness to cast votes for a Republican candidate who was not hostile to

Nativist principles.<sup>77</sup> The Republican Party, the *American* critiqued, was willing to swamp “every other principle of reform beneath the transient issue of Slavery non-extension,” but at least they recognized the evil of slavery and the need for reform. In Massachusetts, it was predicted that the Republican and American parties would endorse the same candidate. “Wisconsin,” the *American* reported, “will have the opportunity of doing the same thing.”<sup>78</sup> In response, the Republicans cringed and attempted to distance themselves from the possibility of a shared nomination. Not only would such an occurrence render their earlier efforts at purging Know-Nothings from their ranks ultimately pointless, but it would hurt them in the eyes of foreign-born constituents.<sup>79</sup> William A. White of the Republican State Committee publicly maintained his disavowal of the Know-Nothings and expressed his wish that the “right sort” of men, or those without dual affiliations, would be the ones attending the upcoming Republican nominating convention.<sup>80</sup>

As spring turned to summer, the political field began to change. Tensions in Kansas, a territory at the crossroads of debates over the extension of slavery, had already captured the state’s sympathy and attention for months. Wisconsinites had watched the violence between proslavery and antislavery forces, fighting over whether Kansas would be admitted to the union as a free or slave state, with great anxiety.<sup>81</sup> An increase in hostilities in early May 1856 led the rabidly abolitionist Republican paper, the *Daily Free Democrat* (Milwaukee), to shift its previous anti-Know-Nothing position and appeal directly to antislavery Know-Nothings, arguing forcefully that continuing to support a rival party in shambles would only divide the popular vote and allow proslavery forces to win the presidential election.<sup>82</sup> On May 21, the violence came to a head when proslavery forces invaded Lawrence, a settlement comprised of antislavery advocates. The proslavery forces wreaked havoc, resulting in arson and murder. The next day, after giving a spirited speech denouncing the events in Lawrence, Senator Charles Sumner, an antislavery radical from Massachusetts, was beaten nearly to death by the cousin of a South Carolina senator on the floor of the Senate.<sup>83</sup> The events intensified the debate over slavery on a national level. The American Party’s official candidate was still Millard Fillmore, but many of the southern Know-Nothing organizations began to break off and support the Democratic, proslavery candidate James Buchanan. The American Party of Wisconsin, citing its overwhelming “desire” to oppose the extension of slavery, officially endorsed John C. Frémont, the Republican candidate for president.<sup>84</sup>

Divided by slavery, the American Party could not withstand the political forces that portended the coming Civil War. Accusations of Know-Nothingism against Frémont abounded, but they did not carry the same threat that they had during the gubernatorial campaign.<sup>85</sup> The American Party continued to exert a strong influence on the local level throughout the summer but its impact steadily waned.<sup>86</sup> The final election returns in Wisconsin saw 66,090 votes cast for Frémont, 52,843 for Buchanan, and 579 for Fillmore. This was unique nationally—in other northern states, votes for Frémont and Fillmore constituted a majority but were split, enabling Buchanan to capture the presidency.<sup>87</sup> Wisconsin Nativists were thus more willing than others to forgo their American Party affiliations and vote for a Republican, signaling the ultimate importance of slavery as an issue in the minds of Wisconsin voters. Following the election, efforts on the national level to reunite the party were attempted, but they were made in vain.<sup>88</sup> Those with any semblance of political savvy could read the writing on the wall: the American Party, split between North and South, was dead.

## ***Conclusion***

In popular histories of the Civil War era, the American Party is oft-forgotten or relegated to a footnote. Know-Nothingism as a whole is portrayed as a nineteenth-century oddity, a bizarre, secret organization that disliked a group of people—Irish and German Americans—widely regarded as red-blooded, white Americans today.<sup>89</sup> The party's relatively short run and ultimate political ineffectiveness is certainly the reason for this perception. Developing due to a perfect storm of political instability and is vitriolic Nativism, Know-Nothingism's hold on the United States was short but intense and worthy of being studied. Although it could not survive the relentlessness of the period's sectional strife—a conflict that the country itself could barely withstand—for a brief moment, the movement inspired political action that won elections, promoted debate, and could result in violence like the DeBar Lynching in West Bend. The intensity of its run illustrates how close the party came to being a lasting and formidable political force. With this in mind, the election of 1856 proves to be one of the most important elections in American history. It ended the hope of Know-Nothing ascendancy, securing Republican dominance and taking the nation on the path that would ultimately lead to the Civil War. Wisconsin's large immigrant population, the intimate ties between state Americans and Republicans, and the ultimate acquiescence of Wisconsin Know-Nothings to the Republican machine in the face of mounting tensions over slavery, is symbolic of the struggle played out on the national scale. It is this fact that makes Wisconsin an interesting case study for Know-Nothingism in the North as a whole.

In addition to influencing events in the escalation to the Civil War, the American Party has had another lasting impact. Like in many other northern states, disaffected Wisconsin Know-Nothings flocked to the Republican Party en masse following the 1856 election. Know-Nothing lodges quietly disbanded as tensions between the North and South intensified. Former American Party operatives with political ambitions concentrated on climbing, or in some cases continuing to climb, the ranks of the Republican Party instead. John Lockwood, former president of the State Know-Nothing Council, would ultimately be appointed postmaster of Milwaukee by President Lincoln in 1860, and Elisha Keyes, the prominent Madison Know-Nothing, would have a long career as a powerful Republican politician.<sup>90</sup> The existence of former high-ranking Know-Nothings in the Republican Party, even after the councils disbanded, continued to impact the perception of the Republicans among foreign-born voters during and after the Civil War, ultimately influencing the development of both parties on the state and national level. Over the ensuing decades, Republicans and Democrats would continue to appeal to their constituencies: in the early twentieth century, it was Republicans who passed restrictive immigration laws, and in the 1960s it was Democrats who repealed them.<sup>91</sup> Despite the many changes both parties have gone through, that same Nativist strand still exists in the Republican Party today. Recent battles over immigration, including President Trump's travel ban as well as debates over the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, see Republicans continuing to appeal to a Nativist constituency while the Democrats play to an immigrant one. The American Party, although it has been defunct for over 150 years, has a long reach.

## Notes

1. For a thorough treatment of this incident, see Jack H. Anderson, *Dark Lanterns: An American Lynching* (West Bend, WI: Washington County Historical Society, Inc., 2015).
2. Ibid., 18; “Horrible Murder and Robbery! At West Bend, Washington Co.,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 3 August 1855.
3. “The Murder at West Bend—Confession of the Murderer,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 6 August 1855.
4. Anderson, 18–19; “Horrible Murder and Robbery! At West Bend, Washington Co.,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*.
5. “The Murder at West Bend—Confession of the Murderer,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*.
6. Richard N. Current, *The History of Wisconsin: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873*, vol. 2 of *The History of Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 193–194.
7. Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3. Anbinder finds that for the years 1845–1854, 2.9 million immigrants arrived in the United States, “more than had come in the previous seven decades combined.”
8. Current, 60–61.
9. For a comprehensive overview of early Know-Nothing thought, see American Party, “Address of the Delegates of the Native American National Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, July 4th, 1845,” <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009572813> (accessed April 24, 2018).
10. Current, 42–43.
11. Ibid., 76–77.
12. “Know-Nothing Secrets,” *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 5 September 1854. Members of the secret organization were instructed to answer “I don’t know,” if questioned about their involvement.
13. Anbinder, 15–19.
14. Current, 226–27; Joseph Schaefer, “The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 7, no. 2 (1923): 153–71; Michael J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840–1861* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1998), 120; Joseph Schafer, “Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 8, no.1 (1924): 3–21.
15. Anbinder, 9; USCIS History Office and Library, “Early American Immigration Policies,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, <https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/our-history/agency-history/early-american-immigration-policies> (accessed May 1, 2018).
16. Samuel F. B. Morse, *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States*, 5th ed. (New York: H. A. Chapin & Co., 1841), 159, <https://archive.org/details/foreignconspiracy00mors> (accessed April 24, 2018).
17. Abinder, 11–13.
18. Ibid., 20.
19. Ibid., 21; the earliest reference to the existence of Know-Nothing lodges in Wisconsin is “Know-Nothingism—Its Workings and Tendency—the Remedy,” *Potosi Republican*, 19 May 1855, a Democratic piece that alleges the existence of

a lodge in “nearly every village and city of the country.” This assertion is vague and unfounded, but by July there was an undeniable Know-Nothing presence in the state.

20. Frederick A. Holden and E. Dunbar Lockwood, *Descendants of Robert Lockwood: Colonial and Revolutionary History of the Lockwood Family in America from A.D. 1630* (Philadelphia: The Lockwood Family, 1889), 246.
21. Anbinder, 90–102, 144; Guy Gugliotta, *Freedom's Cap: United States Capitol and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 194.
22. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 693.
23. “Know-Nothingism—Its Workings and Tendency—the Remedy,” *Potosi Republican*, 19 May 1855.
24. “The Reply,” *Fond du Lac Freeman*, 11 July 1855; “Cool,” *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 7 November 1855.
25. Adam J. Schrager, “The Most Corrupt Election in Wisconsin’s History,” *Madison Magazine*, 17 October 2014, <https://www.channel3000.com/madison-magazine/city-life/the-most-corrupt-election-in-wisconsins-history/162601871> (accessed August 16, 2018).
26. Quoted in “The Reply,” *Fond du Lac Freeman*.
27. Schrager, “The Most Corrupt Election.”
28. William Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950).
29. Current, 226.
30. Sherman M. Booth, “Another Light,” *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 13 August 1855.
31. Editorial, *Fond du Lac Freeman*, 11 July 1855.
32. *Milwaukee American* reprinted in “False Light,” *Fond du Lac Freeman*, 22 August 1855.
33. “Rich Developments—K. N. Movements,” *Madison State Journal*, 21 August 1855.
34. Joseph Schafer, “Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin,” 14–15.
35. “Rich Developments—K. N. Movements,” *Madison State Journal*.
36. Ibid.
37. Richard W. Hantke, “The Life of Elisha Williams Keyes,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1942), 75–76. Many of the Know-Nothings who attended the state convention were sent because they were members of the Republican Party. This included prominent low-level Republicans like Samuel C. Bean of Lake Mills, Wisconsin, as well as leaders like Madison lawyer and Republican State Central Committee member Elisha W. Keyes.
38. Hantke, 77; Current, 226.
39. Elisha W. Keyes to John Lockwood, 23 September 1855.
40. Ibid.; Elisha W. Keyes to Robert Chandler, 24 September 1855, Elisha W. Keyes Papers, box 5, folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Archives and ARC (hereafter known as “EKP”); Robert Chandler to Elisha W. Keyes, 24 September 1855, EKP; Elisha W. Keyes to Robert Chandler, 25 September 1855, EKP; Hantke, 80. Keyes, the vice president of the Madison

Know-Nothing Council, appealed to John Lockwood, the State Council president, on behalf of Simeon Mills. He believed that running a man with Republican ties would “injure the cause and fail to accomplish the results.” Lockwood and the other Milwaukee-based Know-Nothings were set on Pixley.

41. John Lockwood to Elisha W. Keyes, 30 October 1855, EKP, box 5, folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC.
42. “Late,” *Madison Daily Patriot*, 29 August 1855; “Republican Delegates from Milwaukee—K. N.’s Ahead!,” *Madison Weekly Argus and Democrat*, 4 September 1855; “Facts for the People,” *Madison Daily Patriot*, 15 October 1855.
43. “Cool,” *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*.
44. Current, 227.
45. “Bashford and the Know Nothings,” *Madison Weekly Argus and Democrat*, 16 October 1855; “Know Nothing Electioneering for Bashford—the scoundrel caught at his tricks,” *Madison Weekly Argus and Democrat*, 10 October 1855.
46. “K. N. Movements,” *Madison State Journal*, 29 September 1855; “Barstow and the Know Nothings,” *Madison State Journal*, 8 October 1855; “Waked Up,” *Janesville Gazette*, 29 September 1855.
47. “Cool,” *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*.
48. “Attention the Whole!” *Milwaukee Daily News*, 18 October 1855.
49. Minutes of the Madison Council, Madison Council, 28 September 1855, EKP, box 5, folder 3, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC.
50. Current, 228–30, 245; Schrager, “The Most Corrupt Election,” Dennis McCann, “3 Governors Held Office within Weeks,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 10 December 1998; “Coles Bashford (1816–1878),” Wisconsin Historical Society, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS5227> (accessed August 15, 2018).
51. Editorial, *Madison Weekly Argus and Democrat*, 20 November 1855; “Our Governor Elect,” *Janesville Gazette*, 9 April 1856.
52. “The Elections,” *Janesville Standard*, 17 October 1855; “Tremendous Know Nothing Demonstration in New York,” *Milwaukee American*, 23 October 1855; “Cool,” *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*.
53. John Lockwood to Elisha Keyes, 30 October 1855, EKP, box 5, folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC.
54. “Secrecy Discarded,” *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 24 November 1855; “Americanism in Connecticut,” *Milwaukee American*, 19 November 1855.
55. “Know-Nothing National Convention,” *Milwaukee Daily News*, 23 November 1855.
56. “One Man Power,” *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, 3 January 1856. The emphasis is not mine.
57. Platform of the American Party of the State of Wisconsin, American Party of Wisconsin, Edwin Hurlbut Papers, folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC.
58. “The American Party of Wisconsin,” *Milwaukee American*, 2 February 1856.



59. "A Special K. N. Edict," *Portage Independent*, 31 January 1856.
60. "Grand Rally of the 'Live Oak' Club at Albany," *Milwaukee American*, 7 February 1856.
61. Anbinder, 202; "Mr. D. E. Wood's Letter," *Madison State Journal*, 9 February 1856. Wisconsin was one of the few states to see a "purge" of Know-Nothings from the Republican Party.
62. William A. White to Elisha Keyes, 24 January 1856, EKP, box 6, folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC.
63. "Somebody," to Elisha Keyes, 28 January 1856, EKP, box 5, folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC. The identity of "somebody" is unknown. Works such as Michael J. McManus's *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840–1861*, 237, have suggested that the identity of the anonymous writer was John Lockwood, but the style of handwriting is not consistent with Lockwood's. Given the large number of powerful Know-Nothings within the prominent Republican circles, the identity of the conspirator remains a mystery.
64. "D. E. Wood's Letter," *Milwaukee American*, 9 February 1856; "Mr. D. E. Wood's Letter," *Madison State Journal*.
65. *Sheboygan Lake Journal*, "Republicanism and Know-Nothingism in Wisconsin—"Things are Working,"" 26 February 1856.
66. Ibid.; Anbinder, 203; Thomas J. Rowland, *Millard Fillmore: The Limits of Compromise* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2013) 149–53.
67. Anbinder, 206–12; "Nomination of Millard Fillmore for the Presidency," *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 27 February 1856.
68. Quoted in "Nomination of Millard Fillmore for the Presidency," *Free Democrat*.
69. Editorial, *Janesville Gazette*, 8 March 1856; Anbinder, 205.
70. "Know Nothing Convention," *Whitewater Gazette*, 28 February 1856; Anbinder, 206. Law was an immensely popular candidate but ran into controversy regarding his aggressive electioneering. Some within the party perceived his methods to be an attempt to buy the nomination.
71. "The Last Split," *Milwaukee Weekly Wisconsin*, 27 February 1856; "The Republican Convention," *Whitewater Gazette*, 28 February 1856; "Cannot Support Him," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 7 March 1856.
72. "Further from the American Council of Massachusetts," *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 6 March 1856.
73. Anbinder, 213. In some states, such as New Hampshire and Rhode Island, candidates previously affiliated with the American Party were running as "American Republican."
74. "Meeting of the State Council of the American Party of Wisconsin," *Milwaukee American*, 15 March 1856; "The 'American' Candidates," *Milwaukee American*, 15 March 1856.
75. "American Council at Milwaukee," *Fond du Lac Herald*, 10 April 1856; Anbinder, 217.
76. "Know Nothing Convention," *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 8 April 1856.
77. "Hauling In," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 22 April 1856.

78. "The Right Spirit," *Milwaukee American*, 28 April 1856.
79. Current, 233.
80. William A. White quoted in "A Letter from Mr. Wm. A. White," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 22 April 1856; "Hath This Extent, No More," *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 6 May 1856 expresses a similar sentiment.
81. Current, 231.
82. "That Call," *Milwaukee Daily Free Democrat*, 20 May 1856.
83. Anbinder, 215.
84. William E. Gienapp, "The Crime against Sumner: The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party," *Civil War History* 25, no. 3 (1979): 218–45; "The Southern K. N.'s for Buchanan," *Madison State Journal*, 24 June 1856; "The Right Ground," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 25 June 1856.
85. "Why Know Nothings Support Fremont," *Janesville Standard*, 21 July 1856.
86. Charles C. Sholes to John Fox Potter, 19 July 1856; Charles C. Sholes to John Fox Potter, 24 July 1856, John Fox Potter Papers, box 1, folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Archives and ARC.
87. Current, 233.
88. "Telegraphic—Syracuse, Dec. 30," *Racine Daily Journal*, 31 December 1856.
89. For examples, see John W. Traphagan, "The GOP: The New Know Nothing Party?" *Huffington Post*, 18 January 2017 (accessed May 5, 2018). [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-traphagan/the-gop-the-new-know-noth\\_b\\_9010454.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-traphagan/the-gop-the-new-know-noth_b_9010454.html) (accessed May 5, 2018); Amy Briggs, "Meet the 19th-century Political Party Founded on Ethnic Hate," *National Geographic*, 16 August 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2017/07-08/know-nothings-and-nativism/> (accessed May 5, 2018). Both treatments are accurate but fail to show the degree of influence the Know-Nothing movement exerted over politics in the mid-nineteenth century.
90. "Milwaukee Postmaster," *Janesville Gazette*, 15 March 1861; Current, 578–79.
91. For brief treatments of these events, see U.S. State Department Office of the Historian, "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson Reed Act)," <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act> (accessed May 5, 2018); Tom Gjelton, "The Immigration Act That Inadvertently Changed America," *The Atlantic*, 2 October 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/immigration-act-1965/408409/> (accessed May 7, 2018).

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# The Effects of Physical Activity on Adverse Side Effects in Chemotherapy Patients

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## Abstract

Each year, more than 14 million people worldwide are diagnosed with cancer. Despite advancements in medicine, a cure for this disease has not been found. Chemotherapy, a common cancer treatment, is often used in an attempt to slow the progression of cancer and achieve remission, but it is also associated with several adverse reactions. Fatigue and reduced cognitive function are notable side effects that can decrease the quality of life for many patients and affect their ability to function as they did prior to the diagnosis. In the past, individuals treated for chronic illnesses were often told by their physicians to rest as much as possible and avoid physical activity to preserve their strength. However, current research suggests that exercise can mitigate many chemotherapy side effects. Adhering to the guidelines put forth by the American College of Sports Medicine in *Exercise Management for Persons with Chronic Diseases and Disabilities* (CDD4), individuals undergoing chemotherapy can and should participate in a regular exercise regime to avoid chemotoxicity, thus improving overall health. As cancer rates are expected to increase in the coming decades, physical activity should be integrated into the typical medication-based care plans of cancer patients to yield additional health benefits.

## ***Introduction***

As one of society's leading causes of death, the impact of cancer can be felt worldwide. Each year, approximately 14.4 million people are diagnosed with the disease (World Health Organization 2017). According to the American Cancer Society (2017), there were an estimated 1.68 million new cancer cases and 600,920 cancer deaths in 2017 in the United States alone. Given these high numbers, the likelihood of knowing an individual who is currently suffering or has suffered from cancer is considerable, and the disease is expected to become more prevalent in the coming decades. Even though the diagnostic rate continues to rise, cancer survivorship is also increasing. The National Cancer Institute (2016) states that the number of survivors who live five or more years following their diagnosis is projected to increase by approximately 35 percent in the next decade. Together, these trends demonstrate that considerable progress is being made against the disease, but the medical community will need to adapt to meet the needs of cancer patients at every stage of the disease, from diagnosis to remission.

While there is no cure for cancer, treatments such as radiation, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or gene therapy can help prevent cancerous cells from spreading or even eradicate them. Despite these advancements, many cancer patients, especially those who undergo chemotherapy, experience unpleasant side effects. Fatigue and nausea are two of the most common and doctors often prescribe additional medications to curb their impact (American Cancer Society 2016). Research suggests that physical activity, although less allopathic, may be just as effective at mitigating adverse reactions. Other conditions, such as depression, dementia, and heart disease, have been found to improve with exercise, thus demonstrating the potential for physical activity to be an effective treatment. Cancer patients often experience some of the same symptoms associated with these other conditions. Therefore, the integration of a regular exercise program during and following chemotherapy may help to lessen common side effects, resulting in improved overall health and quality of life for cancer patients.

## ***What is Cancer?***

Cancer is a disease that occurs when a group of the body's own cells are mutated, causing them to divide at an especially high rate. When the human body is functioning normally, there is a system that replaces old or damaged cells with new ones. The development of cancer disrupts this orderly process; damaged cells continue to survive and new cells are formed when they are not needed (National Cancer Institute 2015). This surplus may clump together to form a tumor, which can be malignant (cancerous) or benign (noncancerous). A malignant tumor is one that metastasizes throughout the body and causes damage to other tissues, while a benign tumor is more easily controlled and not usually life-threatening (Cleveland Clinic 2016). Because malignant tumors feed on other parts of the body, it is not the cancer itself that leads to patient death; it is the failure of other organ systems, such as the intestines or kidneys.

## ***Causes of Cancer***

On the molecular level, cancer is caused by mutations or changes to the DNA within cells. Because DNA contains the set of instructions that determines the function and lifespan of a cell, any error in the genetic material can affect the cell's

behavior. A gene mutation can direct a healthy cell to allow rapid growth, fail to stop uncontrolled growth, or make mistakes when repairing DNA errors (Mayo Clinic 2015). Such mutations are either hereditary, which account for only a small portion of cancers, or the result of an environmental or lifestyle factor after birth. Although hereditary mutations cannot be controlled, many other factors can be. Common non-hereditary causes of cancer include smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise. Cancer can also occur as a result of other environmental factors such as overexposure to harmful chemicals, radiation from the sun, or X-rays (Cleveland Clinic 2016). The gene mutations that an individual is born with, and those that may have been acquired throughout his or her lifetime, often interact to cause cancer, and the more mutations that accumulate, the higher the risk of developing the disease. While mutations occur repeatedly during normal cell development, complications arise when the system that identifies and corrects such errors is not functioning properly.

Once a cell becomes mutated, it differs from a normal one in numerous ways that allow it to metastasize and affect other organ systems and tissues. First and foremost, a cancer cell is less specialized than a normal one. While normal cells will differentiate into specific types or functions, a precancerous one typically remains undefined, which increases the risk of uncontrolled growth (National Cancer Institute 2015). In addition, cancer cells have the ability to influence the environment around them to their own benefit by prompting other cells and blood vessels nearby to supply a tumor with the nutrients it needs to thrive. Usually the immune system would work to destroy such cells to avoid this situation, but they are often able to conceal themselves in a way that the immune system does not recognize them as foreign (National Cancer Institute 2015). In fact, tumors can use the immune system to further promote their growth and survival, which ultimately leads to the spread of cancer.

### ***Signs and Symptoms***

Although patients experience different combinations of symptoms based on the types and severity of their cancer, the following symptoms occur most frequently among the majority of patients:

- Fatigue
- An unusual lump under the skin that can be palpated
- Weight loss or gain
- Skin changes, including a sore that does not heal or changes to existing moles
- Hoarseness of the voice or a persistent cough
- Unexplained bleeding or discharge
- Problems with indigestion and swallowing
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits

It is important to note that these symptoms are not exclusive to cancer, but can occur with a variety of diseases and conditions (Mayo Clinic 2015). Therefore, a physician or other medical professional needs to conduct a physical exam, as well as other laboratory tests, to diagnose an individual with cancer. Some of these tests include blood analyses, urine samples, X-rays, computed tomography (CT) scans, ultrasonography scans, and biopsy procedures (Cleveland Clinic 2016). The

progression of cancer will increase the severity of symptoms when left untreated, so it is not uncommon for an individual's cancer to have advanced to later stages when it is first diagnosed.

### ***Cancer Types***

As cancer research continues to progress with new medical developments and technologies, it has become easier to diagnose and identify the origin of an individual's cancer. Today, there are over 200 different types of cancer and each is named for the organ or tissue where the disease began or the class of cells that turned cancerous (National Cancer Institute 2015). Oftentimes the name of a certain cancer will end in the suffix “-oma,” which in medical terminology refers to a tumor or other abnormal growth. The three most common cancer types—lung, breast, and colorectal respectively—contribute to approximately 35 percent of all newly diagnosed cancer cases (Ferlay et al. 2015). All three of these cancers are considered to be carcinomas, a broad term for a cancer that is formed by epithelial cells. These cells compose one of the four major types of tissue and specialize in absorption and secretion. Epithelium covers the majority of both the external and internal surfaces of the body, which is why cancers of this type develop most frequently (National Cancer Institute 2015). Cancer treatments vary depending upon the location of an individual's cancer and the tissues that are affected.

### ***Interventions and Treatments***

The three most commonly used interventions for cancer are: surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Surgery is employed initially in an attempt to locally remove the tumor from the body. Chemotherapy and radiation are used as adjuvant therapies to further destroy cancerous cells and keep them from metastasizing. Like surgery, radiation is a local treatment that uses high-energy particles from X-rays or gamma rays to kill cancer cells. Radiation can either be internally placed through a radioactive implant or externally delivered by a machine (National Cancer Institute 2017). Using radiation postsurgically in an attempt to achieve remission is known as curative radiation, while utilizing radiation to reduce unwanted tumor effects is considered to be palliative. Chemotherapy is a systemic treatment, meaning it affects the body as a whole. This type of treatment uses powerful drugs administered orally or intravenously to destroy cancerous cells, so it can lead to additional undesirable side effects that were not present prior to the start of treatment. (Cleveland Clinic 2016). Patients are given a “chemotherapy cocktail” that includes several medications—given together or in a sequence—to produce the most efficient result.

While effective for treating cancer, chemotherapy can negatively impact the human body due to its destructive nature. The treatment uses medications known as chemostatics to target and kill rapidly growing cells. However, chemostatics are cytotoxic; they do not distinguish between cells that are foreign and those that are not (American Cancer Society 2016). As a result, chemotherapy drugs also destroy healthy cells that grow quickly: hair and blood cells and those of the mucous membranes in the mouth and throat. Destruction of these cells causes side effects such as hair loss, anemia, and nausea or vomiting (National Center for Biotechnology Information 2016). In addition, fatigue and nerve and muscle problems are also common (American



Cancer Society 2016). While each patient may experience any combination of these side effects in varying degrees, all occur frequently in those who undergo chemotherapy. Additional prescriptions are provided to combat side effects; however, these medications are associated with side effects of their own, further compounding the original problem. As a result, patients are often reluctant to begin or continue an exercise program for fear of exacerbating these side effects or due to a general feeling of lethargy.

### ***Effect of Exercise on Fatigue***

The destruction of healthy cells throughout the body often leads to increased fatigue in chemotherapy patients. This can be a deterrent to comply with an exercise program, but research has shown that regular physical activity can potentially decrease fatigue during chemotherapy treatment. Terson de Paleville, Topp, and Swank (2007) examined the effects of aerobic training on a 42-year-old breast cancer patient. She began a home-based walking program one week prior to the start of her chemotherapy treatment and continued the program for eight additional weeks. Initially, each exercise session included a 5-minute warm-up, a 15-minute walk, and a 5-minute cooldown. As the weeks passed, the patient was able to increase the duration of the exercise session until a maximum of a 35-minute walk was achieved. Using a rating of perceived exertion (RPE) scale, the patient rated her fatigue after each exercise session and after various activities of daily living (ADLs). At the end of week nine, she reported a score of 0 out of 10 for all categories. A rating of 0 on the RPE scale correlates to no exertion felt by the patient, whereas a rating of 10 indicates maximal exertion. This information, combined with the improvements in distance traveled during walks, led to the conclusion that aerobic exercise boosts peak exercise capacity and reduces lethargy in breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy (Terson de Paleville et al. 2007). Though this was a case study that only examined the effects of exercise on one patient, the results are consistent with research that has been done with larger sample sizes.

Although a different type of physical activity compared to walking, a seated exercise program can also reduce fatigue in cancer patients. Headley, Ownby, and John (2004) conducted their own study to investigate exercise interventions on fatigue over time in females suffering from advanced metastatic breast cancer. There were a total of 32 patients in the study who met all inclusion criteria: at least 18 years of age, diagnosed with stage IV breast cancer, and scheduled for outpatient chemotherapy. The patients were randomized into either the control group or the intervention group; those in the intervention group participated in a 30-minute seated exercise program three times each week. The study utilized a videotape called "Armchair Fitness: Gentle Exercise," which included a warm-up period, 20 minutes of various flexion and extension exercises, and a cooldown. No strength or resistance exercises were included in the patients' regimes. Using the Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy—Fatigue Version IV (FACIT-F), researchers assessed patients' reported fatigue after each chemotherapy course for a total of four measurements. After 12 weeks and four rounds of chemotherapy, both groups experienced an increase in fatigue and decrease in overall well-being. However, those cancer patients who were in the intervention group reported less increase in fatigue and less decrease in well-being compared to the control group who did not participate in the seated exercise program (Headley et al. 2004). The

fact that this study resembles the results of the previous case study with a larger sample size helps to solidify the advantages of physical activity during chemotherapy. These results also demonstrate that exercise can be beneficial for patients whose cancer is more advanced and not just those in the early stages.

Closely behind breast cancer, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer worldwide (Ferlay et al. 2015). Like its counterpart, colorectal cancer is often treated with chemotherapy, whether as the sole treatment or in conjunction with other treatments. Research completed at seven Dutch hospitals between 2010–2013 reported that approximately 46 percent of those undergoing treatment for colorectal cancer suffered from moderate to vigorous fatigue, which often increased during chemotherapy treatment (van Vulpen et al. 2016). Similar to the previous studies, this research showed that the implementation of regular physical activity had beneficial effects on the overwhelming fatigue experienced by these patients. Thirty-three patients who had recently been diagnosed with colorectal cancer were selected to participate in the study. Each was randomly assigned to one of two groups: one group participated in an 18-week exercise program and the other did not engage in any exercise outside of ADLs. Cancer patients who took part in the exercise program were required to attend two supervised exercise sessions per week and were instructed to exercise on their own on three other days (van Vulpen et al. 2016). The findings of this study indicated that participants in the intervention group experienced significantly less physical fatigue after 18 weeks when compared to the cancer patients in the control group. In addition, the experimental group reported higher physical functioning than the control group (van Vulpen et al. 2016). These outcomes demonstrate that an exercise regime for chemotherapy patients is not only manageable but also effective at reducing fatigue and lethargy.

### ***Effect of Exercise on Cognitive Function***

While fatigue is cited most often as a physical side effect, chemotherapy agents can also have an effect on cognitive function. Impairments in memory, processing speed, and executive function can endure for decades following the completion of adjuvant cancer treatments (Crowgey et al. 2014). It has been found that a decreased risk of dementia is associated with higher levels of physical activity among cancer-free adults, but less is known about how exercise following chemotherapy can affect the resulting cognitive function loss. A study conducted at Duke University recruited 37 breast cancer patients in an attempt to examine the relationship between exercise and cognitive function after chemotherapy. The cognitive function of each patient was gauged using a computerized test that employed the following subtests: reaction time, complex attention, cognitive flexibility, processing speed, executive function, and verbal memory, among others (Crowgey et al. 2014). Comparing these test results to the self-reported exercise data provided by patients, the authors of this study noted that breast cancer patients who had not participated in regular, structured physical activity performed more poorly on the majority of the cognitive tests. Therefore, there was a positive correlation between levels of exercise and cognitive function in those who had previously undergone chemotherapy.

It is routine for cancer patients to be treated with more than one chemical agent throughout the course of their chemotherapy, which can amplify the subsequent

cognitive deficits. Despite this supplementation, exercise may still prove effective in reducing such impairments. According to Fardell et al., 5-fluorouracil (5FU) and oxaliplatin (OX), two common medications used during the treatment of colon cancer, induce “a profile of peripheral neurotoxicity in both rodents and humans indicating that potentially both peripheral and central nervous systems may be affected by systemic treatment” (Fardell et al. 2012, 184). Using rats as subjects, several researchers sought to examine the impact of each of these chemotherapy agents alone and together and to investigate the therapeutic remediation of exercise on resulting cognitive function loss. Each of the 60 male rats were treated with a single dose of chemotherapy, but each dose varied in its chemical composition; some rats received only 5FU, some only OX, and others a combination of the two (Fardell et al. 2012). By subjecting the rats to a variety of memory and recognition tests, researchers were able to measure their cognitive function before and after chemotherapy and after exercise. They found that rats treated with 5FU or OX alone experienced impaired object recognition following the administration of chemotherapy. On the other hand, rats that were given a 5FU/OX-combined treatment experienced a decrease in spatial memory and contextual fear recall, in addition to object recognition. Even though the combination of two chemotherapy agents resulted in additional consequences compared to single agent treatments, exercise proved to be effective for improving cognitive function in all subjects. (Fardell et al. 2012). Since rats and humans exhibit similar reactions when exposed to these particular medications, it is reasonable to assume the results of this study could be applied to humans as well.

### ***Effect of Exercise on Immune Susceptibility***

Just as chemotherapy drugs mistakenly target healthy cells in the blood and mucous membranes of cancer patients, they also destroy cells that are essential to the immune system. Both T-lymphocytes and B-lymphocytes can be damaged by the chemicals present in chemotherapy drugs and are slow to return to normal levels (Hutnick et al. 2005). A study published by Hutnick et al. (2005) examined the effects of exercise on lymphocyte activation in patients with breast cancer following chemotherapy. A total of 49 patients were gathered to participate in the study and divided into two groups: one group had a formal exercise intervention and the other did not. The exercise group participated in a three-month exercise regime that was composed of one-on-one sessions with a trainer three times per week. At the end of three months, some participants chose to continue with a trainer, while others fulfilled their exercise requirements in their own homes (Hutnick et al. 2005). Blood samples were collected from all patients before chemotherapy, after chemotherapy but before starting the exercise program, after three months of exercise, and after six months of exercise. The samples were tested for the presence of various lymphocytes and the results indicated that CD4<sup>+</sup> T-helper activation was greater in exercisers compared to non-exercisers (Hutnick et al. 2005). T-helper cells stimulate other immune cells to destroy foreign bodies and kill infected cells. Because a high level of T-lymphocyte activation is associated with an active immune system, exercise may prove to be an effective treatment for boosting the immune system of cancer patients.

As a result of their immunodepressed state, cancer patients are at a significantly higher risk for secondary infections following chemotherapy treatment. Because they

can lead to further complications, infections are “the leading cause of treatment-related mortality in cancer patients” (Baumann et al. 2012, 638). Research conducted at the University Hospital of Cologne in Germany sought to investigate if infections—particularly non-fungal, nosocomial pneumonia and fever—can be prevented with the implementation of routine, moderate physical activity. Rather than breast cancer or colon cancer patients, subjects for this particular study suffered from leukemia or lymphoma. Subjects were paired based on sex, age, stage, and risk profile to obtain the most accurate results. One member of each pair was designated as the control, and the other member participated in an exercise program that was conducted on a stationary bicycle two to three times per week. Following the completion of the exercise regime, pneumonia was observed in seven individuals in the control group, but only in two from the intervention group. In addition, 16 individuals in the control group were diagnosed with fever, while only 11 in the intervention group experienced the same symptoms (Baumann et al. 2012). Therefore, cancer patients who exercised following the completion of chemotherapy displayed a reduced risk of developing a fever and pneumonia.

### ***Exercise Recommendations for Cancer Patients***

Given the positive implications of physical activity on several side effects in chemotherapy patients, the integration of a regular exercise regime is recommended to improve overall patient health. According to the American College of Sports Medicine [ACSM] (2016), both current patients and cancer survivors should be following these recommendations for exercising set forth in *Exercise Management for Persons with Chronic Diseases and Disabilities* (CDD4):

- Every person with a chronic condition should be physically active, accumulating a minimum weekly total of:
  - 150 minutes of preferably moderate-intensity physical activity or, if that is too difficult then,
  - 150 minutes of light-intensity physical activity may be substituted.
- At least two days per week of flexibility and muscle strengthening activities that should minimally involve:
  - Chair sit-and-reach stretches on the left and right,
  - At least 8 consecutive sit-to-stand exercises,
  - At least 10 step-ups (or a flight of steps), leading with each foot, and
  - At least 8 consecutive arm curls with a minimum of 2 kg held in the hand; 4 kg is recommended (ACSM 2016, 19–20).

Though these recommendations are established, it is important to individualize exercise sessions to patients’ wants and needs. This is especially necessary for those who are undergoing chemotherapy, as additional adverse effects must be taken into account. As with any chronic condition, the ultimate goal when implementing an exercise regime is to increase the physical activity and fitness level of the patient while minimizing the risk of exercise-related complications (ACSM 2016). For this reason, patients should begin exercising at a light to moderate intensity and progress

to higher intensities if they are able. If needed, the typical 30-minute exercise sessions can be broken up into smaller, more frequent sessions as long as the 150-minute goal is reached (Bleck 2017). An exercise session should be discontinued if cancer symptoms become exacerbated or if the patient develops any new or unusual reactions. Despite these limitations, however, cancer patients should unquestionably avoid inactivity. The ACSM (2016) states that progression is necessary and that some individuals may need to be pushed beyond their perceived limitations to see improvement.

### ***Barriers to Exercise Implementation***

Cancer patients who have been prescribed an exercise regime and who were avid exercisers before cancer may be eager to return to their previous level of training. Due to a general feeling of malaise and weakness caused by chemotherapy, many cancer patients lead a sedentary lifestyle despite prior involvement in physical fitness. Because deconditioning occurs very rapidly, this often leads to exercise-related setbacks. Lying in a hospital bed for seven days results in a 20 percent loss of total system strength, and after ten days, three pounds of muscle will be lost in a healthy individual (Bleck 2017). A loss of muscle mass and strength weakens the musculoskeletal system, thus resulting in a decrease in overall ability to withstand physical activity (ACSM 2016). To avoid injury and benefit overall health, previously active individuals need to begin at lower intensities and gradually increase to rebuild muscle mass before returning to their prior training level.

In addition, patients may cite boredom or lack of time as reasons for not participating in exercise. Encouraging aerobic fitness during normal daily activities can help to increase adherence to an exercise regime. Many different types of activities meet recommendations set forth by the ACSM and can be done without access to an exercise facility or expensive equipment. Some examples of moderately intensive activities include walking, dancing, in-line skating, bicycling, or yoga. In addition, household chores like mowing the lawn or gardening qualify. Manual labor as part of an individual's job can also contribute to the recommended 150 minutes of aerobic physical activity (Bleck 2017). The more that patients enjoy exercising, the more likely they are to continue with the regime. Therefore, it is important to individualize patients' plans to include activities that are already part of their daily routines or are of interest to them.

### ***Conclusion***

As one of the leading causes of death around the globe, cancer is a major concern for medical professionals and civilians alike. Despite the upward trend in the total number of cancer cases in the United States, the death rate declined by 25 percent from 1991 to 2014 (Simon 2017). New treatments and technologies in the medical field have contributed to this decrease, but some current treatments, mainly chemotherapy, can cause harsh side effects. Although traditional recommendations for cancer patients included excess rest and energy preservation, new research suggests that physical activity can ameliorate the typical side effects of chemotherapy without additional medications. According to many studies, a structured, regular exercise regime is likely safer than polypharmacy and still effective at reducing fatigue, increasing cognitive function, and boosting the immune system in cancer patients who have undergone

chemotherapy treatment. When compared to individuals who do not participate in an exercise program, individuals who do exercise are more likely to have increased energy, greater memory and recognition, and a higher level of lymphocyte activation. This evidence indicates that participating in physical activity both during and following chemotherapy can help to combat some of the typical chemotherapy side effects; therefore, exercise can be used to guide the future treatment of cancer patients.

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# Music as Political Power in Postwar Germany: The Fight for German Reunification through the Voices of East and West German Musicians

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## ***Abstract***

When the Second World War ended, Germany embarked on a period of heightened reconstruction. Along with the restoration of bombed buildings and the reestablishment of political systems, the postwar era was a time of rich cultural adaptation as German musicians reinvented themselves and their style. Initially, the evolution of music was impacted by the military occupation in Germany and by American and British musical influences, which inspired German musicians to change their sound. However, the Cold War, which divided Germany, influenced the evolution of music in both parts of postwar Germany. In the West, the increasingly democratized Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) embraced capitalism, which created a freer environment for musicians to express themselves. In contrast, the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) became a socialist state, which censored music. My paper surveys how musicians in East and West Germany negotiated the presence of the Iron Curtain through their music. Using case studies of two Eastern musical groups and one Western singer-songwriter, I analyze how musicians challenged the socialist system and the Iron Curtain through their music. Whereas Eastern musicians faced censorship and sometimes persecution as they composed and performed their music, Western musicians aided the fight for freedom in the East by composing political music. As my paper demonstrates, musicians provided a voice for the people of a divided Germany and may even have contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain.

## ***Introduction***

The Cold War developed out of the competing postwar worldviews of the Soviet Union and the United States and its Western allies. The disagreements complicated efforts to rebuild war-torn Europe and led to the formation of the Iron Curtain, a solid line that divided Germany into a Soviet-controlled, socialist, East German state and a Western-influenced, democratic, West German state. In response to Cold War tensions,

many East and West Germans turned to music to establish political, social, and cultural messages to protest the Iron Curtain.

A number of historians have examined the impact of music during the Cold War. Historian Uta Poiger discusses the role of American culture in Cold War Germany. She argues that the introduction of American culture in postwar Germany influenced progressive changes among German youth who began to challenge the contemporary cultural norms.<sup>1</sup> Historian Alexei Yurchak explores the integration of Western music and mass culture into Eastern Soviet socialist society, arguing that while Western mass culture during the Cold War produced political messages, Eastern youth failed to recognize the divide between “bourgeois mass culture and the politics of anticommunism,”<sup>2</sup> essentially claiming that artists had no hand in stirring up politics through their music. On the other hand, historian Yale Richmond argues that the transmission of Western rock music onto the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain encouraged progressive free speech among citizens in a socialist society.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, few historians have looked at both the East and the West and focused on the impact of specific artists, which is the goal of this paper.

The role of musical ideology begins with the American occupation in postwar Germany. American GIs arrived in Germany as occupying military authorities with the goal of influencing Germany’s perspective of democracy. Two similar concepts, Westernization and Americanization, are commonly associated with the introduction of democracy into postwar Germany. According to historian Konrad Jarausch, popular culture and mass consumerism were powerful tools of Americanization and were useful in the process of teaching West Germans the value of democracy.<sup>4</sup> However, the reception of this new culture varied widely in the context of East German socialism. Moreover, Jarausch argues, “This democratic influence was by no means a sure-fire success.”<sup>5</sup> As this paper argues, Western influence inspired a united front against the postwar divide of the East and West, and popular music became a powerful political force in the years to come.<sup>6</sup>

The acceptance of popular music varied at different generational levels in this era. Jarausch, in an examination of listeners, suggests the difference in reception between generations by stating, “Rock (in particular) appealed to the working-class youth, while it alarmed adults who saw suggestive gyrations.”<sup>7</sup> While the youth were able to identify with this new form of music, adults were fearful of cultural change. After rock music became popular, responses in East and West Germany took the form of actions to combat the new cultural ideology.

These so-called actions took different forms on either side of the Iron Curtain. Uta Poiger suggests that “West German authorities, in spite of their commitment to a Western military and political alliance tried to find a fourth ‘German’ way,” especially to separate from the “self-destructive, sexualizing, and emasculating power of American-style consumerism.”<sup>8</sup> After a decade and a half of occupation, dominant American culture became a roadblock to West German culture, nevertheless initiating inspiration into Germany’s own creative process. West German musicians began to match the Western influences and had the freedom to produce German mainstream music without restrictions to their lyrical messages or public performances in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The subsequent idea of “Germanness” began to spring forward, giving form to German music styles and creating a response to the

pressures of a globally distributed popular music.<sup>9</sup> West German musicians, inspired by Western culture, flourished by introducing their own German styles and musical expressions.

In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), maintaining a socialist ideology supported the government's oppressive nature. The GDR's vision for a socialist society strictly focused on youth groups and celebrating the working class. In the eyes of East German officials, rock 'n' roll was to blame for social unrest in the GDR, an issue they attributed to Western music culture.<sup>10</sup> After witnessing so many rock 'n' roll riots, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) responded with a statement, criticizing the nature of the West. SED leaders wrote, "In West Germany, they depend on these ways of life to poison young people psychologically and to prepare them ideologically for their criminal war plans with all possible means of brutalization and of stimulation of the basest instincts."<sup>11</sup> The SED believed that the West was poisonous because rock 'n' roll "was one of the first forms of Anglo-American music to 'conquer' Germany and reinforce a 'quasi-colonial relationship' between West Germany and the United States."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Eastern leaders saw the looming threat from cultural change in the FRG as the result of the West's willingness to adapt to Western culture.

Soviet leaders were determined to persuade the East Germans of the superiority of Soviet culture and socialism.<sup>13</sup> In this effort they failed. Pedro Ramet, author of "Disaffection and Dissent in East Germany," observed, "As resocialization fails, the population becomes susceptible to alternative cultures."<sup>14</sup> East Germans refused to conform to socialism, not because the SED failed to convert its residents, but because its residents were already immersed in the Western culture that permeated through the Iron Curtain. As a response, the Soviet Union and East German authorities "began a campaign against the United States and United States presence."<sup>15</sup> The Communist Party was determined to "portray America as an oppressor and aggressor,"<sup>16</sup> and eventually cracked down and banned Western artistic influences and the artists themselves.

In the East, the ultimate goal for socialist music was to inspire artists to return to their German roots. In 1958, the SED worried that the Germanness, which had "brought forth Bach and Beethoven," would be distorted, and "young people were being transformed into raging beasts with the help of [rock] music."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, "the SED had feared that rock music . . . [reinforced] tendencies toward individualism,"<sup>18</sup> and began making clear that these immoral and individualistic attitudes were unacceptable. Additional restrictions on East German citizens followed.

But how did East German musicians use their music to combat these cultural restrictions? Pedro Ramet has suggested that disaffection and dissent are accurate representations of society in this case. "Disaffection," according to Ramet, "is discontent with the system without invoking one's ability to change the system," whereas "dissent is discontent charged by one's ability to effect change."<sup>19</sup> Although East German musicians were primary targets of cultural censorship, disaffection arose among Eastern and Western activist musicians alike. This led to dissent against the GDR's unnecessary cultural restrictions and the Iron Curtain itself. Author Jolanta Pekacz argues, "The question as to whether rock music is able to play a role in a process of political change evokes skepticism, rather than endorsement."<sup>20</sup>

My research compares Eastern rock musicians the Klaus Renft Combo and Wolf Biermann with the Western singer-songwriter Udo Lindenberg, and explores the

disaffection shared through their music. While one cannot argue that they brought down the Wall, their music and lyrical messages contributed to an undercurrent of rebellion against the Cold War, evoking a political attitude and backlash against the Eastern cultural censorship.

### ***The German Democratic Republic and Censorship: “The Bad Boys of East German Rock”***

Cultural oppression in the socialist landscape of the GDR took a toll on musicians’ lyrics. Regulation of creative freedom burdened a musician’s creative process. For example, lyrics were required to portray an appreciation of the socialist state and underwent censorship. Furthermore, public performances depended on musician licensure. To understand the musical culture in the GDR, this research draws from Eastern musicians Klaus Jentzsch and Wolf Biermann and will examine how socialist censorship affected them as musicians in East Germany.

In 1958, Klaus Jentzsch took his mother’s maiden name for his stage name Klaus Renft and formed a group known as the Klaus Renft Combo.<sup>21</sup> In the GDR, bands were normally called “combos,” or given other descriptive terms like “dance ensembles” in order to adhere to the socialist theme.<sup>22</sup> In an interview, author Anna Funder described him as “the bad boy of East German rock ’n’ roll,”<sup>23</sup> because Klaus and his friends, like many other youth, had access to and listened to the government-banned RIAS radio (Radio in American Sector).<sup>24</sup> RIAS allowed Western culture to continue to seep through the Iron Curtain. After Jentzsch and his bandmates, Christian Kunert and Gerulf Pannach, formed the Klaus Renft Combo, they started performing covers of hit music from the late 1950s and early 1960s of their forbidden Western inspirations, including Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and the Beatles.

By the late 1960s, the combo had evolved from performing covers to writing their own original works. During this period, SED censorship intensified. In response, the combo felt compelled to radicalize their message. When playing Western covers, they never conformed to the socialist ideology; however, their original music, as it became more politicized, earned them a reputation for refusing to cooperate with the regime. Their aim was to send messages to the SED leadership through their lyrics, describing the oppression all East Germans felt.

Three particular songs reveal the change in Renft’s music. The first, titled “Die Ketten Werden Knapper” (“The Chains are Getting Tighter”), largely reflects the group’s main intention of speaking out. The song’s lyrics explain that with worldwide performance of music, all the chains will loosen and break free, putting an end to the suffocation of the oppressed in East Germany. Another song, “The Ballad of Little Otto,” describes a little boy who longed to reach his brother in West Germany, which was a common theme for many East Germans who were separated from family by the Iron Curtain.<sup>25</sup> A third ditty, titled “Questions of Faith,” spoke directly to the SED through spiteful lines, which asked, “You, what does he believe in/ he who goes to the flag/ swears to the glory of the flag/ stands tall there?”<sup>26</sup> Author Olaf Leitner, who interprets these lines, states, “The phrase ‘going to the flag’ refers to absolving one’s military service,” which was a one-way ticket to prison.<sup>27</sup> The combo’s lyrics reflected the struggles of many East Germans living under socialism. The lyrics attacked socialist censorship, the ban on travel outside the GDR, military conscription, and the SED leaders.

The combo's new focus successfully drew the attention of the SED leadership, and more specifically, that of Erich Honecker, general secretary of the SED, who employed the Stasi (East German secret police) to keep a record of Klaus and his combo. Klaus Renft's Stasi file contains correspondence from Erich Honecker and Erich Mielke, head of the Stasi. Honecker wrote, "'Dear Erich (Mielke), Please attend to the case of Jentzsch, Klaus, as speedily as possible. Regards, Erich (Honecker).'" The letter suggests an intent to disrupt the combo and provides evidence as to how oppressive the SED was becoming. The party began to devise strategies by which to silence the combo. However, the SED and the Stasi quickly realized that the combo was too popular to "handle directly" and abandoned their public efforts to silence the group.<sup>28</sup>

Instead, when it came time for the Klaus Renft Combo to renew their performance license in 1975, the SED attacked. Performance licensing, which began in 1958, was guided by the GDR's 60:40 clause, which mandated that "no more than 40% of the repertoire of GDR bands or of the programming of radio and televisions could be from capitalist countries."<sup>29</sup> The GDR's Directive on Programming stated, "To elevate the level of light music and dance music in the shaping of socialist culture, at least 60% of works performed are to be created by composers in the GDR." The decree furthermore dictated that all "events in this sense are public performances, of which entertainers need professional cards."<sup>30</sup> For this reason, the Klaus Renft Combo headed to the SED Ministry of Culture for a renewal.

As the combo began to set up for their performance, they were approached by an SED official who told them the Ministry would not hear them play. Moreover, she informed them that "the lyrics have absolutely nothing to do with our Socialist reality. The working class is insulted and the state and defense organizations are defamed." As if this did not strike a hard enough blow to the reputation of the combo, the official further stated, "We are here to inform you today that you don't exist anymore."<sup>31</sup> Klaus related to Funder that he should have seen this coming after he was, on several occasions, approached by "strangers" who offered him passports and money to flee to the West. After the hearing, the Ministry of Culture began to spread rumors that the band had split up.<sup>32</sup> A short time later, Klaus Renft defected to West Germany. However, his bandmates, Pannach and Kunert, were imprisoned in the GDR until West Germany bought their freedom in 1977.<sup>33</sup>

The case of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann is similar to that of the Klaus Renft Combo. Biermann was an early "inspiration for the Klaus Renft Combo,"<sup>34</sup> although his troubles with the GDR came later. Biermann grew up in Hamburg, West Germany, before relocating to the GDR in the mid-1950s when he was seventeen years old. David Robb suggests that Biermann moved east due to "an apparent yearning, as a communist, to learn how to build a communist society."<sup>35</sup> Once in the GDR, Biermann recognized the restraints on his musical career and composed critical musical messages in order to mock the political practices of the GDR.<sup>36</sup> In short, from 1965 to 1976 Biermann was banned from performing and publishing.<sup>37</sup> Following the end of the ban, however, he returned to performing his original works. As a result, the GDR expatriated Biermann in November 1976.<sup>38</sup>

Renft and Biermann provide two examples of extreme cultural defiance on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, many other East German musicians who fought alongside them continued after they had moved West. By the 1980s, the context for East German musicians had changed. Many up-and-coming artists performed in the

new punk rock genre, which became a further nuisance to the SED. A few of the artists were even able to remain licensed and live in the GDR. Lesser-known groups were no longer constantly targeted and probably experienced very little hassle. Some groups preferred to stay out of trouble altogether and adapt their music to the socialist agenda. In the end, traditionalism was the safest way to remain intact.

The political oppression that characterized the GDR clashed with citizens' yearning for Western culture. Musicians who wished to express their appreciation of musical heroes in the West faced particular trouble. The Klaus Renft Combo and Wolf Biermann refused to conform, writing songs critical of the socialist system that were understood and enjoyed by their fans. East German audiences related to their message, causing the SED to suppress musicians either by jailing them or by forcing them to go West. Eastern musical martyrs had limited avenues through which to protest, and the SED effectively upset their attempts.

### ***The Federal Republic of Germany: Udo Lindenberg's Peace Ideology***

While the cultural and political situation of the East looked glum, West Germany was more conducive to protest. Udo Lindenberg, a West German singer-songwriter, came ready to challenge the daunting politics of the Cold War. Lindenberg grew up in Gronau, West Germany. According to Annette Bluhdorn, he experienced "a childhood dominated by the economic miracle and political consolidation of the 1950s, further based on a lower-middle-class lifestyle and strong Catholic convictions."<sup>39</sup> His childhood in the West allowed him to set his priorities and shaped his dream for the future.

To understand Lindenberg's musical ambition, it is important to understand his position alongside other musicians whose role models were Western artists. Lindenberg's inspiration to begin his career as a rock 'n' roll drummer was none other than Elvis Presley. Lindenberg credited Elvis and Bill Haley, among many other American artists, for motivating him to become a musician. He writes, "I pulled myself up by his example, and with that, the decision about my choice of career—sailor or drummer—was made. Elvis helped pave the runway from which many musicians, myself included, eventually took off in their own jets."<sup>40</sup> Elvis's influence on Lindenberg did not reflect Lindenberg's political ambition. However, the beginning of Lindenberg's career, heightened by freedom of opportunity and the inspiration of others like Elvis, marked the beginning of his musical journey to give a voice to those without one.

By the late 1960s, Lindenberg's career as a musician began to emerge. Invoking Germanness, Lindenberg sang in his native language throughout his career, which makes interpretation for a non-German speaker difficult. Several sources aided my search to understand Lindenberg's appeal. Historian Edward Larkey argued that Lindenberg "utilized the daily jargon of pub-goers, musicians, youths, and outcasts to tell stories of different people and figures."<sup>41</sup> Lindenberg puts together a real model of "the people's" feelings, marking his style by drawing off the everyday German people.

For example, in his song "Strassen-Fieber" ("Fever Street"), Lindenberg describes "the potential for protest among young people who find themselves conflicting with coldness and inhumanity of society, mendacity and unreliability of politicians, and apathy and insensitivity of older generations."<sup>42</sup> It is unclear to which side of the Iron



Curtain Lindenberg directed his words, however. Initially, “the metaphor of fever suggests that young people’s protest against socio-political status-quo are comparable to an immune system’s response to illness.”<sup>43</sup>

Lindenberg’s career made him more than a musician. With his politically charged messages, Bluhdorn asserts that “Lindenberg engaged the East-West conflict of the Cold War and was strongly committed to bringing the two German states closer together.”<sup>44</sup> Lindenberg’s life in West Germany, she argues, helped him make a Cold War statement through his unconventional songs while his motives encouraged the two nations to “come together,” even if he did not “advocate for German unification.”<sup>45</sup> What then were his motives? Bluhdorn believes that Lindenberg was looking more for “unconditional recognition of the GDR by the FRG and further development of good contacts between the two.”<sup>46</sup> Ideally, this meant that the maintenance of a better relationship and more effective communication between the FRG and GDR had the potential to influence the GDR to be more cooperative and less oppressive.

Furthermore, among the amusing features of Lindenberg’s political music was his fascination with the GDR and his goal of crossing the Iron Curtain to promote his idea of development. Unfortunately, Erich Honecker expressed disgust at the “criticism and protest apparent in Lindenberg’s lyrics dealing with political issues.”<sup>47</sup> It seems his criticism of the GDR’s refusal to develop was most prevalent, and his calls to action were intended to inspire GDR citizens to protest, an action despised by the SED. Due to his persistence, Lindenberg became a constant thorn in Honecker’s side and the general secretary banned him and his music.

However, Lindenberg was determined to have a relationship with Honecker. Early in their struggling association, Lindenberg published a song titled “Special Train to Pankow,” an electrified contra facta of “Chattanooga Choo Choo” by Glenn Miller, an American musician and composer. Intended for Honecker, the significance of the song was primarily a self-invitation from Lindenberg for a drink with Honecker in the residential district of Pankow in the GDR capital.<sup>48</sup> The blunt lyrics were not appropriate for the socialist state. For example, Lindenberg wrote, “Excuse me, is this the Special Train to Pankow? / I need to have a short trip to East-Berlin / I’ve got to get something straight with your chief-indian.” Nevertheless, he goes further, “Oooh, Erich, hey, is it true you’re such a squareminded troll?”<sup>49</sup> This provocation resulted in Honecker vetoing Lindenberg’s self-invitation. However, the song made its way into the GDR music scene and was played in clubs, where two unfortunate disc jockeys were caught by the Stasi and served five-month prison terms for playing the banned artist.<sup>50</sup>

In 1983, Lindenberg again requested a chance to perform in the East and, to his astonishment, Honecker finally obliged. At the recommendation of fellow SED officials, Honecker sought other musicians to perform as well “so that his visit would not degenerate into a ‘concert of Lindenberg only.’” Agreed upon and communicated, Lindenberg’s management reached out to “American singer and peace activist, Harry Belafonte, who was added to Lindenberg’s act.”<sup>51</sup>

Lindenberg and Belafonte arrived in East Berlin on October 25, 1983, to play at the Palace of the Republic, which Lorenz Luthi calls “Erich’s Lamp Shop” because of the large number of light bulbs. Luthi recounts that Lindenberg did not realize he would be performing for “a blue-shirted and politically reliable Free German Youth (FDJ) activist group, while his real fans remained outside, ‘loudly’ demanding access.”<sup>52</sup>

Undaunted, Lindenberg performed his concert, an SED preapproved set, inside the “lamp shop.” At the end of his set, to the surprise of the SED, Lindenberg addressed the audience claiming, “‘we want peace, neither a cold nor a hot war’ completely astonishing the East German activists.”<sup>53</sup> Although “the GDR saw Lindenberg as a tool in a desperate mobilization campaign initiated by the Warsaw Pact,”<sup>54</sup> Lindenberg was acting on his own. Lindenberg had his say and went home to the West awaiting a chance to tour the East.

A tour deal was worked out between Lindenberg’s management and the SED for 1984, which was later cancelled because Honecker grew impatient with Lindenberg’s politicized lyrics. The musician was officially banned from East Germany in 1984 and received no invitations to return. Following many attempts to recreate a deal, Lindenberg tried to contact Honecker in 1987 following a round of protests near the wall in the East. According to Bluhdorn, he appealed to Honecker for greater tolerance of youth culture, and even sent the East German leader “a leather jacket,” which is kept today in a museum in Rostock, Germany.<sup>55</sup> Lindenberg’s effort was valiant even if Honecker eventually undermined his campaign. Indeed, his hard work made an impact. In 2014, “Lindenberg was awarded the *Bundesverdienstkreuz am bande* (The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) to honor his commitment to German-German cultural exchange, the contribution of his lyrics to the discussion of social and political issues, and his dedication to the German language within popular music.”<sup>56</sup> Although Lindenberg was unable to visit the East again, he “achieved political fame for his performance in the GDR, contributing an added success to the peace movement in the FRG,”<sup>57</sup> and his actions led to the buildup of politicized dissent yet to come.

### ***Rock in the 1980s: The Generation That Witnessed the Fall of the Wall***

Although they met many roadblocks, German musicians like Klaus Renft, Wolf Biermann, and Udo Lindenberg paved the way for the new culture of politicized music to combat the Iron Curtain. As the Cold War dragged on into the 1980s, more musicians followed their path and advocated for reunification. In this section of my research, I examine non-German musicians who joined the movement, such as David Bowie and Genesis. As author Toby Thacker has argued, “Musicians who were so embroiled in the confrontations of the early Cold War in Germany took note of the cultural ideals presented to them by the super power centers, but provided their own distinct understanding of how these applied to their peripheral struggle.”<sup>58</sup> The use of new political messages to fit with the most recent issues became the new wave of hope for the 1980s. Peter Wicke argues that “rock musicians were instrumental in setting in motion the actual course of events which led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the GDR.”<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Tony Mitchell contends that “rock music represented probably the most widespread vehicle of youth rebellion, resistance, and independence, behind the Iron Curtain.”<sup>60</sup> One of the best examples to consider is a three-day music festival, which took place in 1987. Staged in West Berlin, opposite the Reichstag, East Berliners could also hear the performance. David Bowie, Genesis, and others entertained the crowd as East Berlin residents gathered near the wall and enjoyed the music. Intended as a cultural festival, it turned into a rock ’n’ roll riot for the East. As the guards tried to shoo people from the wall, residents began to chant “‘Gorbachev! Gorbachev!’ in an attempt to appeal to East German authorities and to copy some reforms aimed at easing restrictions on expression.”<sup>61</sup> Of course, the SED leadership blamed the West for the riot.



What was it about Genesis and David Bowie that caused such a riot in the first place? Bowie's contribution evolved through several decades of his personal experience with the Berlin Wall. Bowie, a British musician, lived in West Berlin at the time he wrote his 1977 song "Heroes," which is about a couple separated by the wall. Bowie wrote, "I can remember, standing, by the wall / and the guns, shot above our heads / and we kissed, as though nothing could fall / and the shame, was on the other side."<sup>62</sup> For Bowie and the rest of the Cold War population, this song was "an anthem of optimism and defiance in a time surrounded by hopelessness and terror." Furthermore, Bowie's concert was surreal for those in the West and those who could hear it over the wall in the East. Only a week later, President Reagan visited West Berlin and, standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate, spoke the famous words, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."<sup>63</sup>

Further evidence of this change is presented in a song by Genesis, a British rock band, titled "Land of Confusion," released in 1986 on their album *Invisible Touch*. While Bowie's song is focused on the trouble in Berlin, Genesis's song is full of references to problems, not just in Germany, but all over the world. In one line from the song, the group explains how rock musicians set society in motion by singing, "I won't be coming home tonight/ my generation will put it right."<sup>64</sup> The subsequent 1986 music video appeals to the confusion that Genesis was attempting to portray. At the end of the video, President Ronald Reagan wakes up in the night, drinks a glass of water, and expresses to Nancy Reagan his need for another. Reaching for the nurse button, situated next to a nuke button, at the side of his bed and confused between the two, he accidentally hits the nuke button and the world explodes. Obviously, the ending reflects the fear of the arms race; however, using only assumptions, this song is a mid-1980s call to action against the Iron Curtain.

James Shingler, in his "Rocking the Wall," recounts the 1988 performance by American singer-songwriter Bruce Springsteen in East Berlin. Unaware of Springsteen's notable style for expressing freedom through his music, the SED was shocked when the artist announced, "It's nice to be in East Berlin. I am not for or against a government. I came to play rock 'n' roll for you in the hope that one day all barriers will be torn down."<sup>65</sup> Later, in 1989, "the Rocker Resolution was drafted by singer-songwriters Steffen Mensching and Hans-Eckardt Wenzeland signed by a number of well-known artists all over the GDR," expressing the angry sentiments of musicians toward the SED. As an "important part of the GDR reform" the Rocker Resolution caused the SED committee for entertainment "to meet in October 1989, a meeting that was 'the first official acknowledgement of and reaction to the worsening political situation in East Germany.'"<sup>66</sup> While the resolution and other concerts did not cause the wall to fall, musicians deserve some credit for assisting in the collapse.

## Conclusion

In short, political music gave hope to the German population on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the darkest of days of the Cold War. Although the SED was effective in silencing musical protest, especially during the late 1950s to the early 1960s East Germans listened to and supported their musicians. The fact that the SED was forced to expatriate Wolf Biermann and ban the music of the Klaus Renft Combo and Udo Lindenberg proves the impact of their messages on society. Still, the SED was not able to force musicians to change their messages. Even after being censored

by the GDR, Wolf Biermann continued to protest. While it may be too much to claim that these musicians directly caused the fall of the Berlin Wall, their insistence on using music to portray to political leaders the powerless feelings of East German citizens must be acknowledged.

Did the German population realize, when foreign militaries occupied their country in 1945, that cultural influences would play such a huge role in their lives? When the German population first encountered Westernization, many from the older generation turned away with disapproval. Over time, disaffection with the GDR rose from the masses in East and West Germany, inspiring dissent and transforming a musical fight against the closed-mindedness of the SED. Westernized music gave a voice to the people, helping to end the Cold War and bring down the Iron Curtain.

At the end of the road, what became of our German musical heroes? After the Cold War, the Klaus Renft Combo reunited. Sadly, the death of Gerulf Pannach prevented a complete reunion. It was later discovered that Pannach died from his lengthy exposure to radiation during imprisonment in the GDR.<sup>67</sup> The Klaus Renft Combo continued to record through the 1990s and even remastered their old music onto a greatest hits album titled *As If Nothing Happened*. Klaus Renft passed away in 2006. As for Wolf Biermann and Udo Lindenberg, the fall of the Iron Curtain meant they and their music were available throughout reunited Germany. Back on tour, millions of screaming fans from all over the country came to greet each of them. Wolf Biermann and Udo Lindenberg are still alive today and continue to compose and perform.

If there is one thing to remember about the Klaus Renft Combo, Wolf Biermann, and Udo Lindenberg, it is that their music shaped a powerful message that contributed to defeating the stigma of war. When considering the role of censorship versus the disobedience of those who believe in free expression, the impact becomes impressive. Musicians laughed in the face of the government and composed political music, leaving a legacy for the German people.

### Notes

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2. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 208.
3. Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 206.
4. Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing the Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120.
5. Jarausch, 120.
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10. Volker Berghahn and Uta Poiger, "An East German Rock 'n' Roll Riot at the Wall Turns Political (June 10, 1987)," *German History in Documents and Images*, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1118](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1118) (accessed October 26, 2017). The context of social unrest as a factor of rock 'n' roll will be explored in more detail further on in this paper. The introduction of social unrest in this section is to give you an understanding of occurrences in reaction to the presence of Western music culture in the GDR. In June 1987, a journalist from the *International Herald Tribune* reported on a three-day series of riots that occurred near the Berlin Wall in East Berlin: "The riots broke out as police attempted to bar young pop music fans from standing near the wall to listen to the concert that was happening just on the other side. Several youth were arrested and wrestled into police cars, some even having been beaten by police with nightsticks. In an interview, the East German authorities denied having clashed with the youth and explained that there had been Western attempts to provoke trouble."
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13. Poiger, 44.
14. Pedro Ramet, "Disaffection and Dissent in East Germany," *World Politics* 37, no. 1 (1984): 87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010307>.
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16. Jarausch, 125.
17. Volker Berghahn and Uta Poiger, "*Neues Deutschland*: 'Bill Haley and NATO' (October 31, 1958)," *German History in Documents and Images*, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=4447](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4447) (accessed October 26, 2017).
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19. Ibid., 86.
20. Jolanta Pekacz, "Did Rock Smash the Wall? The Role of Rock in Political Transition," *Popular Music* 13, no. 1 (1994): 41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852899> (accessed November 19, 2017).
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22. Larkey, 247.
23. Funder, 185.
24. Ibid., 185–86.
25. Ibid., 187.
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# Memorializing Atrocities: The Problems of Censorship and Fleeting Memory within Eastern European Holocaust Sites

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Jacob Covey graduated from UW Oshkosh in January 2019 with a bachelor of science degree in history and English. On campus, Jacob created a temporary exhibit titled *Play Ball: A History of Campus Baseball* in summer 2017 through an internship with the university's archivist. He currently works as a content developer for Renaissance Learning and spends his free time building his portfolio by volunteering to interpret and create museum exhibits around the state.

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## **Abstract**

Since 1945, memories of the Holocaust have gradually faded around the world. Using a combination of firsthand accounts by Holocaust survivors and Soviet soldiers who liberated Auschwitz, as well as scholarly articles on the Holocaust and its memorialization, this paper investigates the factors that have contributed to the disappearance of memory during and after World War II in Eastern European areas formerly controlled by the Soviet Union. This research focuses on efforts to erase memories of the Holocaust carried out by Nazi officials who hid and destroyed memories of extermination camps such as Belzec. In addition, this research explores the Soviet government's censorship, which manipulated collective memory and memorialization efforts. This censorship included Stalin's fight to commemorate Russian victimization, the suppression of literature such as Ilya Erhenburg's *The Black Book*, and the handling of the memorialization at Babi Yar, one of the most notorious Holocaust sites. A third attempt to repress memories of the Holocaust occurred at the regional level after the war. In the Ukrainian towns of Tulchin and Pechora, for example, a lack of funds and a decline of Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses led to a struggle over whether or not to maintain or completely abandon memorials. Even Auschwitz, the most well known of all Holocaust sites, has experienced a battle over the gradual loss and misconstruction of memory. There is an ongoing effort to present history to the public through survivors' experiences, organized trips, and documents and artifacts—each of which carry their own problems. My paper argues that, although the memory of the Holocaust may always stick with humankind, previous attempts to erase or manipulate evidence combined with the expanding amount of time between postwar and present day will make it increasingly more difficult to memorialize the truth of such a momentous event.

## ***Introduction***

On January 27, 1945, the Red Army marched through wind and snow to Auschwitz—one of the most notorious concentration camps in Holocaust history. By then, Soviet troops were aware of such camps, as previously liberated sites appalled them. Upon the first encounter with the ominous “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign at the entrance, many saw firsthand the horrors that officers had spoken of. Soviet officer Vasilii Davydov wrote of his experience:

[Soviet troops] saw many times the consequences of Nazi policy. But nothing can be compared with what we saw and heard at the well-known, massive death camp, Auschwitz. . . . Wherever one looked, he saw piles of human bodies. In some places, the former prisoners, looking like living skeletons, sat or lay around. . . . When we were there, the State Committee started to investigate the fascists’ terrible crimes. They opened huge ditches filled with human corpses, bones, and ashes (the fascists sold these ashes as fertilizer for five marks a pound).<sup>1</sup>

Walking among the dead and dying, a fervor of hatred grew within many soldiers, some of whom belonged to the tortured and eliminated groups—Russian citizens, political dissidents, communists, as well as fellow Jews, Poles, and Soviet prisoners of war. One soldier, Pyotr Nikitin, ended a letter to his family, “We will forget nothing, and we will never forgive.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the Soviet government, led by Joseph Stalin, decided otherwise. News of Auschwitz hit Soviet newspapers on May 7, 1945, withholding any information about the nationalities of the victims and significantly omitting any hint of mass Jewish extermination.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Soviet offensive in the Second World War, the Nazi Party made considerable efforts to maintain a level of secrecy in its implementation of the Holocaust. After the war, the Soviets and the communist governments of Eastern Europe manipulated and censored Holocaust sites and the memories that remained from Nazi extermination efforts. Despite resistance from survivors, religious groups, citizens of the Eastern European states who had experienced the Holocaust, and the general public, efforts to alter or erase Holocaust memories continued throughout the Cold War and into the modern era.

In this paper, I will argue that although memories of the Holocaust will always remain, previous attempts to erase or manipulate evidence, combined with the passage of time and the struggle to transfer such knowledge to future generations, make it increasingly difficult to preserve the truth of the Holocaust. This investigation will begin with memory eradication through the Nazi construction and deconstruction of Belzec. Second, it will examine Soviet Era censorship of collective memory, Stalin’s fight for Russian victimization, the censorship of literature, and the memorialization of Babi Yar—one of the most iconic battles between the Soviet regime and the public. Third, it will focus on several Eastern European sites of the Holocaust that continue to struggle with memorialization in the current era in rural Ukraine. Finally, it will discuss Auschwitz and the question of proper remembrance and the unique issues that are faced in trying to preserve a fading history.

The Holocaust has long been fascinating to historians. Due to the inaccessibility of archival material to the West, primarily because of the Cold War, Holocaust literature lacked detailed material. Since the fall of the Soviet Bloc, new materials have opened up to Holocaust researchers. The discussion of Eastern Europe during the Holocaust has been one of the more recent historical advancements in the field. With new information, some have delved into deeper assessments of the story of memorialization and the effectiveness of exhibits and historical sites to portray specific narratives. Historian Tim Cole has proposed that memory itself can be utilized as a political tool to create monuments in which “constructing a memorial is a conscious act of choosing to remember certain people and events.”<sup>4</sup> Holocaust historian Rebecca Golbert has examined the role of Soviet censorship in the struggle for public remembrance through physical or intellectual spaces, as Jewish survivors attempted to memorialize only to be censored in the Ukraine. However, when finally able to overcome past obstacles to commemorate what remains, issues arose in utilizing spaces and artifacts for educational purposes. German professor Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich discusses the technological issues of overexposing artifacts to desensitize its horror. However, Holocaust historian James E. Young was in favor of German “anti-monuments” that allow individuals to remember events within their own minds rather than viewing public spaces.<sup>5</sup> This study will link together the ideas of scholars to examine the story of Holocaust memorialization as it continues to fade, while displaying the complex methods educational sites grapple with today.

### ***The Construction and Deconstruction of Belzec***

Among major Holocaust sites, the Polish extermination camp of Belzec remains ever-elusive due to its destruction well before the Soviets invaded. Under the title “Operation Reinhard,” actions taken by Nazi officials to exterminate German and Polish Jews came under the guise of resettlement to eastern sectors of Nazi-occupied Poland. The operation began on March 17, 1942, when Jews from Lublin ghettos entered Belzec station.<sup>6</sup> Many Jews believed that the innocuous site in the southeastern corner of Poland was to be used for farther movement eastward. Even many Gestapo officials had no knowledge of the plan. For example, SS *Gruppenführer* Müller, chief of the Gestapo, arrested a camp official for removing traces of mass executions. However, the charges were dropped after he was notified that the actions were justified under a confidential “state secret.”<sup>7</sup>

Nazi intentions—as well as the reasons they were only stumbled upon by Soviets postwar—were simple: the site was intended to incinerate Jewish populations quickly before being completely dismantled. Since the Nazis claimed that Operation Reinhard was meant to relocate the Jews, local citizens did not bat an eye at the development of such camps. During the construction, no information was leaked to workers; although blueprints were made with eventual deconstruction in mind. Wooden huts were made so workers could fill “the empty space [between interior and exterior walls] with sand . . . walls were covered with cardboard and . . . sheet-zinc . . . the doors were very strongly built of three-inch-thick planks and were secured against pressure from the inside by a wooden bolt . . . water pipes were fixed at a height of 10 cm. from the floor.”<sup>8</sup> The Nazis constructed huts with natural material so they would be easier to destroy when operations were completed by the end of 1942. Nearby, the

mock bathhouses were ditches for the remains. When the camp ceased all transports in mid-June, new methods of hiding evidence were needed. In November 1942, the Nazis began to burn bodies and dump them in ditches because wooden gas chambers were ineffective on such a large scale.<sup>9</sup> After a month, production halted due to the successful eradication of Jews in the region and the beginning of more large-scale efforts in camps, notably Auschwitz. The operation continued until March 1943, when mass graves were dug up and evidence was either burned or transported for use in other camps. On the surface, Nazi officials had been successful. No physical evidence remained of their atrocities as they dismantled the railway that led directly to the camp and planted trees across the field.

However, enough original accounts and records of the site remained despite Nazi suppression efforts. Although reports differ, a small handful of prisoners survived the camp—only one, Rudolf Reder, provided a written testimony.<sup>10</sup> Had it not been for these witnesses, personal narratives could have vanished. However, the accounts allowed Soviet officials to acknowledge Belzec without completely understanding how deadly the site had been. Although collective memory appeared to fade in postwar years due to Soviet Jewish suppression, the Polish Council of Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom fenced off the area in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Aside from a monument erected in May 1961, nothing was done to preserve the site. The gruesome extent of the camp was finally uncovered in 1997. Five mass graves were unearthed, some of which included partially burned bodies likely indicating panic from workers as the Red Army advanced.<sup>12</sup>

Efforts to connect public memory to the Belzec site are important because of the destruction of physical evidence. Before there was time to fully assess the Holocaust, Nazi efforts to hide the site had almost eliminated the physical remains of Belzec, where an estimated 500,000 Jews perished.<sup>13</sup> Though victims continue to be identified and an updated memorial was built at the camp in 2004, the precise number of victims will remain unknown. In contrast to other extermination camps, remnants of Nazi deeds at Belzec are mostly absent. There were no abandoned buildings like at Auschwitz nor any topsoil proof of charred bones and teeth as was found at Treblinka. At Belzec, such spaces were burned, buried, leveled, and planted over. Therefore, the memorial and burial sites are models of remembrance. The memorial was built into the ground; onlookers are surrounded by the earth that houses the victims and their lost stories.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Soviet Approach to Postwar Memory***

With the liberation of Eastern Europe by the Soviets in late 1944, evidence at Holocaust sites was discovered. As the Red Army moved into each camp, gas chambers, burial pits, and ponds filled with ashes acted as grim reminders of what had truly happened in these locations. What came with these discoveries, however, was a sense of victimization—something Joseph Stalin quickly realized he could use to his and his country's advantage.<sup>15</sup> Because Berlin was doomed to fall, the spoils of war would soon be negotiated by the Allies. While American, British, and other Allied forces fought on the Western front, the Soviet Union stood as the lone opposition to the Nazis in the East and suffered disproportionate losses. Soviet casualties are conservatively estimated at 20 million—far greater than any other country, including

Germany. The Jewish community had lost a far greater percentage of its population, however, and was the primary victim group. Although the Jews had been protected and valued by the prewar Soviet government, the Soviets now began the process of erasing Jewish victimization from public memory.

Despite Soviet efforts to wipe nationalities from concentration camp reports, the Jewish community did not completely leave Eastern Europe. In fact, Jews did not fear communism. Instead, as Anca Oltean argues, they “perceived it as the only force capable to stop Nazism.”<sup>16</sup> When the war ended, many Jews from communist countries left for Palestine, but a large number of survivors stayed in their home countries in the East in order to help the Soviet regimes that helped put a stop to the gas chambers. In the Soviets’ favor, the postwar period also saw the rise of cosmopolitanism—the belief that everyone, no matter what their race, religion or ethnicity might be, belongs to a single nation. After the Holocaust, international law began to recognize “crimes against humanity,” which set the bar for actions seen as dangerous to all people. In order to emphasize the victimization of Soviets and de-emphasize Jewish suffering, Stalin utilized the philosophical idea to suppress Jewish sympathy, which resulted in Jews being persecuted as a population of “cosmopolitans without roots.”<sup>17</sup> As such, synagogues, schools, literature, and other forms of teaching religion were shut down, while the Jewish population was encouraged to stay within Russia and become “Russified.” Throughout this period of anti-Semitism, partly due to Stalin’s desire to claim the position as the sole victim of the war for Russians, many works of literature and potential efforts to memorialize non-Russian sufferers were suppressed.

Another major factor that contributed to the censorship of Holocaust memories was the fear of being associated with fascism during the postwar period. In coming to terms with the Holocaust and the end of the Third Reich, both the Soviets and the Western powers tried to separate themselves from fascism. The epicenter of such conflicts was in Germany, as each side made a concerted effort to disassociate itself from the ideologies that made the Holocaust possible. According to Andrew Beattie, this created a battle between the two Germanies as West Germany claimed that the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic (GDR) was a “‘totalitarian’ dictatorship fundamentally similar to the Nazi regime,” while Eastern Germany associated Nazism with “a highly aggressive, chauvinistic version of imperialist ‘fascism,’” and condemning “incipient fascism of the capitalist Federal Republic.”<sup>18</sup>

With each side attributing to the other fascist or totalitarian characteristics, Stalin enacted his own anti-Semitic measures to ensure collective Russian victimization. Holocaust literature and research withstood serious fire from Stalin during and after the war in the Soviet Union. One major example was Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman’s *The Black Book*, a chronicle of atrocities committed against the Eastern Jewish population with primary accounts (i.e., eyewitness, letters, diaries, etc.).<sup>19</sup> While the central theory of the Soviet-Jewish authors was agreed upon in the West—as it centered around Nazism as a driving force in anti-Semitism—the Soviets rejected it outright, claiming it focused on a specific group rather than the collective. Instead, they eradicated such thought “to the point that in [initial postwar] history textbooks anti-Semitism was totally expunged from the record of Nazism.”<sup>20</sup> The Soviet government believed that focusing on the suffering of a selected group undermined the fight for collective suffering and was too dangerous to publish.

Armed with public concerns and Grossman's self-censorship—he initially omitted prior research on Nazi collaborators in the Eastern Bloc in the hope that his work would be published—the Soviet government never let the book see the light of day. Instead, a large portion of the 27 Russian contributors to the book were arrested and served prison sentences for taking action against the state. The texts, which were printed by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1946 but never distributed, were burned en masse in 1948, thus eliminating an important form of literary Holocaust memory.

It was through the force of remaining Jewish populations and those who stood with them that memories of the Holocaust continued to live on despite being weathered and partially erased by government intervention. An original manuscript was found in May 1965 and brought to the Israeli research center.<sup>21</sup> *The Black Book* was eventually published by Israel's Yad Vashem, the premier research and study center on the Holocaust, in 1980.

### ***Soviet Censorship at Babi Yar***

Turning to the physical spaces of Holocaust memorialization, one discovers that Soviet intervention in public affairs also prevented memorialization that was not collective. One striking example of Nazi crimes comes from the site of the Babi Yar massacre—the mass burial ground of a single night of purging outside of Kiev, Ukraine. Nazi officials decided to execute any Jewish civilians in the town over the span of four days in retaliation to Soviet bombings, including a single night where nearly 33,000 deaths were recorded.

A monument has been built where over a third of the 100,000 Jewish victims were buried, though it took 35 years of struggle for victims to convince Soviet officials to permit the memorial.<sup>22</sup> Immediately after the war, survivors and witnesses attempted to memorialize the site on their own. However, growing friction between intellectuals and the Soviet state caused production to cease and all discussions were stopped. Then, in 1961, the city of Kiev made preparations to erase the site by constructing a park and a sports stadium on it.<sup>23</sup> This direct threat to destroy a site that meant so much to the Jewish population infuriated intellectuals and writers, who began to organize. The Soviet government reacted by arresting countless intellectuals and poets who spoke against flooding the site. Similar to Belzec, Soviet censorship attempted to wash over major Holocaust sites and influence public memory. Rather than erase memories, however, Soviet pressures attempted to manipulate history into portraying a specific narrative to the world as well as its people.

After years of public outcry, the Ukrainian government gave in to public demands and erected a monument on the site; however, in Soviet fashion, the monument depicted historical Russian heroes—none of whom were Jewish. An inscription at the base of the monument stated, "Here, in 1941–43, the German Fascist invaders executed over 100,000 citizens of Kiev and Prisoners of War."<sup>24</sup> The Ukrainian government, feeling the brunt of Soviet pressure, erased the memory of Jewish tragedy and replaced it with collective memorialization. Throughout Stalin-controlled lands, failure to acknowledge Jewish history was prevalent because people feared being accused of favoring a specific group instead of treating all as sufferers and survivors equally. Unfortunately, the intentional whitewashing prevented many memorials from being built and literature from being written, thus erasing parts of Holocaust history forever.



### ***Regional Struggles and the Overall Loss of Memory***

Though much could be said of larger Holocaust sites such as Belzec and Babi Yar, many other regional Holocaust sites, each sharing an equal amount of experiences, dotted the eastern landscapes. In the Ukraine, towns fought lesser standards of censorship but needed basic memorial essentials—notably money and survivor stories. Lesser-known places that had witnessed scenes of the Holocaust were in the greatest danger of being forgotten, as rural Jewish citizens fled either westward or to Israel during the Cold War era. Without survivors to shepherd the memorialization process, those who remained in the 1950s and 1960s quietly maintained sites, while Soviet-Ukrainian officials continued to censor in every way possible. For example, the Zionist organization in Korsun-Shevchenkivsky tried to collect funds for a monument to Jewish heroes who died, only to have the regional authorities seize the collection.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, small groups of survivors made efforts to memorialize sites at the regional level with limited budgets. An example of such a struggle is the Mogilev-Podolsky Jewish community in the Vinnytsia Oblast region of western Ukraine. Citizens there established their own sites out of pocket along the road from Tulchin to Pechora—the site of a march in early December 1941 where Jewish citizens died by the hundreds due to hypothermia and illness.<sup>26</sup> Initially, the two towns, both part of the Mogilev Podolsky Jewish community, secretly memorialized their own cemeteries. When cracks began to show in the Soviet regime during the 1970s however, both village councils agreed to link the two sites along the path of the march.

Money was also a problem for the memorialization. For the first 20 years, the project was funded by Pechora camp survivor and Tulchin resident Mikhail Abramovich Bartik.<sup>27</sup> Because of his financial investment, the community was able to begin construction on marking the path. The two factors of budgeting restrictions and survivors were strongly tied even into the 1990s and early 2000s, as Bartik and his wife emigrated to Germany in 1998 and the memorial upkeep was left to the community.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, this meant that financial responsibility was placed on patrons and citizens who had no recollection of the event. As a result, communications broke down between the two towns. Upon Bartik's visit in 2001, the Torkov memorial he helped fund—which stands between the two and marks where the march had stopped briefly—had become hidden behind vegetation growth.<sup>29</sup> With the earlier exchange of power from survivors to second-hand patrons, the small commemorative sites were left in serious jeopardy. This was the first step in the loss of memory.

Although budgetary concerns were a major issue, the lack of communal memory triggered the largest worry. Cracks in memory and legitimacy have continued to grow, as seen in the rise of Holocaust denial, which began as early as the late 1970s. To combat the slow-rolling wave of rejection, a bevy of firsthand accounts, such as the documentary *Kitty, Return to Auschwitz*, have been released.<sup>30</sup> The film observes a Holocaust survivor and her son walking around the site she lived in for a year and a half in an effort to gather stories and experiences to pass on to him and younger generations. Stories such as Kitty Hart's portrayed legitimate accounts of victims and survivors to provide narratives alongside the myriad of shoes, glasses, suitcases, and bones found in the camp.

The strength of witness accounts will continue to fade over time as the number of survivors decreases. Without these sources, public memory will only consist of

what can be taught from the remaining materials. The loss of firsthand accounts was problematic in small locations, such as Tulchin and Pechora, and is an even greater issue in the United States. A recent survey from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany found that over one-fifth of millennials “haven’t heard or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust,” while nearly a third of Americans believe that two million Jews or fewer were killed during the Holocaust.<sup>31</sup> Even Kitty Hart has trouble conveying what happened. She admits “I open my eyes and there’s nobody. Open my eyes and see grass. Close my eyes and see mud.”<sup>32</sup> Though Holocaust survivors are still alive to tell their stories, they are unable to truly encapsulate what they experienced. This, along with the small number of remaining survivors, creates difficulty in accurately representing the Holocaust.

### ***Education at Auschwitz***

Even a place as prominent as Auschwitz, which did not face the same level of monetary restrictions or historical accuracy questions as other sites, still struggles with presenting the history to the public. In 1945, the lower branch of Polish government passed a bill to “preserve the grounds and buildings of the former camp as a memorial to the international martyrdom of nations.”<sup>33</sup> As one of the most widely publicized camps, there were no qualms with placing Auschwitz at the forefront of Holocaust history. However, the sheer magnitude of the tragedy for groups other than Jews raised the question of how to memorialize the site, and this has become the most difficult and pivotal problem facing historians today.

Initially, Polish political prisoners who survived Auschwitz proposed the preservation of their hell just months after the camp’s liberation in 1945. Auschwitz had been remembered as a mass grave, a labor camp, and a place to mourn and learn. Due to the diversity of its prisoners, the site has a variety of meanings: Jews perceived it as the ultimate symbol of the Holocaust, Poles regarded it as a representation of the destruction of everyday life, and Soviet prisoners of war, Roma-Sinti, and homosexuals also held their own meanings. Even to those who were thousands of miles away, the site stood—and still stands—as an image of sinister thoughts and actions taken too far under the orders of a totalitarian regime.<sup>34</sup>

By encompassing diverse histories of group suffering, the problem is further complicated when observed on an individual basis. Because of the diversity of individual memories, educating and deciphering the totality of the Holocaust becomes an immense and confusing task. Strong emotional ties to Auschwitz and other Holocaust sites caused a population to divide over the issue of memorializing the sites. For some, the concept of being able to enter and consequently leave such demonic places is enough—especially to visual theorist Griselda Pollock, who will never desire to visit a place such as Auschwitz.<sup>35</sup> The notion that one would want to visit a place of great tragedy can cause distress and can quickly and easily be judged as sick or twisted. Such beliefs have merit, as preserved Holocaust landscapes are considered by some as humanity’s most ruthless and horrid pieces of history. On the other hand, Pollock would oppose “dark tourism.” The term, coined by Dr. Phillip Stone, executive director of The Institute for Dark Tourism Research, refers to “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering, or the seemingly macabre.”<sup>36</sup> People choose to experience horrific sites not for masochistic pleasure, but to reflect on human history



and mourn lost lives. This contrast makes the portrayal of the Holocaust difficult to negotiate. However, the vast majority of visitors are not strongly opinionated. Some of those without a strong position include former prisoners, who visit the site to find closure or peace.<sup>37</sup> The designers behind Auschwitz as a memorial have attempted to appease as many parties as possible—though their decisions have angered some groups.

From a historian's perspective, people inherently associate Holocaust sites with the power to make the past present.<sup>38</sup> Such a belief allows visitors to educate themselves by visualizing what happened at the site. To maintain the link between past artifacts and experiences and the current generation, memorials are designed to place visitors as close to historical authenticity as possible; however, this poses additional problems for those with conflicting viewpoints.

Despite many difficulties in constructing memory, tours of Holocaust extermination camps have been successful, especially those sponsored by international organizations such as the British Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) and the March of the Living.<sup>39</sup> These groups arrange trips to sites that physically place young students in Holocaust venues—namely Auschwitz-Birkenau—to promote life-like experiences such as listening to audio clips, reading poems by survivors, and marching where prisoners once did. By placing themselves within similar bounds as victims, students can relate to the historical experience.

Although such tours have been effective, how museums and exhibits utilize artifacts alongside other visual material can also cause issues, especially if they are to be exhibited away from the actual sites. The display of *momentos*—such as shoes, prayer shawls, or victims' hair—at a site may not enhance the experience if their relationship to the Holocaust is unclear. Journalist Micheal Bernard-Donals highlighted problems in the exhibit of confiscated shoes found within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as he notes visitors' behaviors regarding the shoes.<sup>40</sup> Such tangible items are used to create metonymies to relate viewers to the historical moment. However, Bernard-Donals found that this widely used tactic was less effective at establishing connection to the Holocaust, and instead led visitors to reflect on their own mortality. As he stated,

... it isn't that Audria and other visitors like her don't understand the Holocaust by means of the display of shoes; it's that the object's relation to other objects—to her own shoes, to other objects in the museum, even to objects of her experience in the present—stands in the way of establishing a clear historical relation, a relation of authenticity, to the past, one that would (I think mistakenly) allow Audria to remark, 'I know this person's experience.'<sup>41</sup>

Misdirected reflection may not allow visitors to grasp the connection a museum is attempting to create.

Some scholars believe that physical sites hinder memory. Holocaust scholar James E. Young proposed such an idea by observing the work of Jochen Gerz, a German conceptual artist.<sup>42</sup> In his creation of the invisible monument in Saarbrücken, Gerz created an anti-monument of sorts, as the project was largely unnoticed in physical

presence. His crew pried loose 70 cobblestones from the Saarbrücken Schloss, the former Gestapo headquarters. On those stones, they etched the names of over 2,000 Jewish-German cemeteries on the bottom and placed them back where they were originally. When a story was published about Gerz's work, citizens flocked to the square to see what had been constructed. They would "become part of the memorial" as they pondered where the stones were, realizing "such memory was already in them."<sup>43</sup> The project proved that memorials, lessons, and inherent historical warnings remain with individuals and not with the monuments themselves, as they depend on human memory to give them life. Teaching such events and maintaining the fleeting flame of memory as best we can is the best form of memorialization.

### Conclusion

On my own visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the summer of 2017, I mentally prepared for one of the heaviest and most solemn experiences I would ever have. While the weather was fitting for the occasion—it rained for the better part of the morning and early afternoon—I expected the entire environment to match the heart-wrenching stories of the dead and those who liberated the camp in the winter of 1945. Despite the common thought that birds never sing at Auschwitz, I was taken aback by the life that teemed there after past horrors: birds sang in the trees and frogs swam in the ponds where the ashes of prisoners were dumped. Natural overgrowth also plagued much of Tulchin and Pechora. Even at the leveled field and subsurface memorial at Belzec, flora and fauna flourished. Considerable efforts have been made to remove the vegetation to maintain the monuments' emotional integrity.<sup>44</sup> Similar to time, nature has moved forward. However, educators and remaining survivors still seek to grasp the fleeting memories that remain to memorialize such places and events for future generations.

Due to the multi-layered destruction of information and evidence—first by the Nazi regime, and then by Soviet Russia—the history of humanity's most evil actions may never be fully uncovered. Likewise, decades of censorship suppressed public memory from forming. In addition, the growing distance from 1945 to the present combined with the diverse methods of educating future generations has caused a spectrum of issues for human memory down the road. The sites of Belzec, Babi Yar, Tulchin, Pechora, and Auschwitz may not fall from view for years thanks to remaining survivors, artifacts, and physical (or mental) memorials. Despite their immense importance today as markers of the darkest moment in human history, such remnants will continue to wither under neglect, manipulation, and the loss of witnesses regardless of the efforts of postwar memorialization.

### Notes

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2. Anita Kondoyanidi, "The Liberating Experience: War Correspondents, Red Army Soldiers, and the Nazi Extermination Camps," *The Russian Review* 69 (July 2010): 456.
3. *Ibid.*, 458.
4. Tim Cole. "(Re)visiting Auschwitz: (Re) encountering the Holocaust in its Landscapes," *Cultural History* 2, no. 2 (2013): 272.
5. James E. Young, "Germany's Vanishing Holocaust Monuments," *Judaism* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 412–18.

6. Arad, 220.
7. Ibid., 234.
8. Ibid., 219–20.
9. Ibid., 224.
10. Barbara Buntman, “Tourism and Tragedy: The Memorial at Belzec, Poland,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14, no. 5 (2008): 422–23.
11. Ibid., 429.
12. Robin O’Neil, “Belzec—The ‘Forgotten’ Death Camp,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1998): 56.
13. Ibid., 51.
14. Buntman, 432, 436.
15. Kondoyanidi, 458.
16. Anca Oltean, “The Situation of the Jews in Soviet Union and its Satellite Countries after the Second World War,” *Annals of University of Oradea, Series: International Relations & European Studies* 1, (2009): 25.
17. Ibid., 26.
18. Andrew H. Beattie, “The Victims of Totalitarianism and the Centrality of Nazi Genocide: Continuity and Change in German Commemorative Politics,” *Germans as Victims*, ed. by Bill Niven (2006): 151.
19. William Korey, “Down History’s Memory Hole: Soviet Treatment of the Holocaust,” *Present Tense* 10, no. 2 (1983): 51.
20. Ibid., 52.
21. Ibid.
22. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Kiev and Babi Yar,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005421> (accessed November 18, 2017).
23. Korey, 53.
24. Ibid., 54.
25. Rebecca Golbert, “Holocaust Memorialization in Ukraine,” *Polin* 20 (2007): 225.
26. Ibid., 231–32.
27. Ibid., 229.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 233.
30. Cole, 235.
31. “New Survey by Claims Conference Finds Significant Lack of Holocaust Knowledge in the United States,” *The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany*, <http://www.claimscon.org/study/> (accessed August 1, 2018).
32. Cole, 239.
33. Teresa Swiebocka, “The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: From Commemoration to Education,” *Polin* 13 (2000): 292.
34. Ibid., 291–92.
35. Cole, 232.
36. P. R. Stone, *Death, Dying and Dark Tourism in Contemporary Society: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis* (Preston: University of Central Lancashire, 2010), 38.
37. Cole, 234.

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 235–36.
40. Michael Bernard-Donals, “Synecdochic Memory at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *College English* 74, no. 5 (2012): 418.
41. Ibid., 421–22.
42. Young, 415.
43. Ibid., 416.
44. Buntman, 431.

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## Oedipa Maas's Struggle against Existential Nihilism in *The Crying of Lot 49*

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the journey of protagonist Oedipa Maas in Thomas Pynchon's novella *The Crying of Lot 49*, specifically through the lens of her resistance to existential nihilism. Her development throughout the novel provides the structure for this essay, which follows her as she numbs herself to avoid meaninglessness, sensitizes herself to fabricate meaning, becomes conscious of this fabrication, and collapses into and subsequently overcomes existential nihilism. Remedios Varo's triptych, *Bordando el manto terrestre*, acts as an extended metaphor in this sense, highlighting Oedipa's attempt to escape her symbolic tower and illuminate the void around her. The views of prominent existential philosophers and writers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard also bring the book's themes into focus. As Oedipa uses her newfound sensitivity to weave a world of countless connections and fantastic conspiracies, her arc follows her absurd quest to construct order in her world and thus avoid the anguishing existential nihilist crisis of facing meaninglessness or nonexistence.

Since the dawn of humanity, we have been asking the big questions: why are we here, what is our significance, and what will our joy, pain, and suffering mean when we're gone? In the twentieth century, postmodernist writers had an answer: existential nihilism, the belief that life is valueless and posits a crisis between purposeless suffering and nonexistence. Viewing *The Crying of Lot 49* through this lens illuminates the journey of its protagonist, Oedipa Maas, as she sensitizes herself and struggles to find meaning in a meaningless world, resisting the existential nihilism suffocating her. As she uses her newfound sensitivity to weave a world of countless connections and fantastic conspiracies, Oedipa's arc follows her quest to create order and avoid the anguishing existential nihilist crisis of facing meaninglessness or nonexistence. The story concludes with her eventual collapse into, and subsequent overcoming of, existential nihilism.

Originally published in 1966, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* follows the journey of 1960s housewife Oedipa Maas as she leaves her insulated, insignificant life in the town of Kinneret to execute the will of her former lover, the late Pierce Inverarity. She ventures to San Narciso, where she discovers clues that hint at the existence of the Tristero, a vast, anti-government conspiracy involving private postage, black-clad assassins, forged postal stamps, and more. Desperate to make sense of the world around her and barraged by vague clues and cryptic conversations, Oedipa investigates, speaking to countless people and following endless leads in a dogged attempt to uncover the truth. This leads her on a journey of self-discovery and initiates her struggle against existential nihilism.

The ultimate metaphor for Oedipa's arc as she attempts to escape her existential crisis is the 1961 painting *Bordando el manto terrestre* by Spanish surrealist artist Remedios Varo. Born in Spain in 1903, Varo spent her life traveling around Europe, fleeing conflict after conflict, including the Spanish Civil War and the German occupation of Paris. Her paintings explore spiritual and psychological journeys, culminating in her most personally reflective work, *Bordando el manto terrestre*.<sup>1</sup> The triptych depicts a group of young maidens trapped in a tower amid a vast nothingness, weaving golden cloth that flows out of the windows. This cloth becomes the world, and it projects the only light in a vast, gray void.<sup>2</sup> Oedipa's world closely parallels this scene. The stoic-faced, dark-robed figure watching over the maidens in the painting echoes Oedipa's musing that "Such a captive maiden . . . realizes that her tower . . . [is] like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all."<sup>3</sup> Several other times, she laments that she's trapped in a tower—in her marriage and in her life. "She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple thousand miles away in her own tower."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, she begins her journey like the maidens; trapped in a tower, going through the repetitive motions of her life just as the women weaving in the painting. Her marriage to her husband, Mucho, is one-sided and unhappy, and her daily responsibilities confine her. Oedipa spends her life in Kinneret doing mundane tasks like attending Tupperware parties, going grocery shopping, and making dinner for her unfaithful husband. Her days are monotonous and repetitive, blurring together. "Through the rest of the afternoon . . . she wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be the first to admit it?) more or less identical. . . ."<sup>5</sup> A sense of pointlessness and entrapment in an unpleasant, mundane existence permeates every aspect of her life. This resonates deeply with existential nihilism which, according to existentialist scholar Alan Pratt, posits that "existence itself—all action, suffering, and feeling—is ultimately senseless and empty."<sup>6</sup> Thus, Oedipa feels insignificant in a vast and complex world, her suffering occurring for no reason at all. As Oedipa drives down a highway in San Narciso, comparing the road to a "hypodermic needle . . . nourishing the mainliner L.A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain . . ." the narrator comments: "But were Oedipa some single melted crystal of urban horse, L.A., really, would be no less turned on for her absence."<sup>7</sup> If she didn't exist, the world itself would change very little. In describing existential nihilism's view of individual life, Pratt draws on the writings of Empedocles, an early Greek philosopher, who asserts "'the



life of mortals is so mean a thing as to be virtually un-life.”<sup>8</sup> The life and suffering of Oedipa Maas, a mere mortal with a mundane life, mean nothing in the face of the vast world around her.

As a result, Oedipa has numbed herself to avoid the anguish of meaningless suffering, her lack of response to the world around her leading to existential depersonalization. According to existential philosopher Steven Crowell, “the self is not something simply given . . . but is something *made* or constituted through my choices and commitments. My inclinations and instincts, for instance, are not brute facts but . . . are present in my experience ever only as opportunities or challenges that take on meaning—become *mine*—through my identification with or refusal of them.”<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, as well, posits that the self is created only through our responses to the world around us, and thus how we choose to live determines who we are; or, in Sartre’s later writing, existence precedes essence.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Oedipa’s unresponsiveness to the world around her saves her from creating a “self,” allowing her to stay numb and oblivious. Instead of weaving golden cloth or facing the void, she simply stays in her tower and steadfastly refuses to look out the window. “Empty-commodity signs” such as pop songs and Muzak, which “require no existential engagement” and are “‘safe,’ emotionally insulating, non-threatening,”<sup>11</sup> ultimately enable her to grow detached without any consequences, unhappy but comfortable in this insulated world.

However, it is Oedipa’s decision to numb herself, not the insulated nature of her surroundings, which ultimately saves her from existential engagement, an unresponsiveness and existential depersonalization that shields and numbs her. As a result, she lists the many details of her life impassively, with very little commentary or investment in what is happening. “There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, she reacts very little or not at all as the world goes on around her, her detachment and aloofness acting as defense mechanisms as she refuses to respond to the challenges that come her way. When she meets for lunch with her lawyer, Roseman, to discuss the will, “Roseman tried to play footsie with her under the table. She was wearing boots, and couldn’t feel much of anything. So, insulated, she decided not to make any fuss.”<sup>13</sup> Her apathy and inaction in this scene represent her withdrawal from almost everything that happens to her. As our self is created by our reactions to what happens around us, in becoming unresponsive, Oedipa has eschewed her “self” and sealed herself in existential depersonalization. She functions like a robot, going through the motions and only half present. She even rejects the idea of sensitivity, the antithesis to her numbness, when she tells her husband Mucho, as he laments about his own suffering, “‘You’re too sensitive.’”<sup>14</sup> In this way, she sees sensitivity and the resulting creation of a self as a problem or a source of misery, and depersonalization as the solution. While contemporary fiction scholar J. Kerry Grant asserts that, “Given Oedipa’s later attempt to discover whether she is enough of a ‘sensitive’ to make Nefastis’s Maxwell’s demon machine work, there is a certain irony to this charge,”<sup>15</sup> its significance does not stop there. Even more than creating irony, this line reveals how Oedipa changes after she leaves Kinneret. Whereas in a meaningless world, sensitivity was the problem, in her new world hopeful of meaning, sensitivity is the solution. According to Grand Valley State University English professor emerita Lois Tyson, adopting this mindset is how she is able to move “from existential blindness and bad faith to existential awareness and engagement.”<sup>16</sup>

Her decision to execute Pierce's will, and her subsequent departure from Kinneret, mark the beginning of this journey.

After she leaves Kinneret and sheds her numbness, Oedipa uses her newfound sensitivity to transform chaos into order, establishing her existential "self" and using Nietzsche's championed pursuit of insight to overcome the nihilism and meaninglessness that threatens her. "She would give them order, she would create constellations. . . ." <sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche names "three ways of transcending the plan of fundamentally animal existence," or a higher humanity that he claims is the true path to meaning—creativity, self-mastery, and insight. <sup>18</sup> Oedipa pursues insight. She tries to make herself into one of those "'rarest and most valuable of exemplars'" that Nietzsche speaks of—the finders of the truth, the readers of the Word, the ones who glimpse the light and can lead others down the right path. <sup>19</sup> Various characters in the novel, including Yoyodyne employee Stanley Koteck and Berkeley inventor John Nefastis, call this a "sensitive," someone who can take in massive amounts of information and make sense of it. <sup>20</sup> This is the purpose, the goal, the drive, that ultimately pulls her up; her pursuit of meaning itself is what ultimately gives her meaning. "If it was really Pierce's attempt to leave an organized something behind after his own annihilation, it was part of her duty, wasn't it, to bestow life on what had persisted, to try to be what Driblette was, the dark machine in the center of the planetarium, to bring the estate into stelliferous Meaning, all in a soaring dome around her?" However, the narrator laments, "If only so much didn't stand in her way: her deep ignorance of law, of investment, of real estate, ultimately of the dead man himself . . . she wrote, Shall I project a world? If not project then at least flash some arrow on the dome to skitter among constellations and trace out your Dragon, Whale, Southern Cross. Anything might help." <sup>21</sup> This echoes Nietzsche's musings on "to what extent one can endure to live in a meaningless world because one organizes a small part of it oneself." <sup>22</sup> Thus, she resolves to at least organize as much as possible, still upset that she cannot see more. Her "self" becomes this pursuit of truth, of "constellations," of ordering the world around her and shining light on whatever parts of the darkness she can, no matter how small.

Oedipa's response to the fictional play *The Courier's Tragedy* demonstrates this newfound purpose. The play itself is an embodiment of absurdity and horror, nonsensical snippets of Jacobean plays piled on top of each other, where graphic suffering and death occur in almost every scene. The purpose behind this suffering appears at first unknown, at least to the outside eye. However, within this parade of tragedy, Oedipa latches onto small, recognizable details that connect to the real world outside of the play, hinting at a greater purpose: the black-clad assassins, the bones made into ink, and most of all, the mention of Tristero. <sup>23</sup> *The Courier's Tragedy* is a metaphor for her own life and the lives of those around her—her emotionally scarred husband, her insane shrink, and everyone else she sees suffering for no apparent reason. By finding evidence of a greater purpose within the play, she finds evidence of a greater purpose within life itself. Believing this gives Oedipa and her life meaning, since she alone can unravel this mystery. It gives her purpose, importance, and meaning, allowing her to truly be a messenger of insight. The seemingly empty world filled with random suffering—Why did Pierce choose me to be executor? Why does my husband cheat on me? Why do terrible things keep happening?—suddenly

becomes meaningful, and each plight she suffers becomes purposeful and explained. She creates her own understanding of this life and why everything happens, fully establishing her instinct to respond to the world and create her “self.” While Grant calls this a “liberation from her Rapunzel-like life in Kinneret” that “exposes her to the possibility of revelation, sensitizing her to the potential existence” of meaning,<sup>24</sup> Oedipa still has not yet been fully liberated from her tower. She has been freed from her lack of sensitivity and her life in Kinneret, but from the perspective of Remedios Varo’s painting, she is still trapped in her own tower trying to create meaning to fill the void around her. Collado-Rodríguez writes, “Varo depicts some girls who are actually embroidering Earth’s mantle from their tower; that is to say, they are projecting the world, a notion that anticipates Oedipa’s self-reflection many pages later.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, just like the women in *Bordando el manto terrestre*, Oedipa begins to weave a fantastic tapestry of connections to fill the gray void around her. She constructs order without realizing its fragility, insisting that the world must have some sort of inherent significance that she can access. As she wrote in her journal, “Shall I project a world?”<sup>26</sup> In this way, Oedipa has taken her existential crisis—meaningless suffering or death—and created a third option: to fabricate meaning.

However, this optimistic streak does not last long, as Oedipa’s sensitivity soon spirals out of control and inundates her with an overabundance of information, so much so that she is unable to process it and it becomes unintelligible. Like Mucho in the beginning of the book, Oedipa has become too sensitive, leading her to take in every detail and every possibility until she is exhausted and overwhelmed. “‘It’s over,’ she said, ‘they’ve saturated me. From here on I’ll only close them out.’”<sup>27</sup> This recalls the beginning of the story, where she numbs herself to the rest of the world; however, instead of blocking out her own empty existence, she’s blocking out the overwhelming fullness of the world around her. She has found so much evidence of a deeper significance that it becomes inaccessible. Just as Pynchon’s puns, according to Frank Palmeri, “signal our position between inaccessible fullness and profane emptiness of meaning,”<sup>28</sup> the very conflict itself places Oedipa on the line between these binaries while she searches for a “position between.”<sup>29</sup> In this way, she has embarked on a quest to find a middle position in a dichotomy: the world as empty and purposeless or so full of hidden significance that it becomes overwhelming and incomprehensible. The complex nature of the possible evidence she finds is, in the end, beyond her understanding, a concept reminiscent of French philosopher Albert Camus’ notion of absurdity, and his insistence that “the world . . . maintains a total and ‘unreasonable silence’ in the face of our efforts to understand it,”<sup>30</sup> whether this means the world is devoid of significance or we simply cannot access it. This is not the first time she has lamented the world’s overcomplexity, as earlier she marveled at a flying hairspray can and wondered if it was possible to predict its erratic and irregular flight path.<sup>31</sup> The sheer density of information eliminates the possibility of finding meaning even if she happens to be in a world where it exists. Despite the appearance of two choices, neither way leads to enlightenment; she always ends up lost and without an explanation, either due to the world’s true meaninglessness or her inability to understand it. Without a middle ground, every road in this outlook leads back to nihilism.

Thus, she is caught in a binary, not sure of whether life does or does not have value, echoing Nietzsche’s writings on absolutism and a “Yes or No” determination

of overcoming or falling into nihilism. Oedipa's sensitivity has opened her up not only to an overabundance of possible meanings, but also to the true possibility of meaninglessness, what she has been running from this entire time. She learns that her understanding of the world is fragile and only mentally constructed; in her despairing isolation, it now collapses. She recognizes the duality—religious meaning and mundane meaninglessness—surrounding everything in her life, including death. Thinking back to her experience in Vesperhaven House (a San Narciso nursing home), Oedipa faces two outcomes: “. . . either an accommodation reached, in some kind of dignity, with the Angel of Death, or only death and the daily, tedious preparations for it.”<sup>32</sup> The end of life could either be religious and meaningful or simply an insignificant and inconvenient end. She finds herself suspended in a dichotomy, “trapped . . . in a systemic necessity to choose between true or false, historically accurate or invented clues.”<sup>33</sup> Her world “has resolved itself into a set of binary opposites, an either/or equilibrium. . . .”<sup>34</sup> Every possibility collapses into two diametrically opposed options. She applies this to her quest for enlightenment, wondering to herself whether she has found a true purpose to life or she's simply making it all up. She tells herself:

Either you have stumbled indeed . . . onto a secret richness and concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating . . . maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise of life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it . . . in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull. . . .”<sup>35</sup>

Nietzsche warned of this absolutist binary; as Crowell explained, “The key to overcoming nihilism, Nietzsche came to understand, is . . . by coming to understand and freeing ourselves from the (false but seductive) ‘God or bust (‘nothing matters’)’ dichotomy, and from the absolutism addiction that disposes one to give up on and disparage anything that does not satisfy the craving for it.”<sup>36</sup> Oedipa is then faced with a choice: “So, Nietzsche writes, a genuine philosopher ‘demands of himself a judgment, a Yes or No . . . about life and the value of life,’” and saying no “is what Nietzsche takes the nihilist fundamentally to be doing.”<sup>37</sup> Oedipa must decide whether life has value and meaning, or whether it is meaningless; whether she can survive this crisis, or whether she will fall into nihilism. In her complete state of isolation from others and from meaning, “[t]hat night she sat for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, oh God, was the void.”<sup>38</sup> For the first time, she truly stares nihilism in its face, the collapse of her commitments finally exposing her to its possibility. After stripping away her imaginings, she is faced with a void. “Nothingness reveals each individual . . . barred forever from knowing why yet required to invent meaning.”<sup>39</sup> And thus, her sensitivity brings her to the anguishing realization that she most feared, that she trapped herself in a numb, insulated life to avoid: that everything—her suffering, her life, and even her death—could be meaningless.

At the beginning of this collapse, Oedipa realizes just how critical this quest has become to her identity; thus, not only her happiness but her entire essence depends on finding meaning. After her midnight walk through San Narciso, where she is barraged by an overabundance of senseless clues and a succession of revelations about death and

destiny, she is lost and afraid, both striving for meaning and terrified of its possibility. A desperate Oedipa returns to Kinneret and confronts her therapist with this dilemma. “‘I came,’ she said, ‘Hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy.’ ‘Cherish it!’ said Hilarius, fiercely. ‘For what else do any of you have? . . . Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it . . . You begin to cease to be.’”<sup>40</sup> In this way, by finding and being part of a purpose greater than herself—unraveling Tristero—she has made herself exist. However, as soon as she stops, she falls back into the void, her entire essence collapsing when she realizes that what she has been working toward since leaving Kinneret—shining light, making constellations—could be a lie. Meaninglessness and nonexistence become synonymous. If she fails to create meaning, or some sensible interpretation of the world around her, she loses herself. The pursuit of the Tristero has become her only significance in an otherwise meaningless world. To give it up is to give up herself and, as Hilarius put it, cease to be.

Symbols of “ceasing to be” follow Oedipa throughout her journey, as she slowly begins to lose herself. Death, the void, and nonexistence permeate the story, but Oedipa does not start to take it seriously until she takes a half-drunken midnight walk through San Narciso. She wanders through the city and is given the name tag of another person, Arnold Snarb. She doesn’t object; she allows others to call her by this false name and gets swept along with them.<sup>41</sup> Later in the book, Oedipa insists that Mucho’s boss, Caesar Funch, call her Edna,<sup>42</sup> an alternative name given to her by Mucho, ironically right after he tells her to “just be [her]self.”<sup>43</sup> The request is frustrated and sarcastic, but unlike her previous mindless compliance as Arnold Snarb or simple confusion at being called Edna Mosh, it is a conscious choice. As Couturier writes, “When she cried out to herself ‘Where am I?’, we understand that she really means ‘Who am I?’”. It is around this time that Oedipa begins to have doubts about her real name.<sup>44</sup> This connects the loss of her name with the loss of her identity, but she loses even more. By eschewing her own name in favor of those given to her by others, such as Arnold Snarb and Edna Mosh, she symbolically loses not only her identity, but also her meaning, and thus, her personal ties to existence. She knowingly recedes once again into depersonalization.

Oedipa has tried to overcome this loss of self just as philosophers have, and her solutions mirror those put forth by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Both Kierkegaard’s beliefs about God and Heidegger’s views about relationally established identity may be valid solutions to nihilism, but Oedipa is ultimately incapable of attaining either. The elusiveness of God and Oedipa’s failure to make a continuous spiritual or religious connection throughout the book (despite her best efforts as she looks out over California or walks through Vesperhaven House) renders Oedipa unable to make the “leap of faith” that singlehandedly supports Kierkegaard’s solution to nihilism.<sup>45</sup> While she does make several religious connections throughout the book and brushes up against the possibility of God and religion in many of her musings (repeating the name of God, sensing a “religious instant”<sup>46</sup>), she still falls short of the strength of faith and religiousness necessary to embrace Kierkegaard’s Christian-centered faith.<sup>47</sup>

Oedipa also attempts to overcome nihilism by making social connections with others, drawing on Heidegger’s belief that the unique condition of human existence—referred to as *Dasein*—is a “social creature” that cannot exist in isolation; however, isolation is exactly where Oedipa finds herself, and she subsequently falls into despair.<sup>48</sup> Heidegger writes that the self can only be maintained in relation to one unconditional commitment that defines one’s identity—for example, a knight defines himself by his love for a princess, a metaphor mentioned repeatedly in the novel.<sup>49</sup>

Oedipa defines herself by this as well, likening herself to a princess waiting for a knight to rescue her from her tower, her identity having as much to do with her quest for meaning as it does with using the men around her to pursue it.<sup>50</sup> This is the solution posited in Varo's painting as the maiden escapes the tower with her lover.<sup>51</sup> However, when Metzger, Oedipa's lover, leaves her, her husband descends into delusion, and all of the other men around her either die, stop believing in her, or abandon her, this solution becomes impossible. "They are stripping from me, she said subvocally—feeling like a fluttering curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss—they are stripping away, one by one, my men . . . Where am I?"<sup>52</sup> Her identity, once determined by the men around her, has collapsed with the disappearance of these relationships. After those who have helped her construct meaning die or fade, she is high up in her tower, alone. Looking out the window over the void as her golden cloth disintegrates, she realizes that she can't possibly hope to fill it with meaning.

This demonstrates the nihilistic view of the absolute isolation of each person within the universe, and the resulting collapse of the self in the face of this realization.<sup>53</sup> Since, as Patricia Bergh argues, "Oedipa's identity has been defined by the reflected light of the males surrounding her . . ." their disappearance strips her of all sense of direction and leaves her disoriented and lost.<sup>54</sup> "[Oedipa] tried to face toward the sea. But she'd lost her bearings."<sup>55</sup> When Oedipa asked Driblette about his production of *The Courier's Tragedy*, he prophesied, "If I were to dissolve in here . . . be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish, too. You, that part of you so concerned God knows how, with that little world, would also vanish."<sup>56</sup> Similar to the third panel of Varo's triptych, where a woman escapes the tower with a man,<sup>57</sup> Oedipa has clung to men to deliver her from the tower of meaninglessness. Bergh writes that "The mythical male rescuer, protector, or guide for whom Oedipa waits never appears to offer her aid,"<sup>58</sup> and the men in her life are not the typical knights in shining armor. However, she believes them to be, and this idea grounds her as she weaves meaning into the void. After they disappear, however, that meaning disintegrates, revealing that her deliverance was only illusory and temporary. Oedipa is alone, and her meaning dissolves; escaping from the tower leaves her not free in a meaningful world but isolated in the void. Much like existential nihilism, where "nothingness is the source of not only absolute freedom but also existential horror and emotional anguish. . . . Nothingness reveals each individual as an isolated being 'thrown' into an alien and unresponsive universe."<sup>59</sup> After even the man from Inamorati Anonymous abandoned her, Oedipa "stood . . . in the night, her isolation complete. . . ."<sup>60</sup> She is finally free of her tower, but her liberation is not how she imagined. It is isolation. It is nothingness. Her very existence begins to evaporate as she faces existential death.

In a last-ditch attempt to avoid this meaninglessness, Oedipa turns to an extreme solution: suicide. Existential nihilism offers this idea of death as the alternative to a terrible, meaningless life,<sup>61</sup> and Oedipa considers taking it. She provokes death, her reckless actions bordering on suicide attempts. As she tells the Inamorato Anonymous, "I got drunk and went driving on these freeways. Next time I may be more deliberate."<sup>62</sup> However, with each attempt she is terrified of her own actions and by what her success would mean, realizing what faces her after death: the unknown. This is a staple of existential nihilism, as the only alternative to a meaningless existence is nonexistence, nothingness. It becomes a "to be or not to be" dilemma as Oedipa struggles with the meaninglessness of her own life and whether nonexistence would be



better or worse. Earlier, she had been confronted with the possibilities of death and what comes after. In a movie she watched with her soon-to-be-lover, Metzger, a dying father told his child, “Your little eyes have seen your daddy for the last time. You are for salvation; I am for the Pit.”<sup>63</sup> In the beginning, she didn’t think much of it at all, allowing the movie to go on with little commentary or emotional response. The movie played out like a dramatized caricature as Oedipa engaged it with amusement rather than distress. However, as the novel progresses, people disappear and fall dead around her: Metzger elopes with another woman, bookseller Zapf burns down his store, and Mucho and Hilarius start hallucinating and go mad. When she discovers that Driblette has committed suicide, Oedipa is struck again. “Death glided by, shadowless, among the empties on the grass. . . .”<sup>64</sup> She finally acknowledges and fully understands mortality when she cradles the dying sailor at the boarding house: “. . . the set of all men who had slept on [his mattress], whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process . . . where death dwelled in the cell though the cell be looked in on at its most quick.”<sup>65</sup> Death becomes real and immediate.

Thus, much like Sophocles’ Oedipus, Oedipa’s attempt to escape her fate brings her right back to where she started: trapped in a self-constructed tower, trying to create meaning out of a meaningless world, facing the death and nothingness she tried so desperately to avoid. Every path she could have taken led back to her tower, so in a way, she never left, and she never can leave. “If San Narciso and the estate were really no different from any other town, any other estate, then by that continuity she might have found The Tristero anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entrances, a hundred alienations, if only she’d looked.”<sup>66</sup> No matter where she went or what she did, she would always be led to the same destination—the promise of meaning and its inescapable devolution into meaninglessness, death, and, ultimately, nonexistence. Some scholars, such as Phillip Gochenour and Stephen Cox, posit that the clicking lock of the auction room door in the very last scene is indicative of a symbolic entrapment, wherein Oedipa is once again locked in her tower.<sup>67</sup> While American author Terry Caesar claims that “this Oedipa is no Oedipus, or only at the earnest reader’s peril,”<sup>68</sup> this connection is not perilous, nor is it earnest. Both Oedipa and Oedipus struggle to rewrite their own stories and escape that which they most fear; however, in doing so, they both end up in the same place they were trying to avoid, revealing that their fear was inescapable. After Oedipa spends the entire story constructing meaning and avoiding an existential nihilist crisis, she finally realizes that this is impossible and is forced to face the fact that her fabricated meaning could be just that: fabricated.

However, at the end of the book, Oedipa emerges from her darkest moments, picks herself back up, and overcomes her collapse into nihilism by disposing of her binary worldview, choosing to believe that life does have meaning and accepting the concept of life as a process of always becoming. After the night of her breakdown, she returns to her next lead, but she has changed. Oedipa has moved past her absolutist viewpoint. While before she lamented the obstacles in front of her (“if only so much didn’t stand in her way”<sup>69</sup>), and the failure of her investigations, she now embraces the struggle, the waiting, when she “settle[s] back” to await her next revelation.<sup>70</sup> Whether she fully understands that she will constantly be struggling against her ignorance and the



complexity of the world in her quest, and that this in itself is what gives her power, is unclear; however, she exhibits a newfound sort of contentment with her situation. “Cox asserts that Oedipa finds herself in a state of ‘new-found equanimity [that] suggests something that the ancient skeptics called *epoche*—a wise suspension of belief produced by the contemplation of equally plausible but contradictory ideas, by a liberating “revelation” of the limits of human knowledge.’”<sup>71</sup> This is much different from her earlier yearning for answers that she could not (and, according to existentialist writer Albert Camus, would never) have. Even further, this is not just recognizing the limits of human knowledge, but a patience that allows her to wait for it. Cox argues that this knowledge is not inaccessible, just always impending. Thus, Oedipa remains in a constant state of becoming.<sup>72</sup> Finally, in the last sentence of the book, she settles back “to await the crying of lot 49,”<sup>73</sup> awaiting her revelation, her answer, always just on the cusp of her experience. It is this forward inertia, this movement toward something yet never arriving, that permeates the novel and, as Pierce put it, “keep[s] it bouncing.”<sup>74</sup> The lack of resolution at the novel’s conclusion, and thus its entire thematic structure, echoes this sentiment.

Postmodernist scholar Geoffrey Lord “suggests that the ‘general “logic” of the novel, which is dictated by Oedipa’s search, certainly urges reading the end as gesturing outwards . . . in the direction of an always impending revelation.’”<sup>75</sup> Thus, her destiny of remaining locked in her tower contrasts with the inescapable lack of a destination in her quest, symbolizing a sort of freedom from this locked tower to which she always returns. As a result, Oedipa finally overcomes nihilism by acting as an agent of knowledge. She searches for meaning and understanding as a philosopher, someone in pursuit of the truth. As she has been doing for the entire book, she fashions herself into an intrepid heroine on the quest for truth, dedicating her life to “consecration to culture,” as Nietzsche puts it.<sup>76</sup> However, she has now accepted the infinite nature of this quest and has made peace with the always-impending revelation. Now she is fully aware and engaged in her world, untethered by earlier delusions or detachments. Instead of avoiding nihilism, she faced and overcame it; she survived and continued.

While Oedipa has not accepted this meaninglessness—far from it—she has learned to live with its possibility while not giving up her quest to defeat it. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of her story, as she journeys through crises and epiphanies, hope and doubt, the pursuit of meaning and the anguish of the void, always returning to hopefulness and subsequently falling into despair. English professor Thomas Schaub maintains that *The Crying of Lot 49* is “forward-looking, bursting with subcultural alternatives and subversive energies.”<sup>77</sup> However, this ending contains a dichotomy; it is optimistic about our dogged intentions to make ourselves and the world around us significant but remains cynical about their true outcomes. Our relentless search for meaning is both admirable and foolish. Even when we are faced with our own existential crises and feel like Oedipa trying to make sense of our world, our lives, or an opaque novel, we have little choice but to keep moving and do what everyone in this world must do: live on.

## Notes

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2. Remedios Varo, *Bordando el manto terrestre*, oil on masonite, 1961, 39 1/2 x 48 1/2 inches, <https://www.gallerywendinorris.com/remedios-varo/> (accessed May 30, 2018).
3. Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1966), 11–12.
4. *Ibid.*, 11.
5. *Ibid.*, 2.
6. Alan Pratt, "Nihilism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/#H3> (accessed May 29, 2018).
7. Pynchon, 15.
8. Pratt, "Nihilism."
9. Steven Crowell, ed., "Existentialism and its Legacy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Companion, 2012), 8.
10. William Blattner, "Heidegger: The Existential Analytic of Dasein," in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 158.
11. Lois Tyson, "Existential Subjectivity on Trial: *The Crying of Lot 49* and the Politics of Despair," *Pynchon Notes* 28–29, (1991): 8–9, <http://doi.org/10.16995/pn.254> (accessed May 5, 2018).
12. Pynchon, 10.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 4.
15. J. Kerry Grant, *A Companion to The Crying of Lot 49* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 18, ProQuest e-book, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uwoshkosh-ebooks/reader.action?docID=3038971&query=#>. In the novella, Oedipa meets a scientist named John Nefastis who had built a perpetual motion machine he claims is operated by "sensitives," who separate fast and slow air molecules while staring at a portrait of the scientist James Clark Maxwell.
16. Tyson, "Existential Subjectivity on Trial: *The Crying of Lot 49* and the Politics of Despair," 6.
17. Pynchon, 72.
18. Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche: After the Death of God," in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 130.
19. *Ibid.*, 131.
20. Pynchon, 84.
21. *Ibid.*, 64–65.
22. Schacht, 128.
23. Pynchon, 57–58.
24. Grant, *A Companion to The Crying of Lot 49*, xiii.

25. Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, "Meaning Deferral, Jungian Symbolism, and the Quest for V. in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 56, no. 3 (2015): 260, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2014.888047> (accessed May 31, 2018).
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# The Indian Civil Service Exam: A Modest Beginning toward Democratization

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## *Abstract*

In 1855 the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the cornerstone bureaucratic system of the East India Company (EIC), made an important change in the appointment of officers. Rather than continuing with the system of individual appointment—that was often based upon merit, rank, and insider connections—the EIC developed a civil service examination for admitting new officers into the inner workings of the public service. The exam also allowed for unprecedented equity within the British colonial system; new prospects for the exam had to be British subjects, which meant they could be Indian. Statistical analysis shows that the exam did not increase Indian involvement in the civil service. But, as this article will demonstrate, the introduction of a standardized procedure and body of knowledge required for the selection of ICS officers had other important consequences. The civil service exam, which first served as a barrier for Indian cadets, would later make the bureaucracy more efficient, even after India gained independence.

## *Introduction*

Beginning in the seventeenth century, the East India Company's (EIC) economic and political dominance reigned second to none in the Asiatic niche of India. The EIC would be the largest privately held benefactor to wield political and economic power until the mid-nineteenth century, after which the British Crown prevailed as the new institution that would control India's bureaucratic and economic power. One of the most important branches of the EIC was the Indian Civil Service (ICS), which had been heralded as India's bureaucratic enigma. The ICS had a complicated history, which some would argue as wholly ineffective during its control in the private realm. Writing under the pen name "a retired Indian," one letter to the editor in the August

21, 1855, issue of the *Daily News* (London) suggested that the ICS lacked the ability to sustain marketable competition for employees. The letter also stated that “another great evil of the Indian Civil Service is, that it excludes that emulation and competition which give such a healthy impetus in every other body of public servants throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup> Others disputed its effectiveness in absolutist control over commerce. Despite the common perceptions of British citizens, one unquestionable standard of the ICS was its exclusivity. The selection process was carried out mostly through cross sections of aristocratic standing and personal connections that allowed for a traditional bureaucratic system of white Anglo-Saxon men within India.

This classic feudal system ended up excluding individuals based on Indian caste and British class, but it also meant that British men were the vast majority of officers servicing the ICS. In the nineteenth century, efforts were made by Lord Bentinck to remedy this problem by promoting Indian officers to new roles, but over the span of 21 years from 1828 to 1849 little progress was made. Ram Parkash Sikka, a historian at Panjab University, observes that while “European and Anglo-Indian or Eurasian elements increased” within the ranks “the Indian element remained, more or less, stable in the uncovenanted branch of its civil service.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1858, when the company was forced to transfer ownership to the British Crown, significant changes and problems arose in India. The ICS and other soldiers had just recovered from a long, bloody rebellion under the direction of Governor General Lord Canning. Upon liquidation of the EIC as a provision of the Government of India Act of 1858, the Crown, specifically Queen Victoria, had direct territorial control of India. In addition, under the auspices of a more democratic rule, Queen Victoria would base the bureaucratic appointments of the ICS on the completion of an arduous civil service exam. After passing the exam, Indians themselves could be a part of the ICS.

The new civil service exam helped form what is often deemed as the iron framework within the ICS. Many saw the ICS as an unwavering bureaucratic institution that survived political and economic calamity, therefore garnering its nickname. The civil service exam of the EIC helped form a democratic, Indian institution, even though the test itself promoted ethnocentric behaviors. Although it was difficult for Indians to become high-ranking officials, by allowing Indians into the officer pool Britain opened the door for a systematic and regulated liberal education through strenuous exam preparation. The importance of the exam lies in its being a small but significant turning point toward eventual independence from the British Crown. The culmination of both Britain’s growing colonial state and the necessity of newly regulated processes set history on a tumultuous precipice of democratization. From this point on, democratization refers to the new opportunities that Indians had in exploring and becoming more knowledgeable about British bureaucracy, administration, and global politics—which would later serve them and others as independence movements gained traction. Despite initial statistical analysis revealing that the exam did not raise Indian involvement in the civil services, it is important to note that the argument for democratization relies not upon initial race integration in the ICS, but upon the rise of standardized procedure and knowledge that was now an expectation for all ICS officers. The exam, which was instituted in 1855, put the ICS a step ahead of other government institutions, which aided in democratization and stabilized its infrastructure during the coming independence. Eventually, this standardized and difficult checkpoint, which first served as a barrier for Indian cadets<sup>3</sup>, would be a neutralizer for future officers and would remain intact indefinitely.



The arguments in this paper build off of a foundation of existing scholarship that includes *Gentlemen of the East India Company: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817–1949* by Pradeep Barua; “The Indian Civil Service and the Nationalist Movement: Neutrality, Politics, and Continuity” by Arudra Burra; “Administering India: The Indian Civil Service” by Ann Ewing; and “The Masculinities of Post-Colonial Governance: Bureaucratic Memoirs of the Indian Civil Service” by Inderpal Grewal. These sources particularly help shape my argument in relation to the various appointment schedules—referring to the typical promotion of officers in the ICS—that had previously been a part of the Indian Civil Service. These sources help nuance my argument that the ICS was a government branch that successfully remained intact from imperialism to independence because of its unintentional liberalism. In addition, I also utilize two other books—E. W. R. Lumby’s *The Transfer of Power in India 1945–1947* and Ram Parkash Sikka’s *The Civil Service in India 1765–1857*. These works give significant insight on how the ICS worked on the implementation of the civil service exam over the years. Some of these sources focus on the question of how and why the civil service remained intact during indianisation. These sources help develop my argument that the civil service exam in 1855 put the ICS a step ahead of other institutions, which aided in democratization and stabilized it during independence.

My main primary source is the *East-India Company’s Civil Service Examination Papers* by William Watts. This booklet is an extensive guide about all of the subjects tested on the exam and the questions and expectations for applicants. The source covers in detail the different sample questions of the exam and is dated 1857 (near the inception of the exam). Also included in my research is a *Book of Exercises for the Lower and Higher Standard Examinations* by Adalut Kahn, which is a later edition of exercises in preparation for the civil service exam that focuses solely upon language preparation. These two primary sources bolster my defense of England’s test curriculum, and its creation of globalized and internationalized Indian officers. They also confirm that England’s democratic leanings in political theory hurt its imperial holdings in the nineteenth century. In addition, I have used several primary source biographies that chronicle the intended functions of the ICS directly from officers involved in the EIC. These include *The Education of the Civil Service* by Henry St. George Tucker; *The India Office* by Sir Malcolm C. C. Seton; and “A Letter of Warren Hastings on the Civil Service of the East India Company” by Warren Hastings. These sources back up my arguments about the ICS exam curriculum and also bring to life the experience of ICS officers and their unpreparedness for the reality of their career.

### ***Where Wealth and Class Reign: Appointment Schedules Prior to 1855***

Before the civil service exam, the EIC kept a close check on appointments using a classic feudal system that relied upon socioeconomic status. This method of entrance into the civil service was insufficient because it created an inequitable system that would not continue to serve the needs of a growing colonial state such as Britain. Using this discriminatory tradition, many ICS officers romanticized the hardships of attaining a position based upon its criteria. The process often involved studying at a university in Britain and then traveling to India on a meager budget. After students made it to India, they would be employed as apprentices for some years, earning a wage that was barely sustainable. After the apprenticeship, he would work his way up

the ranks during the course of his service, which was often a lifetime stretching 30 to 40 years.<sup>4</sup> This process of entering as a low-rung service official put Indians at a sizable disadvantage. Sir Malcolm C. C. Seton, an Indian Office official, has concluded that university and age requirements made becoming a civil servant as an Indian impossible before the exam was enacted.<sup>5</sup> Sir Seton was a liberal-minded official at the time, effectively criticizing the EIC and Raj, the British Crown's imperial rule of India, for the manner in which they appointed officers. He also suggested that the governors of the EIC, during the latter half of the eighteenth century, should help restore the system to a less mentally and physically demanding process. "The scandals caused by the original plan of sending young men out to the east on a starvation wage but with liberty to engage in private trade," Seton argues, "were checked by Clive, Warren Hastings, and Cornwallis, and an adequately paid Service with most rigid standards transformed the spirit of the Indian administration."<sup>6</sup> However, the transformation of the ICS during the eighteenth century still relied on British aristocratic men with little knowledge of the infrastructure, commerce, and city life of India. The men would be thrown into service on the basis of their economic privilege with little training. This left Indians vulnerable to authoritarian sources of power with too much privilege and too little practical experience in building and maintaining Indian towns and cities. Not only was this system undemocratic, it was disarrayed and subjective.

Because of the EIC's reliance upon the archaic system of appointments, it had deemed a more standardized entrance unnecessary. Even as late as 1855, the EIC director, Henry St. George Tucker, wrote that "we do not require for our service deep theologians, profound lawyers, erudite physicians or metaphysicians, or subtle political economists. The most distinguished in our service have gone out to India before the age of eighteen; and when they felt a deficiency, some of them have educated themselves."<sup>7</sup> Here, Tucker suggests that the EIC leadership valued direct experience and self-instruction over a more formal education and training for members of the ICS. The pre-1855 system was arguably undemocratic, disorganized, and ineffective. As demonstrated by the 1857 rebellion, these weaknesses perhaps even threatened the capacity of Britain to sustain its empire.

### ***A Brave New Age: The Beginning of the Civil Service Exam***

Even though the introduction of a standardized civil service exam might suggest the intent to democratize the ICS, that was not necessarily the case. The exam was intended to be a barrier, argues Dr. Pradeep Barua, history professor at the University of Nebraska: "Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that the British were increasingly apprehensive about a possible influx of Indians into the hitherto all-white ICS."<sup>8</sup> To increase difficulty for Indians, British officials decided that "the competitive [civil service] examination was to be held only in London. That this arrangement would pose a formidable obstacle to prospective Indian [c]andidates was realised by several members of Parliament and they therefore urged the [g]overnment to hold the examination in India as well as in England."<sup>9</sup> The officials decided against multiple testing locations; thus the civil service exam did not equalize the playing field for Indian candidates. Instead, it showed the privileges of class and insider connections with little effort to standardize exam testing centers. These details are salient in the analysis of long-term effects of the exam on the Raj and later India's independence.

From the beginning, according to Ram Parkash Sikka, the Englishmen who created the exam favored classic British liberal education. “The Committee found the vernacular Indian languages of ‘no value’ and specifically recommended that these ‘ought not to be the subjects of examination.’”<sup>10</sup> This action demonstrates the ethnocentrism and benightedness that British officers had in planning an exam that would be relevant for the service of ICS officers.

### ***A Biased Start: Civil Service Exam Curriculum***

Despite ethnocentricity littered throughout the administrative ideology and practice, the exam gave credence for Indian candidates to explore a globalized worldview through the British colonial curriculum. While this appears problematic, when the test curriculum is analyzed, the questions served later governmental and political movements quite suitably. To analyze the long-term effects of the exam on democratization, it is crucial to look at the curriculum. The subjects included were chosen for their relative importance to Englishmen and their perceived ability to create strong and disciplined leaders. The depth of knowledge required for the exam was a testament to students’ dedication. As Indian involvement became more common in the twentieth century, the liberal arts content of the exam gave cadets useful know-how for placing the Indian bureaucracy on an international level. The exam contained questions such as: “Describe the means—military, civil, and economical—by which the Romans ruled Britain. Compare their government of this island with our own in India, and with the French and Algeria.”<sup>11</sup> Stripped of academic loftiness, these types of questions created a foundation for political knowledge and encouraged cadets to take a holistic approach to political systems. Not only were cadets expected to recite historical fact, they were also expected to analyze different subjects. Another prompted, “Describe our [English] foreign policy between 1820–1837.”<sup>12</sup> With these test questions, Britain was unintentionally preparing Indian independence on a political basis. Giving candidates a means and purpose to explore the historical methods of war, revolt, government institutions, and law meant that a change was quietly taking place in how Indian candidates viewed themselves. Great Britain also started a small-scale democratization of India through its demand for extensive knowledge of languages. Cadets were expected to know German, French, Italian and, to a smaller extent, Arabic and Sanskrit.<sup>13</sup> Cadets’ knowledge of foreign languages helped situate India as an international power. This is the crux of the argument for democratization; Great Britain, priding itself on colonial dominance, gave some Indian candidates an exclusively intimate look at global and national politics, which would later herald in the new age of indianisation and self-sufficiency. The colonial machine and the Crown itself fostered intimacy in order to appropriate regularity to the growing system.

Great Britain did not fail in its ethnocentricity of language curriculum, either. Warren Hastings, English statesmen and governor of Fort William in Calcutta, had an interesting comment on learning the languages of India, writing, “To the Persian language as being the medium of all Political intercourse the first place ought to be assigned in the studies of the [p]upils. . . . The next in order, and necessary though not in the same degree to be understood and spoken by all, is the language in common use among all the Mahommedan Inhabitants of India called Kootta, or Hindostanny.”<sup>14</sup> Often the decisions made for spoken communication were ethnocentric and, in most

cases, unhelpful for bureaucrats on a local level because they failed to learn the languages of the people they were commanding.

However, for many officers the on-site training occurred after they passed the civil service exam when the focus shifted from a traditional English liberal arts education to vocational training appropriate for lower-rung officials in the EIC. Lord William Bentinck, who was governor general of India, suggested a more practical form of study for the time: “first, Indian History; secondly, the Science of jurisprudence; thirdly commercial and Financial Science; and, fourthly, the Oriental tongues.”<sup>15</sup> As a result of the ethnocentric test questions, Indian candidates had more exposure to a global scale mindset—preparing them for independence by teaching them about historical revolutions and other events that pushed forward liberation from colonial oppressors. In addition, cadets would have an acute awareness of potential allies and enemies on a worldwide scale. For the few Indian officers who did make it into the ICS, their global interaction is significant. Sir Krishna Govinda Gupta, a member of the Secretary of State’s Council of India; Sir Atul Chandra Chatterjee, an international diplomat and a former Indian high commissioner; and K. P. S. Menon, a foreign secretary and later state ambassador, all became international figures throughout their service in the ICS.

Not only did the curriculum push for an international India, it also focused on creating an industrialized state. Various questions in the exam reflect this change. One question prompted students to “explain the principles of soap-making,”<sup>16</sup> which was the newest technology during the first Industrial Revolution. On a theoretical level, the exam asked cadets to “examine the arguments for and against the beneficial effects of an increased use of [m]achinery upon the condition of labourers.”<sup>17</sup> While many of these questions seem both high-minded and trivial for civil servants, hidden amongst them are some real applicable properties for ICS officers in both governmental bureaucratic interactions and public relations for the eventual independence of India. The questions prompted candidates to start thinking about the basis of industrialized business in an independent Indian economy, and also set the foundation for labor policy and ideology after the British Raj stepped out of India.

### ***The (Im)perfect Civil Servant: The British Raj and Beyond***

According to Inderpal Grewal, for the elite members of the Indian bureaucracy “the idea of ‘character’ was a critical element of the selection process and after independence it continued to be so in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), but with some changes which came from challenges to elite power.”<sup>18</sup> When ICS officers reflected upon what they thought constituted knowledgeable and esteemed ICS officers, the general opinion was their inherent character—which often meant what British family they were born into. However, it should be noted that a standardized focus on education in preparation for the exam made honest and better-discerned leaders who were fit to dispense justice, therefore creating a more sustainable ICS. These leaders had better character because of their exposure to a liberal arts education, not because of their families’ socioeconomic class. This created a more sustainable system that relied upon equity as its basis for admission and seemed another small step toward democratization whether it was recognized at the time or not. R. P. Sikka’s history of the civil service argues that the ICS strongly believed in the ability of a liberal arts education “to open, to invigorate, and to enrich the mind” rather than solely focusing

on one specific skill.<sup>19</sup> The EIC wanted problem solvers with a broad knowledge base, people who could be easily trained in the processes and intricacies of the bureaucracy, which was what the exam required and prepared cadets for.

Sikka observes that there was public dissent on the EIC's decision to require an exam that was only offered in London. Indians like Harishchandra Mukherjee, who was a political and editorial writer for an Indian newspaper, maintained that Indians should focus their attention on the three branches of the EIC that garnered the most power: "[t]he Civil Service, [t]he Supreme Court, and the Zamindars."<sup>20</sup> He argued this trifecta of governmental offices should be held by Indians, as Indians are subject to them, and therefore the civil service exam should be open to Indians and by default offered in India, not just London.<sup>21</sup> Besides Mukherjee, there were many other dissenting opinions, including those of British officers. There was another large disconnect between ICS application and lofty policy. Not only was there disagreement about the logistics of the exam, but in practice the exam proved even less capable in its initial aim to involve more Indians. Ann Ewing, in her study of the Indian Civil Service, writes that "the Public Services Commission of 1866 found that officers too often rose by seniority rather than by merit."<sup>22</sup> With Indians having little seniority in the ICS, and being uncovenanted, the exam failed to centralize a system for advancement. However, the true success of the exam is its sustainability in the long-term political landscape of India.

The exam remained relevant after Indian independence because it could be altered to fit new ideas in the changing centuries. The civil service was historically a more progressive bureaucratic system within the Raj. For example, after the civil service exam, ICS officers were not allowed to join political parties, which is why they can seem "aloof" in their decisions.<sup>23</sup> This is also why cadets in the civil service appear disconnected from their communities. Administrative and subject "disconnect" is built into the exam questions. The application of political and philosophical theory often does not translate to administering policy to Indian towns and cities. Some of the theory speaks to the way a large bureaucracy should run at the national level, but these ideas are hard to implement in small locales.

The ICS, which would become the Indian Administrative Service (ICA) during independence, was not without its faults. As stated in *The Transfer of Power* by E. W. R. Lumby (India Office official from 1934–1948), "Although the Indianisation of the administration had gone far, the two principal services—the Indian Civil Service and Indian Police—still contained a considerable proportion of British officials, and the proportion was highest in the higher ranks."<sup>24</sup> In uncovenanted ICS positions, the numbers of Indian officials were not any better. According to Parliamentary records, "the number of Indians employed in the various civil situations of the government in India was 2,813 in 1849, rose to 2,910 in 1851, to fall to 2,846 in 1857, of course, all in the [u]ncovenanted service."<sup>25</sup> These numbers show why it is impossible to evaluate the short-term impact of the civil service exam. The exam was not direct in its democratization approach; the ICS still had a large amount of baggage from its racialized past. Instead, the exam served the branch over the course of political and economic uncertainties—standing as the iron framework. Looking at the deep pockets of time the trends will point toward more equitable access of bureaucratic branches starting with the standardization of the civil service exam in 1855.

## **Conclusion**

Academic scholarship on this topic has always presented short-term issues with the Indian Civil Service exam. To understand the holistic implication of the exam on the larger scale of independence, one must examine its ability to remain relevant as a standardized factor among competing political systems. Because the test's curriculum was set up for alterations and adaptability, it was changed throughout the years to retain relevancy. By 1897, the civil service exam saw a shift in exam policy, in which some Indian languages—Persian, Hindi, and Urdu—would be included in examinations.<sup>26</sup> The civil service exam was finally proctored in India in 1922.<sup>27</sup> This kept it in the forefront of bureaucracy, while it slowly made an effort toward long-term and equitable democratization.

These ideas would be important in the formation of an independent India. As Inderpal Grewal argues, postcolonial masculinity remained a key element when the ICS became the Indian Administration Services in 1950.<sup>28</sup> Grewal's argument draws upon the work of the prominent scholar of imperialism, Ann Stoler. According to Stoler, "in British India, too, such exams selected for something called 'character': 'self-denial, diligence, temperance, and self-control were coveted bureaucratic traits.'"<sup>29</sup> Grewal explains the complicated viewpoints about the ICS after the end of colonial rule. While some nationalists considered ICS officers to be traitors against the movement, many saw them as a necessary evil, and they were allowed to continue to serve the new Indian state in 1947. Problems ensued when many officers remained silent on the issues of independence and kept in line with their service as though they still sought to serve a state that resembled that of the EIC.<sup>30</sup> However, the exam curriculum ICS students were exposed to molded them into neutral bureaucrats, expecting to ensure their integrity and prevent political corruption. In reality, the democratization of the exam with its extensive focus on "bureaucrat building" created public dissent, making people feel that the ICS administration was more elite than its citizens, even though many ICS officers were deeply involved in their local communities and connected to the people they served.

After such a contentious and convoluted relationship with the historical ICS, and now IAS, why did India turn to a civil service examination? Historically speaking, in the long run, the exam has always offered a standardized and democratic bureaucracy that relies less upon political favors and corruption and gives credence to the importance of liberal arts education and values leaders with a broad knowledge base. Despite its beginnings in the colonial state, the civil service exam today offers a more democratic process than its predecessors, which was steeped in suppression and ethnocentricity. Because it stands as a classic staple of bureaucratic neutrality in the face of tumultuous political structures and is a standardized procedure, the exam has proven itself as a sustainable force that continually works on equalizing differences in the face of government employment. If one analyzes the introduction and implementation of the exam there is a distinct pattern that adheres to the lofty political and economic theories written into the curriculum. These tenants rest upon the ideas of democratization, equitable access, and a search for truth and knowledge. While these ideas seem aristocratically liberal, the curriculum continues to influence change through its belief in these principles. The liberal-minded ICS officers fostered change in high office positions, granted more equitable access to the exam, and secured proctoring rights of the exam in India. All of these advances rest upon the preceding



values that were written into the curriculum. While the exam is not perfect and untouchable, its key to sustainability in the modern age is its agency to change based on its founding principles of democratization, access, truth, and knowledge.

### Notes

1. "THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE," *Daily News*, August 21, 1855, *British Library Newspapers*, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8Hiwz0..>
2. Ram Parkash Sikka, *The Civil Service in India 1765–1857*, (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1984), 109; Seton explains that covenanted work was for high-ranking officials, and was almost exclusively done by white British men. Uncovenanted work was done instead by lower ranking officials, often Indians and men of color, and was poorly paid and without the benefits of appointment. He further writes on the subject that eventually, due to size, the service was split into three branches: imperial, provincial, and subordinate. All three dealt with different issues: imperial had many appointed officers and dealt with international issues; provincial, where most Indians were employed, dealt with more local issues; and subordinate included small local authorities. Sir Malcolm C. C. Seton, *The India Office* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), 131.
3. For this research, cadets and candidates are synonymous. A cadet in this understanding is a person who is preparing and training to enter the ICS. This definition is identical to that of a candidate. Both of these words will be utilized as equivalents in the text that follows.
4. The pronoun his is used in this instance because females were not allowed to enter the civil service; James Frey, "The Company Raj" (lecture, Modern India, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, October 25, 2017).
5. Seton, 131.
6. Ibid. Seton tells readers that within the British Raj apprentices started at £5 and writers at £10.
7. Henry St. George Tucker, *The Education of the Civil Service* (London: Elder Smith, 1853), 4.
8. Pradeep Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817–1949* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2003), 19.
9. Sikka, 177; several times throughout this paper there will be instances where the leading letter of a word is in brackets, i.e. [c]andidates. For this source and several others the authors chose to utilize a British grammar system. However, for readability and clarity I have changed this capitalized letters to lowercase.
10. Ibid., 167.
11. William Watts, *East-India Company's Civil Service Examination Papers* (London: Crown Court, 1857), 5.
12. I acknowledge that this question is based on English history and for Indians to answer negatively would have resulted in a disqualification from the exam. However, that does not mean that in practice they did not learn the basics of opposing viewpoints, giving them the opportunity to explore competing ideas, even if they weren't so boldly stated during the actual exam. Watts, 6.
13. Ibid., 21–24; Ibid. 45–48; Ibid., 53–60.
14. Warren Hastings, "A Letter of Warren Hastings on the Civil Service of the East



- India Company.” *The English Historical Review* 44, (1929): 634, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/552925>.
15. John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck—The Making of a Liberal Imperialist*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974):185, quoted in Ram Parkash Sikka, *The Civil Service in India 1765–1857*, (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1984), 169.
  16. Watts, 49.
  17. *Ibid.*, 35.
  18. Inderpal Grewal, “The Masculinities of Post-Colonial Governance: Bureaucratic Memoirs of the Indian Civil Service,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, 2 (2016): 623; These challenges were mainly created by the Government of India Act of 1858, which pushed standardization and eliminated exclusive elite access.
  19. Sikka, 167.
  20. *Ibid.*, 197.
  21. *Ibid.*, 197.
  22. Ann Ewing, “Administering India: The Indian Civil Service,” *History Today* (1982): 45, <http://www.remote.uwosh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=a9h&AN=4864737&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
  23. Arudra Burra, “The Indian Civil Service and the Nationalist Movement: Neutrality, Politics, and Continuity,” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 48, no. 4 (2010): 421, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2010.522032>.
  24. E. W. R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India 1945–1947*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954), 35.
  25. “Parliamentary Paper,” (1852): 110C, quoted in Ram Parkash Sikka, *The Civil Service in India 1765–1857*, (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1984), 105.
  26. Adalut Kahn, *Book of Exercises for the Lower and Higher Standard Examinations*, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1893).
  27. Seton, 138.
  28. Grewal, 622–23.
  29. Anne Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 65, quoted in Inderpal Grewal, “The Masculinities of Post-Colonial Governance: Bureaucratic Memoirs of the Indian Civil Service,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (2016): 622–23.
  30. Grewal, 624.

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